

## Malaysian Chinese Attitude of Inheriting Chinese Culture<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** *Cultural self-identification is critical to effective Cultural Inheritance. Chinese culture originated a long time ago, thus has a great influence, and has been identified by many Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese. Though they have immigrated to other countries, they have endeavored themselves to inherit Chinese culture. Among all the Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese, Malaysian Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese have been the most successful Chinese culture Inheritors due to the fact that they always stick to the identification of Chinese culture. The rise of China has enhanced Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese's faith and motivation on inheriting Chinese culture. In order to provide reference for policy study of Chinese culture heritage, it is necessary to know the attitude of Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Chinese towards Chinese cultural identification and inherit in this new era. We did some research about Malaysian Chinses in the survey. In general, Malaysian Chinese has a high identification towards Chinese culture. However, there is a decline in young generation. There is also difference between people in different age, vocation, income.*

**Keywords:** Malaysian Chinese, Chinese culture, cultural identification, cultural heritage

**1. Introduction.** It has been several hundred years since the huge immigration wave at the end of Qing dynasty. Since then, Overseas Chinese have been facing the issue of culture identity and heritage. Li (2013) claims that culture identification is a nation's mental experience of self-awareness, self-confidence and passion towards its own culture [1].

Generally speaking, after moving out of the homeland, the very first thing people would

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encounter is the lack of communication and learning environment. Thus it would instantly become a problem for the first generation of immigrants to inherit native culture. Second-generation immigrants would retrograde or abandon their native language and culture because of Social and language Environment, as well as the education they got. This phenomenon is especially typical in European and American countries due to the fact that European and American culture is usually more powerful. Gao (2005) thinks that compared with European and American culture, Chinese culture is usually not the dominant one. However, Chinese culture has its own strength in Southeast Asian countries because these Southeast Asian countries are newly founded, diverse, and have relatively weak native culture. Moreover, Ethnic Chinese generally have higher socioeconomic status and tend to maintain their own culture.

Among all the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries, Malaysian Chinese have done the most prominent job in identifying and inheriting Chinese culture. It has always been the common sense to keep up with Chinese culture thus there is no huge gap yet. However, with time changing, the upcoming new generation of Chinese immigrants, globalization, and individualization, the youth tend to obey contemporary values and ignore traditional values. On the one hand, the new generation of immigrants are less attached to their motherland, and are easily less connected to Chinese culture. Motherland is more like a compulsory and obscure idea for new generation of Chinese immigrants, and they rarely have personal understanding of motherland. On the other hand, they would grow more culture identity towards Malaysian because they are born and raised there. Hence, new generation of immigrants would experience crisis of culture identity. Therefore, we did survey about the culture identity and the sense of culture heritage of Malaysian Chinese to provide some suggestions for overseas Chinese culture transmission in new era.

**2. Research Background.** On May 17th 2017, President Xi delivered *the speech on philosophy and social science*, which emphasized on the importance of cultural confidence. He claimed that “Cultural confidence is rooted, deep, and persistent power. History and reality have shown that a nation that abandoned its own history and culture would, by no means, thrive. And chances are that nation would probably have a tragic ending”. No matter Chinese are in domestic land or not, we should have absolute confidence in long-history Chinese civilization. With the increase of comprehensive national power, China should advocate cultural confidence domestically. It comes to the critical moment for China to build an image of culturally powerful country. China should enhance the connection with Overseas Chinese and help them build cultural confidence, because without cultural confidence, there is no identity and heritage of culture.

Researchers put much emphasis on two aspects in overseas Chinese culture focusing on overseas culture transmission. One is traditional cultural symbol, such as martial arts, Chinese medicine, and calligraphy. The other one is education policy studies or Chinese education history studies, focusing on the new issues of Chinese education in a new era and how to strive for civil rights and interests. Beside the research articles on several journals, United Chinese School Committees’ Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) founded

Chinese Education Studies, reflecting new status and progress of Malaysian Chinese education, covering up the history, current situation, and future develop of Chinese education, discussing about the relationship between Chinese education and politics, economy, culture, and society development. Thus, *Chinese Education Development and Studies* has become the mainstream of Chinese education studies. [3] There are many qualitative researches and few quantitative researches towards psychological factors and subjective consciousness of current social cultural inheritor.

