

# CHINESE EDUCATION AND CHINESE IDENTITY IN MALAYSIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In general, research and discourse on the concept of identity has been naturally evolved as the changes of social structures in social processes, such as industrial affairs, modernization, and globalization, are expanding as well. The concept of identity, meanwhile, has also changed by following the development of social thoughts, i.e. the formation and change in the philosophy of knowledge paradigm, such as the development of structural theoretical perspective to post-structural and post-modernism (Bendle, 2002; Lee, 2007).*

**Key words:** Chinese Education, Chinese Identity, Ethnicity in Malaysia

## **Introduction**

It cannot be denied that the new knowledge has added human knowledge about who themselves. However, what is more important is that the results of scientific identity studies are also used as a reference by nation leaders, particularly by a new nation. The results are also used in forming policy and nation building project, especially in forming national identity.

According to Wang (1988), Chinese concept of identity is an academic construction in the discourse of social science experts who study the Chinese community. In everyday social life, Chinese people do not discuss the issue of their identity as what is done by academic experts. In addition, they rarely use the word identity in everyday life. They are more aware of and emphasis on “being Chinese” and “being non-Chinese” or what is commonly called by Wang as being Chinese. The level of this being Chinese may be different from each individual, who can be “more Chinese” and “less Chinese”. Wang believes that the Chinese concept of identity is produced in the discourse of academic experts and is popularized by social science experts when they researched Chinese community since 1950. Therefore, the concept of being Chinese can more practically refer to how the Chinese see Chinese people themselves and often related to their knowledge on culture, geopolitics, and history (Tu, 1994).

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In generally, the concept of identity is complex and accessible to see in various perspectives. The nature of various types of identity has been conceptualized by academic experts since 1950s. Among various constructed identities are national identity, communal identity, cultural identity, ethnical identity, and class identity. In the discussion of identity and being Chinese in Malaysia, one of the important aspects which influence Chinese identity is education. Education is considered as the most important channel in perpetuating the main identity symbol of Chinese, i.e. Chinese language and Chinese culture. As believed by many people, Chinese education can be a medium in which the Chinese philosophy can be transferred to the next generations through curriculum and co-curriculum activities.

Having migrated to Malaya, Chinese people in Malay tried to build Chinese education for young generation though most of them were illiterate workers. Naturally, they continue education model practiced in China and use the resources from China, such as teachers and materials that characterize China. Doing this, the practice of Chinese and Malay culture is applied, and then directly affects the identity of Chinese, especially after the Second World War.

In this writing, the writer wants to explore the relevance between the developments of Chinese education with the identification of the Chinese and their concept of being Chinese. In scientific studies, there are some published writings that discuss the history of development of Chinese education in Malaysia, particularly in Semenanjung Malaysia. However, those writings do not discuss the Chinese identity as the main focus. For example, Ku Hung-Ting (2003), a scholar of history in Taiwan, has seen the formation of Chinese in the context of the development of secondary level education. In the writer's point of view, Ku does not identity issue, but he mostly discusses the impacts of political factors, like the implementation of government policy, and the reactions and the roles of Chinese people in MCA, *Dong Zong* (United Chinese School's Committee Association), *Jiao Dong* (United Chinese School's Teacher Association) and *Dong Jiao Zong*<sup>2</sup>, in the development and the existence of Chinese secondary school.

The main objective of this writing is to look back at the changes of Chinese identity with the development of Chinese education in Semenanjung Malaysia according to initial stage, after the Second World War and after the independence of Malaysia. In addition, the writer wants to discuss how contemporary Chinese see the issue of being Chinese in the context of Chinese language and culture. It is hoped that the difference of Chinese identity and being Chinese can be well understood in macro and micro level. Therefore, some writings have also been reviewed to see the reciprocal relevance between the changes of identity and the development of Chinese education. Additionally, some "non-elite" Chinese were also interviewed to understand their perspectives on being Chinese in the context of language interest and Chinese culture if they identified themselves as Chinese in Malaysia.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Tan Liok Ee (1992: 181), *Dong Jiao Zong* refers to the two organizations that cooperate in expressing opinions and interests of Chinese people in education and related issues.

