

## Chinese Civilization in Malaysia: History and Contribution

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**Abstract:** Malaysia is a multicultural country with diversity. Among the cultures here are the Chinese inclusive of all their subcultures. This paper discusses the contribution of the Chinese civilization to Malaysia. Malaysian Chinese has contributed a lot to the building of Malaysia both culturally and economically. They arrived in Malaya in the year of 1500 and have embedded themselves by bringing their economical capabilities as well as religious and linguistic values. Chinese Malaysian have layered identities based on ancestry. Upon arrival in Malaya many years ago, they were here as traders who eventually married locals and begun the early assimilation of Malayan Chinese. However, in the early of 1900 they were brought into Malaya under the British rule to mine the tin mines in land rich in natural resources. The final wave is recent and include Malaysia's My Second Home program. Among the contributions of Malaysian Chinese is wealth. Some of the richest Malaysians and successful businesses are Chinese-owned. There is also no shortage of Chinese architecture in Malaysia and that has also influenced the art industry. Mandarin is the main language spoken by Malaysian Chinese and is used in all vernacular schools and businesses as the official method of communication. However, there are many sub-cultural languages among the Chinese community as well. The Chinese have also brought their religion which is mainly Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism. Chinese religions are more of a way of life rather than a worship of a supreme being.

**Key words:** *Chinese Malaysian, Contribution of Chinese Malaysian, Chinese Civilization*

### INTRODUCTION

The Chinese Civilization is the oldest civilization in the world and one of the nations that reached its earliest civilization. This civilization has also been traced since 2000 before century [1]. The long-established Chinese culture started to communicate with foreign cultures when the Chinese migrated to other countries. The Chinese have been encouraged by powerful, strong, and stable political systems to migrate either to economic activity or to seek new settlements. A broad and powerful society was created by the unification of the Chinese ethnic groups later known as the Han or Chinese people thus the Chinese has come to Malaysia and becomes one of the ethnic groups in Malaysia since a very long time ago. They were actively engaged and adapted with natives in Malaysia especially because they played a major role in economy, they were generally known as Malaysian Chinese.

Today, the contribution from the Chinese Civilization can be widely seen in Malaysia as it

successfully attracts not only the local but also the tourist to learn and discover further about Chinese culture. Significantly, this research aims to understand further on the contribution of the Chinese in Malaysia and how it is still being use till to date.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To study about the background of Chinese Civilization in Malaysia.
2. To look at history of Chinese Civilization in Malaysia.
3. To discuss on what the contributions of Chinese Civilization in Malaysia.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### History of Malaysian Chinese

Many Malaysian Chinese have called Malaysia home since their predecessors cruised over and settled in this area route, harking back to the fifteenth century. Malaysian Chinese, otherwise called Chinese Malaysians, allude to individuals of full or halfway

Chinese blood who were conceived in or moved to Malaysia. The majority of them are plummeted from workers - likely of Han Chinese parentage - who showed up between the mid-nineteenth and mid twentieth century. Today, Malaysian Chinese speak to the second biggest ethnic gathering in Malaysia. They are likewise viewed as the second biggest network of Overseas Chinese on the planet after Thailand.

Chinese migration into Malaysia can be grouped into three significant waves:

**i. First Wave**

More than 500 years back, Chinese merchants and youthful aristocrats from an imperial company began settling in and around Melaka. Some wedded local people, making another class of Straits-brought into the world Chinese [2]. Tun Seri Lanang's 'Sejarah Melayu' recorded that in 1459 CE, Princess Hang Li Po of the Ming Dynasty was sent from China to wed the king of Melaka, Sultan Mansur Shah. The princess carried with her an escort of 500 high-positioning youngsters and two or three hundred handmaidens, every one of whom in the end settled in Bukit Cina. It is accepted that some of them had hitched into the nearby masses, birthing another network known as the Chinese Peranakan, some of the time basically alluded to as Baba-Nyonya.

**ii. Second Wave**

From mid nineteenth century to the 1930s, a large number of Chinese outsiders came to British-governed Malaya looking for a superior life. Most Malaysian Chinese today are slid from this wave of outsiders. During the British guideline, a huge number of Chinese individuals - the greater part of whom are from the Fujian and Guangdong territories in the south east shore of Mainland China - came to Malaya with expectations of getting away from an existence of destitution in China. The Chinese, alongside Indian migrants, filled work deficiencies in tin mines, elastic estates, and railroad development.

This wave, thought about the biggest deluge of movement to Malaysia, carried with it a few distinctive Chinese subgroups alongside their particular lingos and societies, for example, those of the Hokkien, Cantonese, and Hakka individuals.