In general, early generations of immigrants are conscious about the heritage of their native language and culture, which would affect their children's heritage of native culture. However, after two or three generations, with the impact of globalization, it becomes arguable whether if the young generation can remain their native tone and culture. To show the process, we did quantitative research towards overseas Chinese.

Both quantitative and qualitative research were conducted to measure the mental status of Malaysian Chinese in inheriting Chinese culture, disclosing different psychology's impact on different generations. Besides, the research results of European and American Chinese would be stated separately.

**3. Components of Questionnaire.** This research is mainly to reveal the consciousness and attitude of Malaysian Chinese who are proficient in Chinese towards Chinese culture identity and heritage, which means that this research does not include Malaysian Chinese who speak another native language other than Chinese. Both survey and interview are included in this research, aiming to find out how different age, education background, vocation, and socioeconomic status affect and influence the attitude and consciousness of Chinese cultural heritage.

There are three part in this survey. First part is eleven questions in Likert scale, including two dimensions, the first one is identity of ethnic and Chinese culture (mentioned as dimension A, including the importance of learning Chinese, the confidence as Chinese, historical position and features of Chinese culture), the second one is attitude and action towards inheriting Chinese language and culture (mentioned as dimension B, including the learning and application of Chinese characters, the value on piety and struggling spirit, following traditional customs especially traditional holidays and eating habits). The second part is four questions about attribution, including age, education background, vocation, and socioeconomic status. The last part is one open question that interviewees can volunteer to evaluate the cultural heritage. 303 valid online questionnaires were collected.

This questionnaire covers seven different age groups and almost all the common vocations. As for education backgrounds, it covered middle school, bachelor, master, and doctor for choices. Family socioeconomic status covers five levels, including high income, middle income, mid-low income, and low income. Please notice that we did not strictly categorize family income, instead we categorize family income based on the location of participants. We categorize age, vocation, education background, and family income level by a precise scale so that we can cover all cases and everyone can find their position and

express their opinions. However, we also found that when the category is too precise, the number of each group was too few. Thus different group has little effect on the result. We also found that when we group the categories, the results remained almost the same. Therefore, we put several groups together to research and describe the result. We group all the participants who are under 30 years old into the young group, all the participants who are between 31 to 50 years old into the middle-age group, and all the participants who are above 51 years old into the old group. As for vocation, considering the importance role teachers play in the process of inheriting Chinese culture, it is necessary to put teachers into a separate group, and to put people who have other vocations into another group. As for education background, due to the fact that there are few people who have a doctor degree and people who have a master degree is also considered as highly educated, we put doctor and master into the same group (doctor/master group). As for family income, considering that there are few high-income family and low-income family, we put them into the relatively-high-income and relatively-low-income group. Besides middle-income group, there are three groups in this research paper in total. The detailed information is listed in table 1.

TABLE 1. AGE, VOCATION, EDUCATION BACKGROUND AND FAMILY INCOME

Age	Freq	Ratio %	Vocation	Freq	Ratio %	Education background	Freq	Ratio %	Family income	Freq	Ratio %
Young	95	31.4	Teacher	118	38.9	Master /doctor	35	11.6	Relatively-high	74	24.8
Middle-age	156	51.5	Student	69	22.8	College	190	62.7	Middle	198	65.3
Elder	52	17.2	Other	116	38.3	High school	78	25.7	Relatively-low	31	9.9

**4. Statistics of Questionnaire.** This questionnaire combined the research result of Chinese ethnic's culture identity and heritage via current academic circle and the practical experience of Malaysian Chinese language education. Before releasing the questionnaire, we did pre-survey. Based on the results of pre-survey, we deleted several question, and asked psychology experts examine the validity of this questionnaire. Then the questionnaire was officially released online. We analyzed the statistic result with SPSS 20. Due to the fact that this questionnaire concerns the effect that different groups have on different dimension, we used one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) and individual samples t test to examine the difference each group show on different dimensions. All the questions are scored positively, that being said, option one (strongly disagree) scores one points and option five (strongly agree) scores five points.