## **Early Chinese Education and Chinese Identity**

Chinese education has already been in Malaysia for more than 150 years. During its development, Chinese education has faced many obstacles and barriers, both internal and external. However, Chinese education still exists and keeps evolving. In general, Chinese education in Malaysia can be categorized into some types and levels, i.e. Chinese primary schools, Chinese private schools, and Chinese language teaching in national schools.

Traditional Chinese schools have existed in Semenanjung Malaysia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the major cause of Chinese people to build education sector outside China is due to the existence of political and social unrest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning, Chinese education was in the form of informal education, such as in *sishu* – small scale private education – or *yixue* – free education welfare. Besides, informal education was also run by clubs and cultural associations. Among the informal education at that time, *sishu* school which was more influential was *Nanhua Yixue* established in 1888 in Pinang island.

Political changes in China have also influenced Chinese education in Semenanjung Malaysia. The defeat suffered by China from British in Opium War (1839 – 1842) and from Japanese in 1895 caused the reformists – Zhang Zhi-dong and Kang Yu-wei – to suggest renewal and modernization in Chinese education system. Kang Yuwei had been to Nanyang referring to Malay as southern ocean, and he had actively promoted modern education there. Besides, the development of Chinese education in Semenanjung Malaysia was also influenced by the most well-known Chinese revolutionary, Sun Yet-Sen. In conjunction with revolutionary movement, a new school had been established and reading clubs were formed in big cities and small towns.

Since then, small-scale private education, like *sishu*, also disappeared and was replaced by formal schools that used the new education system which was specially written following the subjects including history, geography, science, music, and physical education. Foreign language was also introduced as a part of curriculum.

The first Chinese modern school was Chunghua Xuetang or Chunghua School which was established in Pulau Pinang in 1904. This school was the first model of modern school. Aside from Chinese language, classical education, and ethics, subjects including history, geography, arithmetic, physics, art, and physical education were also given. Total hours per subjects were then set. Besides, English language was also taught as foreign language since the school was located in the British area.

The good example of this school was then followed by the establishment of other new schools which used the new and modern concept. Some of them were Confusian School established in Kuala Lumpur in 1906, Yuk Coy School in Ipoh in 1907, Pay Fong School in Melaka, and Foon Yew School in Johor Baru in 1913. Besides, modern girls' school were also established in some cities, such as Kuen Cheng Girls' School in Kuala Lumpur in 1908, Perak Girls' School in 1914 in Ipoh,

and Fukien Girls' School in Pulau Pinang in 1920 (Tan Liok Ee, 1997). In 1938, there were about 996 Chinese primary schools and 36 Chinese secondary schools in Semenanjung Malaysia which were fully established and sponsored by Chinese community (Tan Liok Ee, 1997).

The new education system which was introduced by the reformists and revolutionaries gave a big impact on the identity of Chinese people. If investigation in terms of changes in the national identity of the Chinese was carried out, the awareness of national and political identity of the Chinese would emerge in 1920s and 1930s when the reformists and revolutionaries began widespread among the overseas Chinese through education system since they realized that *huaqiao* had high potential on finance and strong obedience to their nation.

Political event in China, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, gave a strong impact to the overseas Chinese community. After being defeated in the first war of *Sino-Japanese*, reformists, such as Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao launched Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 to give new breathes to Ching dynasty, the more corrupt dynasty. They failed in the movement and escaped to other countries, such as Japan and North America. Across the ocean, Kang established Bao Huang Hui (Emperor Protection Society) which had branches in several countries, including Singapore and Malaysia (Dikotter, 1992; Yen, 2000). By using modern media, especially newspapers and organizations such as *Chinese Philomatic Society*, the reformists promoted the Chinese nationalism, the ideas of progress and reformation, and the obedience to the king of Kuang-hsu. Their activities had created new political awareness in Chinese community. Besides, Kang Yu-wei and Ling Chi-chao believed that education was the important factor in the modernization of China. Hence, they also took part in the establishment of modern schools in the Chinese community.

