

# IN BETWEEN WORLDS: THE CONVERGENCE OF CHINESE AND WESTERN VALUES AS GLOBAL HABITUS

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses Coppel (2012)'s claim regarding the heterogeneity of the identity of the Chinese Overseas. My paper chronicles the case of the Malaysian Chinese who come from two different educational mediums – the national mainstream medium, and the Chinese-language medium through a review of the existing literature on Malaysian Chinese identity. Past research showed that significant behavioral and ontological differences existed among individuals who experienced Chinese-language education and those who experienced English or Malay language education (the national mainstream medium) (Purcell, 1948; Tan & Santhiram, 2010). In the present climate characterized by multidirectional ideological flows across geographical regions, I argue that the differences in educational outcomes, especially measured in terms of cultural capital, are waning. This suggests a cultural convergence which augurs the possession of desirable cultural capital, or as Illouz and John (2003) terms it, 'global habitus'.

*Keywords: global habitus, cultural capital, educational outcomes, Chinese education, English education, heterogeneity, convergence*

## **Defining the Malaysian Chinese**

The Chinese Diaspora covers approximately 40 million people across all continents of the world, originally leaving mainland China for other places in search of better economic opportunities (Jacques, 2008). Also termed the 'overseas Chinese', they continue to possess a strong sense of shared identity based on their powerful attachment to mainland China (Jacques, 2008). In

Malaysia there are 6 601 000 people of Chinese ethnicity (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014).

The powerful attachment felt by the overseas Chinese tended to override regional and political differences (Jacques, 2008), even as its members continued to be involved in the economics, politics and culture of their new homes. However, not all overseas Chinese and their narrative of 'Chineseness' could be contained within one single rubric, that of being under the cultural hegemony of China (Ang, 2001). This makes the issue of 'Chinese identity' formation complex.

Before achieving Independence in 1957, Malaysia was known as Malaya. Historically, Malaya was a British colony throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, Chinese migrants from South China arrived in large numbers to Malaya due to economic opportunities such as tin mining. Malaya was then made up of various ethnicities, from the Malays, to the Indians and Chinese who migrated here for work (Hirschman, 1986; Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, 2013). Throughout their colonization, the British maintained control over the local education system, overseeing the establishment of schools (Purcell, 1948). This policy extended to the Chinese migrant community in Malaya.

The Malaysian Chinese originally migrated to Malaya during the 1800s, at the height of Malaya's British colonial era, due to opportunities in tin mining. Even so, they maintained strong socio-cultural and economic ties with their kin in south China, their place of origin (Cheong, Lee, & Lee, 2013). The aspect of imagined community was considered central to Chinese identity in Southeast Asia (Hirschman, 1988). 'Older' and 'modern' Chinese identities were separated, where the 'older' identities referred to nationalist identification with mainland China, and 'modern' identities referred to localized national identities (Hirschman, 1988). While some Chinese prioritized class identity, it did not override 'Chinese' identity (Hirschman, 1988). Carstens (2014) echoed this argument, saying that Malaysian Chinese identity is reflexive and subjective. Intergenerational socialization was responsible for transmitting language, religion, values and beliefs (Hirschman, 1988).

The question of 'what does being Chinese mean' has long been asked, by scholars over the years, culminating in a significant breadth of studies. According to Lee (2014), many scholars have conducted research on this area, varying in their units of analysis, ontologies and epistemologies. He classified the bulk of existing studies on Malaysian Chinese identity formation into emic and etic interpretations, terming them as 'actor-oriented' and 'author-

oriented'. In Lee (2014)'s classification, he compared the authority-defined and everyday-defined explanations of 'Chineseness'. He found that scholars' ontologies remained largely similar while their epistemologies varied, in their interpretation of what constitutes 'Chineseness'. For the author-oriented scholars, who take an etic approach to defining identity, many of them acknowledged that Malaysian Chinese identity is fluid and dynamic, such as Tan (1982), Loh (1988, 2000), Chui (1990) and Hou (2002). For the actor-oriented scholars, who take the emic approach to defining identity, such as Carstens (1983) and Nonini (1997), they too acknowledged the malleability of Malaysian Chinese identities. The most apparent difference between the various studies of Malaysian Chinese identity has been in their epistemologies.

The locations in which scholars conducted their research varied, as with their indicators. Some studies had been conducted in specific locations such as Chinese new villages (Carstens, 1983; Loh, 1988). Indicators were also divided between primary data sources and secondary ones. Among the primary source indicators that were used to represent identity included clothing, hairstyles, cuisine, rituals and dialects (Tan, 1983); culture, education and politics (Hou, 2002); and village demographics and access to resources such as land, education, housing, services and government aid (Loh, 1988, 2000). Secondary source indicators included Chinese-language newspapers, magazines, and yearbooks (Chui, 1990; Hara, 2003; Ku, 2003); historical records and government reports (Chui, 1990; Ku, 2003). Loh (1988, 2000), Hou (2002) and Ku (2003) prioritized education as one element of their epistemology in defining Malaysian Chinese identity. Loh and Hou acknowledged the fluidity of Malaysian Chinese identity, while Ku has examined Chinese-medium education as a socialization agent transmitting ethnic identity values to the Malaysian Chinese. Many of these indicators are contained within elements of cultural capital. For example, clothing, hairstyles, cuisine, and newspapers can be considered objectified cultural capital. These studies, however, tended to focus more on material tastes and institutions, and less on phenomenology.

In contrast to the above, Lee (2014) explored the construction of identity based on 'Chineseness' from a subjective, actor-oriented perspective, arguing that identity based on 'Chineseness' is 'everyday-defined'. In his phenomenological study, Lee found that his interviewees defined 'Chineseness' based on several factors, namely language, culture, connection to mainland China, and notions of ethnicity (which included the physical). As Cohen acknowledged, communities are symbolically constructed, based on imagery, boundary-making processes, customs, habits, rituals, and the

communication of all these attributes, similarly seen in the case of the Malaysian Chinese. Lee concluded that interviewees defined their identities in dynamic and subjective ways, according to the social actors' own interpretations.

These differing research orientations resulted in a divide between an emphasis on material resources versus an emphasis on idealist factors. Between the primary source and secondary source material, both categories rely on the use of material possessions to signify identity. For example, within the category of primary sources, Tan (1983) focuses on self-presentation including clothing and hairstyles, while Loh (1988, 2000) focuses on ownership of property. Meanwhile within the secondary source category, Chui (1990), Hara (2003) and Ku (2003) examined records such as yearbooks and government reports, thereby ignoring the subject's active ability in providing meaning to their reported activity. This materialist versus idealist debate is reminiscent of the debate regarding social change within the field of sociology. If at all social change within the Malaysian Chinese community were to be observed, one would have to choose between looking solely at possession of material resources, or at the ideas held by individuals. The materialist approach corresponds to a measure of objectified cultural capital, while the idealist approach corresponds to a focus on embodied cultural capital.

It is worth noting that Lee (2014) does acknowledge the importance of adopting the emic perspective, whereby he notes that Malaysian Chinese identity is subjective, malleable, and 'everyday-defined'. Still, I contend that a separation of objective factors from subjective factors totally would be problematic in painting a complete picture of Malaysian Chinese identity. Thus, I call for a combination of materialist factors such as outlined above, with an emphasis also on phenomenological factors, as I believe the relation between the infrastructure and superstructure (after Marx) is reflexive. This means that while ideas shape taste in material objects, consumption of material objects too can shape ideas.

