Being Minority and Majority

- Chinese Muslims in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper examines the identities of Chinese Muslims who are simultaneously an ethnic minority and a religious majority in the Malaysian social context. The research questions how their identities shape their festival practices and social environments. As the research question in this paper is highly relevant to identity, identity theories serve as the theoretical framework for this paper to support this study. The data for this paper was obtained through semi-structured interviews with Malaysian Chinese Muslims. From the data obtained, this paper draws three conclusions. First, Malay and Muslim identities are conflated in Malaysian society, so being Muslim also means the possibility of not being identified as Chinese for the Chinese; Second, in Malaysian society, the existence of religious laws gives Muslim identity clear boundaries, and the identification of the individuals becomes less important, which may reinforces the construction of a Muslim identity, but can also lead to negative attitudes about being Muslim. Finally, this study also found that the identities of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia are not exactly equal, but rather the Chinese identity is stronger and the Muslim identity is weaker.

Keywords: Identity, Festival customs, Malaysian Chinese, Social environment

Acknowledge

Firstly, I am very grateful to my supervisor Izzy, who is very patient, professional and has always given me effective advice in writing this paper. She is always upbeat, encouraging and willing to communicate when I needed it. Secondly, I want to thank my parents who would like to support my willing and decision to study in Lund University, which is why I am here. Then I want to thank my friends, Menglin, Wei, Yongheng, Pengfei, and so on who have always been with me bringing me joy. I cannot ignore my classmates of Asian Studies too. My classmates are always friendly, enthusiastic and lovely and they make my study experience shinning and impressive. I also appreciate my caring and dependable boyfriend, Daniel, who would always show up immediately when I need. Of course, I would also like to thank all my interview participants. Without them, this thesis is not able to complete. Special thanks to Zelda: Breath of the Wild, which effectively relieves my anxiety and stress.

Glossary

Hijab: kerudung, jilbabs, 头巾

Chinese New Year: Spring Festival, 华人新年, 春节

Qingming Festival: 清明节

Lantern Festival: 元宵节

Double-Seventh Festival: 七夕节

Mid-Autumn Festival: 中秋节

Laba Festival: 腊八节

Dragon Boat Festival: 端午节

Prophet Muhammad's Birthday: 穆罕默德的诞辰

The Day of the Descent of the Quran: 古兰经降世日, Nuzul Al-Quran

Eid Adha: Hari Raya Aidiladha, 哈孜节，宰牲节

Eid al-Fitri: Hari Raya Aidilfitri, 开斋节，马来新年

The month of Ramadan: Ramadhan, 斋月

Deepavali: Diwali, 屠妖节，印度新年

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1. Introduction

As the country with the world's largest population for hundreds of years, and due to frequent wars, crushing poverty and prosperous trade (Gabriel, 2014), a significant number of Chinese people migrated overseas. Due to geographical proximity, Southeast Asia accepted most Chinese immigrants, with Malaysia being one of the most popular destinations (Mackie, 2003). The history of Malaysian Chinese immigrants can be traced back to the voyages of Cheng Ho (Zheng He, 郑和) in the 15th century via trustworthy written records (see Purcell, 1947). Until the 19th and early 20th century, many Chinese and Indian immigrants arrived British Malaya to "serve British economic interests in its tin mines and rubber plantations" (Gabriel, 2014), then a remarkable number of Chinese continued to move to Malaysia since then and built up communities. They not only moved to Malaysia themselves, but they also brought their culture and religions to the Malay peninsula. Overtime, the Chinese community became a significant part of the colorful Malaysian society.

Most Chinese are adherents of Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism, but there is a small population of Chinese who believe in Islam. Records indicate that Chinese Muslims have had a presence in Malaysia since the fifteenth century (see Muljana, 1968; Lombard & Salmon, 2001; Tan, 2003; The, 1993). There have also been Chinese Muslim laborers during colonial times (see Djinghiz, 1911), and sporadic migrants towards the end of the nineteenth century (Ma, 2011). Besides, there is also a notable

number of Chinese people who embrace Islam because of marriage or social influence. Nowadays, about 42,000 Chinese Muslims are residing in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The Chinese community is the biggest minority group in Malaysia, thus being able to maintain their own identity and culture. Despite this, they are both ethnic and religious minorities, so they face a certain extent of social inequality under the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) dominated government where elites aggressively set about creating a Malaysian nation that is Malay in cultural characteristics and Islamic in identity after the May 1969 ethnic riots (See Tan & Abdullah, 2015, p. 16). However, Chinese Muslims are part of the religious majority and live differently from other Malaysian Chinese.

As Rosey Ma said, "Islam, being a way of life, also incorporates in its practice the customs, language, values, superstitions, and other cultural aspects of the people concerned" (2011, p.27). Thus, research on the lifestyle of Malaysia's Chinese Muslims is important in deepening the knowledge about this specific group. Festivals, as an important part of every religion and civilization, are an important site of research. The thesis applies identity theories in analyzing Malaysian Chinese Muslims' festival customs and social influences. The primary research question of the thesis is: How does identity shape Malaysian Chinese Muslims' festival customs and social environment?

Through semi-structured interviews with eight interviewees, the paper reached the following conclusions: First, Malay and Muslim identities are conflated in Malaysian society, so being Muslim also means the possibility of not being identified as Chinese

for the Chinese; Second, in Malaysian society, the existence of religious laws gives the identity of Muslim a clear boundary, and the identification of the individuals becomes less important, which may reinforces the construction of a Muslim identity, but can also lead to negative attitudes about being Muslim. Finally, this study also found that the identities of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia are not exactly equal, but rather the Chinese identity is stronger and the Muslim identity is weaker.

2. Literature Review

This literature review presents the current situation of Malaysian society; literature on the historical, current situation and contemporary cultural context of the Chinese in Malaysia; and literature on Malaysian Chinese Muslims.

2.1. Literature about research background

The ethnic Chinese are one of the biggest populations in the world, with a large population of ethnic Chinese residing abroad (Mackie, 2003). Due to historic and geographic reasons, Southeast Asia is one of the most popular areas for them to settle in. Based on their own identity, cultural background and social integration, how this group integrates and keeps its own specificity in different societies can become a controversial issue (Ho & Chua, 2015).

In Malaysia, large numbers of Chinese people have immigrated there for hundreds of years. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia, out of a total population of about 32 million, 22.6% are ethnic Chinese in 2020, making ethnic Chinese Malaysia largest minority group. The proportion of ethnic Malay people is 69.6% and 6.9% are ethnic Indians. Besides the factor of multiple ethnicities, diverse religious beliefs also constitute the complicated society in Malaysia. 61.3% of people believe in Islam, 19.8% of people believe in Buddhism, 9.2% Christianity, 6.3% Hinduism and some other religions. Chinese usually believe in Buddhism, Christianity or other traditional Chinese religions like Taoism and Confucianism, and most Indian believe in Hinduism (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). As in Malaysian society religion and ethnicity play important roles and often are mixed into a person's ethnic identity (Ma, 2005; Aminnuddin 2020), research on identity in Malaysia cannot avoid talking about both race and religion.

Malaysia claims that the right to freedom of religion is guaranteed in Article 11(1) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. However, Islam is the official religion of the country. As Islamic matters belong to the state jurisdictions, most provisions in relation to apostasy are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Shari'a Courts. (Adil, 2007, p.1). Muslim-born Malaysian do not have any choice in their religion. Tan (2011, p.1) argues that "nation building in Malaysia has been shaped by the politics of ethnicity, which has fostered a communal world view and created a nation that is communally divided".

In terms of the situation that the government of many states tends to be predominantly constituted by Islamic parties after the Islamic resurgence in the 1980s (See Tan, 2011, pp.10-11), people with other religions and of other races are suffering from inequality. Thus, the group of Chinese Muslims is standing in the middle of the scale – they are part of the majority in terms of religion, but minority in terms of ethnicity.

2.2. History and social dynamics of Malaysian Chinese

There is a considerable literature concerning the history of overseas Chinese in Malaysia. The earliest settlement of certain Chinese immigrants can be tracked to the arrival at Malacca in 1408 of the Chinese Admiral Cheng Ho (郑和, Zheng He), but Chinese Settlement was not very extensive (Purcell, 1947). By the time European powers arrived in Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century, the ebb and flow of regional empires and extensive trading networks had already created multiethnic communities that contained peoples from China, India and Indonesia (Lamb, 1964; Reid, 1980; Wheatley, 1961). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain gradually acquired control of Malaya. With the trade expansion of British colonial economy, Chinese, Indian and Indonesian laborers were imported in such large numbers as to soon outnumber the Malay population in the west coast states (J. Jackson, 1964). Though "large-scale immigration from China and India had ceased by the 1930s" (Gabriel, 2014, p.1211), the colonial era of Malaya was not only a period of total political and economic transformation of the Malay states, but also a watershed era of change in the development of Malaysian ethnic relations (Khoo, 1981). The ethnic Chinese group has

achieved success in business, their relative economic wealth and perceived monopolization of the corporate sector have contributed to question about their national allegiance by the dominant culture (Gabriel, 2014).