The influence of revolutionaries came later. After failure in the revolutionary movements in Waichow, Guangdong, in the late 1900, many revolutionaries came to Malaya to seek safety. Most of them established associations and spread revolutionary and republicanism ideology, for example *Zhong He Tang* which was established by Yu Lieh in Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Johor, Seremban; *Jiu Guo Shi Ba Yau* in Tangkak in 1897 and *Tong Meng Hui* (Society of Alliance) by Sun Yat-sen in 7hb. Ogos 1906. In the next two years, *Tong Meng Hui* established other branches in Pulau Pinang, Seremban, Ipoh, Kuala Pilah, Muar, and Kuantan. Tong Mei Hui was not only spreading revolutionary and republicanism ideology through newspapers, reading clubs, and play groups, but also collecting donation to overthrow Manchu kingdom in China (Yen, 2000).

The interaction of China community with the ideas of reformists and revolutionaries gave a big impact on political awareness in all community layers. The interpretation of their relationship with China had changed from the thoughts of Confucian tradition, which depicted China in the form of cultural empire into modern thoughts, which visualized China as a nation state or a nation which was composed of economic and political entities.

Nevertheless, we have to realize that not all Chinese people in Malaya support the reformists or revolutionaries (Wang, 1992: 42). The nationalism of China in Chinese community also diminishes due to the process of assimilation and integration which are unavoidable between them and their recipient countries. The emergence of indigenous nationalism, more or less, is due to the reaction of the nationalism of China, but there is no conflict between the two nationalisms before the Second World War (Yan, 1995).

In such circumstances, the interaction between Chinese and local people in Malay is that Malay people has raised their awareness to maintain their own language and culture, and at the same time, to consider their identification whether to be faithful to China or Malay.

### **Chinese Education and Chinese Identity after the Second World War**

Ku Hung-ting (2003:1) states that after the Second World War, there was the spirit of nationalism among the local inhabitants in the countries of Southeast Asia and further “anti-china” activities and tried to chase away the Chinese out of their countries.

After the Second World War, most of Chinese left China to find their family members in Nanyang, which was in the region of south sea. Since 1945, the ideas of Chinese people as *huaqiao* had changed. Many Chinese were no longer seeing themselves as impermanent people in Malaya, but people who wanted to settle in Malaya. Therefore, they began to see themselves as Chinese descents or *huayi* (Wang, 1994). Being Chinese concept, as discussed earlier, could be seen in terms of how Chinese people maintained their traditions in cultural practices which gradually diminished from generation to generation. This concept could also be seen in relation to their place of origin which adhered to political development in China through visits, newspapers, and political propaganda. However, their interaction with local inhabitants could not be avoided in the discussion of being Chinese concept due to the definite difference between the two communities.

While Chinese in Malay want to maintain the cultural identity, there are some of them who have been influenced by Melayu and western culture. At early stage, Chinese immigrants in Melayu faced many problems, especially in marriage. Chinese traditions and Chinese government restrictions on migration of women abroad caused Chinese immigrants to marry local inhabitants. The descendants of mixed marriages produced a new social group called Baba and Nyonya (Tan Chee-Beng, 1979). At the same period, many Chinese people who were born in Malaya had been sent to British Schools. They were more exposed to western influence, and more acceptable to their western values or customs.

In the post Second World War period, the interpretation on nationalism identity based on *min-zu* (race-nation) became increasingly fresh among Chinese since most of them wanted to settle in Malay. Many Chinese were willing to leave

their identity of nationalism and replaced it into the new one, Malayan national identity, but at the same time they also built an awareness of strong communal identity to claim community rights in the distribution of power in Malaya. Community leader still maintained a sense of old cultural identity and struggled to let the characteristics be officially certified as part of a composite national identity of Malayan (Wang, 1991).

One of the most significant identity symbols of China and the most commonly discussed was education and the status of Chinese language (Tan Cheen-Beng, 1988; Tan Liok Ee, 1988, 1997; Wang, 1991; Yen, 1986). The awareness of Chinese on the importance of maintaining Mandarin language as a medium of instruction in schools becomes strong particularly after the announcement of Barnes Educational Report of 1951 which denies the importance of the first language in education system (Tan, 1997). British colonial parties see Chinese schools as the main trouble in integrating Chinese community and local community, namely Melayu community. In other words, Chinese schools have slowed the process of hegemony in Malay before reaching its independence. Chinese, especially those who receive Chinese language education are generally to see that the struggle of maintaining mother tongue, i.e. Chinese language, is important in maintaining their Chinese identity and culture. They call *muyu* as mother tongue as the spirit of identity, culture, and race of Chinese.