Furthermore, while institutionalized cultural capital is mentioned, there is a lack of comparison done to acknowledge different value systems which may exist within families, schools, peer groups, or mass media. Hence the role of socialization agents in shaping Malaysian Chinese identity has not been sufficiently fleshed out. The lack of comparative studies within subsets of Malaysian Chinese, especially according to the socialization process, also indicates a monocultural assumption. Ultimately, the position of Malaysian Chinese in relation to the existence of global value systems, revolving around mainland China and the West, has not been sufficiently contrasted. Law and

Lee (2006, 2009) highlight that this issue, particularly concerning Malaysian Chinese, is an important topic to be explored. Thus, to address this issue, I would use a framework that combines an analysis of both materialist and idealist aspects, in addition to institutionalized cultural capital.

Indeed, there is reason to compare identity formation among the Malaysian Chinese. Given the available variety of meaningful symbols such as language, identity formation among the Malaysian Chinese is not homogeneous. According to Shamsul Amri Baharuddin and Sity Daud (2002), the reason for intra-ethnic diversity in Malaysia may be traced to the institutionalization of the vernacular school system, a system in which the pupil undergoes education conducted in a medium which is their mother tongue, for example in Mandarin Chinese. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin and Sity Daud (2002) also pointed out that "English and Chinese schools established at the turn of the century (1900) were soon followed by 'Malay' vernacular schools", and that "teaching was in English, Mandarin, and Malay respectively". This shows that in Malaysia, pupils in schools continued to be separated by language. Language itself is one of the main elements in symbolically defining one's identity, and when there exists such a division by language, it follows that there would be intra-ethnic diversity. Within the case of the Malaysian Chinese, those who attended Chinese-language medium schools and those who attended English-language medium school experienced this intra-ethnic identity difference. As Lee (2014) stated, Malaysian Chinese identity subjectivity is a 'stimulated subjectivity' because of its members' awareness of their surroundings, and their reflexive reaction to stimuli such as language, other people's behavior, graphics, and others.

Having arrived at this point, my position in relation to the existing studies of Malaysian Chinese identity is to contribute to the existing literature, in a way that is not limited to only exploring 'Chineseness'. Rather, I prefer a comparative study of identity expression among Chinese-medium educated and English-medium educated Malaysian Chinese in a culturally globalized context. It would be based on the concept of cultural capital, and the approach taken would be classified as author-oriented. This is because cultural capital is classified into certain attributes that will be taken as indicators of identity and has thus been fixed. Since cultural capital largely centers on the question of individual taste, I would conduct this study using indicators that are related to cultural tastes. These include languages of intimacy and literacy (Tan, 1988); education; and elements of self-presentation such as fashion, style, and leisurely activities (Hebdige, 1999; Barker & Beezer, 1992). In the following section, I review existing studies on the selected identity indicators.

### ***'Chineseness' and Language***

The centrality of Chinese language to the formation of Malaysian Chinese identities indicates that Chinese language socialization is of paramount importance (Tan, 1997). Tan (1997) states that 'language is undoubtedly an important indicator of ethnic identity'. He examined the relationship between literacy, ethnicity, and national identity. Literacy in Chinese makes one a different kind of Chinese – a Chinese that can read Chinese and have direct access to the Chinese literary heritage with the opportunity to learn more about Chinese history, philosophy, and civilization in general. The Chinese-educated Malaysians are interested in Chinese music and songs which are produced locally as well as those produced in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and elsewhere. The Chinese-educated Chinese see Chinese identity in terms of the ability to speak Chinese. In his analysis of Chinese language usage among Malaysian Chinese, Tan found that there are four groups that may be classified according to fluency in Mandarin Chinese as either a 'language of literacy' or a 'language of intimacy'. The former is the language used in official business while the latter is the language spoken in informal settings.

Carstens also focused on Chinese language, culture, and identity in defining 'what it means to be Chinese'. She argues that based on identity formations, Malaysian Chinese identities are multiple, diverse, and constantly shifting – both in official discourse and in the daily experiences of particular individuals. There are four levels of identity construction identified – political constructions of ethnic identity at the national level, the influence of transnational and global messages and discourse on local identities, identity constructions at more experiential levels where the processes of habitus and practice shape and inform personal identities, and multiple and complex individual responses to identity issues.

Social class analysis, according to Carstens (2014), was not such a relevant concept for Malaysian Chinese identity, as they did not identify themselves so strongly on this basis, as mentioned in a speech given at the invitation of University of Malaya's Malaysian Chinese Research Centre in March 2014.

Most respondents were not aware of its implications. This was particularly so with the advent of the 1990s when global influences spread. The subject became decentered and identified with different levels or subject positions. In her study, Carstens examined identity construction at four different locations – discovering four different processes. These were with Chinese educated students at Chung Ling High School; while having lunch and later a movie with an English educated friend; while conducting fieldwork

in a village in Pulai; and while attending local thespian Krishen Jit's play. In all instances, the Chinese people she met identified as Chinese, albeit in very different ways.

Within the Chinese language, whose official form is Mandarin, there are also spoken dialects based on dialect groups. The four major Chinese dialects spoken in Malaysia are Hokkien, Khek, Cantonese, and Teochew (Asmah Haji Omar, 2005). Apart from dialect groups, there is also the Peranakan Chinese group, also known as the Baba-Nyonya, who are descendants of Chinese immigrants who have adopted Nusantara customs (Hanafi Hussin, 2014). Although most Chinese continue to speak their original southern Chinese dialects as a first language, the use of Mandarin is increasing. It is now perceived to be the Chinese lingua franca, both in Malaysia and worldwide. Its growth in Malaysia may partly be attributed to the influence of Chinese schools, where it is used as the medium of instruction (Asmah Haji Omar, 2005).

Despite the fact that Chinese language is considered one of the most important indicators of 'Chineseness', there is linguistic division between Chinese-educated and non-Chinese-educated Malaysian Chinese. A consultant for Sin Chew Media Group, Rita Sim, studied the gap in the Chinese community between the Chinese-literate and English-literate. In her study it was highlighted that according to the Nielsen Media Research report, 90 percent of Malaysian Chinese are Chinese-literate, although only the other 10 percent who are English-literate are visible as the voice of the others. This 10 percent is referred to in common slang as 'bananas', 'yellow on the outside and white inside' (Sim, 2011).

To explain the phenomenon above, Sim (2011) conducted an extensive study on media consumption among the Malaysian Chinese, dividing them into three clusters based on sociolinguistics. The first group (G1) is made up of Malaysian Chinese who hold traditional values, support Chinese language media and education, and use Chinese language as an identity marker. Group 2 (G2) is made up of the non-Chinese educated Malaysian Chinese, who use English as a primary language, and are mostly unable to read Chinese or speak dialects. These two groups belong to Generation X and represent the parental generation for much of today's youth. The third group, Group 3 (G3) is an overlap of G1 and G2. They consist of members from either G1 or G2 who have been obliged to adapt to new environments whether due to work or other reasons, thus embracing the language of the other group. This group is made up mostly of Generation Y. Generation Y is defined by Sim as being those born between 1981 to 2000 (making them between the ages of 10 to 29 at the time of

this study). In terms of the community of Malaysian Chinese in general, 89% are Chinese literate and 7% are completely non-Chinese literate but literate in English. Clearly, there is a division between linguistic preference, which appears to be changing as we wade deeper into the globalized world.

### ***'Chineseness' and Education***

Given the importance of Chinese language and its education as a means to acquiring a Chinese identity, I now explain the history of Chinese-language education in Malaysia. I then compare it with the development of English-language, and later with that of Malay-language education.

Some scholars have attempted to define the formation of Chinese identity in Malaya through the dissemination of Chinese language education. As 'Chineseness' depends so heavily on one's ability to converse and achieve literacy in Chinese language, its association with education mediums cannot be separated from an analysis of 'Chineseness'. Education acts as a socialization agent in transmitting the norms and values of 'Chineseness'.