Among the vast amount of literature focusing on the Chinese in Malaysia, there are some very noteworthy papers that examine the inter-ethnic conflicts that occurred in Malaysia. After the colonial period, Malaysia went through several ethnic and racial crises which hugely impacted contemporary Malaysian society. Tay (2015) worked through the Second World War memory and the long-term "not-quite-citizens" status of Malaysian Chinese to explore formation of Malaysian Chinese identity. Large-scale clashes between Chinese and Malays emerged several months before the defeat of Japan. Most prominent were the radical religious Malay groups that formed militant forces and coalesced into a Holy War movement (Tay, 2015). In the following years, "common citizenship became mired in intercommunal wrangling" (Tay, 2015, p. 99). When the Federation of Malaya was established in 1948, "stringent conditions were imposed on migrants to qualify for citizenship" (Tay, 2015, p.102), which made most Chinese lose the right to be a Malaysian citizen. This split the Chinese sense of belonging in the Malays' Malaysia. Tan (2012) focuses on the influence of the 1969 May 13 Race Riots between Malays and Chinese. "Politicians of different ethnic groups have articulated along ethnic lines, the revival of Malay nationalism after 1969 and non-Malay reaction pushed the country to become a highly polarized nation" (Tan, 2012, p.2). Afterwards, the National Economic Policy (NEP) was made in 1971. The

NEP "extended more privileges to the Malays, ensuring that they gained better positions in business, academia and politics" (Raju, 2008, p.69).

Historical crises between different races have led to the creation of a particular racial and religious boundary in Malaysia. Aminnuddin (2020, p.1) pointed out that, "the complex relationship between race and religion has always been a sensitive issue in Malaysia." He focuses on racial and religious discriminations among Malaysian Malays and Chinese. With a survey involving 1200 people of Malay and Chinese backgrounds, he found evidence on the prevalence of racial and religious discrimination in Malaysia where "Malays have more than double the likelihood to discriminate based on race and religion compared to the Chinese" (2020, p.14). A conflation of race and religion is also a significant phenomenon in Malaysia.

Many researchers dig into the particular cultural background of Malaysian Chinese, including language (Wang, 2016), education (Lee, 2011), communication (Ng & Lee, 2018; Raju, 2008) and food culture (Tan, Ngah &Abdullah, 2015). In education, a policy in 1971 that implemented a comprehensive ethnic quota to advance Malay educational qualifications negatively impacted education opportunities of Chinese (Lee, 2011). However, Chinese primary schools are recognized in national education system, and some middle schools still insist on teaching in Chinese. Malaysian Chinese share the idea that "the high prominence of the Chinese language in public spaces is because of the fact that language is the most important marker for the Chinese identity, and maintaining the Chinese language is crucial to their Chineseness" (Wang, 2016, p.208).

The Chinese Standardization Committee founded in 1997 further maintains and promotes Chinese language in Malaysia. In communication, there are also some Chinese newspapers in Malaysia, for example, *Sin Chew Daily*, one of the leading Chinese newspapers, which "remains focused on emphasizing and preserving Chinese cultural and nationalist discourses" (Ng & Lee, 2018, p.63). Raju (2008) paid attention to Malaysian Chinese films. Under the strict control, Malaysian Chinese films can hardly receive any support or even cannot be screened in public cinemas. Instead, independent movies bravely express Malaysian Chinese identity in private Chinese cinemas (Mahua cinema) or turn to transnational distribution. Moreover, this cinema makes visible the Other(s) of the Malaysian nation. These are instances of how the Chinese, as the Other of Malay-Muslims in Malaysia, encountered and responded to a monolithic Malayanized notion of Malaysian national identity (Raju, 2008, p.77).

These literatures provide different perspectives on contemporary Malaysian Chinese life and culture. The history of the Malay Chinese, Malaysian Chinese culture and identity are given full attention. On the one hand, it demonstrates the fact that Malaysian Chinese have experienced inequality as a dual racial and religious minority in Malaysian society which exists certain racism between Chinese and Malay; while on the other hand, Malaysian Chinese have worked hard to preserve and develop their native language and to maintain their identity and culture as Chinese. Regardless of religious identity, cultural and social influences have impacted every Malaysian Chinese.

2.3.Malaysian Chinese Muslims

The initial difficulty to study Chinese Muslims in Malaysia is that it is hard to define the group, because there are complicated reasons for Chinese people being Muslims. One of the biggest groups is oversea Chinese Muslims who are not Malaysian citizens. Most people of the group moved to Malaysia in last 50 years, and they have already been Muslims before they moved. Chow Bing Ngeow and Hailong Ma (2016) studied this group. They noticed most people in the group are Hui (回族), and the association OCMA (Oversea Chinese Muslim Association) they organized. They used transnationalism, ethnonationalism and constructivist theories to analyze the group. They mentioned the Muslim-majority country has attracted many Chinese Muslims to study and live there. Rosey Wang Ma (2005) also focuses on Chinese Muslims, but at the same time she put much effort on studying the other biggest Chinese Muslim group - Chinese who are Malaysian citizens converting to Islam. However, some have lost part of their Muslim identity because they have assimilated into other Chinese community because they as Muslims may face bias in the Chinese community or they have married to Malays thus gradually moving away from the Chinese community.

Tan, Ngah and Darit (2017) researched on the Kelantan Kampung Pasir Parit Peranakan Chinese. This group is originally ethnic Chinese group, intermarrying with Siamese women and living among Malay people has brought the group a special intersecting identity. Tan (1991) pays attention on a small group of Chinese Muslims in Terengganu, who are originally Hui and moved to Malaysia. This group is also an

important part in Ma's (2005) research. However, as early immigrants, this group has gradually integrated into the Malay community or Chinese community, these studies thus have limited significance for this thesis. Wu's (2015) study is also about Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. He argued that in modern-day Penang, Chinese Muslim converts are well received in the Malay-dominated Muslim community (2015, p.89). Rosey Ma gives a perspective of current identity dilemma as a Chinese Muslim in Malaysia. It gives a general view on "the challenge they face to be acknowledged, in their multiple and fluid identities" (Ma, 2011, p.26). Lam (2004) focuses on reconstruction of Chinese Muslims conversion, which could be a good sample for this thesis. However, festival customs are a small part, and Muslims-born Chinese were not included in the research. Muhamat (2009) did an empirical study towards Chinese Muslim in Kuala Lumpur. More than 600 people were involved in his survey, which are numerous and referenceable but the study takes a broader view of many aspects rather than conducting detailed interviews, so there still are not enough examples about food, festivals, or customs.

One cannot ignore limitations of current literature on Chinese Malaysian Muslims, comparing to extensive and comprehensive literature about general Malaysian Chinese. First, there are still gaps in the study of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. The Islamic faith clearly brings a different identity and complexity to Malaysian Chinese Muslims than the non-Muslim Chinese. There are not enough detailed studies on their lives, for example, their language, or intersecting discrimination they may experience. My

research is going to fill a small piece of the gap by studying their festival customs. Second, most scholars of the field are Chinese or Chinese Muslims. Though they know the group in depth, their study cannot avoid the influence of their own experience and position. I, as Chinese from mainland China, share certain identity with them, but as a non-Malaysian, my view could be more objective.

3. Theoretical framework

In this part, firstly, it introduces the uses of identity and how the identity of Malaysian Chinese Muslims is used and understood. Secondly, the concept of identity through Lawler's (2015) work explains why identity theory can be used as the basis of this research and why it is meaningful to study the identity of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia.

3.1.The uses of identity

Once we want to talk about Chinese, Muslims, Malaysians or other specific sectors to describe a person, we use the term "identity". Like Coulmas said, "talk about identity has become ubiquitous" (2019, p.2), identity has been bonded to every person, and it becomes a more and more popular word as a target of different research in recent decades. However, what is identity? Why is identity so important?

Theories of identity are surprisingly myriad. Goffman (1956; 1986) discussed the relationship between self and identity. Lawler (2015), Izenberg (2016) and Gyberg (2019) try to understand and analyze identity from its own process and context. Coulmas (2019) uses some short articles to help understanding different aspects related to identity. There are many articles and books talking about identity in a more particular perspective. Fukuyama (2018) focuses on the background of contemporary society, how identity effects politics. Mayer, Whittier and Robnett (2002) connect identity to social movements. Lemert (2011), Kendall (2011) and Forsh (2011) pay attention to the history of identity. Sex and gender are also highly concerned in the work of Casey (2011), Holmes (1997), Butler (2002) and Coulmas (2019). Ethnicity and race are a big topic related to identity. Wang (2009) takes a broad perspective to analyze the influence of Chinese history paradigms on overseas Chinese. Religion-related identity, for example, Rosey Wang (2005) looks through Malaysian Chinese Muslims' identity shifting while Stark (2006) focuses on Indian Muslims' life in Malaysia. Through a study of the Rohingya Crisis, Rosyidin (2017) discusses about collective identity in Southeast Asia.