In those days, it's not uncommon for individuals of a similar lingo gathering to remain together, regardless of whether it be the area of their initial settlements or their exchange of decision, as occupations were filled for the most part dependent on referrals by companions or individual foreigners from a similar territory. Pariahs - the individuals who don't

have a place with a similar subgroup or are from another region - are avoided.

**iii. Third Wave**

In the current day, Malaysia is seeing a little yet rapidly developing number of Mandarin-talking outsiders from China, particularly those wedded to Malaysian Chinese just as rich and white-collar class families. The mid 2000s saw an expanding number of Malaysian Chinese men wedding outside spouses from Mainland China and Vietnam.

Later on, in this decade, China's well-off elites and white-collar class families began rushing to Malaysia to get away from contamination, food alarms, and political limitations in their country. Indeed, Chinese nationals are the biggest gathering of members of the 'Malaysia My Second Home' (MM2H) outside residency conspire.

**Contribution in Language**

Malaysian Chinese people have adapted the Mandarin language and most refer to result as Malaysian Mandarin which differs in style and pronunciation with traditional Mandarin. Although, mandarin is generally spoken by the Chinese in Malaysia, Hokkien is the biggest Chinese dialect in the country, followed by Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, Fuzhou, Hainanese and Foochow. Different towns and cities in Malaysia are placed by different Chinese dialects among Chinese speakers; for example, Cantonese in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Sandakan, Hokkien in George Town, Klang and Kuching, Hakka in Kota Kinabalu, Teochew in Johor Bahru, Foochow in Sibul, Miri and Sitiawan, and Hainanese in Kuala Terengganu. Many Chinese can speak more than one Chinese dialect.

However, in modern times, Mandarin has taken the role as a shared language to bridge the language gap between the Chinese sub-cultures. Mandarin is taught in vernacular schools at both primary and secondary levels. Malaysian Chinese often use English and Malay words even when communicating with other Chinese speakers. A common trait amongst Malaysians is to simultaneously use three to four languages to communicate and the Malaysian Chinese are no exception.

**Contribution in Art**

Art from China is known for being articulate and extremely detailed which is aiming at striking awe in whomever views the art. Chinese art spans across carving, painting and even calligraphy. Chinese art can be seen daily such as paintings on bowls and spoons. Chinese paints are mostly ornamental which means that it is made up of patterns and designs, especially on pottery.

Chinese paintings usually utilize black ink usually painted on silk or paper instead of canvases. Chinese carvings can be seen on buildings in Malaysia usually accompanied by Chinese calligraphy in Penang, Malacca, and Perak. Chinese art symbolism can be felt in the pottery and ceramic industries as well which is mostly a result of the sculpting mastery by the Chinese. Malaysian Chinese architecture can be spread into two categories, tradition Chinese and Baba Nyonya. Examples of traditional Chinese architecture in Malaysia can be seen throughout the country in the form of Buddhist temples whereas old houses in Penang and

### **Contribution in Education**

Early in the nineteenth century, Chinese education was established in the form of private home school in the peninsular of Malaya due to mass immigration of workers from China. They recruited teachers and brought in textbooks from China using their own resources – either sponsored by the Chinese community associations or self-funded – to provide education to children. One of the earliest Chinese private home schools was Wu Fu Shu Yuan established in 1819, which can still be found in Penang today.

In order to protect mother-tongue education against the government, the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM) or Jiao Zong was founded in 1951 in response to the release of the Barnes Report 1951, whereas the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia (UCSCAM) or Dong Zong was established in 1954. Thereafter, the two organisations work closely with each other to take the lead of fighting for Chinese education with its liaison committee named "Dong Jiao Zong".

To assess the academic performance of students in the teaching medium of Chinese language, the UCSCAM ('Dong Zong') organises and coordinates its internal standardised test – Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) commenced in 1975, which emphasizes equal importance of three languages' use, i.e. Chinese, Malay and English. Over the years, the UEC has gained wide recognition as a qualification for entrance into many tertiary educational institutions around the world, including Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada etc. It is not recognised by the Malaysian government for entry into public universities despite the recognition of most local private universities and colleges. Some Chinese independent high schools hence opt to teach the national secondary school curriculum simultaneously to provide students an

Malacca are from the Baba Nyonya where they build indoor courtyards and utilize beautiful colored tiles throughout the house. During the early days, the colonial era, the Chinese introduced the art of puppetry and opera to Malaysia. This made Malaysia's theatrical tradition more diverse and richer. In modern times, there are numerous Malaysian Chinese artists that contribute to Malaysian art. Painters, singers, dancers and many more. A memorable contribution of Chinese dance is the Dragon Dance which is a way to attract good luck. The longer the dragon, the more luck is attracted to the community.