In the early 1900s, the Malaysian Chinese had two education options which were Chinese-medium education and English-medium education (Purcell, 1948). English-medium schools were introduced by the British during the colonial period in Malaya, while Chinese-medium schools were formed by the migrant Chinese community in Malaya, inheriting the syllabus from nationalist China (Purcell, 1946). Tan and Santhiram (2010) chronicled the conditions of the Chinese-medium schools and English-medium schools. Chinese-medium schools were originally clan-based and private, formed based on the ideology of the triumphant nationalist party in China (Tan & Santhiram, 2010). The schools were small, containing twenty to thirty pupils, with one teacher who was usually a master of many other trades and considered a village elder (Tan & Santhiram, 2010). The syllabus was obtained from nationalist China, with the ruling party occasionally sending teachers over to Malaya to garner overseas Chinese support (Tan & Santhiram, 2010). It emphasized Confucian teachings, the knowledge of classical Chinese texts, calligraphy, skill with the abacus, and the ideology of Sun Yat-sen (Tan & Santhiram, 2010). Students were the children of Chinese migrants who believed strongly in the Kuomintang nationalist belief, and when they completed their education they regarded themselves purely as 'Chinese' (Tan & Santhiram, 2010). In the beginning, the British were content to leave them alone until their political activism threatened to overthrow the colonial law and order (Tan & Santhiram, 2010).



English-medium schools, on the other hand were established by missionary bodies with grants obtained from the British government. They placed an emphasis on literary aspects – focusing strongly on a strong humanities education. Students were groomed to enter local civil service. Although students were charged a fee, scholarships were provided. Students were prepared to sit for the Cambridge examinations, which then enabled them to either pursue clerical employment in the civil service, private firms, or even attend Raffles College to study medicine. This education system, according to Purcell (1948), ‘did not touch the bulk of the Chinese’ because migrant children were too old to enter the system. Also, the nationalist sentiment the Chinese possessed, ensured they opted for Chinese education rather than consider this alternative. Because they were prepared for civil service in Malaya, graduating pupils considered themselves as citizens of Malaya rather identifying with mainland China (Purcell, 1948). In short, the graduates of Chinese schools viewed themselves as an extension of their counterparts in China, while graduates of the English schools viewed themselves as part of Malaya (Tan & Santhiram, 2010).

According to Carstens, ethnic Chinese culture in Malaysia during the 1950s and 1960s was supported primarily through Chinese schools (Carstens, 2003). However, apart from this, it was also backed up by Malaysian Chinese newspapers; Chinese clan, dialect and district associations; and Chinese temples and religious practices (Carstens, 2003). These show that while education was the main socialization agent responsible for transmitting the values of ‘Chineseness’, other socialization agents such as mass media and social networks or peers also helped.

At that time, many English-educated Malaysian Chinese continued to speak Chinese dialects such as Hokkien or Cantonese at home. While they maintained connection with their dialect group identity, this prevented them from accessing certain areas of Chinese culture, due to their inability to read Chinese (Carstens, 2003).

After Malaysia achieved its independence in 1957, the demarcation between Chinese-medium schools and English-medium schools shifted slightly, because of reforms in the overall national education policy.

Tan and Teoh (2014) chronicle the development of Chinese education in Malaysia from 1952 to 1975. This period begins with the British transformation of vernacular schools into English-Malay bilingual ones and ends with the gradual replacement of the English medium with the Malay medium in national schools.

In 1952, the British enacted the Education Ordinance with the publication of the Barnes Report. This established English-Malay bilingual primary schools, also known as national schools, to replace Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools, which the British colonial officers initially supported but later viewed negatively in terms of achieving national unity. Many Chinese vernacular schools elected to switch to the national medium as well, in order to receive state funding. These were called National-Type Chinese Schools, or Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJKC). SJKC schools initially used the English-language medium of instruction but switched to Malay ten years after Malaysia's Independence. Some Chinese vernacular schools however did not switch, and thus did not receive state funding. These were known as Chinese Independent High Schools (CIHS).

Chinese Independent High Schools are unique in their attributes. They are not considered part of the common education curriculum, but are private schools established by the Chinese community and are fundraised (Low, 2015). Thus, they charge tuition fees. Low (2015) studied the case of the Confucian Private Secondary School (CPSS) in Kuala Lumpur, noting the school's special characteristics. Aside from its obvious affiliation with Confucian values in its name, the school is known for being strict with its discipline, lacking issues of delinquency, having especially committed teachers (who would organize extra classes for weak students), efficient in administration, and enabling cultural activities such as practicing calligraphy, painting, or performing musical instruments (Low, 2015). Thus, parents are keen to send their children there due to an affiliation with the Chinese language, a sense of cultural pride, influence from family and friends, as well as a belief that they will gain better future prospects in the job market (Low, 2015). Parents also believe that the CIHS differs from the National Type Chinese Secondary School, or SMJK (C) and the National Secondary School, or SMK. For example, based on my interviews with student respondents who responded to my questionnaire for this study, I learned that students of the CIHS use textbooks imported directly from mainland China, which chronicle its history from the ancient day to present.

Chinese educationists in Malaysia had all throughout, intended to uphold the Chinese language as the medium of instruction, together with an internal Chinese school culture. Helen Ting (2013) differentiated the remaining 'Chinese schools' from schools that were formerly 'English schools'. From between 1970 to 1982, the English-medium schools experienced a gradual transition into becoming Malay medium schools (Ting, 2013). Schools which had converted from the Mandarin medium were known as 'Chinese-

conforming schools’, while those which had converted from the English medium were called ‘English-conforming schools’ (Ting, 2013). Thus, a demarcation continues to exist between the two types of education systems, providing an opportunity for socialization into different sets of values (Tan & Teoh, 2014).

Before independence, primary schools were segregated by the British colonial authorities according to language and ethnicity. These included English schools, Malay schools, Mandarin schools, and Tamil schools. English schools were found mainly in urban areas, though interestingly most of their students were ethnic Chinese. Secondary education was only available either in English or Malay, and tertiary education only in English (Nuffic, 2015). Within the post-Independence period, Malaysian primary and secondary education consisted of the following:

**Table 1: Types of Primary Schools and Secondary Schools in Malaysia (adapted from Nuffic, 2015)**

Primary School(s)	National Secondary School	Chinese Independent High School
1. National Schools	Junior Secondary (3 years)	6 years
2. National Type Chinese Schools	Senior Secondary (3 years) Pre-University (1 year)	
3. National Type Tamil Schools		
<u>Final Exam:</u> Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)	<u>Final Exam:</u> Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR)/Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)	<u>Final Exam:</u> Unified Examination Certificate (UEC)  <i>*Not regarded as part of national education system</i>

Tertiary education was limited to the University of Malaya until 1970, as the number of state-controlled universities began to expand up to 1990, followed by the introduction of foreign university branch campuses as well as private universities and colleges in Malaysia between 1990 to 2000 (Arokiasamy, 2010).

In 1983, the Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (New Primary School Curriculum) (KBSR) was introduced, followed by the Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (New Secondary School Curriculum) (KBSM) in 1989. These two education policies stressed the infusion of “moral and spiritual values” through the teaching of English (Saadiyah Darus, 2009). The following table

summarizes the difference in the teaching of English in Malay-medium and Chinese-medium schools.