We would analyze the results of the questionnaire from two dimensions, dimension A is the relationship between ethnic and culture identity, and dimension B is the relationship between ethnic and the attitude and deed of inheriting Chinese language and culture, based on age, vocation, education background, and socioeconomic status.

(1) Different age groups: first, use one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze

the young, middle, and elder groups. The results show that both Dimension A ( $F=7.421$ ,  $P=0.0007$ ) and dimension B have a statistical significance ( $F=10.484$ ,  $P=0.00004$ ) on all the three age group.

Through Bonferroni post examination, significant difference between young group and middle group in dimension A ( $p<0.001$ ) was found, and a significantly important difference between young group and elder group ( $P=0.026$ ) was found. Whereas there is no statistical significance between middle-age group and elder group ( $P=1$ ). On dimension B, there is significant difference between young group and middle-age group ( $P<0.001$ ). Also, young group and elder group has significant difference ( $P=0.036$ ). However, there is no significant difference between middle-age group and elder group ( $P=0.989$ ).

Comparing three different age group by independent sample t test, the result was congruent with Bonferroni post examination. There is significant difference between middle-age group and elder group both in dimension A and dimension B ( $P<0.001$ ). More information is provided in table 2.

TABLE 2. T TEST RESULTS IN YOUNG GROUP AND MIDDLE-AGE GROUP

	Young group (N=95)	Middle-age group (N=156)	t
	M±SD	M±SD	
Dimension A	4.11±.51	4.34±.44	-3.727**
Dimension B	4.02±.48	4.29±.43	-4.632**

Note: \*\* $P<0.01$

There is important significance between young group and elder group on both dimension A and B,  $P$  (dimension A)=0.013,  $P$  (dimension B)=0.018. More information is provided in table 3.

TABLE 3. T TEST RESULTS IN YOUNG GROUP AND ELDER GROUP

	Young group (N=95)	Elder group (N=52)	t	P
	M±SD	M±SD		
Dimension A	4.11±.51	4.33±.48	-2.503	.013
Dimension B	4.02±.48	4.22±.49	-2.388	.018

However, the difference between middle-age group and elder group has no statistical significance.  $P$  (dimension A)= 0.859,  $P$  (dimension B)=0.318. More information is provided in table 4.

TABLE 4. T TEST RESULTS IN MIDDLE-AGE GROUP AND MIDDLE-AGE GROUP

	Middle-age group (N=156)	Elder group (N=52)	t	P
	M±SD	M±SD		
Dimension A	4.34±.44	4.33±.48	.177	.859
Dimension B	4.29±.43	4.22±.49	1.001	.318

(2) Different vacation: we compared the teacher group and the non-teacher group, which consisted all the other vacations except teacher. Through independent sample t test, it was found that there in significant difference between teacher group and non-teacher group on both dimension A and B. More information is provided in table 5.

TABLE 5. T TEST RESULTS IN TEACHER GROUP AND NON-TEACHER GROUP

	Teacher group (N=118)	Non-teacher group (N=185)	t
	M±SD	M±SD	
Dimension A	4.39±.46	4.19±.47	3.655**
Dimension B	4.32±.45	4.12±.47	3.782**

note: \*\*P<0.01

(3) Different education background: Overall, Malaysian Chinese are highly-educated. Through One-way ANOVA, all three groups no statistical significance on both dimension A and dimension B, F(dimension A)=0.691, P(dimension A)=0.502; F(dimension B)=1.031, P(dimension B)=0.358. More information is provided in table 6.