Although identity has become so popular nowadays, the arguments surrounding identity are still intense. If we looked at phenomena at first - the uses of identity - rather the definition or concept of identity, Brubaker and Cooper (2000, pp. 6-8) have offered a clear and comprehensive summarization of a few key uses worth noting in full below:

"1. Understood as a ground or basis of social or political action, "identity" is often opposed to "interest" in an effort to highlight and conceptualize non-instrumental modes of social and political action.

2. Understood as a specifically collective phenomenon, "identity" denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category. This may be understood objectively (as a sameness "in itself") or subjectively (as an experienced, felt, or perceived sameness). This use is often about gender, race or ethnicity.

3. Understood as a core aspect of (individual or collective) "selfhood" or as a fundamental condition of social being, "identity" is invoked to point to something allegedly deep, basic, abiding, or foundational. This is distinguished from more superficial, accidental, fleeting, or contingent aspects or attributes of the self, and is understood as something to be valued, cultivated, supported, recognized, and preserved.

4. Understood as a product of social or political action, "identity" is invoked to highlight the processual, interactive development of the kind of collective self-understanding, solidarity, or "groupness" that can make collective action possible.

5. Understood as the evanescent product of multiple and competing discourses, "identity" is invoked to highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary "self"."

These uses can be applied almost effortlessly to the use of the identity "Malaysian Chinese Muslim". For example, this identity as the basis of social action is the reason they celebrate Chinese holidays and Islamic holidays. The identity "Malaysian Chinese Muslim" can help to understand collective phenomenon and collective self-understanding that they follow both Chinese customs and Muslim customs. Unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary "self" can be used to explain the perception of self-identity is constantly changing. So for every Malaysian Chinese Muslim, they may acquire a new identity outside of this one, or change their existing identity.

The multiple uses of identity are a manifestation of its complexity, but they cannot help us to answer the question of what is identity and why identity is important for this research. To get at what identity is, it is vital to uncover its complex nature and examine the core of identity. Lawler pointed out that "part of the slipperiness of the term 'identity' derives from the difficulties of defining it adequately. It is not possible to provide a single, overarching definition of what it is, how it is developed and how it works" (2015, p.7). Identity is a not a stubborn term and is constructed by different social meanings and facts in regards to different situations. There are some examples: Goffman (1986) divided identity into three different forms, which are personal identity, social identity and ego identity, and they are bonded with personal characters, social categories and self-awareness. Charles Tilly (1996, p.7) characterizes identity as a "blurred but indispensable" concept and defines it as "an actor's experience of a category, tie, role,

network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative." Lawler (2015) introduced a new tendency of recent writers to analyze different dimension of self and identity: "identity" and "subjectivity". She cited Wetherell's explanation that "it is 'subjectivity' that makes it possible for any particular social identity to be lived either thoroughly or ambivalently, while 'identity' helps specify what there is to be lived" (Wetherell, 2008, p.75). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) think some works focusing on identity often "do not depend on the use of "identity" as an analytical category" (2000, p.11), so they have tried to use alternative terms to make identity less confusing: identification and categorization; self-understanding and social location; commonality, connectedness, groupness. Through these arguments, Lawler argues that, "rather than looking for the one, essential definition, or splitting the concept into multiple definitions, the task is to consider the different conceptualizations in terms of their *relationship*" (2015, p.9).

3.2. Identity and relationship

As Lawler thought that "relationship between the ways in which people live and understand their lives and the kinds of social categories available to them is at the heart of struggles to understand identity" (2015, p.9), he further explains how the *relationship* plays the role in identity:

1. Sameness:

When he begins to explain the sameness of identity, he used a not rare word "social categories" formed on the basis of social divisions. However, it is not that the social category determines the person's identity, but categories "will inform people's sense of themselves, and how they view one another". Identities are better seen as ongoing processes, and identity-making is in terms of more active processes of identification. (2015, pp. 10-11) Calhoun describes this argument in detail:

> "to see identities only as reflections of 'objective' social positions or circumstances is to see them always retrospectively. It does not make sense of the dynamic potential implicit – for better or worse – in the tensions within persons and among the contending cultural discourses that locate persons. Identities are often personal and political projects in which we participate, empowered to greater or lesser extents by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organization" (1994, p.28).

Under the research questions of this paper, both Chinese and Muslims can be an example of this point. When Chinese identify themselves, they are also identifying/identified with Chinese culture, Chinese appearance, Chinese language related to the wider category *Chinese*, and among these, there could be something others do not identify as Chinese. This is similar for Muslims. Dietary taboos, religious dress, and daily prayers can all be considered as features to identify a Muslim, but those who identify themselves as Muslims can be those who do not follow these; and those who follow these may also not identify themselves as Muslims. Holiday practices can

be a feature of identity, as festival is also a part of culture, a part of sameness of a group. Therefore, this study examines Chinese festivals and Muslim festivals through Chinese Muslims in Malaysia to study elements of group identity.

Lawler also notes that a person always belongs to more than just one identity category. Some forms of identity are mutually constitutive (e.g., race and class and gender). Some forms of identity are understood to be mutually exclusive and, indeed, rely on not being able to be combined. (2015, p.11) This is what Stuart Hall calls the 'constitutive outside' to identity:

> "Identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected" (1995, p.5).

In the case of this thesis, the first one explains the rationality of existence of Malaysian Chinese Muslim as a combination of three identities, and they are mutually constructed. Being Muslim makes other beliefs disappear as an option of identity, and the identity of Muslim also relies on not having other religions. Thus, Chinese Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese identities exist in a mutually exclusive manner, and the identity of Chinese Muslim depends on the identity of non-Muslim Chinese. This is why it is necessary to review the Malaysian Chinese and knowing their life and their identity, as the identity of non-Muslim Chinese in Malaysia helps form the Malaysian Muslim Chinese identity.

2. Differences:

Lawler notes that "conflicts between different groups have relied on the precept that there are fundamental differences in identity between different groups" (2015, p.12). Yet these differences are not simply 'there'; they are not 'given in nature' but need to be made (see Ignatieff, 1994). Lawler thinks, although innate differences may be the cause of differences of identity, differences could be "produced out of discriminatory processes that establish some identities as more or less valuable than others" (2015, p.13). Identities are not only relational, but also all are produced within systems of inequality. Race is an obvious example:

> "'race' as a category is now generally agreed to have no credible biological basis. Its effects – which are very real – stem not from real differences 'within' the person, but from the stigmatizing and unequal mechanisms of racism." (Lawler, p.14)

The differences make the identity of Chinese as a race particularly evident in Malaysian society where racial difference is emphasized. This difference based on race exposes the Chinese as a racial minority to unequal mechanisms of treatment. And, after linking Islam to the Malay race, non-Muslims also become victims of inequality within the religious groups. The existence of this difference has led to the specificity of the identity of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia.

3. Individuals

Lawler also discussed the uniqueness of every individual. The general view in the West is that one's 'true identity' is somehow 'locked away inside' (Elias,1994), but it may not be an adequate foundation for analysis, since no one can figure out where is clear dividing line between "what is 'inside' man and the 'external world'" (Elias, 1994, p.206). Through the distinction of *inside* and *outside*, he argues that the core concept of self and identity of self are the result of social civilization process. It suggests, how we understand ourselves is an effect of knowledges or truths that circulate about the self. Meanwhile, it also suggests to understand identity as formed between rather than within persons. (Lawler, 2015, p.17)

It explains that identity, or the construction of identity is not static. Lawler argues that socially constructed understandings are not fixed forever but are changed by people's own take-up and understandings of them (2015, p.19). Therefore, the same person living in a different time and space will have a difference in what the one understands to be one's identity, because a nexus of others changes. It is clear that in the context of this paper's research, the particularities of Malaysian society, and the interactions of Malaysian Chinese Muslims with others also influence their identity, so to focus interaction of social influence could be importance of identity.

4. Methodology

This part covers the important methodological approaches of this study. There are three sections in this part. The first part is the method of data collection and the design of the interviews. The second part is the data collection and sample selection for this thesis, including how to conduct the interview, sample selection and collected. The third part is ethical considerations for this interview, including ethical standards for the method used to obtain data for this thesis, and how I protect the privacy of interviewees.

4.1.Research Design

Given that the research question of the thesis is to analyze the festival customs and social influence of Malaysian Chinese Muslims, the thesis is going to rely on a qualitative method, which was assessed to be the most appropriate method since the study is explorative and non-numeric in its nature (Stebbins, 2001; Pierce, 2008; Bryman, 2012). Qualitative content analysis is a flexible research strategy which envisions not simply the manifest content of the text, but satisfies the researcher's ambition to 'dig down' the topic of inquiry by including contextual and latent content, thus allowing to identify themes and core ideas inherent to the text in analysis (Drisko and Maschi, 2015).