## **Chinese Education and Chinese Identity after the Independence**

The effort of Chinese language, however, is different from some groups of leaders in Chinese society. For example, after the graduation of 1961 Education Acts, general checks in the secondary schools could be accomplished in English or Malay language (Tan, 1997). The acts required Chinese schools to change into national type schools by using English as a language of instruction. If the schools received this requirement, they would get full financial support from the government. However, the leader of *United Chinese School Teachers' Association* (UCSTA), as Lim Lian Geok, conceptualized Malay as multiethnic and multiculturalism society, and there must be the needs of equal service and respect to language used by each race. According to him, the struggle of Chinese language and Chinese school retention was the same as the struggle of rights and the position of the Chinese. On this side, the use of Chinese language in instruction must be maintained though there was no financial support from the government (Tan Liok Ee, 1988).

On the other side, professors of Chung Ling High School, David Chen and Waung Yoon Nien believe that it is not necessary and not important for Chinese schools to use full Chinese language in the instruction. What is more important, according to them, is how these schools can produce students who are having quality and having good work prospects though English language is mostly used

in the instruction. For them, Chinese identity is more important to see from the success of the Chinese in education and professional career (Tan Liok Ee, 1988).

The discourse of Chinese identity that exists in the form of struggle for Chinese language or Chinese Education Movement has continued up till now. After Barnes Education Report in 1951 and Education Acts 1961, there exist several events which involve the issue of Chinese language status, for instance the proposal of the establishment of Merdeka University in 1964; government action in placing teachers who do not speak Chinese in the structure of Chinese school administration in 1987; the implementation of Education Acts 1996 (Shamsul, 1999); and the use of English in the instruction of science and mathematics. Seeing these events, the efforts of maintaining the Chinese language and Chinese schools might be the identity symbol of Chinese or being Chinese. It is not only the interpretation of Chinese who were educated in Chinese language, but the interpretation also becomes an equal symbol to all Chinese societies through their involvement directly and indirectly in struggling the status of Chinese language in education.

### **Daily Chinese and Chinese Language**

The ability of the Chinese to speak is one of important characteristics in the discourse of Chinese identity. In macro level, there are some writings and past studies (Hou, 2002; Ku, 2003; Tan Liok Ee, 1988 and 1989) which discuss the issue deeply and thoroughly, especially in the context of Chinese education. The earlier discussion on the development of Chinese education was also featuring the importance of education in maintaining the characteristics of Chinese people, such as Chinese language and culture. Most of the respondents in this study believe that Chinese language is the most significant characteristic in determining being Chinese of a Chinese. However, their description is different from what could be obtained in the academic discourse or the social study experts. Most of interviewed respondents suggest that Chinese people should have the ability to speak in Chinese, but their meaning is not homogenous. When the writer asked them what they meant and why they said so, the answers were quite interesting and critical. WSM, for example, was an active respondent who was always telling that Chinese language as the main characteristic of being Chinese, aside from cultural points which are discussed later<sup>3</sup>. He said:

Food, the way they eat, and clothes are not important to the Chinese identity. Conversely, the thoughts or the philosophy is important and they can only be understood well if someone takes the benefit from

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<sup>3</sup> WSM said that he was not sure whether language is part of culture. In academic, language is part of a culture referring to concept of culture proposed by E. B. Taylor (Scupin, 2000). Yet, for analysis, the researcher distinguishes language and culture as two discussions in the context of being Chinese due to too many respondents separating language from culture in discussing being Chinese.

the thoughts and philosophy in Chinese language. Other languages, such as Malay and English, are not sufficient enough to understand the philosophy of Chinese people which is an old history. To understand the philosophy of a nation, we must also learn the native language.

To describe his arguments further, WSM exemplified two Chinese proverbs as samples. The proverbs were “*yi shan hai you yi shan gao*” and “*xue hai wu ya, wei qin shi an*”. If we translated these two proverbs into Malay, the first one would be “though a mount is high enough, there must be another mount which is higher.” This proverb means that though there is someone who has high ability, there must also be another one who is higher. The moral lesson from the proverb was that we did not need to be proud of being smart because there must be someone who was smarter than us out there. The second proverb says “the knowledge is like a wide ocean and we can reach to a land if we are diligent.” The moral lesson of this proverb was wide and varied. According to WSM, we could translate the two proverbs into other languages, but to understand the true meaning and to get pleasure from them was impossible without the ability of Chinese language.