**Table 2: Comparison of English-language teaching in Malay-medium and Chinese-medium schools (adapted from Saadiyah Darus 2009)**

Subject Duration/School Type	National Primary School (Malay medium, replacing former English schools)	National Type Chinese School
English Language	Year 1 to 3 240 minutes per week	Year 3 onwards 60 minutes per week
	Year 4 to 6 210 minutes per week	Year 4 to 6 90 minutes per week
Total of Malaysian students (2009)	Over 2 000 000	Over 500 000

The English language is a compulsory subject in Malaysian primary and secondary schools (Nuffic, 2015). While the Malay language had replaced the English language as the official medium of instruction since 1969 (Saadiyah Darus, 2009), usage of the latter continues to be emphasized. Thus, it is taught in both Malay-medium schools and Chinese-medium schools. It is clear from the comparison above however, that the teaching of English language is more greatly emphasized in the Malay-medium schools. Based on this demarcation, I categorise 'English schools' as schools which inherited the education system introduced by the colonial British. This view has also been highlighted by Saadiyah Darus (2009) who notes that the Malaysian education system has inherited the English school system despite a change in the language of instruction.

The relationship between English and Malay as linguistic mediums of instruction continues to be complicated. Despite the switch from English to Malay as a medium of instruction, in 2002 the English medium was reintroduced, together with a bilingual option for Science and Mathematics (Saadiyah Darus, 2009). However, the government later claimed that the policy did not work well and decided to reverse this policy and revert to Malay in national schools and Chinese and Tamil in vernacular schools (Saadiyah Darus, 2009).

Meanwhile, international schools using English as a medium of instruction based on an American or British syllabus continue to flourish in Malaysia. According to Bailey (2013), in 2012 there were a total of 12 200 Malaysian students in a total of 112 international schools in this country.

Notably, Bailey (2013) states that international schools are a means for students to acquire cultural capital. These are also classified as 'English schools' in my study.

Given this scenario, Ting (2013) conducted a survey in a local public university to measure the reality and perceptions of Malaysian Chinese university students regarding various aspects of the linguistic dimension in education. This was done in acknowledgement of the fact that the majority of the present generation of Malaysian Chinese youth undergo Mandarin primary education and Malay-medium secondary schooling, in the Malaysian public education system. She found that the majority of respondents approved of vernacular education, regarding it as an institution that helped preserve cultural diversity as a 'national asset'. Chinese primary schools in fact, transmitted Chinese values and culture.

Ting also found a high proportion of Chinese youths who went to Malay medium schools but regard their best spoken language as English instead. She attributes this to differences in their history, in which convent schools practice oral English despite lessons being taught in Malay. Meanwhile Chinese schools which were converted into National Type Schools (SMJK) and had embraced the Malay language, had also preserved a Chinese-speaking environment. She elaborates that there is a degree of correlation between pupils' socioeconomic background and family cultural orientation – and the type of school they enter. She remarked that her surveys from 2000 and 2002 uncovered that linguistic competence depends more critically on students' immediate linguistic environment – for example family, friends, and residential area, rather than simply the medium of instruction (Ting, 2013). These point to the relevance of using cultural capital as a concept in identifying sources of linguistic preference. It also highlights the importance of socialization agents such as family and peers aside from education.

However, the ongoing process of globalization profoundly changes the identities of ethnic groups, nations, and regions (Chin, 2015). Identities are today becoming increasingly fluid, especially through channels of consumption and lifestyle, which provide a movable feast. This concurs with the globalization-enabled availability of cultural products (Langman, 2003). Contemporary globalization, with its time-space compression and pluralization of life-worlds, has impacted the social, cultural, and subjective, to foster transformations of identity (Langman, 2003). Furthermore, socialization agents such as parents, teachers, religious leaders, and the mass media – attempt to colonize desire, consciousness, and identity (Langman, 2003). Clothes, adornment, and appearance have thus become statements of cultural

capital as well as cultural resistance and opposition to values and norms of the dominant society. Globalization is said to both fragment and yet homogenize. Thus, drawing from Coppel (2012)'s statement on the heterogeneity of Chinese identities – I aim to demonstrate that the former disparity between Chinese-educated Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Chinese who experienced the national medium is decreasing, due to the emerging social forces that override the sole influence of education.

### **Cultural Capital in a Global Dimension**

The concept of cultural capital was conceived by Pierre Bourdieu in 1984, to explain variations in academic performance among students. This performance was not to be attributed to economic capital, but to the sometimes-resultant benefits from it, such as the ability to expand one's tastes in consumption of cultural goods, alongside attitudes and values associated with it (Bourdieu, 1984).

Such as definition will invariably be tricky to measure, as it contains a set of abstractions which do not conform to cardinal values. Much of the debate in this framework thus revolves around constructing an appropriate research design to capture differences in cultural capital. By itself, cultural capital may be divided into three forms – the institutionalized, the objectified, and the embodied (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). The first refers to socialization agents and the norms they transmit; the second refers to the material consumption of goods and services; and the third refers to attitudes or ambitions (Igarashi & Saito, 2014).

I advocate that this framework is apt for measuring differences in a multilingual community (Chan, Juli Edo, & Rosila Bee Mohd. Hussain, 2016). Within the subgroup of the 'Chinese overseas', differences among the Malaysian Chinese which originate from their multilingual environment can be expressed using this framework.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is based a survey questionnaire I designed with influence from other landmark cultural capital surveys, such as those by Bennett and Silva (2006), Noble and Davies (2009), and Savage, Devine, Cunningham, Taylor, Li, Hjellbrekke, Le Roux, Friedman and Miles (2013). Bennett and Silva (2006) composed survey questions on eight cultural subfields to assess taste, participation, and knowledge – including questions on TV, film, music, reading, visual arts, eating out, and personal style embodiment. Noble and

Davies (2009) designed their questionnaire to include items such as leisurely activities; regularly watched TV programmes; book preferences; family members lived with, parents' occupation, education levels, reading habits, common conversation topics and leisurely activities. Savage et al. (2013) meanwhile, designed the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) to include questions on people's leisure interests, musical tastes, use of the media, and food preferences. The main elements these questionnaires shared was that they assessed respondents' cultural tastes through mass media choices (TV, film, books, etc.), and the values of socialization agents such as family (family members lived with, parents' education level, etc). This questionnaire differs from these in that the researcher has included peers as a socialization agent, apart from education, family, and mass media. Although there exists debate between the 'wild' (abstract) or 'domesticated' (quantified) interpretation of Bourdieu, many of the attributes developed in these landmark surveys are useful to address the objectified and institutionalized forms of cultural capital.

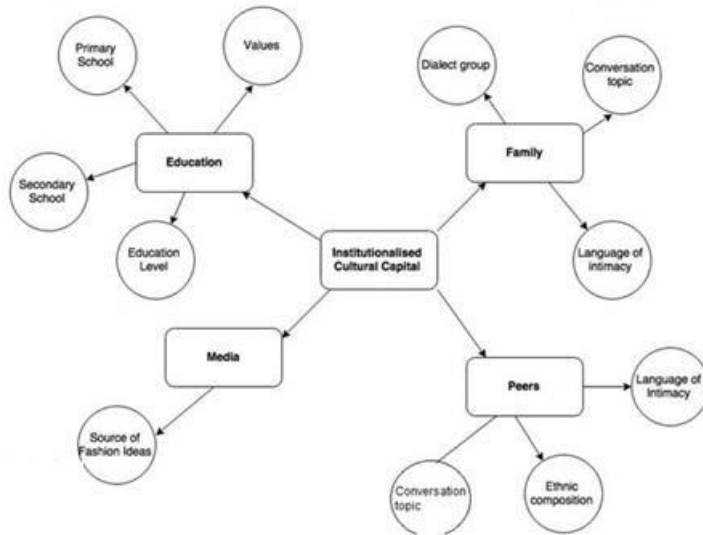
The difference in this survey is that I included questions on the reasons why respondents claim to have a certain preference, in order to address the 'embodied' aspect of cultural capital. As opposed to Noble and Davies, I opted for a close-ended questionnaire, which provides a limited list of answer options respondents can choose from.

