

# **Identity Negotiation Mechanism in A Multicultural Field: A Three-Dimensional Framework Analysis Based on the Cultural Practice of Chinese in Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

In this work, the author finds out the way Chinese Malaysians manage their ethnic identity in the multicultural Malaysian society in terms of cultural practices and the strategies of intercultural communication. The study is a quantitative approach with analysis based on SPSS that focuses on the effects on the participation in rituals, festivals, and multilingual practices on the development of communication style and identity. The results indicate that Indirect communication is highly practiced particularly in the city or metropolitan of Malaysia such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang, whereby the cultural diversity fosters subdued flexible interactions to preserve peace and identity. The urban life increases the multicultural engagements and therefore, indirect communication becomes important in ensuring a nationwide social cohesiveness besides testing the cultures to change and redefine their identity. The integrative strategies promote the bicultural competence and advance the ethnic identity, whereas the assimilation ones are linked to its diminishment. The results highlight the protective role of indirect discourse and inclusive cultural practices in managing identity in urban multicultural contexts. This study offers a foundation for future research on identity negotiation in diverse societies..

**Keywords:** Cultural Practices, Intercultural Communication Strategies, Indirect Communication Style, Ethnic Identity, Chinese Malaysian.

## INTRODUCTION

Identity has transformed from a static, single-dimension theory to an adaptable, process to a large extent that dictates how multicultural spaces operate <sup>1</sup>. In the last couple of years, social sciences have paid much attention to identity negotiation, which depicts how people interact with other cultures to strive for social status in their society. People in multicultural contexts have to negotiate identities in the face of a multitude of cultural stories, linguistic systems and social norms that they encounter during their daily activity <sup>2</sup>. Malaysia stands as an ideal environment to study this phenomenon because its multicultural structure comprises the main Malaysian population groups that include Malays, Chinese and Indians <sup>3</sup>. Chinese Malaysians create an appropriate environment to study cultural hybridity as it develops through negotiation practices. This study addresses the problem of how Chinese Malaysians navigate and negotiate their ethnic identity within Malaysia's multicultural society, where cultural preservation and adaptation often conflict. The objective is to examine how cultural practices, multicultural exposure, and communication strategies interact to shape identity negotiation, with a focus on the mediating role of indirect communication style. The ancestral link of Chinese Malaysians with China exists alongside their national dedication to Malaysia and their global cultural understanding leading to continuous ethnic identity transformation <sup>4</sup>. The group identity exists both through social interactions as well as contests of performance which makes its ancestral roots difficult to determine <sup>5</sup>.

The Malaysian Chinese population combines their cultural heritage with government-led Malay supremacy policies through the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) <sup>6</sup>. Malaysian Chinese go through different life levels such as linguistic practices that incorporate Mandarin, the various Chinese dialects and Malay- English with religious-cultural practices. This harmonizes different spiritual backgrounds and social behavioural changeovers from homes, workplace to public domain like; global mobility, online communication access amongst others and learning circles of the world system has made identity combination even more difficult for the younger generations who are left with the responsibility to merge old ethnic roots with modern cosmopolitan aspect <sup>7</sup>. Identity identification positively performs nonstandard family issues since it accommodates wider macroscale environments that also entail state laws as well as tools for economic advancements and cultural development <sup>8</sup>. Experts require complex analytical approaches to cope with so many influencing factors and environment-based ones for the understanding of identity formation in such a context <sup>9</sup>. The existing body of research about cultural practices with multicultural exposure fails to integrate analytical structures that unite these elements with the process of identity negotiation through cultural inclusion along with communication strategies. Research frequently fails to address how indigenous communication patterns of East and Southeast Asia act as regulatory mechanisms which influence ethnic identity disclosure. The analysis in this study uses three dimensions including cultural resources represented by cultural practices and social positioning represented by cultural inclusion and interactional strategies manifested through indirect communication. Social positioning refers to how individuals perceive their place and acceptance within the societal and cultural hierarchy, influenced by both personal experiences and structural factors. Chinese Malaysians utilize their traditional cultural heritage to follow official state perspectives and current multicultural norms through specific patterns of communication. Research variables receive comprehensive literary evaluation through this study which allows builders of empirical hypotheses to connect theoretical base with regionally applicable information. The structural model utilizes hypotheses to determine direct and indirect relationships between cultural practices together with multicultural exposure and cultural inclusion processes while indirect communication style acts as a culturally important mediating factor.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is structured around the core variables used in the proposed identity negotiation framework: (1) cultural practices, (2) multicultural exposure, (3) cultural inclusion, (4) indirect communication style, and (5) identity negotiation strategies. This structure aligns with the development of testable hypotheses in later sections and addresses the identified gaps in past research.

### Cultural Practices and Ethnic Identity Development

Cultural practices, including language, rituals, festivals, and daily customs, are foundational in shaping ethnic identity. These practices are not only expressions of cultural heritage but also serve as mechanisms for reinforcing group cohesion and distinctiveness, as they foster a collective sense of belonging and reaffirm shared cultural

values across generations<sup>10</sup>. Engaging in traditional rituals, language use, and communal festivals allows Chinese Malaysians to maintain ethnic continuity while navigating the complexities of Malaysia's multicultural society. In the context of Chinese Malaysians, traditional practices such as Chinese New Year celebrations, temple rituals, and linguistic preferences (Mandarin, dialects) continue to serve as identity anchors.

Wang, *et al.*<sup>10</sup> highlight how cultural pedagogy utilizing traditional Chinese arts (e.g., calligraphy) reinforces identity through educational spaces. However, this work is limited to formal educational settings and does not explore identity expression in broader sociocultural contexts. Cultural practices also intersect with societal expectations, as observed in Malaysian policy frameworks that emphasize Malay cultural dominance. This makes cultural preservation not only an act of tradition but also one of resistance and negotiation.

### **Multicultural Exposure and Identity Adaptation**

Fewer cultural interactions engage multicultural exposure, which involve daily work with foreign cultural groups, in institutions of learning and via policy or migration. Malay society's multicultural exposure is integrated with multilingual communities, use of shared public offices and media content. Quinio<sup>11</sup> study targeted Canadians immigrants reveal how multicultural surroundings make the production of hybrid identities problematic.

The results of multicultural exposure often manifest in two primary identity adaptation strategies: integration and assimilation. Integration enables individuals to preserve their cultural heritage while actively participating in broader societal systems—for example, Chinese Malaysians may retain traditional festivals, food customs, and language use while engaging in Malay-dominated public institutions, schools, and workplaces. In contrast, assimilation involves individuals aligning more fully with the dominant cultural norms, often at the expense of their original cultural identity; this can be seen in younger Chinese Malaysians who prioritize English or Malay over their heritage languages in daily communication and adopt mainstream cultural expressions to avoid social exclusion. These divergent strategies highlight the dual pressures faced in multicultural societies, where maintaining ethnic continuity and achieving societal inclusion often compete<sup>11</sup>. Despite the personal stories provided in Quino's research, it does not help to analyse the subtle ways communication creates these transitions<sup>12</sup>. Chinese Malaysians can reap benefits from multicultural experiences if they develop bicultural competence, but just as easily these exposures may present challenges which will blunt ancient identity markers. Bicultural competence refers to the ability to effectively navigate and integrate the values, behaviors, and expectations of two distinct cultural environments.