By taking a qualitative approach, data was thus inductively collected and analyzed, and a theoretical framework was consequently extrapolated (Pierce, 2008; Bryman,

2012). Due to the research concentration on detailed festival customs and social influences and environment of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia, data is highly based on personal experience and personal feeling and would have to be apart from previous academic literature, so semi-structured interviews targeted on Malaysian Chinese Muslims would be the appropriate approach to explore impact of Islam on their festival customs. A semi-structured interview would be useful for collect empirical data. Bryman (2012, p. 471) describes the semi-structured interview as "one where the researcher has a concrete scope or specific topics that will be asked in the interview, usually by a prepared a list of questions based on an interview guide". Based on the overall research question, I focused on three main topics to design interview questions. The first one is the Chinese festival customs, the second one is Islamic festival customs, and the third one is the social influence of being a Muslim. A total of fourteen fixed questions were designed into the interview. As Bryman pointed, "in qualitative interviewing, 'rambling' or going off at tangents is often encouraged and there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view" (2012). Therefore, in addition to the designed questions, interviewees were also asked questions that are not part of the designed questions during the interview to offer more information about their identity.

Considering that Chinese is an important language for the Chinese in Malaysia and myself as a native Chinese speaker, the interview is provided in both Chinese and English for the interviewees to choose from, to enable the interviewees to use the language that is comfortable and fluent for them to open up. As it is a semi-structured

interview, all questions are open and flexible without a fixed answer. Interviewees are encouraged to state something relevant to the topic, even if it may be outside the scope of the question itself.

4.2. Data collection and sampling

All empirical social research selects evidence to make a point, and needs to justify the selection that is the basis of exploration, description, demonstration, proof or disproof of a particular claim. (See Kish, 1965) Choosing proper sampling is the most important part of data collection as interviews would be foundation of the thesis. According to the official statistics office of Malaysia, there were 42,048 Chinese of Islamic faith in Malaysia in 2010. Therefore, the total number of the group and people available for interview is not broad. As Bryman refers, "purposive sampling was selected as a strategic way to ensure that the sample is relevant to the research questions" (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). In order to refine and identify the target group for the study, for the purpose of this thesis, *Malaysian Chinese Muslims* are specifically defined as legally recognized Muslims who were born and raised in Malaysia, have Chinese ancestry and are Malaysian citizens. Under Malaysian law, race is based on the father's descent and therefore children of mixed-race families with Chinese fathers are also a target group for this paper. Since the overall population of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia is small, to ensure sufficient interviewees, and due to the research question is not relevant with other sectors, the sample group was not selected for age, occupation, residence or gender. All those who meet the above definition are the sample group of this thesis.

Due to the pandemic, it is unable to go to Malaysia for a field work. As a result, social media became my primary means of finding interviewees. After trying to find respondents through multiple social media, I used a popular Chinese social media platform to seek interviewees. Through slight differences in Chinese language use between China and Malaysia, I have selected some keywords to find interviewees. Given that there are more female than male users of the platform and that Muslim men may be more cautious about talking to a single female that they have not met before, the eight people who agreed to participate in the interview were all women. After the interviewee agreed to participate in the interview, I completed the interviews through video calls or voice calls through some other communication media, including WhatsApp, WeChat and Zoom. All interviewees answered all the same interview questions, and were asked three to five additional questions about their identity outside of the established questions, based on their answers and personal experiences. Of the eight interviewees, six chose to conduct their interviews in only Chinese and two chose a combination of Chinese and English.

4.3. Ethical considerations

This study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (CODEX, 2019). All interviewees were informed that the interview sessions were only for academic purposes and that the information provided by the interviewees would be used only for this master's thesis. Consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interview sessions. The recording method used for data collection during

interviews was also informed to all interviewees and consent was obtained prior to all interviews. No compensation was offered to any interviewee to enable their participation.

Since Chinese Muslims are a very small group in Malaysia, it does not take much detail of personal information to potentially reveal interviewees' identities. Religion, especially Islam, is a sensitive topic in a country like Malaysia where there are strict religious laws, so, to protect the privacy of the interviewees, this thesis will minimize the release of their personal information, and prevent someone from combining multiple types of personal information in order to discover their identity. The specific measures are as follows:

1. I have chosen not to disclose the social media platform I used to recruit respondents.

2. I intentionally avoided asking interviewees about their place of birth and place of residence during the interviews, even though these may have influenced the interviewees' perceptions and experiences. Several interviewees volunteered their birthplace and residence to me during interviews, but I will not use them to ensure fairness and to protect privacy.

3. Age, reason for conversion and time of conversion were parts of the interview questions, and some interviewers offered very detailed information, e.g. on which day they converted. I will obscure such information in the data analysis and use only what is necessary and safe.

4. I numbered the participants from 1 to 8 in the order of the interviews and named them with Chinese numbers from 1 to 8 in pinyin instead of real names. (See table 1)

table 1: interviewees information

NUMBER	NAME	RACE	RELIGIOUS STATUS
1	Yi	Chinese	converted
2	Er	Malay-Chinese mix	born
3	San	Chinese	converted
4	Si	Chinese	converted
5	Wu	Malay-Chinese mix	born
6	Liu	Chinese	converted
7	Qi	Chinese	converted
8	Ba	Malay-Chinese mix	born

5. Data analysis

By examining a classification of Malay New Year, Chinese New Year, other important Malay festivals and Chinese festivals and social influence, this part will analyze the identity theory with festival customs and social environment of Malaysian Chinese Muslims. It begins with a description of festival customs, followed by the discussion and analysis of the interviews.

5.1.An introduction of Chinese and Malay festival customs

Although Islam has special position in Malaysia, religious freedom guarantees non-Islamic festivals can be celebrated in Malaysia as well. China has a long history of more than five thousand years, and many festivals grew up in popular tradition. Most of the festivals were connected with the development of astronomy, the calendar and mathematics. Wei (2011) introduced most important traditional and modern festivals in China. Many Chinese festivals originated in the pre-Qin Dynasty (秦朝, before 221 B.C.) and the major traditional Chinese festivals had been established by Han Dynasty (汉朝, 202 B.C.-220 A.D.), including Chinese New Year, Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Double Seventh Festival (Wei, 2011, p. 1-3). Most of traditional Chinese festivals follow Lunisolar Calendar rather than pure Lunar Calendar. Buddhism and Taoism have also had a huge impact on the formation of the traditional Chinese festivals, for example, Laba Festival is a day people eating laba porridge to commemorate Shakyamuni being Buddha (see Wei, 2011, p.9).

Since the amount of Chinese traditional festivals are numerous, and there are notable differences depending on regions, to limit study scale, the research will mainly focus on most common and popular festivals among Malaysian Chinese, which are the Chinese New Year, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Middle Autumn Festival, Chinese New Year is the most important and grandest day for all Chinese to celebrate the first day of Chinese Calendar. Family should eat reunion dinner together at the night before Chinese New Year, which is also called New Year's Eve. The New

Year's Eve dinner usually is very large and sumptuous including more than ten dishes. Families with Buddhism, Taoism or other traditional religions have ancestor worship rituals – from my own experience as a traditional Chinese family with strong Buddhism and Taoism influence - after most of the dishes are prepared, empty plates, empty bowls and small glasses filled with traditional yellow rice wine would be placed on the big round table with lit red candles and incense, which means the dead ancestors are invited to come back to the world of living and eat the dinner first, and people are asked to kneel down to show their respect and make wishes by generations for at least three times in a few hours. After the ritual, all family members can be seated and have the reunion meal. Setting off firecrackers and fireworks near twelve o'clock to welcome the new year is also a big thing, which related to the origin of New Year that people used firecrackers to drive away a monster called Nian (means Year) in ancient. Other traditional customs including wearing new red clothes, giving away or receiving lucky money in red envelopes, visiting relatives, saying New Year greetings to each other and going to Buddhism and Taoism temples for pray. Qingming Festival is the fifth term of 24 solar terms system from Chinese calendar that divides 24 terms of a year (Zhang & Huang, 1994), and usually Qingming Festival is on 4th or 5th April. Qingming is a day when Chinese show their respect and remembrance for their ancestors. During this festival, there are two main customs: one is to clean and renovate the graves of ancestors and pay prostrations; the other is to hang and burn paper money in front of the graves of ancestors to provide for ancestors' expenses in the world after death (Xiao, 2011, pp.130-132). Dragon Boat Festival is a day to get rid of "toxic gas" and to honor the

memory of a great Chinese poet Qu Yuan (屈原, 343 B.C. – 278 B.C.) who committed suicide by jumping into a river. Padding dragon boats is the most famous custom of the festival. Another important tradition is to eat a traditional Chinese food Zongzi. (Xiao, 2011). Mid-Autumn Festival is a day related to moon worship (Xiao, 2011, p. 156). This is the day of the full moon, symbolizing reunion. Therefore, children living away from home would go home to spend the Mid-Autumn Festival with their relatives, enjoying the beautiful full moon and eating a traditional food called Mooncake. In Malaysia, Chinese New Year has two days of national public holidays, but other traditional Chinese festivals are not public holidays.