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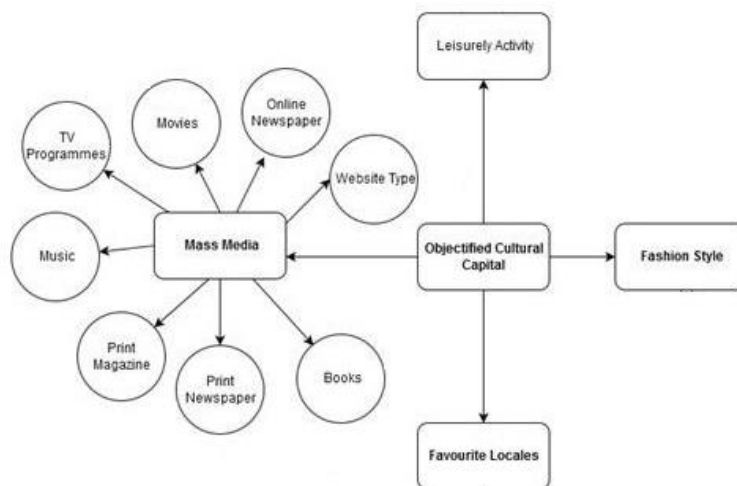
Likewise, I am aware of the issues in measuring cultural capital. Sociologist Goldthorpe (2007) himself has noted that there are two styles of measuring cultural capital, which include the 'wild' and 'domesticated' interpretations (Goldthorpe, 2007, cited in Chan, Juli Edo, & Rosila Bee Mohd. Hussain [2016]). The 'wild' form referred to an interpretation of Bourdieu in his original, unabridged meaning, where the abstract embodied form of cultural capital was acknowledged. The 'domesticated' form referred to an interpretation of Bourdieu in a way that had converted the forms of cultural capital into empirical attributes. Many theorists have debated the interpretation of Bourdieu's original idea, especially Goldthorpe (2007) who claimed that some scholars, in their quest to construct empirical attributes, had ignored the essence of Bourdieu's idea, which was meant to be more phenomenological and less quantifiable. Van de Werfhorst (2010) echoed this sentiment, claiming that it would almost impossible to conduct any kind of

reliable measurement which conformed to that requirement (Chan, 2016). Thus, I have embarked upon the task of using Weberian ideal types to express the value systems possessed by respondents, which forms the 'embodied' and abstract aspect of cultural capital.

To create the questionnaire, I used the online survey design platform, eSurveysPro.com. The questions were grouped into the three aspects of cultural capital. Each item in Figures 1, 2 and 3 corresponds to a topic in my questionnaire:

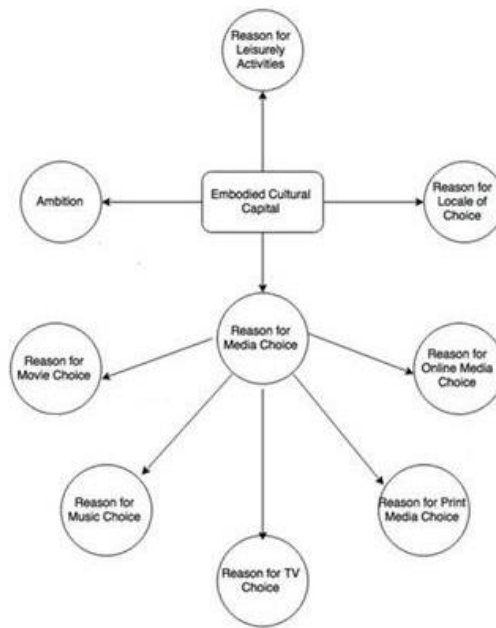


**Figure 1: Institutionalized cultural capital**



**Figure 2: Objectified cultural capital**





**Figure 3: Embodied cultural capital**

The survey questionnaire was followed up with a series of open-ended questions. Respondents were asked to elaborate in depth about their concept of identity, their inspirations and aspirations, their worldview, and where they viewed their place within it.

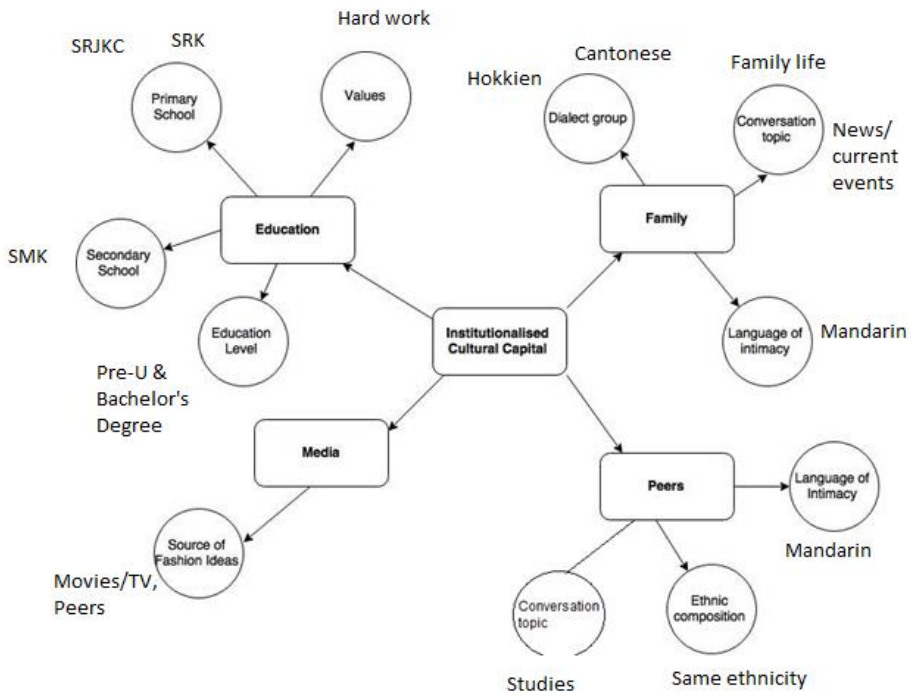
The population studied was Malaysian Chinese youth, aged between 18 and 25 and studying at the tertiary level in education institutions within Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city. In order to capture responses from Generation Y, the age cohort of 18 to 25 years was chosen. Another reason was because this age cohort had the most autonomy to develop their own identities free from parental control and had the most financial freedom compared to younger age cohorts such as those in primary or secondary school. The capital city was chosen because of its proximity to global influences from a variety of technologies, such as higher-speed Internet access and transportation. For comparison purposes, the population needed to include one Chinese-medium institution, and one English-medium institution. This population itself is a sample within larger Malaysian Chinese society. In this stage, purposive sampling was used to define the population. Within the selected institutions, convenience sampling was used to identify individual respondents. Because this study is exploratory, probability sampling was not required.

I chose New Era College for the Chinese-medium institution, because it was founded by the most prominent local Chinese educationist organization, *Dongjiaozong*. The association is concerned with the operation of Chinese-language schools and upholds Chinese language education and culture in Malaysia strongly. New Era College was established as a Chinese tertiary educational institution for the realization of a complete Chinese education system in Malaysia (New Era College, 2015). I chose HELP Academy for the English-medium institution, due to its reputation of being the first private institution in Malaysia to offer the University of London (UOL) External Programme, a British distance learning programme established in 1858. Respondents were selected from students of this programme. In order to enrol in the UOL programme, a respondent needs to have attained at least a credit in English in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), a compulsory secondary-school leaving examination. If they attended Chinese-medium Independent School and have sat for the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) examinations, they must attain a Band 6 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (HELP University, 2015).