### **Cultural Inclusion and Social Belonging**

Cultural inclusion is a feeling of being recognized, identified with in the dominant culture. This would mean giving resources, valuing cultural legacy, and letting minority groups play a role in the creation of public stories. Some state policies such as New Economic Policy in Malaysia tend to influence cultural inclusion, guarding pre-eminence of the Malay culture and economy<sup>6</sup>.

Sabaliauskienė<sup>13</sup> presents a theoretical view of identity as shaped by cultural and power dynamics. Her analysis underscores the importance of inclusion in maintaining a stable sense of self in multicultural settings. However, the lack of empirical data limits the applicability of her conclusions. In the Malaysian context, perceived exclusion—such as underrepresentation in political discourse, education disparities, or preferential state policies like the New Economic Policy—can lead minority groups like Chinese Malaysians to adopt defensive identity strategies. These may include withdrawing from public debates, emphasizing intra-group solidarity, or selectively emphasizing traditional customs in private spheres. Moreover, in order to keep the social harmony and prevent the direct cultural confrontation, one can use the indirect communication strategies in the form of suggesting, silence, or euphemistic speech, particularly in the inter-ethnic interactions in the workplaces, educational setting, or public administration. This preference for indirectness plays the protective role whereby the ethnic identity is maintained while keeping down friction in a Malay society<sup>12</sup>.

### **Indirect Communication Style as a Mediating Strategy**

In cultures of East and Southeast Asia there is a significant number of indirect communications characterized by

implicit communication, deference, and contextual cues. It is to ensure harmony and avoid conflict as well as group face protection. For Chinese Malaysians, indirectness makes it possible for the expression of identity within the confines of multicultural decorum and hegemonic power structures<sup>12</sup>.

Teh<sup>12</sup> illustrated Malaysian ESL classrooms as the identity-forming spaces, where the indirect communication facilitates the negotiation of divergent cultural expectations. Although helpful, the study is limited to institutions of learning. The wider role of the indirect communication in negotiation between cultural practices and strategies of identity is under researched in empirical models.

This study assumes that the indirect communication plays the main role of mediator intertwining the cultural practices and multicultural exposure with the choice of identity strategies. Its regulatory function is crucial to addressing sensitive intercultural dynamics within the complex social environment of Malaysia, where the need to maintain the interpersonal harmony frequently overrules the direct confrontational approach. For instance, in professional or bureaucratic setting Chinese Malaysians might use the indirect speech style to negotiate against disagreement or dissent without controverting the dominant cultural norms hence upholding the social cohesion<sup>12</sup>.

### **Identity Negotiation Strategies: Assimilation and Integration**

Identity negotiation involves strategic decisions about how individuals present themselves within multicultural environments. Strategies include:

- Assimilation: minimizing cultural distinctiveness to blend into the dominant culture.
- Integration: maintaining one's cultural identity while participating in the broader society.

Research suggests that integration fosters stronger ethnic identity and psychological well-being, whereas assimilation may lead to identity loss or confusion<sup>11</sup>. However, these outcomes are moderated by other factors such as inclusion and communication style.

Bhujel, and Sinha<sup>14</sup> focus on how Nepali communities in West Bengal use visual cues in public spaces (linguistic landscape) to assert ethnic identity. While insightful, this study neglects the interpersonal dimensions of identity work. This gap reinforces the need for a model that includes both symbolic and communicative aspects of negotiation.

### **Synthesis and Conceptual Gaps**

While existing studies contribute to understanding identity in multicultural environments, most focus narrowly on either macro-level structures (e.g., policies) or micro-level expressions (e.g., narratives, symbols) without integrating them into a cohesive framework. Moreover, few studies consider the mediating role of culturally specific communication styles like indirectness.

This research addresses these gaps by proposing a model that integrates:

- Cultural practices and multicultural exposure as background variables,
- Cultural inclusion and indirect communication style as mediators,
- and identity negotiation strategies as outcomes.

This structure enables empirical testing of how Chinese Malaysians negotiate identity in a way that respects both heritage and multicultural realities.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

Figure 1 illustrates the framework which demonstrates how cultural practices interact with multicultural exposure and identity negotiation strategies through cultural inclusion. The framework displays the middle role of cultural inclusion which bridges cultural practices with multicultural exposure. The research builds its theoretical basis through this model which provides an organized method to conduct statistical analyses of proposed relationships. The analytical framework will provide guidance for the empirical analysis to produce better insights regarding how cultural heritage interacts with multicultural exposure to shape Chinese Malaysian identity expressions.

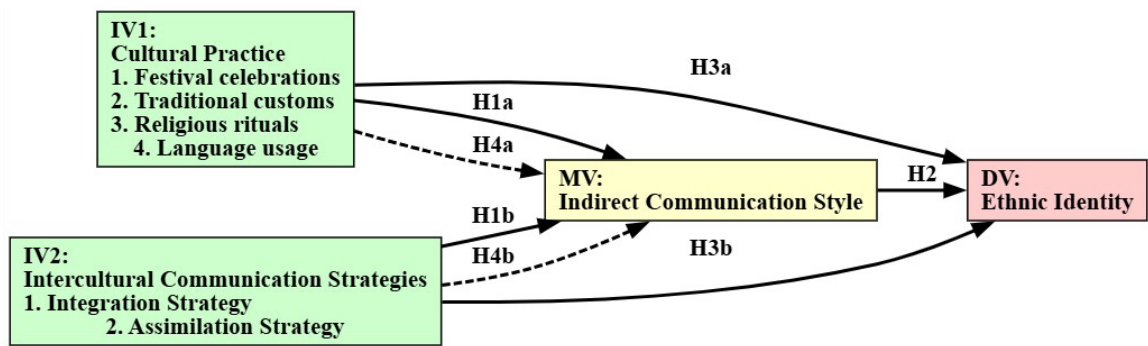


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Hypothesis

Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1a:** Cultural practices (festival celebrations, traditional customs, religious rituals, language usage) significantly influence indirect communication style.
- H1b:** Intercultural communication strategies (integration and assimilation strategies) significantly influence indirect communication style.
- H2:** Indirect communication style significantly influences ethnic identity.
- H3a:** Cultural practices significantly influence ethnic identity.
- H3b:** Intercultural communication strategies significantly influence ethnic identity.
- H4a:** Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity.
- H4b:** Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.