TABLE 6. RESULTS OF ONE-WAY ANOVA FOR DIFFERENT EDUCATION BACKGROUND GROUPS

	Master & PhD group (N=35)	College group (N=190)	High school group (N=78)	The total number (N=303)
	M±SD	M±SD	M±SD	M±SD
Dimension A	4.29±.52	4.29±.49	4.21±.45	4.27±.48
Dimension B	4.24±.48	4.21±.48	4.13±.43	4.19±.47

There is no statistical significance found in comparative analysis through individual sample t test between different education background groups.

(4) Different family income: in general, 90% are from middle class, which is the highest proportion among all three groups. There is no statistical significance through One-way ANOVA, F=2.066, P=0.128. Whereas, there was statistical significance found on dimension B, F=5.948, P=0.003.

In order to compare the difference between three groups, we used individual sample t test to analyze comparatively. It was found that there is no statistical significance for all three groups neither on dimension A nor on dimension B. More information is provided in table 7.

TABLE 7. RESULTS OF INDIVIDUAL SAMPLE T TEST IN HIGH FAMILY INCOME AND MIDDLE FAMILY INCOME

	High family income group (N=74)	Middle family income group (N=198)	t	P
	M±SD	M±SD		
Dimension A	4.30±.44	4.28±.49	.406	.685
Dimension B	4.26±.45	4.21±.45	.854	.394

There is significant importance for high family income group and low family income group on both dimension A and B. For more information, please see table 8.

TABLE 8. RESULTS OF INDIVIDUAL SAMPLE T TEST FOR HIGH FAMILY INCOME GROUP AND LOW FAMILY INCOME

	High family income group (N=74) M±SD	Low family income group (N=31) M±SD	t	P
Dimension A	4.30±.44	4.11±. 49	2.044	.044
Dimension B	4.26±.45	3.93±.55	3.227	.002

There is no statistical significance on dimension A for both middle family income group and low family income group. However, there is significant importance on dimension B,  $P=0.002$ . For more information, please see table 9.

TABLE 9. RESULTS OF INDIVIDUAL SAMPLE T TEST OF MIDDLE FAMILY INCOME GROUP AND LOW FAMILY INCOME GROUP

	Middle family income group (N=198) M±SD	Low family income group (N=31) M±SD	t	P
Dimension A	4.28±. 49	4.11±. 49	1.835	.068
Dimension B	4.21±.45	3.93±.55	3.095	.002

**4. Analysis.** Generally speaking, Malaysian Chinese have high culture identity towards Chinese culture, and a high recognition for the historical status of Chinese culture. It is not hard to tell that Chinese ethnic has strong common sense to inherit Chinese culture. The average score on two dimension, the recognition of Chinese ethnic and culture, the attitude and action of inheriting Chinese language and culture, is above 4.0, which is high. There is significant difference between different age, vacation, and socioeconomic status. However, the difference between difference education background groups is subtle, which means that different education background groups have constant attitude towards heritage of Chinese culture.

As for different age group, the elder and middle age groups tend to have stronger sense, attitude, and action of Chinese culture heritage. This accords with current situation, which was congruent with the pre-judgement of this research. Thus, it is important and possible to strengthen the connection between young generation of Malaysian Chinese and China, strengthen their recognition towards Chinese culture, and make them inherit Chinese culture like their ancestors did.

As for different vacation groups, teacher group tend to have stronger sense to inherit Chinese culture compared with non-teacher group, and they are also more positive in attitude and action. Because Chinese teacher has always been an important part in inheriting Chinese culture. It is Chinese teachers' responsibility to pass Chinese language and culture to younger generation. It is also many Chinese parents and communities' common sense to maintain and pass their own ethnical language and culture. Likewise, it is Chinese teachers' responsibility to achieve parents' expectation. It is the high-quality Chinese language and culture education system that leads to the current situation that

Malaysian Chinese are passionate about their ethnic language and culture.