In the Chinese-medium institution, print questionnaires were handed out to several respondents from each faculty and department. I was assisted by the staff of the institution to approach students of the different faculties and departments. In the English-medium institution, I handed out print questionnaires to students from the University of London programme. In total, 60 hard copy filled questionnaires were obtained from each institution, totalling 120 hard copy filled questionnaires.

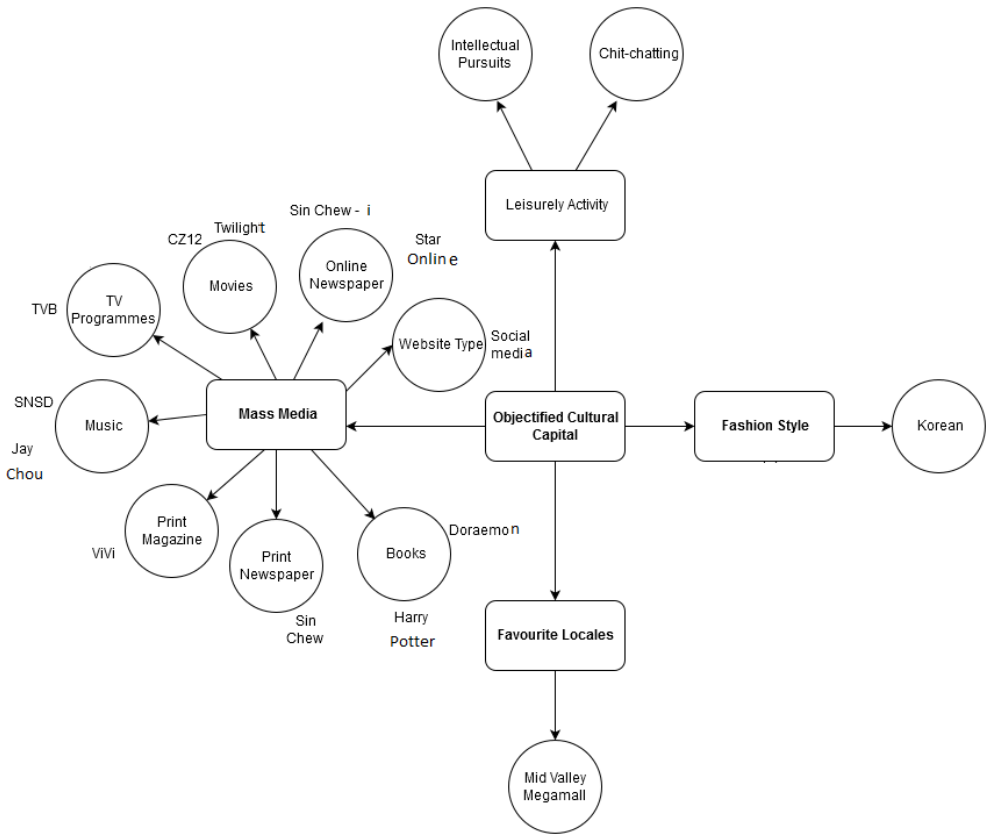
## **Findings**

Institutionalized cultural capital is manifested here as four main social institutions functioning as socialization agents. These are the family, peers, education and mass media as shown in Figure 4. Two groups were compared, which are the Chinese-educated and English-educated Malaysian Chinese.



**Figure 4: Taste depicted through institutionalized cultural capital**

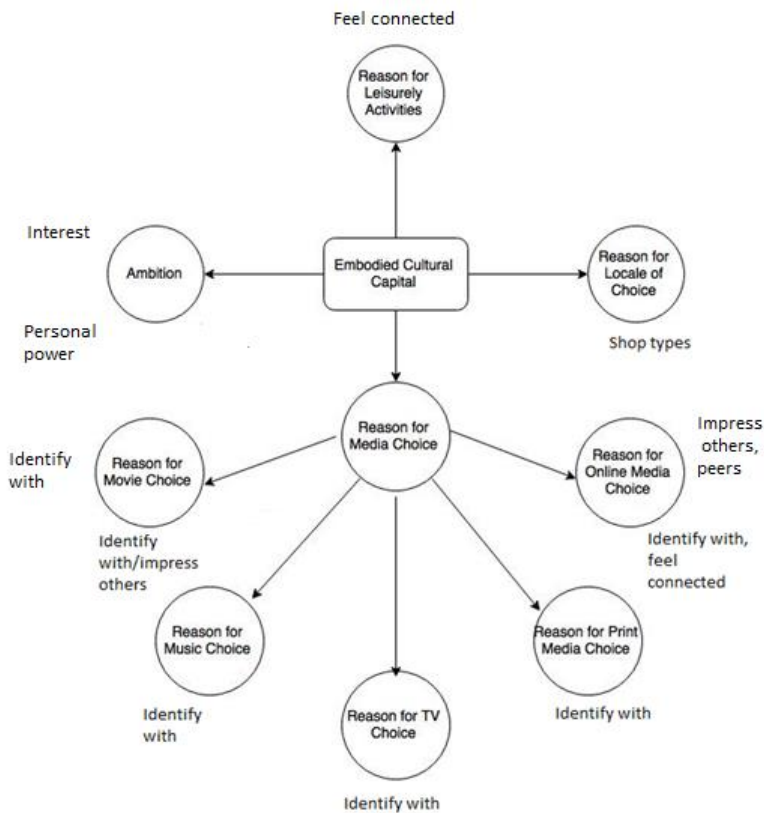
The former was largely of the Hokkien dialect group, went to SRJKC and SMK, value teamwork strongly, speak Mandarin with family and peers, and mix largely with members of the same ethnic group, getting fashion inspiration from movies and TV. The latter were largely from the Cantonese dialect group, attended SRK and SMK, value hard work strongly, speak Mandarin with family and peers, mixed with peers of the same ethnic group, and get fashion inspiration from movies, TV, and peers. Notably, both groups do speak Mandarin as a language of intimacy. The main difference is in terms of value orientation. The Chinese-educated view the value of ‘teamwork’ most strongly, indicating collectivism, whereas the English-educated view ‘hard work’ as the most important value, which in itself could refer to individualistic drive towards achievement. There is a slight dichotomy of collectivist versus individualist values inherent in the respondents’ socialization process. It is worth noting however, that because a few respondents who attended Chinese-language primary school had later on switched to National Secondary School (which is non-Chinese), some influence of Chinese-education values still remain.



**Figure 5: Taste depicted through objectified cultural capital**

There are four elements of self-presentation which are indicated by objectified cultural capital. Based on Hebdige (1979)'s subcultural definition, these elements are fashion, consumption of mass media, favourite locale, and leisurely activity as shown in Figure 5. Two groups which are the Chinese-educated and English-educated Malaysian Chinese were compared. The former preferred watching the Chinese-language movie *CZ12*, the Cantonese-language TV show *TVB Ghetto Justice*, listening to K-pop music by SNSD, reading the Chinese-translated print magazine *ViVi*, reading print and online news by Sinchew Media, using social media, reading the Japanese manga *Doaraemon*, using Mid Valley Megamall as their social space, shopping leisurely, and wearing Korean fashions. The latter preferred watching the English-language movie *Twilight*, the Cantonese-language TV show *TVB Ghetto Justice*, listening to Mandarin-language songs by Jay Chou, reading the Chinese-language print magazine *ViVi*, reading print and online news by Sinchew Media, using social media, reading *Harry Potter*, using Mid Valley

Megamall as their social space, chatting leisurely and wearing Korean fashions. There is little language preference as the English-educated prefer to listen to Jay Chou who sings in Mandarin. Interestingly the Chinese-educated prefer listening to Korean music, though this is probably due to the wide coverage given to K-pop by Chinese-language media. Aside from these, the Chinese-educated prefer intellectual pursuits such as playing chess, while the English-educated prefer socialising or partaking in chit-chat.