The development of these hypotheses ensures alignment with the conceptual model and offers scholars a robust foundation for conducting empirical studies within Malaysia’s multicultural context. The investigation examined connections between cultural practices, multiculturalism experience, and approaches to cultural inclusion and identity negotiation <sup>15</sup>. The hypotheses presented here are described below:

**H1a:** Influence of Cultural Practices on Indirect Communication Style

Engagements like attending cultural events, religion followings and speaking native languages build the foundation of infection patterns of individuals. The involvement in these practices strengthens values of harmony, respect of hierarchy, and collectivism which brings the indirect forms of communication development. Those who are tied close to their cultural traditions often choose indirection, hidden meanings and a refusal to confront directly in their transactions in accordance with expectations in a culture <sup>16,17</sup>. A way of communicating, in this sense, reflects a deep interest in cultural background and has the character of a conscious endeavor at maintaining social cohesion in various contexts.

**H1b:** Influence of Intercultural Communication Strategies on Indirect Communication Style

Communication strategies used in the intercultural milieu, i.e., integration and assimilation have very important role to play in terms of the manner people adapt their communication strategies in the multicultural setting <sup>18</sup>. Indirect communication may be an intentional strategy of integrators, which allows preserving its cultural heritage and at the same time being responsive to other cultural values. The problems with direct confrontation and indirect hints they use keep everything in balance and in respect to ensure that without forgetting their cultural roots they can fit into the multicultural environment. On a similar note, there are some forms of indirect communication, which assimilators can embrace in order to downplay any cultural manifestation and reduce the risk of cultural

conflict. That is, the orientation adopted by individuals in control of their consumption in order to move cross-cultural environments has a significant bearing on the means by which they plan and express themselves in the course of the social interaction process.

## **H2: Role of Indirect Communication Style in Shaping Ethnic Identity**

The survival of ethnic identity and the development of this ethnic identity relies heavily on using an indirect method of communication, as this gives the individual a means to express themselves; their self-expression is that which targets the realities of society to the norms of society and thus to the values therein. From deployment of non-literal translations of meanings, body language, and cooperative interactions, people guard their cultural distinctiveness through cross-cultural interactions. Through such a form of communication, individuals are not forced to overemphasize the need to oppose the dominant social rules in order to preserve their cultural core <sup>10</sup>. Because of this, people can survive with a strong ethnic identity through a feeling of shared continuity and group in their cultural community.

### **H3a: Effect of Cultural Practices on Ethnic Identity**

Cultural traditions are important in the creation of ethnic identity through inter connectedness to the past and tradition for individuals. The process of internalization of values and norms of one's ethnic group is achieved when an individual participates in cultural events and observances, linguistic expressions, community traditions and so forth. With social and psychological support, individuals enhance their sense of ethnic identity as such support fosters belonging and validates cultural continuity <sup>10</sup>. The sustained preservation of cultural traditions contributes to the formation of a strong and recognizable ethnic heritage for individuals within multicultural environments.

### **H3b: Effect of Intercultural Communication Strategies on Ethnic Identity**

The people's perception of and communication of the ethnic identity is determined by the choice they make concerning intercultural communication, i.e., integration or assimilation. By integrating, a person is able to maintain his cultural heritage while, at the same time, staying in touch with the wider society, thus promotive the ethnic self-awareness. Assimilation on the other hand can make ethnic markers less visible, which will dilute the visibility where ethnic identity is concerned. Therefore, the strategy chosen in the adaptation to multiple-cultural contexts has a significant influence on one's experience value when it comes to ethnic background.

### **H4a: Mediating Role of Indirect Communication Between Cultural Practices and Ethnic Identity**

Indirect communication style serves as a crucial mediating factor between cultural practices and ethnic identity. While cultural practices instill foundational values and norms, the way individuals express and sustain these through communication determines the visibility and strength of ethnic identity <sup>10</sup>. Indirect communication allows for the subtle transmission of cultural meanings in ways that align with group expectations and avoid social conflict. Through this mediating role, it enables individuals to uphold their cultural identity while adapting to broader multicultural dynamics.

The indirect form of communication is an integral link between cultural practices and ethnic identity formation. Cultural practices serve as the foundation for core values, but it is through communicative behaviors—particularly the mode of expression and adherence to these values—that the visibility and resilience of an individual's ethnic identity are articulated. . Indirect communication provides a resource for passing cultural relevance without being aggressive to the standards of a group and contributing to the social peace <sup>16</sup>. This mediation by way of indirect communication enables people to live up to their cultural identity, whilst exiting effectively in multicultural settings.

### **H4b: Mediating Role of Indirect Communication Between Intercultural Strategies and Ethnic Identity**

The way people see and express their ethnic identity is to a large extent dependent on their indirect communication in intercultural situations. Indirect communication is important in defining the expression or hiding of the culture identity when people choose integration or assimilation. By mediating interactions people can retain cultural values

and thrive in multicultural social scenarios. Using the indirect means of communication can help people find the right equilibrium between their ethnic identity and social expectations of multicultural ambience.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design used a quantitative approach through cross-sectional surveys to examine how Chinese Malaysians manage their identities while considering cultural behaviour together with their multicultural interactions. A cross-sectional research design works best for data measurement at one moment in time because it reveals important relationships between variables in the population of interest. The study defines cultural practices as traditional customs alongside Chinese Malaysian values alongside behaviours while multicultural exposure captures the extent to which members of the Chinese Malaysian community engage with and adapt to various ethnic groups in Malaysia. The research evaluates how these elements affect identity negotiation methods within multicultural settings. Cultural inclusion refers to an individual feeling of belongingness and acceptance in the Malayan society at large. The research explores how cultural inclusion builds or weakens the connections between the cultural practices and multicultural exposure, identity negotiation approaches. The research makes use of both Multiple regression analysis and mediation analysis based on statistics for an in-depth quantitative study of Chinese Malaysian identity interactions leaning towards the cultural and multicultural components.

### Population and Sample

Chinese Malaysians of all inhabiting the various states in the Malaysian state were the research participants for this study. The cultural diversity in Chinese Malaysian population demanded the researchers, to add numerous demographic characteristics that would reflect the community in their study<sup>19</sup>. In the study, stratified random sampling was employed to get an equitable representation of the Chinese Malaysian population using the different age groups and level of education and their residential preferences of being rural or urban people<sup>20</sup>.

The population had five age groups beginning at 18-29 and ending at 60-65 years. Besides four levels of education that increased from secondary school to post graduation degrees were taken into account. The researchers divided the residential districts among urban and rural sectors in order to measure the possible differences in the urban and rural life of people when people adjust their identities<sup>21</sup>. The specified sampling technique reduced unintended sampling errors by ensuring participants from various backgrounds participated. Therefore, the findings delivered broader insights across diverse groups.