Basic principles and practices of Malay festivals are as instructed by religion, but there are ceremonies following Malay traditional practices (Ishak, 2008, p.99). For Malay, most important festivals are the month of Ramadan, Eid Fitri (Hari Raya Aidilfitri), Eid Adha (Hari Raya AidilAdha), Prophet Muhammad's birthday. In the month of Ramadhan, it abstains Muslims from eating, drinking and sexual relations during the day for a month (Ishak, 2008, p.99). When Ramadhan comes to an end, there is an important Islamic festival, Eid al Fitri, which is an occasion for family reunion. People wear traditional Malay customs, go to mosques for praying and *Open House* - invite relatives and friends to visit them and treat them as big meals with traditional Malay food. (Ishak, 2008). It is also a day for Malaysian Muslims to ask forgiveness from parents, elders or even friends for their wrongdoings. On this day, Malays also give children small amount lucky money, usually in a green envelope. Eid Adha is

another important Islamic festival, an event seventy days after Eid al Fitri, and most remarkable custom of the day is slaughtering of cows and goats and distributing the meat to poor people. *Maulidur Rasul* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) has both religious and social meanings. The celebration of the birthday normally involves on the procession along designated roads or gathering in the villages organized by the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) of the states or by the committees of the mosques across the nation (Ishak, 2008, p.100). All these festivals have one or two days of national public holidays in Malaysia.

5.2.Two New Years

Interviewees told me that three main races coexist in Malaysian society, which is the foundation of their society. Malaysian Chinese always say that there are three New Years in Malaysia in a year. Since the Chinese in Malaysia call their most important festival Chinese New Year, they follow this custom and call the most important festivals Eid al Fitri and Deepavali for the other two big races (Malays and Indians) as Malay New Year (马来新年, Ma Lai Xin Nian) and Indian New Year (印度新年 Yin Du Xin Nian). Race, as an important category of identity, is rooted in the minds of Malaysian Chinese. Thus, Eid al Fitri is also known as Malay Year New in Chinese community in Malaysia, although it is not the Malay New Year in terms of the calendar. In what follows, the uses of the term Malay New Year when interviewees said 马来新年, and the term Eid al Fitri when they said 开斋节 both mean Eid al Fitri.

When asked about the importance of the two biggest festivals for Chinese – Chinese New Year and for Muslims - Malay New Year (Eid al Fitri), most interviewees said the two new years are equal in their mind:

> "It is hard to say. I think both of them are important to me. I would say they are equal to me, no preference." (Yi)

> "I haven't considered which one is more important, but I guess they are the same. Because in both festivals I have vacations, and I celebrate, and then I am happy. I wouldn't say 'this is a Muslim holiday so I don't want to pay much attention to it'". (Qi)

Among those who consider both holidays equally important contain mixed-race people and Chinese who have converted to Islam for a very short time.

One said Malay New Year is more important:

> "They are both important, but I think Malay New Year is more important, because the thirty days before Malay New Year is a month of fasting, a month when we Muslims do not eat or drink, which is partial to our Islamic teachings. It makes Eid more ritualistic." (Ba)

One interviewee thought Chinese New Year is more important:

"Chinese New Year is more important. To be honest, I actually only celebrate Chinese New Year." (Wu)

There is also one interviewee saying neither Chinese New Year nor Malay New Year is more important than the month of Ramadhan:

"New Years are not very important for me. The month of Ramadan is more important. It is a very sacred month, in which there are no demons, so we can accumulate blessings and cancel out sins." (Si)

When asked about customs, almost all interviewees said there is no large gap between them and other Chinese or Malays, except food, and ancestor and gods worship. However, due to the differences in their family, there are still some minor differences in their customs.

Ba, as an example from a mix family, described her days on the two New Years:

"In Chinese New Year, we would do a lot of traditional things, like hanging red lanterns, making New Year cakes, having a reunion dinner, giving New Year greetings to others, and giving away and receiving red envelopes. But we do not go to worship our ancestors and Bodhisattvas on New Year's Day. We do not make any pork dishes either, but my father would sometimes joke that it would be nicer to have pork dishes, like when we eat chicken

dumplings. In Malay New Year, we would wear beautiful Malay clothes on the first morning of Eid, then go to a mosque to worship Allah. Then we go to clean the graves of family members and pray for them. When we come back home, we apologize to our elders and repent for our mistakes in the past year." (Ba)

Qi, who became a Muslim as a result of marriage, is a good example of how a wife in Chinese-Malay marriage celebrates the two festivals - they follow the customs of their original families to celebrate Chinese New Year and the families of their partners to celebrate Eid al Fitri:

"When I spend Chinese New Year, I go home and eat New Year's Eve dinner (reunion dinner). On the first day of Chinese New Year, I get up in the morning wearing new red clothes, and say New Year's greetings to my family. My family and I would also go to a local Guanyin (Kwan Yin or Kuan Yin) Temple to watch traditional Chinese performances, such as lion and dragon dances. There is no ancestor worship in my parents' family, so I have never practiced those rituals since my childhood, but I don't mind to do ancestor worship if my relatives ask me to. For Malay New Year, I do what my husband's family does. Since my husband doesn't go to a mosque for pray, I don't go either. What I do are putting on new Malay dress in the same color as my husband's family, kneeling down with my husband and his

siblings and saying 'please forgive me for my mistakes' to their parents. They don't have many customs." (Qi)

Si is the only interviewee who comes from an exclusively Chinese-Muslim family:

"For Chinese New Year, probably the differences are my family only eat Halal food, like we don't eat pork feet. And we don't worship ancestors during Chinese New Year. For Malay New Year, there are also some differences, more of a cultural difference, because we are Chinese after all. For example, we don't like Malay food as much, so we eat and drink the same as usual. For other traditions, we spend in a same way." (Si)

Answers of motivation on spending two festivals are different. For Chinese New Year, most converted interviewees thought of it as a *tradition* to celebrate, but for Malay New Year, *duty* is the word that interviewees tended to use:

"Because I am Chinese and grew up as a Chinese, Chinese New Year is all I remember from my birth, so having Chinese New Year is a natural thing for me, it is my culture and my root. For Malay New Year, since I am now a Muslim, I feel obliged to learn the Islamic customs. Growing up in Malaysia, where Islam is the main religion, these things (Islamic customs) are not very difficult to learn." (Qi)

"Since I have converted, I feel that it is my duty and obligation to understand and celebrate Eid al Fitri. Now I am trying my best to learn the various customs, and if there is something I don't know well enough, I ask my husband for advice. My husband's family is very focused on family harmony and integration, and as a junior I want to do my best to meet their expectations, so I try to be present in the festival and do what they do." (San)

"(For Eid al Fitri) It should be duty. I have gotten used to spending the festival because I have converted to Islam for more than 10 years." (Si)

"I feel that because Chinese New Year is linked to race, Chinese should celebrate Chinese holidays regardless of religion. Even though my dad went from Buddhist to Islamic and changed his name to a Malay name, it doesn't change the Chinese identity. As I am a Malay and Chinese child, it is both a tradition and a sense of responsibility to celebrate it." (Ba)

When it comes to the feeling of celebrating the two New Years, almost all interviewees said they were happy:

"I think the overall feeling is all very positive. Other than that I would mostly feel interesting in Malay New Year because there were many things I haven't done before I became a Muslim." (San)

"Happiness. Actually, I am really glad that I have two big festivals to celebrate now. I really enjoy spending time with our families. Although I have to give away lucky money in both festivals and that becomes double expense, my kid can receive double lucky money." (Yi)

"I feel happy. Because I think celebration itself is just joyful, whether it's Chinese New Year, Malay New Year, my birthday or any other day worth celebrating. They are all wonderful. Now that I have one more grand holiday to celebrate, of course it's a joy. And because I now have a Muslim identity, I begin to have a sense of belonging to Eid al Fitri. I feel this is *my* festival, so it means a lot to me." (Qi)

"I am very happy to celebrate both New Years. I can wear beautiful traditional clothes to celebrate two big festivals with elders. Having big meals with traditional Chinese and Malay food. I also enjoy different rituals a lot. I think they are interesting." (Liu)

Besides one participant:

"It is hard to say that I am happy; it is rather uneventful. I just feel that another year has passed. I have to be asked by my relatives about my job and my studies again." (Si)

When it comes to the one impressive thing about the two New Years, almost all of the interviewees who married a Malay told stories about their partner coming to their home to spend Chinese New Year together and their visit to their partner's family for Eid al Fitri:

> "Maybe I would say the first year my husband and I went to my parents' family to celebrate Chinese New Year, and my Malay husband secretly learned many Chinese blessing words and said to my parents, which surprising my parents. This Malay New Year was very impressive to me, because both my parents and his parents came to visit us and celebrated it together. We took the first photo of our big family." (Liu)

> "Because I grew up in a Chinese family, the Chinese New Year atmosphere is very strong and surrounding me. Every year on New Year's Eve my grandfather would give red envelopes to younger generations and there was a relatively formal ceremony that was a very important thing for our family and showed the unity of our family, which was very impressive to me and I always look forward to it. For Eid, the most impressive thing for me is that everyone would apologize to their parents and reflect on their mistakes in the past year. This is something that we Chinese children don't do; we rarely admit our faults to our parents. However, the Malays would take turns to kneel down to their parents according to their generation, sincerely apologizing and telling them about their faults. This is something I really

appreciate because I have never done this to my parents. I think it's meaningful to have such an opportunity to think about our own behavior." (San)