**Figure 6: Taste depicted through embodied cultural capital**

As shown in Figure 6, embodied cultural capital is composed of the meanings behind respondents' preference for objectified cultural capital, giving their tastes a phenomenological layer. Thus, most of the questions for this section are composed of the reasons respondents attribute to their consumption behaviour, or tastes. Two groups were compared, that were the Chinese-educated and English-educated Malaysian Chinese. The former ate out and tried new dishes frequently as a hobby, volunteered and participated

in charity events, and attended cultural exhibits because it made them feel more connected to the rest of the world; shopped as retail therapy, and when they had no free time it was because of family needs. The latter ate out and tried new dishes frequently as a hobby because it made them feel more connected to the rest of the world as well as being able to catch up with friends, and shopped because it was a platform to display their identity through consumption practices. The Chinese-educated had a greater variety of hobbies, notably being more engaged in volunteering and attending cultural exhibits, indicative of more cosmopolitan cultural capital.

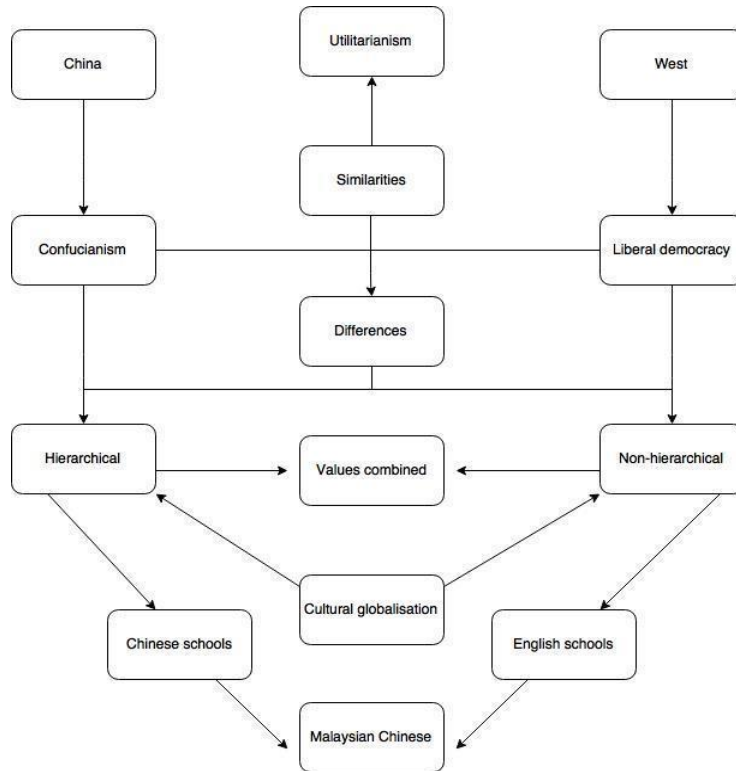
Where choice of social space was concerned, both groups claimed to prefer Mid Valley Megamall, due to the type of shops available. This shows they are driven by consumption needs in choosing a social space.

In terms of preference in mass media, both groups chose movies, TV shows, music, and books because they identified with the characters, plot, theme, style, writing angle, or lyrics.

The Chinese-educated however chose online news in order to impress others and due to peer influence, while the English-educated did so because they identified with the angle or style of writing, and because they felt more connected to the rest of the world. Similarly, this was the case with choice of websites, which in both cases was social media, where the Chinese-educated wished to impress others and the English-educated felt more connected to the rest of the world.

Finally, the Chinese-educated claim that their life goals would be motivated by their interest in a pursuit, while the English-educated claim that they have a high power-orientation.

Phenomenologically, both Chinese-educated and English-educated respondents demonstrate a strong desire to embrace global norms and values, which indicates cosmopolitanism rather than insularism. As the 2006 Merdeka Youth Survey in Malaysia found, a majority of young Malaysians believed that global and events in faraway places affect their daily lives (Merdeka Center, 2006).



**Figure 7: Conceptual model explaining the acquisition of values by respondents**

My study examined the possession of values by Malaysian Chinese youth with regards to their experienced system of language education. As shown in Figure 7, Malaysian Chinese youth who experienced Chinese-language education start out by possessing Confucian values, which originate from mainland China. Malaysian Chinese youth who experienced English-language or Malay-language education (influenced by the British colonial era) start out by possessing Western liberal democratic values, which originate from the British colonial education legacy. Between these two value systems, there are similarities and differences. The similarity between Confucianism and Western liberal democracy is their concern for the greater good, or utilitarianism.

The differences between the two value systems is that Confucianism has emphasised the need to abide by rules, regulations, and social roles. Thus, it is hierarchical in nature. Western liberal democracy which originated from ancient Greece, does not emphasise such hierarchy and views individuals as capable of performing any responsibility without fixed social roles.

These beliefs about hierarchy are transmitted to the students via schools as a socialization agent. Chinese-educated students have thus been observed to possess more pragmatic worldviews, and possessing bonding social capital; while English-educated students possess more individualistic worldviews with bridging social capital.

However, with the advent of cultural globalization, mass media takes over as a socialization agent promoting neoliberal norms and values. Because neoliberalism is strongly aligned with liberal democracy and the free market, which is less hierarchical, the capitalistic norms and values promote cosmopolitanism as a desirable attitude. In the face of globalization, mass media which are owned by transnational companies tend to promote cosmopolitanism as an important value system, regardless of Confucianism or authentic Western liberal democracy.

As a result, the Malaysian Chinese who are part of a globalizing nation-state are roped in to this experience. The norms and values which they have acquired from early education are often replaced with the norms and values which beckon from the global labour market. To survive, they need to reinvent themselves as cosmopolitan knowledge workers. This has resulted in a combination of prior and new values and is institutionalized cultural capital.

This phenomenon has manifested itself through the Malaysian Chinese youths' tastes in objects, among which include mass media, food, fashion, and leisurely activities. These are objectified cultural capital.

Finally, the Malaysian Chinese youths' worldviews also become integrated with global values and norms, and informs their ambitions in life. It is found that students of both education systems possess a global phenomenology, which entails a curiosity about the outside world in the belief that they are able to transcend geographical and linguistic borders.

## **Discussion**

In this study, I used the framework of cultural capital to indicate the tastes of individuals who come from Chinese-educated and non-Chinese-educated backgrounds. Cultural capital has widely been used to study class differences in terms of tastes. In my research, I used this framework in a novel way, to express the taste differences resulting in education as a socialization agent. My findings demonstrate that while education plays an important role as a socialization agent, the mass media has overtaken its influence in the globalized context. This case is unique because I did not examine class structure at all, given that Malaysia is not a class-based society (Hirschman, 1988; Carstens, 2014). I have instead looked at an ethnic group, known for its



great diasporic outreach across the globe, and noted for its intra-ethnic diversity. As ethnicity has been expressed in this case to be based on linguistic and educational associations, I have thus examined the influence of these two aspects among others on individual expression of tastes. Thus, my study of cultural capital ownership among the Malaysian Chinese is unique in its approach and contribution to the field of Malaysian Chinese studies.

Previous studies on the application of cultural capital have either focused very strongly on the objectified or institutionalized aspects and ignored the embodied; or have argued for the focus to be solely on the embodied. I have included all three aspects by designing a survey. Furthermore, my survey includes response options that takes into account the cultural nuances of the unique site of study which is Malaysia. Thus, my survey differs from the bulk of large-scale cultural capital studies which have been conducted in Europe, using European cultural attributes as response options.