A power analysis with G\*Power software found the suitable sample size at 129 based on three conditions: an  $\alpha = 0.05$  significance level, medium effect size (0.15) criteria, along with a desired power of 0.80 while applying four predictors in the model. Statistical analysis revealed 129 participants as the minimum requirement for hypothesis testing because of the need for sufficient power<sup>22</sup>. Because of potential missing information and non-respondents, the study distributed 200 questionnaires to ensure complete necessary questionnaire returns. The chosen sampling method guaranteed a strong final response count which could produce statistically reliable analysis to reveal accurate relationships between cultural practices and multicultural exposure and identity negotiation methods among Chinese Malaysians<sup>23</sup>.

### Instrumentation

The established questionnaire served as the data collection method to examine Chinese Malaysian cultural practices and multicultural exposure while investigating identity negotiation strategies<sup>24,25</sup>. Through a thorough construction method the questionnaire was created to fulfil its dual requirement of being complete and suitable for the Malaysian multicultural environment. Five distinct parts structured the research instrument to explore different types of variables and demographic information. The 5-point Likert scale extended from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) for respondents to evaluate their perceptions and attitudes about cultural practices as well as multicultural exposure and cultural inclusion and identity negotiation strategies. The studied items originated from validated previous instruments while field experts confirmed their content validity. The following document shows the arrangement of survey questions into separate sections.

### Section A: Demographic Information

The demographic portion of the survey collected fundamental participant information in its first section. The section functioned as an overview to acquire respondents' background information<sup>26</sup>. Basic demographic information collects necessary data to understand the variety of participants while making it possible to analyze subgroup results. The demographic questions included:



- Age: The survey participants chose their age segment from organized age brackets which included 29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–61.5 years.
- Gender: A simple choice between male, female, and other.
- Educational Attainment: Respondents were asked to indicate their highest level of education, with options including secondary school, diploma, bachelor's degree, and postgraduate degree.
- Residential Area: This item classified respondents based on whether they lived in an urban or rural area, reflecting the potential influence of living environment on cultural practices and identity strategies.
- The demographic data filled in the A section helped in the fact that, diversity in the sample was achieved and that the sample is representative of the population of interest. It was also used as a foundation of subgroup analyses which came up during the subsequent processes of data analysis.

### **Section B: Cultural Practices**

The section called Section B of the questionnaire gauged the cultural practices of the respondents who participated in the study. As an example, the celebrations of the Mid-Autumn Festival or The Chinese New Year, and the usage of Mandarin or dialects in the communication at the workplace can be seen as the examples of how the traditional practice is defining the cultural identity. This segment had four questions that analyzed the participation frequency in as well as the strength of cultural events in the traditional Chinese culture and cultural value observation<sup>27</sup>. The measurement items tested cultural events and general practice which defines the foundation of culture identity. These were four items:

- I frequently participate in Chinese cultural festivals and ceremonies.
- I speak Chinese dialects (e.g., Mandarin, Hokkien) in daily life.
- I follow traditional Chinese values in personal and family matters.
- I engage in cultural practices such as calligraphy, tea ceremonies, or Chinese medicine.

The questionnaire assessed different aspects of cultural practices through these items which evaluated the degree of cultural engagement and their influence on daily activities of respondents<sup>28</sup>. Participants completed their responses using a 5-point Likert scale which measured their frequency and intensity of interaction with these practices.

### **Section C: Intercultural Communication Strategies**

It updated Section C to evaluate the intercultural communication strategies that is distinct with multicultural exposure. The strategies are concerned with the extent to which people are able to interact with other people who belong to other cultural groups through means such as integration as well as assimilation<sup>29</sup>. The instruments of measuring these strategies are:

- Strategies to integrate one's cultural values when interacting with individuals from other ethnic groups.
- Adjustments made in behaviour or communication style to align with the dominant culture during interactions with people from other ethnic groups.

By evaluating these strategies, the study aims to understand how Chinese Malaysians navigate intercultural interactions and manage their ethnic identities within a multicultural environment. A combination of integration and assimilation are the most important approaches to formulate identity negotiation processes by allowing individuals to integrate into the cultures of a wide variety of societies without losing their cultural status<sup>30</sup>.

### **Section D: Indirect Communication Style (Mediator)**

As the mediating variable in Section D, indirect communication style was referred to in the study in order to investigate how this factor can form the identity negotiation strategies adopted by Chinese Malaysians. In this section, the study examined the way the participants utilize indirect communication to be able to work through intercultural situations and to enact their cultural identity. The following was incorporated in this section:

- Tendency to communicate directly and indirectly when dealing with other people of different ethnicity.
- Employing non-verbal communication to say something or to show an opinion in multicultural communication.
- Caution in the use of words so as to eliminate conflict or misunderstanding in intercultural communication.

This part examines the use of covert verbal and non-verbal acts by the Chinese Malaysians to control their identity within the multicultural contexts. Indirect communication style acts as a broker in the discussion of a correlation between cultural practices, multicultural exposure and identity negotiation strategies. Such a style of communication allows people to communicate and retain their ethnic identity and adjust to the norms and expectations of multicultural conditions <sup>31</sup>

### Section E: Ethnic Identity (DV)

The last part of the survey was an examination of ethnic identity as a dependent variable (DV) of the research. The main question that was covered in this section was to discuss the perceptions of Chinese Malaysians towards their ethnic identity and its management in multicultural settings. The five questions in this section man measured the negotiating person and identity and how people assert their cultural identity to deal with different environments <sup>32</sup>. Depending on the contact with the different cultural groups, the participants altered their identity negotiation strategies. These were the five items

- Multicultural settings are associated with a strong connection with ethnic identity.
- Traditions and values of certain cultures are practices within various environments.
- Ethnic identity affects interaction with other cultural persons.
- It is felt when one feels proud about his or her ethnic background in relation to others.
- Ethnic identity can be said to give confidence to handle multicultural scenarios.

These questions were items of the scale that assessed the magnitude of the ethnic identity and the manner in which the participants uphold and assert their cultural values as they communicate with representatives of other cultural communities. According to the study results, the study covered how Chinese Malaysians manage their ethnic identity in the context of multicultural encounters, the need to retain their culture and consider adaption <sup>33,34</sup>. The responses were rated on a 5-point likert scale, with 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), which allowed conducting the statistical analysis and connected to the validity and reliability of the instrument used to measure the ethnic identity in the multicultural setting of Malaysia <sup>3</sup>.

### Validity and Reliability

The measurement instrument became essential for guaranteeing accurate and valid results during the research process. The research results would maintain both accuracy and meaning because of the tests conducted <sup>36</sup>. The following methods were Multiple methods helped to validate and establish the reliability of the data collection instrument through assessment procedures.