'The first year when I spent Eid Fitri with my husband's family, I found there was a tradition that younger generations should regret their faults in the past year in front of elder generations. It really impressed me. I think such regret and self-examination is meaningful. In Chinese New Year, my husband always feels shy to get lucky money from my parents. In his mind, we are married and we have a job, so we should not get lucky money because we are mature. But I keep convincing him that it is fine to accept money from them although we have got married. Then he accepted lucky money but he also decided to give money to other family members. Finally, all of us in my family give lucky money to each other. This is really interesting." (Yi)

For Born-Muslims and those who converted not only because of marriage, their impressions are more about their own experience:

"In the case of Ramadan, when the first year that I converted to Islam, I forgot about it sometimes. One day when I got up in the morning, I went to drink water naturally, which was a waste of a day. There is nothing impressive about the Chinese New Year, only that they keep asking why they

celebrate New Year when they have become Malay, which is actually very frustrating." (Si)

"Maybe lucky money. I can get some lucky money in both festivals, but my mom would take away lucky money in Chinese new year and allows me to keep lucky money in Malay New Year." (Er)

"I think one of the things that stood out to me was probably one year I went to spend Chinese New Year with my relatives, and I played firecrackers with my cousins and ended up getting hit in the face with a firecracker by my cousin." (Wu)

"I love the Chinese New Year reunion dinner because I get to eat at the same table with lots of loved ones. It is very cozy. What I like most about Malay New Year is the food, I can eat a lot of traditional Malay food, such as Malay curry chicken." (Ba)

When examining perspectives on customs of Chinese New Year and Malay New Year, it is clear that those born as Muslims and those who converted to Islam have different ideas. Interviewees born as Muslims grew up with a blend of both environments, so celebrating the two holidays is natural for them; but for people who converted to Islam, they originally grew up as non-Muslim Chinese, and Muslim is a new identity for them. Celebrating Eid al Fitri is a relatively new thing brought by the Muslim identity and they had to change or abolish certain customs as a tradition of

celebrating Chinese New Year (such as eating pork dishes). These new social interactions reinforce the new identity of Muslims, and it demonstrates the ongoing process of identity. However, whether they were converted to Islam or born Muslim, the respondents in this interview are able to maintain a good balance between the two holidays. All but one of the interviewers considered the two New Years are equally important with a happy attitude to spend them. Therefore, it can be said that the identity of Muslims has no negative impact on the Chinese New Year.

5.3.Other festivals

The second section of the interview is about other important Chinese and Malay festivals. When asked about if they celebrate other Chinese festivals and Malay festivals, interviewees have different answers. For two interviewees, they still spend Chinese festivals, except Qingming festival:

"I celebrate all Chinese except Qingming festival." (Er)

"I will have almost all Chinese festivals, including Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Winter Solstice Festival, except Qingming Festival. Like the Mid-Autumn Festival, we will have Halal mooncakes." (Ba)

Qingming Festival is still celebrated by two interviewees in the case with some limitations:

"I spend all the Chinese festivals as I did before. For example, on Qingming Festival, I go to sweep the tomb… I walk to see the graves of relatives and help family members clean up the graves. The difference may be that I will no longer take incense to pay respect, but I will all still participate." (San)

"If I take the day off from work, I would go home and spend these Chinese festivals with my parents, and I spend them all the same as I always do. But for Qingming Festival, I do not burn incense or scriptures anymore. I just stand near the grave and watch my relatives do ancestor worships." (Liu)

There are also four interviewees do not have any limitations on spending Chinese festivals:

"I spend all other Chinese and Islamic festivals, including Qingming festival. My Malay husband also would spend Qingming festival with me." (Yi)

"Chinese festivals are all celebrated. For example, the Qingming Festival is still a time for me to sweep tomb, and I still do ancestor worship customs. At the Mid-Autumn Festival, we eat mooncakes, and at the Dragon Boat Festival, we eat zongzi. As long as festivals don't involve customs about worship other gods like Buddha, I'd like to celebrate." (Si)

For the other Islamic festivals, the one that eight interviewees spend is Ramadhan. Except for Ramadan and Eid al Fitri, only two interviewees said they celebrate other festivals:

"I follow my husband's family to spend Muslims' festivals. And I would like to integrate into their family and Islam. We spend Eid Adha, Ramadan, Eid Fitri and Al-Quran." (Qi)

"My family have four Muslim festivals, Ramadan, Malay New Year, Mohammed's Birthday and Eid al-Adha." (Si)

There is one interviewee who does not spend any Islamic festivals:

"I do not spend any Malay festivals, including the month of Ramadhan. I know it is shocking, but I don't care." (Wu)

And other interviewees do not do anything special about other Islamic festivals:

"Islamic festivals, with the exception of Eid Fitri and Ramadhan, are not celebrated much by my husband and I. We treat them as normal days." (San)

"I do not know much about Islamic festivals other than Eid Fitri and Ramadhan. I heard about Eid Adha, but I haven't celebrated it yet. My husband told me that there is nothing special about Eid Adha." (Liu)

When asked which festivals they tend to celebrate, only one interviewee answered Islamic festivals:

"I am a Muslim so I tend to spend Muslim's festivals more." (Si)

While the other eight all said they tended to spend, or celebrated Chinese festivals more frequently:

> "I think there are more Chinese festivals to celebrate so I spend more Chinese festivals. There are also many Islamic holidays, but many are not for celebration." (Liu)

> "It must be Chinese festivals. You know Chinese festivals are very lively, and I am Chinese after all, so I definitely know more about Chinese festivals." (San)

> "I think I am more familiar with Chinese festivals, because I grew up as Chinese and in Chinese community, so I know how to arrange stuffs and what to do in Chinese festivals. In Malay festivals, my husband would arrange things, and I just follow what he does. So for me personally, I'm leaning towards Chinese festivals" (Yi)

Ancestor worship is a significant conflict between Chinese and Muslim identities. In most cases, becoming a Muslim means giving up the traditional Chinese ancestor worship, because in the culture, where dead people would go after they die is different. Although the Chinese identity, which is categorized by race, and the Muslim identity, which is categorized by religion, are not mutually exclusive social categories, they become mutually exclusive in terms of festivals customs due to the existence of ancestor worship. Nevertheless, it also depends on how individuals think about these

conflicts and how they deal with conflicts with the perceptions of others. Thus, some people choose to abandon all customs influenced by any gods other than Allah, and some abandon all customs related to ancestor worship, while others embrace both sides.

When asked if they were familiar with the origins of the various festivals that they spend, the majority of interviewees said they knew the origins of Chinese festivals in some extents, but had limited knowledge of Islamic festivals:

> "I did learn about origins of Chinese festivals in school. Although I went to Malay schools, there was some teaching about Chinese festivals. I've forgotten most of them now though." (Wu)

> "I know more about origins of Chinese festivals, I went to a Chinese school in primary school, so I learned about them in school. Honestly, I don't know much about the Islamic festivals, but I would ask my husband or search in the internet for them." (Qi)

> "I don't know the origin very well… I only know roughly that the Chinese New Year is about a story of defeated monster and the Mid-Autumn Festival is about a couple. I don't know about Malay festivals." (Ba)

> "I know all the Chinese festivals well, but I don't really know much about the Islamic festivals. Although I observe my husband's custom to spend

Ramadhan and Eid, I do not know the history and origins of Ramadhan and

Eid." (San)

Two interviewees said they knew origins of both Chinese and Malay festivals:

"I know Chinese festivals' origins very well as I have celebrated them so

many years. Besides, I studied in Chinese schools, so I was taught about such

stuffs, and elder generations also told me about festival stories. I did not

know much about Malay festivals before, but since I married my husband

and I began to celebrate Malay festivals as well, I become curious about

these festivals and I would ask my husband to tell me origins and background

of Malay festivals, so I can say I also know Malay festivals." (Yi)

"Yes, I know the stories of these festivals. I was taught in schools. I went to

Chinese kindergarten and primary school, then went to Malay middle

schools, so I was taught these in school." (Er)

For those who said they knew the origins of festivals that they spend, a further question

is what knowing the origins brings to them. Interviews admitted that they felt a deeper

connection with these festivals:

"It is a bit complicated…I definitely agree that it means something. Knowing

origins of festivals means to understand why should we celebrate these

festivals, and this is important for me to spend festivals. It is like the root."
(Yi)

"Yes, I feel as a Chinese Muslim, these stories have a relation with me, so I remember them clearly." (Er)

For interviewee who said they "do not know" and "have forgotten" origins of festivals, further question is if they are curious about the origins of festivals or if they want to reacquaint with origins of festivals. About half interviewees said they were not curious about the origins:

"Actually I do not have much interest to know. Spending festivals are natural for me." (Liu)