Apart from WSM, WHS also said that language was important, but he was different from WSM. WHS said:

Chinese people must learn Chinese language; at least they know how to speak in one dialect, though it is not Chinese language. Besides, Chinese people must be able to read Han written, no matter how he reads it in Chinese or other dialects.

He emphasized that the argument was important because Chinese language was a language that is used in daily communication by Chinese. If someone could not speak Chinese but could speak a dialect, he/she could use this dialect when conversing with other Chinese. According to WHS, it occurred because each Chinese in Malay could speak in, at least, one type of a dialect and many people could speak using more than one dialect. If someone could not speak in Chinese, he/she at least needed to read at least newspapers in order to understand what was going on in the community, especially around Chinese community through Chinese newspapers.

LPT and LNK had the same opinions with WHS. They said that Chinese language was not the only characteristic of Chinese identity, but dialects were also important. LPT said, “while Chinese is important, dialects such as Hainan, Hokkien, Kantonis, Hakka, and so on must also be accepted as a “symbol” of one’s Chinese identity. This individual must not be expert in dialect, but at least is allowed to communicate in daily life.” LNK also said, “language which is also important is a language which is spoken by Chinese, Chinese language or dialect languages. If it is possible, fluent in some languages is possible. It does not mean Chinese must speak Chinese, but using dialect is enough already.” However, LNK also mentioned that this problem really depended on the context. He said,

This will be depending on the situation, and we have to think the contexts in which someone can be allowed to speak in Chinese and cannot be allowed to speak Chinese. If someone was born outside the country, how can he learn Chinese? If only he consider himself as a Chinese, I will accept him. I will see him as a descent of Chinese, as his Chinese individual.

The argument above shows that although Chinese language is seen as one of main points, Chinese language is not the absolute point that determines Chinese identity.

FWW also emphasizes that Chinese people need to speak and read Chinese language because Chinese language is the mother tongue of Chinese people. He sees that language as a tool that connects Chinese people and that allows Chinese to identify themselves as Chinese. He says, "language can connect us. If we can read the same language, then we can make an identity. But if a Chinese cannot use the Chinese language, should we accept them as a Chinese?" He then emphasized his argument that the ability to write is not really important, instead Chinese people need to know their mother tongue. He was really disappointed to a Chinese who was not ashamed of not having the ability to use Chinese language, but they felt proud of their ability in English. He emphasized that the Chinese need to understand and know how to communicate with Chinese although writing is not able to do. In this context, Chinese people need to communicate and learn Chinese language and then can be accepted as a Chinese.

FWW noticed dialect languages as the "root" of Chinese people. He differentiate this from Chinese. In his opinion, Chinese language is the mother tongue of Chinese and is more significant than Chinese dialects. It is because not all Chinese can speak in dialect languages, but many speak in Chinese. If Chinese are meeting each other, they will start the conversation using Chinese. If they know each other that the hearer speaks in on dialect, then they will use the dialect in the conversation. If someone cannot understand his partner using in dialect, then Chinese language is used in the interaction. He believes that dialect was a wealth that was given since 5.000 years ago in the history of Chinese. If a Chinese knows more that one dialect, for example, it means that he has more wealth. He illustrated the wealth as a knife, which is something that can be used for everything.

In addition, SL also saw Chinese language was an important thing in being Chinese. His believed that if someone cannot communicate in Chinese, he cannot be considered as Chinese. He said, for example, "banana man"<sup>4</sup> is that someone who cannot speak in Chinese, and therefore cannot be considered as a Chinese."

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<sup>4</sup> Banana man is a Malay term which refers to labeling Chinese people who had English instruction, especially the Chinese who cannot read and write Chinese. Banana is a kind of fruit which has yellow skin but white flesh. It is used to symbolize the Chinese who has yellow skin as a common Chinese but uses English as his main language in daily life and his thought like a white man, like a western who has white skin.