- **Content Validity:** The questionnaire content validity assessment took place through evaluation by experts in multicultural psychology and Malaysian cultural studies. experts in the fields of multicultural psychology and Malaysian cultural studies. These A group of experts examined the questionnaire to validate that the included items captured their intended construct properly. The experts confirmed that each questionnaire item accurately measured the constructs alongside cultural and contextual relevance for the Malaysian Chinese community. relevant to the Malaysian Chinese community. Their feedback was incorporated to A process was used to evolve and adapt the survey questions until they perfectly matched the native characteristics of the target population.
- **Construct Validity:** Exploratory Factor Analysis was the method used to determine construct validity. conducted. An EFA analysis investigated how the research constructs structurally relate to each other. Each part within the questionnaire underwent an examination to check if items linked successfully to the targeted factors. factors. All content measuring fewer than 0.50 points on factor loadings received elimination to reduce the questionnaire content. Researchers included items in the final instrument which properly reflected each construct. questionnaire. The evaluation delivered valuable information about the different factor relationships. The examination of scales together with their relationship patterns validated the theoretical framework of the study.
- **Reliability:** Internal consistency served as a tool to validate the instrument. evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. This measurement method shows how similar the questionnaire items perform when rating the constructs.

These scales contain items which successfully assess the identical basic construct. The following Cronbach's alpha values were obtained:

- Ethnic Identity:  $\alpha = 0.88$
- Indirect Communication Style (Mediator):  $\alpha = 0.84$
- Cultural Practices:  $\alpha = 0.81$
- Multicultural Exposure:  $\alpha = 0.76$

The values illustrate acceptable through excellent reliability measures which confirm that all scales surpass the accepted threshold level of  $\alpha > 0.70$ . The established threshold for  $\alpha$  relies on a value greater than 0.70. Results from reliability coefficients demonstrate that the provided questionnaire shows consistency. The instrument demonstrates reliability as a dependable method to measure all targeted constructs.

### Data Collection Procedure

The information collection design succeeded in gathering data from a wide range of Chinese Malaysian demographics spanning various geographical locations. Malaysians across different geographical and demographic groups<sup>37</sup>. A combination of online A combination of online and offline survey approaches allowed maximum outreach for an increased number of participants. The following procedures were followed:

- **Online Distribution:** The survey builder platform selected Google Online data collection utilized the Google Forms platform to let users easily distribute the questionnaire. The survey link got distributed by various social networks including Facebook alongside Instagram and WhatsApp as well as through email sharing. The survey tools consisted of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp as well as email lists to offer universal survey access. survey. This procedure offered excellent opportunities for contacting those who used digital media frequently. People who do well with technology and individuals who live in cities where internet presence is common participated throughout the study. more prevalent.
- **Offline Distribution:** This analysis distributed both online surveys combined with paper surveys to our respondents. The survey appeared in areas where digital tool access was restricted. The project included steps to guarantee enrolment from urban and rural participants equally. These surveys were Community centres together with Chinese cultural associations served as distribution points for surveys. educational institutions. The research project employed combined online and paper-based surveys to reach the maximum possible sample size representing different participants. diversity in terms of age, education, and location.
- **Informed Consent:** Every respondent received instructional information before starting the survey. A form provided details regarding the research objectives together with assurance of response confidentiality as well as voluntary participation conditions. of responses, and the voluntary nature of participation. Respondents were informed that the participants had full freedom to stop their involvement in the study without facing any penalties. This process ensured All participants received complete understanding about their rights together with the reason for participating. fostering ethical research practices.
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** Response confidentiality received protection because the survey was anonymous. Survey data received no personal identification details while the study maintained full privacy protection for all respondents. was stored securely. Participants were informed repeatedly about the data's absolute confidentiality by research staff. The researchers ensured participants their responses remained solely for the examination purposes of this study. All collected data under this research would remain confidential as well as anonymous per survey regulations.
- **Voluntary Participation:** The research study gave participants absolute freedom to decide whether or not they would join. The study provided participants with assurances of honesty responses and no adverse effects from non-participation including survey abandonment at any point during the assessment process.

The quantitative methods allowed investigators to acquire data from diverse and representative Chinese Malaysian participants thus making study outcomes more widely applicable.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Different statistical methods were employed to analyze the collected data and test the research hypotheses.

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations for age, gender, educational attainment, and residential location. This provided a clear profile of the participant distribution within the sample.
- **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** EFA was conducted to assess construct validity of the instrument. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was used to identify the underlying factor structure among the questionnaire items. This analysis confirmed the alignment of items with their respective constructs: cultural practices, intercultural communication strategies, indirect communication style, and ethnic identity.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between the core variables: cultural practices, intercultural communication strategies, indirect communication style, and ethnic identity. This step helped identify significant associations between constructs before applying advanced statistical models.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** Multiple regression was performed to assess the direct effects of cultural practices and intercultural communication strategies on ethnic identity. The analysis evaluated the predictive strength of the independent variables in determining outcomes in ethnic identity.
- **Mediation Analysis:** Mediation analysis was conducted to investigate the mediating role of indirect communication style in the relationship between (a) cultural practices and ethnic identity, and (b) intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity. This analysis determined whether the indirect communication style served as a significant explanatory variable between the predictors and the outcome.
- **t-Tests and ANOVA:** Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were employed to examine differences in ethnic identity across demographic categories such as age groups, gender, education levels, and residential areas. These comparisons revealed whether specific demographic factors influenced the perception and negotiation of ethnic identity.

## RESULTS

The research presents data through three types of analysis that include descriptive statistics in addition to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and hypothesis testing performed with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was chosen for its ability to examine complex relationships between observed and latent variables, offering a comprehensive view of both direct and indirect effects within the identity negotiation framework. The study will include descriptive data for sample demographics through these statistics yet EFA will examine the construct validity of the variables by validating their factor structure. Using SEM for hypothesis testing enables the evaluation of relationships among cultural practices with multicultural exposure and cultural inclusion in relation to identity negotiation strategies. The SEM output contains path coefficients plus significance levels together with model fit indices. The results from these analyses will clarify the entire process through which cultural elements and multicultural experiences affect Chinese Malaysian identity negotiation strategies.

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 and 2 presents a summary of participant demographic characteristics, including age distribution, gender, educational attainment, and residential location. In addition to demographic data, the table includes descriptive statistics—mean scores and standard deviations—for the key study variables: cultural practices, intercultural communication strategies, indirect communication style, and ethnic identity. These statistical measures provide a general overview of the central tendencies and variability within the data, offering insight into participant responses across the primary constructs of the study.

### Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The population demographics of Chinese Malaysians find representation in the survey participants. The sample consists mostly of respondents between 25 and 34 years old (35%) while those between 35 to 44 years constitute 30% of the sample. A smaller percentage of respondents were from the older age categories (45-54 and 55+), indicating a younger sample overall. Gender distribution was fairly balanced, with 52% female and 48% male respondents. In terms of education level, most respondents had completed secondary (30%) or diploma (40%) education, while 20% had a degree, and 10% held a postgraduate qualification. Regarding residential area, 60% of respondents lived in urban areas, while 40% resided in rural areas.

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

The mean scores for the main variables provide insight into participants’ typical responses across the constructs. The variable Cultural Practices recorded a mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.72), indicating a moderate engagement in traditional cultural customs and values. Intercultural Communication Strategies had a mean of 3.56 (SD = 0.68), suggesting that participants moderately adopt strategies such as integration and assimilation in cross-cultural interactions. The variable Indirect Communication Style showed a mean of 3.92 (SD = 0.75), reflecting a relatively high tendency to use subtle, non-confrontational communication in multicultural settings. Finally, Ethnic Identity, the dependent variable, recorded the highest mean at 4.10 (SD = 0.65), indicating strong confidence and consistency among participants in maintaining and expressing their ethnic identity within diverse social environments.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage
Age	18-24	15%
	25-34	35%
	35-44	30%
	45-54	10%
	55+	10%
Gender	Male	48%
	Female	52%
Education Level	Secondary	30%
	Diploma	40%
	Degree	20%
	Postgraduate	10%
Residential Area	Urban	60%
	Rural	40%

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cultural Practices	3.78	0.72
Intercultural Communication Strategies	3.56	0.68
Indirect Communication Style	3.92	0.75
Ethnic Identity	4.10	0.65

Table 1 and 2 contains comprehensive data that displays the demographic structure of the sample population while showing statistical distributions of analyzed variables. The provided descriptive statistics establish the groundwork to understand Chinese Malaysian perception of cultural practices and their multicultural engagement and identity management approaches.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to assess the construct validity of the measurement model. The analysis evaluated items from the variables: Cultural Practices, Intercultural Communication Strategies, Indirect Communication Style, and Ethnic Identity. The primary objective of the EFA was to identify the underlying factor structure and to ensure that each item appropriately loaded onto its intended construct. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was used for factor extraction. Items with factor loadings below 0.50 were excluded to improve the reliability and clarity of the measurement scales. The results confirmed that each set of items clustered as expected, supporting the theoretical structure of the proposed research framework.

The analysis used varimax-rotated principal component method while items loading higher than 0.50 obtained retention status since this level signifies strong construct-related association. The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that all items exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating excellent factor reliability and convergent validity. Each item loaded strongly onto its corresponding factor, thus supporting the validity of the measurement model and justifying the use of these items in subsequent structural analyses.

The findings of the EFA suggest that items are confidently measured by what they have been designed to be; that there are no cross-loadings of significance or deviations. These results ensure the structural validity of the measurement model on empirical basis and they validate its use in the subsequent Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

**Table 3:** Factor Loadings from Exploratory Factor Analysis

Variable	Item	Factor Loading
Cultural Practices	Participation in Chinese cultural festivals and ceremonies	0.84
	Speaking Chinese dialects in daily life	0.79
	Following traditional Chinese values	0.72
	Engaging in cultural practices (e.g., calligraphy)	0.83
Intercultural Communication Strategies	Interacting regularly with individuals from other ethnic groups	0.81
	Feeling comfortable in multicultural environments	0.78
Cultural Inclusion	Feeling respected for my cultural background	0.75
	Feeling a sense of belonging in multicultural settings	0.80
	Believing Malaysian society promotes cultural integration	0.83
Indirect Communication Style	Adjusting behavior to avoid cultural conflict	0.87
	Adapting communication style depending on others' cultural background	0.76
	Feeling confident negotiating my cultural identity in diverse settings	0.89
	Maintaining my cultural identity while engaging with other cultures	0.85
	Using different identity strategies depending on context	0.82

**SEM and Hypothesis Testing**

The indices of goodness of fit of the structural equation model assessed in Table 4 are given in Table 4. The Chi-square ( $X^2 = 193.45$ ,  $df = 120$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is statistically significant and this is expected when sampling is large. There are other indices that are within acceptable limits: Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.92) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.95) are higher than 0.90, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.05) has the value lower than 0.06. All of these indicators taken together point to the overall good fit of the model.

**Table 4:** Model Fit Indices for SEM

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold	Status
Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ , $df = 120$ )	193.45	$p < 0.05$ expected	Significant
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.92	$> 0.90$	Acceptable
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.95	$> 0.90$	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.05	$< 0.06$	Acceptable

**Hypothesis Testing Results**

Results of the hypothesis test, which was performed by Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), correlation analysis, mediation analysis, and demographic comparisons, are introduced in the following section. These comparisons aid to investigate how the cultural activities are connected with the intercultural communication approaches, indirect discourse style and ethnic identity and how the demographic aspect like level of education and place of residence affects them. The findings of these tests give more insight into what influences the ethnic identity in the multicultural Malaysian context.

**SEM Analysis**

Hypothesis testing on structural equation modelling (SEM) exhibits the following results obtained in Table 5 below. Path coefficients also show the extent of relationships between the reconstruct items: Cultural Practices, Intercultural Communication Strategies, Indirect Communication Style, and Ethnic Identity. The p-values are used to determine statistical significance.

**Table 5:** Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value
H1a: Cultural Practices influencing Indirect Communication Style	0.36	0.001
H1b: Intercultural Communication Strategies influencing Indirect Communication Style	0.29	0.002
H2: Indirect Communication Style influencing Ethnic Identity	0.41	0.000
H3a: Cultural Practices influencing Ethnic Identity	0.33	0.003
H3b: Intercultural Communication Strategies influencing Ethnic Identity	0.27	0.004
H4a: Indirect Communication Style mediating the relationship between Cultural Practices and Ethnic Identity	0.15	0.002
H4b: Indirect Communication Style mediating the relationship between Intercultural Communication Strategies and Ethnic Identity	0.13	0.003

The concept of cultural practices and intercultural communication strategies exerted its influence on the indirect style of communication (H1a and H1b). In its turn, this style of communication had a significant influence on ethnic identity (H2). Further, the ethnic identity was directly bored by the cultural practices and intercultural communication strategies (H3a and H3b). As part of mediated relationships, indirect communication style was the most important determiner of cultures practices and their ethnic identity (H4a) and intercultural communication strategy and ethnic identity (H4b). Furthermore, significant differences were found in ethnic identity based on education level ( $F\text{-value} = 5.42, p = 0.001$ ) and residential location ( $t\text{-value} = 2.18, p = 0.031$ ). These findings confirm the validity of the conceptual framework, highlighting the importance of cultural engagement and communication strategies in ethnic identity development within a multicultural context.

**Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects:**

The standardized path coefficients indicate both direct and indirect effects among the constructs. Cultural Practices and Intercultural Communication Strategies both exert direct effects on Ethnic Identity ( $\beta = 0.33, p = 0.003$  and  $\beta = 0.27, p = 0.004$ , respectively). Indirect Communication Style serves as a mediating variable with significant indirect effects (Cultural Practices  $\rightarrow$  Indirect Style  $\rightarrow$  Ethnic Identity:  $\beta = 0.15, p = 0.002$ ; Intercultural Strategies  $\rightarrow$  Indirect Style  $\rightarrow$  Ethnic Identity:  $\beta = 0.13, p = 0.003$ ). Therefore, the total effects (direct + indirect) are  $\beta = 0.48$  for Cultural Practices and  $\beta = 0.40$  for Intercultural Communication Strategies.

**Correlation Analysis**

Table 6 shows the correlation coefficients between the study variables. Correlation analysis provides insight into the strength and direction of the relationships between constructs, which can help in understanding how cultural practices, intercultural communication strategies, indirect communication style, and ethnic identity are related.

**Table 6:** Correlation Analysis Results

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation (r)	p-value
Cultural Practices	Indirect Communication Style	0.36	0.001
Intercultural Communication Strategies	Indirect Communication Style	0.29	0.002
Indirect Communication Style	Ethnic Identity	0.41	0.000
Cultural Practices	Ethnic Identity	0.33	0.003
Intercultural Communication Strategies	Ethnic Identity	0.27	0.004

The correlation results reveal moderate to strong positive relationships between the variables. Cultural practices are positively correlated with indirect communication style ( $r = 0.36, p = 0.001$ ), indicating that engagement in cultural practices tends to enhance the use of indirect communication strategies. Similarly, intercultural communication strategies also show a significant positive correlation with indirect communication style ( $r = 0.29, p = 0.002$ ). Indirect communication style is strongly correlated with ethnic identity ( $r = 0.41, p = 0.000$ ), demonstrating that a preference for indirect communication is associated with a stronger ethnic identity. We also found positive correlation between the level of cultural practices ( $r = 0.33, p = 0.003$ ) and strategies of communicating with other people ( $r = 0.27, p = 0.004$ ), which implies that cultural engagement and communication strategies between people are factors that contribute to, as well as influence, the development of ethnic identity.

**Mediation Analysis**

The findings of the mediation analysis are shown in Table 7. Mediation analysis employs the degree to which indirect communication style is considered as a mediator in the connection between cultural practices, intercultural communications strategies, and ethnic identity. The strength of mediation is computed using the indirect effects.

**Table 7:** Mediation Results

Relationship	Indirect Effect ( $\beta$ )	p-value
Cultural Practices $\rightarrow$ Indirect Communication Style $\rightarrow$ Ethnic Identity	0.15	0.002
Intercultural Communication Strategies $\rightarrow$ Indirect Communication Style $\rightarrow$ Ethnic Identity	0.13	0.003

Results of the mediation analysis suggest a strong moderating effect of indirect communication style between cultural practices and ethnic identity ( $\beta = 0.15, p = 0.002$ ) and between, intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity ( $\beta = 0.13, p = 0.003$ ).

The mediation effect supports the idea that communication strategies are an essential mechanism through which cultural practices and intercultural strategies shape ethnic identity.

**Group Differences by Education Level and Residential Location (t-test & ANOVA)**

Table 8 provides the results of comparing ethnic identity across different demographic groups. While SEM assesses structural relationships among latent variables, t-tests and ANOVA were applied to explore group-level differences (e.g., based on education and residential area), which SEM does not explicitly capture. The analysis examines the influence of education level and residential location on the strategies individuals use for identity negotiation.

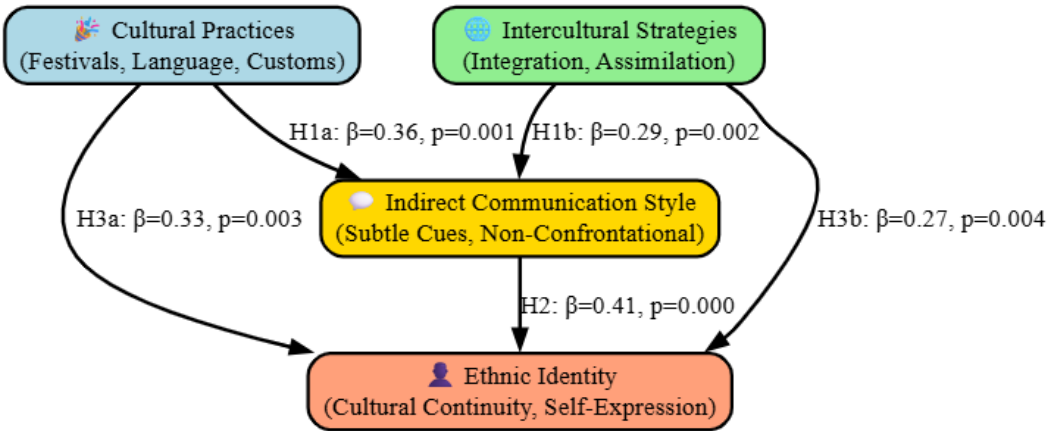
**Table 8:** Education Level and Residential Location Differences

Grouping Factor	F-value/t-value	p-value
Education Level	5.42	0.001
Residential Location → Ethnic Identity	2.18	0.031

Significant differences were found in ethnic identity based on education level (F-value = 5.42, p = 0.001) and residential location (t-value = 2.18, p = 0.031). These results suggest that individuals with different levels of education and those living in urban versus rural areas adopt different strategies for negotiating their ethnic identity. Education and residential location are important contextual factors that influence how individuals manage their cultural identity in a multicultural environment.

**PLS Path Diagram**

Figure 2 illustrates both immediate and secondary influences of Cultural Practices, Intercultural Communication Strategies, and Indirect Communication Style on Ethnic Identity. Standardized values of path coefficients are presented in favour of each of the pathways indicating the direction and strength of the connection.



**Figure 2:** PLS Path Diagram

Such findings are significant in suggesting how identity negotiation is undertaken by Chinese Malaysians. Particularly, they show the role of cultural interaction and flexible communication strategies in affecting the process of ethnic identity formation among the Malaysian multicultural community mediated by such demographic variables as educational level and the place of residence.