"Festivals are just a part of life, so I don't have a special feeling that I have to know the origins of them." (Si)

And the remainder were interested in origins of festivals:

"I have thought about origins of Islamic festivals. I have listened to my husband telling me about Ramadan and why it is celebrated, such as the need to be attentive to the lives of the poor and to flush out the toxins from our bodies. I think it is interesting to know something new, so I would like to know more about origins of other festivals." (San)

"Of course I want to know the origins again, why not? I know these Chinese festivals have interesting stories. As I don't really spend Islamic festivals, I do not have many interests to know." (Wu)

"I've only ever wondered why we have Ramadan. For other Malay festivals, although I was sometimes curious, I never thought to really know them very well. For the Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival that I had heard about, I only heard about them from casual conversations with friends. At school, as I went to a Chinese school, I had the option of taking Chinese History and Chinese Geography, which I was too lazy to take, and I am regretting now. My younger brother and sister both did those two courses, and I read their textbooks and I found them very interesting and I was eager to learn about those." (Ba)

When asking about who they spend festivals with and if they have the same identity with them, all interviewees had similar answers. They spend holidays with their family members. For those who converted because of marriage, they usually spend Chinese holidays with their original family and Malay holidays with their partner's family:

"There is not really anyone who has same identity with me. Because my (original) family has various religious beliefs, such as Buddhist, Christian,

and atheist. My husband as a Malay certainly has a different identity than I do." (Qi)

"I usually spend festivals with my families, my parents' family, my husband and his family. I am the only Chinese Muslim among people I celebrate festivals with." (Liu)

For mixed race interviewees in this research, as none of them are married, they all spend festivals with their parents and siblings, or sometimes with their parents' families:

"I usually spend the holidays with my family. Sometimes we spend festivals with my dad's family or my mom's. But I also spend some festivals with my friends., if these festivals are neither Chinese festivals nor Malay festivals. Like during Christmas, I don't participate in Christian religious activities, but I do hang out with my Christian friends together. My family basically has the same identity as me, except for my mom who is not Chinese." (Ba)

"My family members are all Chinese Muslims except my mom. As I spend festivals with them, I would say they have same identity with me."

"With relatives, my dad's family, and also with friends. They all have different identities from me, they are all just Chinese. I do not have Malay friends." (Wu)

For the Chinese Muslims in Malaysia who participated in this interview with marriage-related conversions, their Muslim identity is relatively passive. When I look back at them and their celebration of Islamic holidays, they tend to follow the customs of their husbands and their husbands' families: if their husbands do not celebrate certain festivals, then they do not celebrate them either. I conclude here that their Muslim identity is highly dependent on the interaction with their husband (and his family). However, in contrast, the identity of Chinese is always available and not based on any other conditions, according to preference on festivals, knowledge on festival origins. Therefore, I draw a crude conclusion here: although all Chinese Muslims involved in the research except one can deal with the conflicts between two identities, the Chinese identity is a stronger identity, while the Muslim identity is a weaker identity. This is also shown in those who are born Muslims in this research, if we review the language preference in following parts.

5.4. Social environment

Besides the festivals, the identity of Chinese Muslims can affect interviewees' social activities more broadly. Here, I examine the social impact of Muslim identity of the interviewees through their family, friends' perceptions and social activities.

5.4.1. Friends

When interviewees were asked which race they had more friends with, all interviewees said they have more Chinese friends:

"I have non-Muslim Chinese friends around me, Chinese Muslim friends, and Malay friends; most of them are common Chinese, because I studied in Chinese schools most of the time." (Ba)

"My friends are basically Chinese girls. I do not know what to talk with Malays, so it is hard to communicate and make friends with them." (Wu)

"I'm Chinese, so I grew up with basically all my friends being Chinese." (Qi)

Five interviewees admit that their identity brings negative impact on their interactions with friends:

"I think it has a big impact. Because you know, racial discrimination exists everywhere and certainly in Malaysia ...... You cannot deny that Malays have darker skin and Chinese have lighter skin and there is a bigger difference in the appearance of the two races, so interracial marriages between Malays and Chinese are very conspicuous in the society. Most of my Chinese friends have expressed to me that they found it difficult to accept inter-racial marriages and hoped that I would not marry a Malay when I told them I was going to marry a Malay. I did have some friends who did not want to be friends with me anymore after I chose to convert to Islam after I get married." (Qi)

"My identity had a big impact on my social circle. For example, when I was still studying in schools, my original (Chinese) friends started to stay away

from me and they thought I was weird after I converted, so I had fewer and fewer friends. Eventually, I had a depression and had no friends at all." (Si)

"Let me put it this way, sometimes I get the feeling that the Malays are more friendly than the Chinese after I get married. What I can do with people who do not respect my religion is to stop paying attention to them. I don't want them to affect my life. After changing my faith, I have made many new friends too." (Liu)

"I found that many people don't want to be friends with me after they know that I am half Malay and I am Muslim." (Wu)

And three interviewees argued that there is no influence:

"I would say no. They respect my religion and I respect them as well. For example, if I went for a dinner with my friends, I wouldn't mind them order dishes with pork. I would only restrain myself to not eat pork." (Yi)

"I don't think so. I think it is hard to say that there is no racism at all, but I hardly ever encounter it." (Ba)

"I don't think there is any impact ah. I don't think being of mixed race has made me have more Chinese friends or Malay friends than others. If I eat with my Chinese friends, I will choose my dish, so it will not affect their choice of dishes." (Er)

5.4.2. Relatives

Converted interviewees were also asked about their relatives' acceptance of their conversion, and interviewees from a mixed family were asked about if their parents' relationship had ever met opposite opinions. Only one converted interviewee's family accepted her conversion and marriage well:

> "My family do not mind that I convert to Islam at all. They believe if I am happy or not is the most important thing, so when they saw my Malay partner treated me like a princess, they immediately accepted our relationship. As I told you, my parents even came to celebrate Eid with us and my husband's family together." (Liu)

All other converted interviewees said they all faced not being understood:

> "It should say that no relatives understood and they even think we were turning ourselves into Malays." (Si)

> "Yes, I had a seven-years underground relationship before I married to my husband. It is struggling to tell my family about it. Chinese family usually doesn't like children marry to Malays. My grandma doesn't accept my marriage until now. She rejects to see me, to celebrate festivals with me and my husband. She pretends I am not her family member anymore." (Yi)

"My parents were very much against it. Talking about this made me think back to my experience of converting to Islam in the last ten years. It was very difficult. It was not accepted in our Chinese families, especially that my family is a very traditional Taoist family, I was always brought up with Taoism. I was from a relatively large family with a certain reputation in my hometown, so they are more conservative. Therefore, there were a lot of gossip and accusations, from my parents, my elders and even my far relatives in the family; so it really hit a lot of nails. I am living a happy life now and they have now accepted me as a Muslim, although my mother still complained about it sometimes. I think the Malaysian Chinese in general have a certain disconnect and lack of understanding of Islam, and if a Chinese marries a Malay, people would have some gossip." (San)

"In fact, my family was very seriously opposed to my marriage. However, I was not young when I wanted to marry my husband, so they finally accepted it. I am so sure that if I was 20 or 25 years old, there is no way that they could agree with it." (Qi)

Differences in identity are very evident in social influence. Race and religion are used to identify people and influence the relationships between people with different identities. Since Malaysia is considered by Malaysians to be a society of three distinct races, and Islam is considered the religion that belongs to the Malays, the Chinese consider that they have a gap from the Malays and Muslims. There is a clear boundary

here. When interviewees get the identity of Muslim, they may be perceived as having crossed the border, so that not only their religious conversion, but their identity as Chinese is also questioned and is regarded as an ambiguity. This may, to a large extent, influence the choice of Chinese to become Muslim in Malaysia. Although for individuals they are able to deal with the conflict between multiple identities, the negative effects of social interactions leave the Malaysian Chinese Muslim identity open to the possibility of unease.

5.4.3. Language

As language plays an important role of social activities, mix-race interviewees were asked about the two languages, Chinese and Malay which is more fluent. Three interviewees said they speak better Chinese, and two of them also thought they gained some benefits by speaking fluent Chinese:

> "Although I always went to Malay schools growing up, but probably because all my relatives and friends are Chinese, my Chinese is much better than my Malay." (Wu)

> "Two languages are both my native tongue and I speak both of them at home. But I think my Chinese is more fluent, which actually is very good, because who can speak good Chinese would easily find a job as there are so many Chinese companies in Malaysia." (Er)

"I think they are about the same, but since I have studied in Chinese schools, I am probably a little better at Chinese. I think it is really lucky to be able to speak Chinese. When I was looking for a job, I found that because I could speak Chinese, I had a lot more opportunities than my Malay friends." (Ba)

5.5. Others:

Beyond the set questions, the conversation with the interviewees provided more information about their daily life and dual identities. Since most of the questions here are personalized and therefore cannot be presented through a structured analysis, in this section, I will go through separate sub-sections to analyze certain information to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. Also, since this section could involve details of interviewees' life, I will not name the interviewees' numbers in this section.