In this study, there were respondents that could be categorized as ‘banana man’, or they realized themselves that they are ‘banana man’. They were WMS, LKC, and TAL. In their discussion on being Chinese, WMS and LKC did not touch the issue of direct language, but TAL mostly told his story about how he was labeled as a Chinese, but not “Chinese enough” or banana people because they cannot speak Chinese.

According to TAL,

Once I heard someone calling me banana people meaning yellow skin but white inside. I consider this as ‘*ang mo lang*’ (someone with red hair which means white skin in Hokkien). Usually only Chinese who are educated in Chinese language called us banana people. It is because they did not like us for we could not speak in Chinese or Kantonis and even know nothing about the Chinese culture. Other Chinese people think that I considered English language more important and more valuable than Chinese language. They think that we looked down to them and they were offended.

TAL saw himself he was not accepted in the Chinese society which was educated in Chinese language and he was offended when interacting with them. He recounted his experience in one occasion that happened in Jalan Petaling, Kuala Lumpur, when he was studying in secondary school. He said,

When I was studying in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I walked around jalan Petaling. When I was buying some food, I did not know how to say the food in Kantonis or Chinese. Then, I was scolded by the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper was really mad at that time. I was offended because I was not wrong. I merely had a chance to learn Chinese language.

TAL’s experience above shows that Chinese people are very sensitive and responsive to their identity in terms of the Chinese language use in daily life. To overcome the problem, TAL has tried to learn Chinese and Kantonis, a dialect used in Kuala Lumpur. Now, he can speak simple Chinese and Kantonis. He said that nowadays he never used English when interacting with Chinese, especially when buying things and food. He says, “I do not want to use English because people will know me and point at me. They probably will be angry if I use English.”

However, TAL explained that his choice to use either Chinese or English was based on the context of situation. He explained that he was not doubt to use English when interacting with his colleagues who were educated Chinese in his work. It was due to most of his colleagues at work respected his effort to use English fluently and perfectly. He also added that Chinese people could change their mind in using the language if they believed that English is very important in their work, especially those who worked in foreign company which linked to international trade.

As a conclusion, this analysis provides important points of view discussed by the respondents on Chinese language as the characteristic of Chinese identity. The first, respondents as social doers which relate Chinese language or dialect language with being Chinese have different objectives. Among them, there are some who make effort to learn Chinese language to identify who the Chinese people are. Yet, some suggest that the possessing the ability to speak dialect language has been called sufficient to be grouped as a Chinese since the reason why Chinese language is called to be important in being Chinese is different. Chinese language is as an important tool in understanding Chinese culture and philosophy, as a medium to unite Chinese people, as a means to interact with other Chinese people, and as an instrument to comprehend what is admitted in Chinese community.

### **Daily Chinese and Culture**

The responses of Malay Chinese to the relation of Chinese language and Chinese identity are different from the results of macro level analysis. The investigation in macro level often relates Chinese education and the use of Chinese language in political aspect. The issue of Chinese language use and Chinese education is seen as a means of maintaining Chinese community and struggling Chinese political status in Malaysia.

In this study, if the respondents believe that Chinese culture as a part of being Chinese, most of them do not separate Chinese culture into language factor in being Chinese. However, for the sake of clearer analysis, the writer distinguishes the two characteristics into topics of discussion. The first topic of discussion which covers the language has been discussed earlier, and the second topic of discussion covers culture in relation to being Chinese.

As in line with the relation of being Chinese and language, the respondents have also different perspectives to the topic of how someone can be considered as Chinese in the context of culture. Generally, one of cultural aspects mentioned by respondents is that the Chinese should commemorate the celebration of the Chinese and should practice Chinese resam customs.

For example, FWW said,

Every nation has their own customs and traditions and this is what makes Chinese are different from other nations, for example Chinese people give *angbao*<sup>5</sup> when Chinese New Year comes. This practice is our practice. Thinking about *angbao* means thinking about Chinese people. Although there are many Chinese people, they have the shared customary. Beside *angbao*, Chinese people love red ornaments used in Chinese New Year, which can distinguish Chinese from other nations.