**DISCUSSION**

The research studies a process of cultural practices and intercultural communication strategies that define identity negotiation of Chinese Malaysians within the cultural tones mosaic of Malaysia. On the basis of findings, it is determined that there is the cultural engagement of events, custom and religious practise engagement. Other than that, the mechanisms of how individuals adapt the process of incorporation include integration and assimilation into interaction, which may alter how they communicate indirectly (H1b) because integration enables the person to bargain the boundary between preserving a certain culture and social adaptation. The reason behind people



maintaining a cultural identity in an indirect fashion is a form of expression where people give clues implicitly and use simple nonverbal communication that is consistent with their culture. It should be mentioned, that such an approach toward the communication strategies due to the possibility to express the ethnic identity without any direct confrontation contributes to support and belonging in the cross-cultural communication<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, Wang, *et al.*<sup>10</sup> acknowledge that indirectness of the Malaysian Chinese communication is not only a face saving strategy but also a cultural art of keeping strategy in the different social context.

The study also shows that the usage of indirect communication expressions is crucial for the relationship between the cultural practices and the ethnic identity (H4a), as well as between intercultural communication models and ethnic identity (H4b). Cultural practices enhance ethnic identity through transfer of central values and norms of behaviour of which indirect communication is a part. According to Wang, *et al.*<sup>10</sup>, traditional customs and festivals of the Chinese Malaysians have symbolic interpretation and it dictates an indirect non-verbal and verbal behaviour. Likewise, when outlining the cultural determination of communicative tendencies, Wang, *et al.*<sup>10</sup> describe how the issue of communicative inclinations is determined by cultural rituals in such a way that individuals can communicate without regard to whether they belong to a particular culture in almost imperceptibly compliance with the patterns. Similarly, intercultural communication strategies are helpful in identity bargaining since it offers a platform where cultural symbols are presented or manifest in the multicultural environment in veiled terms.

Based on the results, culture inclusion and social systems play a key role in the building of effective identity negotiation. Cultural inclusion acts of mediation serve to strengthen the feelings of belongingness amongst people whose lives are embedded in highly multicultural and urban environments. This acceptance makes people feel justified in their cultural expression and increases the use of more adaptive identity negotiation strategies. Schools and workplaces along with other institutions of civic life in the city are critical to the ways Chinese Malaysians negotiate their ethnicity. In other instances, such as cities like Kuala Lumpur, one has to often make multicultural experiences in these locations, which trigger the need to use adaptive communication plans. Other forms of these urban environments encourage the use of two languages, indirect form of communication, and cultural sensitivity, allowing such people to retain their heritage and still adapt to the rest of the world. Therefore, lived urban experience plays an important role in forming bicultural competence and the flexibility of identity. As an illustration, Ma, and Roosli<sup>38</sup> report that inclusive cultural context empowers the minority groups in the process of claiming and renegotiating of their identity.

In addition, historical factors such as living in the city and the countryside and the influence of educational level also affect ethnicity identity management. These results indicate that the design and planning of multicultural cities and inclusive public places are vital determinants of the multicultural exposure and social integration that provide space helping to negotiate day-to-day intercultural encounters. According to Hu, *et al.*<sup>16</sup>, more adaptive and integrative identity strategies are more likely to be used by people who settle in urban space and who have more multicultural exchanges and a higher educational level. This corpus manifests dynamic nature of identity, and strategic communicational role in sustaining the cultural partition between multicultural populations. This indicates that mixture of cultures by people in cities is often present with consequent development of adaptive strategies of communication, such as, *de facto*, indirect communication. These contexts force people to strike a trade between cultural maintenance and social assimilation, making such process even more difficult. Conversely, the rural environment might seek to strengthen cultural homogeneity and reduce interaction chances with encounters of a different culture.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

Although the research sheds light on identity bargaining among the Chinese Malaysians, there are a few limitations we must pay attention of. First, it can be seen that the cross-sectional data cannot be used to determine how identities change with time. Second, the use of self-reported survey data may be influenced by social desirability bias. Third, the sample was predominantly urban, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to more rural populations. Lastly, while the SEM approach offers robust analysis of relationships, it does not capture the rich, contextual nuances that qualitative methods might reveal.

## STUDY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer meaningful implications for multicultural policy development, particularly in education and workplace settings. In educational institutions, integrating cultural awareness programs and cross-cultural communication training can promote inclusivity and strengthen students' identity confidence. In workplace environments, policies that acknowledge and respect cultural practices, such as flexible holiday observances or intercultural team-building activities, can foster a sense of belonging and reduce identity conflict. One may also apply the lessons to urban planning and community organizing to create culturally inclusive spaces and community events that facilitate the expression (and attendance) of cultures and provide interaction between different cultures in particular the multicultural metropolis such as Kuala Lumpur.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper demonstrates that the concept of identity negotiation is important in the complicated ethnic composition of Malaysia where autonomy is given to the identification and people enjoy inclusive governance. This paper reveals that embodiment of social events, construction of multicultural relationships and significance of inclusive institutions are critical attributes in how Chinese Malaysians can request identities. Those who take part in the study testify that their exposure to other ethnic groups when it comes to cultural practices boosts higher levels of self-confidence and open-mindedness to their identities. The ethnic inclusion function in identity negotiation mediation illustrates the importance of community acceptance in identity negotiation. The findings also offer valuable insights for educational and workplace policies. Educational institutions can incorporate multicultural awareness programs and intercultural communication training into curricula to support identity negotiation among youth. Similarly, workplaces can benefit from diversity and inclusion policies that encourage intercultural dialogue and respect for ethnic identity, especially in urban settings. These practical measures can create environments where individuals feel safe expressing their cultural identity while engaging effectively across cultures. Also, the research points out that identity negotiation (as socially structured by educational attainment and living arrangement) explains how individuals reconcile multicultural settings. In this study, we validate Identity Negotiation Theory by outlining the integration strategies of individuals with diverse backgrounds into Malaysia.

This provides recommendations for policy makers, educators, and community leaders. Likely, diversification policies and inter-ethnic contact opportunities are of great importance to organizations, as they contribute to reinforced relations between different ethnic groups and a greater confidence in the individual's identity. Examples of educational setting and community-based programs should work towards developing cross cultural communication skills and cultural awareness at an early stage to allow more inclusive societal environment. Although the study has valuable insights, it has cross-sectional design making it impossible to see changes in the identity negotiation among individuals during their life span. The existing investigation into this complex identity negotiation process is largely reflective, providing general information on what it means and what tends to be the general outcome. Future studies should explore how identity negotiation changes over the years and use the methodology of qualitative research in order to bring attention to the very detailed, everyday encounters with this process in Malaysia.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study's cross-sectional design offers a snapshot of identity negotiation but does not capture its evolution over time. In future studies, it is recommended to use longitudinal designs in an attempt to understand the variations of identity negotiation at different developmental stages. Moreover, in-depth data on life on a day-to-day basis among Chinese Malaysians living in the context of multicultural environments can be offered based on qualitative research (interview or ethnography). Generalizability would also be increased by widening the sample to other ethnic groups or regional comparisons in order to discover any patterns, which are indicative of identity construction in Malaysia.

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