One of the interviewees recounted the predicament her Malay name had caused her:

"I don't think my identity has affected the way I celebrate holidays, but it has affected my daily life. I look completely Chinese, but I have a Malay-style name because I was born Muslim, so my teachers always find it strange and often asked me if I am not Malaysian; I feel that it also affects my friendships, for example, when people at school see my name, they would think I should be Malay, but when they see my appearance and hear me speaking fluent Chinese, they then think I might be Chinese. It makes them

confused, and I have to explain again and again that I have Malay descent. In fact, for me, I would feel that my Malay descent has only brought me disadvantages, so I would like to be a real Chinese. I want to immigrate and change my name, then I can be completely Chinese."

From her example, an identity dilemma in Malaysia is shown. Although, interaction with persons affects the individual's perception of identity, in Malaysia, the specificity of the identity of the Muslim in question invalidates this interaction. The legal divide has made the identity of Muslim somehow a simple dichotomy: yes, or no. For people without the legal process of becoming a Muslim, it could be interactive or processual. But for legally recognized Muslims in Malaysia, it is deterministic.

For several interviewees in Malay-Chinese marriages, they told me why they would like to marry a Malay. There were some commonalities in several of the interviewees' stories: Pork is not an important food for them; their partners are religiously open minded.

"I grew up in a multi-religious background. As many Malaysian Chinese would do, I have Guanyin[1] as my godmother to bless me. I have Buddhist brother and Christian brother, so I am very accepting of other religions. My husband is also from a very enlightened family. My husband studied abroad, so he is very open-minded. None of his sisters wear the hijab, and he did not

---

[1] Guan Yin, Guan Shi Yin, 观音菩萨.

ask me to wear it. I do not wear a hijab simply because I do not think I look good with it. When we got married, there is a traditional Chinese custom to take incense and worship heaven and earth, and my husband did this ritual as well. All of this is what finally made me make up my mind to marry him.For most Chinese, it is hard not to eat pork and drink alcohol, but because I have not eaten pork since I was a child, and I have quit drinking alcohol to live a healthier life several years ago, so food taboos of Islam have never been an issue for me. I can imagine that if I were a big pork lover, changing my belief might be a struggle."

"I converted to Islam by my own choice, but in fact, I did not follow the teachings of Muslims in practice, except for the fact that I was a Muslim in nominal terms. Since I married a Malay, I do respect my husband's idea thus starting to change my dress and eating habits, but he is open-minded. He does not mind I still wear shorts in some occasions, like when I go back to my parents' house or hang out with friends. I also do not wear a hijab unless I am going to spend Eid al Fitri with his family. If he is very conservative, then I am not sure if I will still marry him."

"My husband is a very nice person and treats me like a princess. That's what made me marry him. After we were in relationship, I had more opportunities to learn about Islam and Malay customs, and I realized that Islam and Malays are not different from us (Chinese). Religious beliefs do not determine how

good or bad a person is. Food is certainly a big influence of being a Muslim,

but because my mother is a vegetarian, I rarely ate meat before I got married.

So not eating pork is nothing difficult for me. My husband doesn't ask me to

wear a hijab or jilbab."

It is significant to note that all of those interviewed who converted to Islam as a result

of marriage originally ate very little pork prior to their marriage. This is noteworthy

because the biggest dietary change required for the Chinese to convert to Islam is the

prohibition of pork and alcohol consumption, yet pork is one of the most common meats

in the Chinese diet. According to a study by Drewnowski, et al. (2020), pork makes up

approximately 5-10% of the meat diet of the Chinese in Malaysia. The sameness in

identity is also reflected in the choice of interracial marriage. Not eating pork, which

could be a feature of Muslims, brings these Chinese more sameness with Malay or

Muslims compared to other Chinese. Due to they share the same feature of Muslim

category, it could bring positive influence for them to accept the identity as Muslim.

There are two interviewees who shared a story about their school life as a Muslim.

One interviewee talked about her experience in religious courses:

"There are religious courses for Muslims in Malaysian public schools, which

is compulsory for Muslims, but there are other courses for Chinese students.

The main content of these courses is to study the Quran. I was not interested

in studying Islamic scriptures at all, so I didn't care about the courses, I was

sleeping in class and I failed the exams. My teachers ended up completely giving up on me."

And the other shared her dress code when going to different schools:

"I went to Chinese schools and the uniform was a nice short skirt and short sleeves, and can be worn by any religion. Then I go to a normal Malay school, the dress code is much stricter there. As a Muslim, I have to wear clothes that conform to religious rules and do not show my hair or legs when I have classes, although I do not follow Islamic dress code in daily life. I am not against it, but sometimes I would think it would be better if I can choose. When I feel I have prepared, I can wear hijab by myself."

Although, generally speaking, identity is more of a concept; in Malaysia, as Muslim identity is governed by law, the identity of a Muslim becomes more specific and defined. Regardless of how Chinese Muslims identify themselves, they are forced to do what Muslims are supposed to do. This can have two effects: it reinforces the identity of being a Muslim and therefore makes it easier for people to construct an identity as a Muslim; or it restricts the way Muslims identify themselves and therefore may lead to negative thoughts about being a Muslim in Malaysia.

6. Conclusion

Although in the thesis, discussion and analysis are between the two identities Chinese and Muslim, we cannot ignore the *Malaysian* prefix. In Malaysian society, due to the emphasis on racial distinctions and the pro-Malay policies pursued by the long-ruling Malay government, the boundaries between races are clear. Differences make identity categories. As a minority group in race and ethnicity, the Chinese in Malaysia have endured inequality in the society. Due to the law, Malaysian Malays are all Muslims, so the distinction between racial group Malays and religious group Muslims becomes blurred. For many Malaysian Chinese, being Muslim has the same meaning as being Malay, which leads to the identities of Chinese and Muslim constructed as mutually exclusive to some extent. Although Malaysian Chinese Muslims can find a balance between the two identities, their Chinese identity may be weakened and questioned when they are identified.

The existence of religious laws and religious courts makes the identity of Muslims determinative in Malaysia. The individual's perception becomes less important. Social interaction will be required of them based on their legal status instead of self-identification. This has deprived Malaysian Chinese Muslims with multiple identities of their choice of social actions, and could thus help them to construct a Muslim identity or bring about a negative perception of a Muslim identity in Malaysia.

In this research, it is also found that for Malaysian Chinese Muslims, although most respondents in the research can handle the conflict between two identities, Chinese identity is the stronger identity for them, especially for people who converted as a result of marriage. This may be due to the multiple influences of social interaction, social knowledge, and interaction with others. Their social interactions and social actions as a Muslim is limited compare their identity as Chinese, since they grow up in Chinese community and have more Chinese friends. The strong economic position of the Chinese in Malaysia may also have contributed to this effect: The Chinese identity brings more opportunities.

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Annex 1: Interview Questions

1.When and why do you start to believe in Islam?

您何时皈依伊斯兰的？原因是什么？

2.Which one is the most important festival for you, Chinese New Year or Hari Raya AidilFitri (Eid al Fitri)?

相对来说，对您来说最重要的节日是春节还是开斋节？

3.Can you tell what do you do specifically in the two festivals?

您可以告诉我在这两个节日您具体会做什么吗？

4.Is there any difference between the way you and other Chinese/Muslims celebrate the festival? (e.g. food, rituals) What is(are) the difference(s)?

您认为您庆祝这个节日的方式和其他华人/穆斯林有不同吗？(比如食物，仪式) 如果不同的话，那是怎么样的区别？

5.What is the motivation for you to celebrate the festival? More about passion, tradition or responsibility or other?

您庆祝该节日时，驱动您的原因是什么？更多的是出于热情还是责任感，或是其他？

6.What feeling does the celebration of the festival bring to you?

庆祝这个节日带给你的感觉是什么？

7.Would you like to tell me one impressive thing about the festivals happened on you?

您可以告诉我发生在您身上的关于这两个节日的一件印象深刻的事情吗？

8.Do you celebrate other traditional Chinese festivals or Islamic festivals? For example, Hari Raya AidilAdha, Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, Qingming Festival or Mid-Autumn Festival/Mooncake Festival.

您庆祝其他传统中华节日或伊斯兰节日吗？比如哈孜节（宰牲节）、穆罕穆德的诞辰或清明节、中秋节等节日？

9.Do you prefer to celebrate Chinese festivals or Islamic festivals?

您更倾向于过哪种节日？

10.Do you know where/how these festivals stem from? (e.g story)

您知道这些节日的起源吗（比如故事）？

11(1). If yes, does knowing the origins bring you anything? Like, a deeper connect with the festival?

对节日起源的了解对您的影响？比如，感觉对这些节日有一种更深的联系。

11(2). If no, have you ever been curious about the origin of festivals?

不知道的话，请问您有没有好奇过起源呢？

12.Whom you spend these festivals with?

您和谁一起过节？

13. Do they have the same identity with you?

他们和您有同样的身份吗？

14. Do you think if your identity impacts the way how you get along with others?

您的身份是否影响你的社交？