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<sup>5</sup> Angbao is a red envelop with a sum of money in it. Angbao is given to young unmarried Chinese people. The purpose of angbao is to beg a bless from the recipients. However, most of Chinese put misconception on this tradition and only pay more attention to the sum of money given.

He also stated that except from giving *angbao*, commemorating Chinese celebrations, like Zhong Qiu (Mid-autumn festival) and Duan Wu (Dragon boat festival) are also important in being Chinese.

LNK agrees with FWW. If asked about being Chinese, he answered, “at least possessing Chinese tradition, Chinese way of life, and practice resam customs.” He also added the importance of *Guo jie* concept to commemorate Chinese celebrations in Chinese traditions. He puts Chinese New Year as an example and said,

For example, the celebration of Chinese New Year must be creating celebration atmosphere. We must eat *tuan yuan fan* (reunion meal), give *angbao*, buy new clothes, visit parents’ house. It does not mean to waste the money by celebrating it, but it is only a celebration.

Besides, LNK also states that Chinese tradition also has values such as diligent or the word “*bia*”, which is Chinese word *bing* in Hokkien language. The word “*bia*” means to work hard and do not give up. In his opinion, the different in terms of physical body is not too important. What is important is that the tradition values can be given by our ancestors, such as diligent and responsibility to the family. However, LNK realized that those values cannot be possessed by all Chinese people, but he believe that majority of Chinese people possess the values.

WHS and LPT see values as an important symbol of being Chinese. WHS said, “Chinese people must also receive Chinese philosophy, especially in *xiao sun*, to respect parents or generally Confucianism or respect teachers.” In the case of LPT, when interviews were conducted, if asked about how he considered someone as a Chinese, without thinking too much, he straightly answered that Chinese people loved making money and prioritized this value of making money. He said that all Chinese people are *rui bin* or money face. WSM has different opinion from LPT. He said, “Chinese people are moderate in taking care of their life.” WSM confessed that himself as a conservative, not care too much, and not aggressive.

Aside from seeing the culture in terms of tradition values as discussed above, LNK proposed material culture as clothes and food which are also important in featuring being Chinese of Chinese people. He said,

Not to mention that they are very much different from others, I think Chinese people have their own way in dressing. I do not mean that Chinese people need to wear traditional clothes, such as *ma qua* or a kind of traditional clothes from Qing dynasty. Generally, Chinese people dress more update, do not stain, unlike the Malay and they rarely take the shirt into pants. Chinese people tend to be up to date in dressing, except young people who prefer to wear any dressing. For food, Chinese people love their own dishes.

According to him, Chinese people have their own way in cooking their own special dishes. In daily life, Chinese people will look for some Chinese food and they rarely accept food others. In dressing, the opinion stated by LPT had been a little similarity as LNK. They emphasized that traditional dressing is not really significant in showing Chinese identity since traditional Chinese dressing are neither appropriate nor practical to wear in everyday occasion. They still considered that Chinese celebrations were the main characteristics of Chinese identity.

In short, there are a number of various aspects of culture that have been used in the interview sessions with some respondents. In general, most of the respondents have addressed the cultural aspects of Chinese, not material aspects, especially on the thoughts of traditions and values. Besides, some comment on material aspects such as ritual celebrations, dressing, and dishes

## **Conclusion**

It is important to see that the analysis of macro and micro level has shown different findings. The analysis on macro level covering the identification of Chinese people in the context of Chinese education has shown that Chinese people are categorized as homogenous groups of people. From this context, Chinese community is a group that perceives the invaders and Malay government as “other parties” which can threaten their efforts to maintain their identity of language and culture through education.

Meanwhile, in the analysis of micro level, Chinese people are not homogenous in nature and more compromise on the issue of being Chinese. The characters of Chinese people are “not elite” and the Chinese identity has been written in the description of respondents in the context of being Chinese, i.e. how they see themselves as being Chinese or becoming un-Chinese. The description in the context of their identification with their Chinese language and Chinese culture, in which both features of being Chinese are the purposes of the Chinese education that are prioritized by Chinese community is dynamic, wide-ranging, and dependent on the context of situation. Therefore, to understand the identity of Chinese and being Chinese in the context of the development of Chinese education, effort on macro study is not sufficient. This must have been achieved by micro study in order to obtain holistic depiction on the issue.

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