Past research on cultural capital has also tended to focus on large-scale social collectivities. The bulk of landmark studies on cultural capital have been based in the United Kingdom (UK). To date, with the exception of the 2006 Asian Social Survey, there have not been many landmark cultural capital studies conducted in Asia.

In particular, this has not been done in Southeast Asia, nor Malaysia. This opens up the possibility to explore wider ground in this part of the world. Given the difference in cultural values in this region, cultural capital may take on new forms in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia. Most research which oriented itself towards Western highbrow versus middle and lowbrow values will indubitably be Western-centric. The way these values manifest within Asian society with different social systems and history may be different.

Hence my survey has attempted to address these issues. The three aspects of cultural capital, which are the objectified, institutionalized and embodied have been adjusted to accommodate the Malaysian experience, in an Asian context. Of particular note is the inclusion of the Confucian-Western liberal democratic value dichotomy, which is taught in schools and is thus passed down through education as a socialization agent. Education as a form of cultural capital thus results in the attainment of either Confucian or Western liberal democratic values. The influence of cultural globalization upon this possession of values can thus also be examined. If cultural globalization is assumed to have a homogenising effect then surely it would entail the erosion of original values to be replaced by either Western liberal democratic values, or Confucian ones. With the rise of China as an economic, political and

cultural power alongside the Anglo-American powers, this ongoing balancing act between possession of values can be observed.

Individualistic and collectivist values appear to have surfaced within both English-educated and Chinese-educated respondents. The traditional collectivist values of being family-oriented and attaining educational success are apparent in both groups. Chinese-educated respondents' display a strong family orientation, likely due to continuous attachment to their own family of orientation, in which their parents or elders who had also embraced collectivist values through Chinese education before them, continue to influence their socialization. Meanwhile, given the overall emphasis on academic performance by the Malaysian education system, respondents from both Chinese-medium and non-Chinese-medium schools placed a primer on academic success.

However, there is also a strong status consciousness displayed through a drive for increasing personal power, which likely comes from global capitalistic values. The emergence of the transnational elite (Sklair, 2002) as a cosmopolitan class not anchored to particular communities nor families, but as border-transcending agents of economic growth brings with it an ideology of self-interest. Its influence, felt since the early days of globalization in the 1980s (Waters, 2001), continue to influence those born in between 1980 and 2000, termed as the members of Generation Y, or millennials (Deloitte, n.d.). They display their own unique worldview, which revolves around mass travel and real-time communication. The age cohort of my respondents, 18 to 25 is located within this generation group.

Numerous characteristics have been associated with Generation Y. These include being a digital native, having grown up with unlimited choices, a lesser need to conform, a desire for consumer control, exploratory learning, flexibility, convenience, customization, personalization, bluntness, and impatience (Sweeney, 2006). These characteristics represent individualistic, self-motivated values. There is a desire for the individual to triumph front and center over the community. Thus, Generation Y has also been labelled derogatively as "Generation Me" (Twenge, 2014). Many platforms influence the drive for personal competitiveness, not least the ever-pervasive social media which Generation Y actively indulges in. Aside from socialization through education, socialization through mass media also shapes individual values. This is particularly so with Malaysian millennials, of which 96 % of survey respondents use social networking sites such as Facebook (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, 2009).

With that said, Generation Y has also been commended for their positive qualities. Despite feelings of self-entitlement, they also possess a greater curiosity about the outside world, more open-mindedness, and are more adventurous. They are more committed to global causes which concern humanitarian and environmental issues as well as equality in aspects such as gender (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, 2009). Millennials expect potential employers to be committed to the same causes and this affects their job choices (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, 2009). In addition, millennials also hold a dynamic worldview regarding global phenomenon. They believe that China, Russia, and India will overtake the United States (US) and Europe as economic powerhouses by 2020, and that corporations will become more influential than nation-states in the future (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, 2009). This indicates that millennials, the age cohort of which my respondents belong to, are facing social changes which come from external sources, in which their response is geared towards economic survival. This is echoed especially by a Guardian report that stated millennials worldwide are facing economic instability, due to factors such as debt, joblessness, and rising house prices (Barr & Shiv Malik, 2016). Hence, behaviours which are engineered towards increasing competitiveness are adopted. Often, this behaviour is also identified as *kiasu*-ism, a Chinese Hokkien term that means 'afraid to lose'. *Kiasu*-ism can manifest positively as diligence or hard work (Chua, 1989), or negatively as extreme competitiveness such as envy and selfishness (Kagda, 1993; Hwang, Ang, & Francesco, 2002).

While millennials expect much from potential employers, research shows that employers also have their share of expectations. JobStreet Malaysia (2013) states that employers expected fresh graduates to be self-motivated in continuous learning, be competent in using the English language, and show confidence. Values such as diligence, curiosity, pro-activeness, entrepreneurship, and leadership were also championed. These values make the candidate stand out from the rest, which is a trait millennials were willing to embrace, according to the PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2009) survey. These values also shape 'personal capital', which is in demand in the global labour market (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011). To match these demands, education systems today exhort the values of cosmopolitanism, which is the openness to foreign others and cultures, as a desirable global disposition (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). Therein lies the advantage in one's possession of globalized *habitus*, or cultural capital. As a matter of fact, quite many populations today see themselves as world citizens, indicating cosmopolitanism, though such global identities do not erode national or local identities (Pichler, 2012). In the case of

the Malaysian Chinese youth, the seeds have been sown to develop a broader, inclusive worldview.

## **Conclusion**

The overall thrust behind this study is that cultural globalization is bringing two formerly disparate value systems into the forefront, repackaging some of its attributes as desirable cultural capital (global habitus), and transmitting these values into Malaysian Chinese youth, who embrace it to remain competitively relevant, regardless of education background. This fits in with Poh Chua Siah and Chong Keng How (2016)'s finding that Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs perceive Chinese cultural values as more important compared to other communities of overseas Chinese, such as Taiwan. This suggests that Malaysian Chinese, regardless of education background, are motivated to acquire Chinese cultural values, making their possession of habitus a blend of Chinese and Western values.

Where Chinese cultural values are concerned, collectivism has often been attributed to Confucian societies. Hofstede (1984) classified Chinese-majority societies such as China, Taiwan and Singapore as collectivist, and this was echoed by many others such as Leung and Bond (1984), Shenkar and Ronen (1987), and Lockett (1988) who found a strong group orientation particularly in China (Wong, 2001). The rise of China as a global superpower (Liu, 2011; Lim, 2015) may have been pivotal in encouraging the Malaysian Chinese towards embracing similar group orientations. Confucian values have also been contrasted to the West, creating an East vs. West dialectic. Indeed, much of the literature has compared Confucian values (or its subset 'Asian values') against Western democratic principles. These studies claim that because of Confucian traditions, 'East Asian societies are paternalistic, accept hierarchic authority, and community-oriented characteristics that promote order and consensus'. They claim that conversely, Western societies are 'rights-based and individualistic, which is congruent with the competitive elements of democratic competition' (Dalton & Ong, 2005).

However, there are in fact several similarities and differences between Confucianism and Western liberal democracy (Hu, 1997). Furthermore, I acknowledge that in real life, no value system can be practiced in such a clear-cut way. Over the course of human history, the practice of both value systems are likely to have diverged from the time they were first introduced.

To describe this cultural convergence in a measurable form, I call for the application of the theoretical framework of cultural capital, which consists of institutionalized, objectified, and embodied aspects. Institutions socialize

individuals, individuals develop material and lifestyle preferences, and attach meaning to these. Variables such as age, gender, social class, and others can be used as the basis of comparison. Doing so would address the divide between materialist and idealist approaches, as well a lack of intra-ethnic comparison within the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. Finally, it also locates the position of Generation Y Malaysian Chinese youth within transnational links to China and the West.

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