As for different family income groups, high family income group tends to have strong sense and positive attitude to inherit Chinese culture. There is huge difference between different family income groups. To sum up, the higher one's family income is, the stronger sense and the more positive attitude he or she would have in inheriting Chinese culture. There is no significant difference between different family income levels, and they tend to have a high recognition of their ethnic status and historical status of Chinese culture on dimension A. However, on dimension B, there is significant difference between different family income levels. The lower one's family income is the less positive attitude they would have in inheriting Chinese culture. It is worth discussing why some Malaysian Chinese recognize the status of Chinese culture yet have uncertain attitude of inheriting Chinese culture. It was found out through interview that, under the circumstances of Chinese language education policy in Malaysia, there is no financial support for Chinese language education, and all the sources of Chinese educational funds are from local Chinese community. For families with low family income, there is higher possibility for the kids to go to public school. In the long term, when someone is hunting for jobs, it does not matter whether if he or she can speak Chinese or not. However, if he or she is proficient in Malaysian, it would be much easier for him or her to have a better job prosperity or just simply blend in local communities. The need for survival always comes first; all the other higher needs for one's life yield to the need of survival. Based on the history of Chinese language education in Malaysia, it was the achievement of several Malaysian Chinese generation's fight despite of disadvantage of Malaysian policy about Chinese language education. The fact that Malaysian Chinese has a high socioeconomic status ensured the development of Chinese language education.

It is obvious to learn about the attitude and consciousness of Malaysian Chinese towards inheriting Chinese culture through some typical questions in this questionnaire. For example, we can learn about current status of recognition and inheriting of Chinese culture through the attitude of practicing Chinese characters, the idea of children education, and eating habit. Because language is the carrier of culture, language and culture are attached to each other and cannot be separate. Thus every language has its own cultural meaning. Words are the tool to record culture. Only through words, a culture can be reflected and spread. The recognition of Chinese culture is the recognition of the essence of Chinese culture on the basis of the recognition of Chinese characters. Chinese language education is the critical carrier of teaching and inheriting Chinese language and culture, as well as an important method for overseas Chinese to pursue and build their culture identity. 85% participants highly agreed that parents should speak Chinese in their household to make sure that kids would continuing speak their native tongue. 77% participants claimed that they strongly agreed to use simplified Chinese characters because simplified Chinese characters are easy for young generation of Overseas Chinese to learn Chinese language and culture. 86% participants said that they had the habit reading Chinese newspaper or Chinese website, which indicated that they were proficient enough to read Chinese. It would also benefit one's Chinese reading capability to read Chinese newsletters or



magazines frequently. The press in Southeast Asia is highly advanced. It is an essential method for local Chinese to maintain ethnic characteristics and fight for civil rights. Until now, *Sin Chew Daily*, *Nan Yang Siang Pau*, *China Press*, *Oriental Daily News*, *Guangming Daily*, and *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* have high circulation and influence in Malaysia. Junlin Chen affirmed the contribution that Malaysian press made for Chinese culture inherit, and thought that Chinese press pushed popularization of Chinese and simplified Chinese characters in Malaysia. Moreover, Malaysian Chinese press has made great effort in spreading Chinese culture, which has always been considered incumbent obligation of overseas Chinese and indicated the value to one's own ethnic. He believed that Malaysian Chinese press will have great achievement and improve Chinese soft power in the future. 84% participants claimed that they were educated by their parents to remain the characteristic of traditional Chinese culture to stay positive and fight for better life. It was the most valuable part of Chinese culture to work hard, stay humble, devote to one's career, and be bold to contribution. Because of this spirit, generation and generation of Chinese have been working hard and fight for a better living.

The situation stated above was quiet positive, yet there is great ratio of interviewee are not certain about inheriting Chinese culture, especially young generation. On the dimension A, the average score of young group (4.11) is lower compared with the score of middle age group (4.34) and elder group (4.33). On dimension B, the average score of young group (4.02) is lower than middle age group (4.34) and elder group (4.33). There are two questions of dimension A about the characteristics of Chinese culture and status; young group who are under 25 scored much lower than the other two groups, which are 3.79 and 3.92. There could be many reasons for this phenomenon. The most important phenomenon is the weak bond with motherland both physically and emotionally due to globalization, increasing influence of Western culture, and new generation of Chinese immigrants. The first generation of Chinese immigrants had a strong bond with China, though China was weak and poor back then. The first generation of Chinese immigrants felt that they were pushed to immigrant to a new country because of the advanced Chinese civilization, the value of family ethics and provincialism. This being-pushed feeling became the original motivation and sub consciousness to maintain and inherit Chinese culture. After several generations of immigrants, these new generation of immigrants lack of physical bond with their native country, as well as emotional bond with their native country. Due to these impacts, new generation of immigrants have less motivation and consciousness to inherit their native culture. It is critical to build emotional connection when physical connection is weak.

**5. Conclusions.** It showed that overseas Chinese have made important role in inheriting Chinese culture, and also carries the soft power of China according to *Report of Chinese International Immigrants (2015)*. According to statistics, the population of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia makes up to three quarters the whole six billions overseas Chinese who live majorly in Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. During the process of reform and open-up policy, overseas Chinese have been playing an important

role in it.

With the peaceful arise of China, the development of Chinese economy and the transmission of Chinese culture are making global impact. The bloom of Chinese economy brings the prosper of Chinese culture. The practical value of Chinese culture has been constantly improved, and the inner value of Chinese culture is glowing. The direct evidence is the Chinese fever hits all over the world, which promotes the increasing number of overseas Chinese-culture-inheriting organization and group. The global environment of inheriting Chinese culture is becoming an advantage for overseas Chinese, thus people are becoming more concerned about this issue. The rapid arise of China puts more faith in maintaining ethnic culture for six billion Overseas Chinese; it also mitigates the weakening ethnic and culture identity, thus reinforced their recognition of motherland. Hence, a powerful native country is the foundation for Overseas Chinese to inherit their native culture, it is also a magnet to draw Overseas Chinese to recognize their native culture. Despite that young generation of Overseas Chinese do not have experience being raised up and educated like the elder generation, nor do they have complex about their native country, it is still necessary to educate new generation Chinese language and culture to enlighten them the historical contribution and practical value that Chinese culture and language has on human civilization. So the emotional connection between young generation of overseas Chinese would be strengthened and young generation would become the new motive power to inherit Chinese culture. In the future, it needs to be discussed how to make young generation of overseas Chinese to actively maintain and promote Chinese culture and to make significant impact on the Belt and Road. As the native country to these 6 billion overseas Chinese, it is China's responsibility to make effort to strengthen the connection between China and overseas Chinese. *Report of Chinese International Immigrants (2015)* suggested to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of overseas Chinese with great openness, so that overseas Chinese would receive the help and care from their native country and make more effort for their native country.

In recent years, China has taken various actions to support Chinese language and culture education globally, and put new motivation to international Chinese language education. For example, the blooming Confucius Institute all over the world made numerous contribution to Chinese language education, Chinese teacher preparation, and culture promotion. Various Chinese culture activities that Confucius Institute outreached to local communities made it possible for people to understand Chinese culture and for overseas Chinese to inherit Chinese culture. In the future, the national quality of China needs to improve according to the increasing economy, and China's international influence needs to improve too. Thus, culture exchange between China and Malaysia would become possible including sponsoring overseas Chinese to study in China. It is the essential for inheriting native culture to recognize one's country. On the basis of recognition of Chinese culture, it is an advantage to build young generation of overseas Chinese's love for homeland and awareness of root. For each individual, the recognition of native culture helps to maintain one's ethnic characteristic, for that without language or culture, there is no ethnic. In general, the recognition of Chinese culture helps with national unity. <sup>[6]</sup>

Above all, from this research, Malaysian Chinese still have strong consciousness to inherit Chinese culture from subjective side. However, there can be differences inside ethnic. Among all the factors what lead to differences, age is the most significant one. Under many factors' impact, young generation of overseas Chinese have weak recognition for their native culture, and are more easily affected by Western culture. It requires for many contributions from government, institutes, organizations, and individuals to maintain Chinese culture. There are more than five generations since overseas Chinese first arrived in Malaysia, thus they have already blended in local community.

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