opportunity to obtain government-recognised certificates like PMR and SPM.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Existence of A New Ethnicity in Malaysia**

Let us have a recap about the existence of a new ethnic in Malaysia during the 1900 century – the Malaysian Chinese whom are ethnically called as Kaum Cina in Bahasa Malaysia. Most of the Chinese people were brought into Malaysia by the British to work in tin mines at the beginning of the 19th century. Further to that, they decided to stay and continue life thus settled down in Malaya.

Furthermore, there evidences of Chinese traders in during the Malacca Sultanate era in 1500's. This is when the traders mingled and assimilated with the local Malays through business and marriages. The local born Malacca are called Peranakan or Baba Nyonya. Many of Baba Nyonya are multilingual and over the years, they started to develop their own language which is Baba Malay. Baba Malay consists of Malay, Hokkien, Mandarin and English. However, as the language is a bit hard to understand, it is now a dying language since many prefer communicating in mixed languages.

Baba Nyonya is also famous for their Chinese fusion Malay delicacies. They preserved most of their Chinese traditions but their food is made of Malay and Indian spices. Some of them are buah keluak chicken (chicken cooked with a type of seed from a tree known as pangium edule), Nyonya dumpling, asam pedas fish (sour and spicy fish stew), cap cai (stir-fried vegetables), pongteh pork (pork braised in soy bean sauce) and cincalok (fermented small shrimps) omelette. Some of Malaysia's famous desserts are of Peranakan origin as well. For example, ang ku kuih (glutinous rice wrapped

around a sweet filling), cendol (iced sweet desert), seri muka (two-layered desert), kuih koci (Passover cake) and pineapple tarts.

### **Various of Dialects Spoken in Malaysia**

The Chinese community in Malaysia is made up of nine subgroups. There are Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, Hokchui & Hokchia, Hainanese, Henghua, Wu & Mandarin and Kwongsai. The third largest Chinese dialect group in Malaysia will be Hakka. They originally from northern China, the Hakkas migrated to the southeastern provinces of China such as Guangdong, Fujian, Guangxi, and Hainan before

coming to Malaysia. They first settled in early as flocked to the gold and tin mines in Selangor, Perak (particularly Taiping and Ipoh), Negeri Sembilan, as well as Sabah and Sarawak. In the present Malaysia today, the Hakka dialect is facing a decline among the younger generations, it is still widely spoken in Sabah, where most of the Chinese community are of Hakka descent. The dialect is also spoken in less urban areas in Kedah, Perak, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan.

Meanwhile, the Teochew people came from the Chaoshan region in east Guangdong, particularly from the city of Shantou. They have already begun migrating to the Malay Peninsula since the 18th century, settling in Province Wellesley (now known as Seberang Perai) in Penang and around Kuala Muda in Kedah. Later in the 19th century, Teochews arrived in Johor, establishing new towns populated by plantation workers. In the present Malaysia, Teochews make up a substantial part of Chinese communities in Johor Bahru and some principal towns along the coast of Western Johor such as Pontian, Muar, and Batu Pahat. Teochew communities are also found in Kedah, north Perak, as well as select hinterlands in Melaka and Selangor, particularly in Sabak Bernam.

For Hokchui and Hokchia, collectively known as Foochow in honor of their shared dialect, which is said to sound like Korean or Japanese. The Hokchui people originated from the city Fuzhou in Fujian province, hence why they are commonly known as Foochow people. The Hokchia people, on the other hand, came from Fuqing, a county within Fuzhou. The Foochow were considered latecomers to Malaya, only emigrating here in the early 20th century. The first

Foochow immigrants set up settlements in Sitiawan, Perak and Sibu, Sarawak. In the present Malaysia, the Chinese community in Sarawak are predominantly descended from the Foochows, specifically in areas around the Rajang River and Sibu. In the peninsular, they also maintain a presence in Sitiawan in Perak, Yong Peng in Johor, and Sepang in Selangor.

As for the Hainanese people, they hail from the Chinese island of Hainan off the coast of Guangdong. Early Hainanese migrants settled in the Straits Settlements (Melaka, Penang, and Singapore) and North Borneo from the 19th century onwards. Hainanese-speaking Chinese are more concentrated in the states of Selangor and Melaka, although they also form the

largest language group in Kemaman, Terengganu and maintain a considerable presence in Penang, Johor Bahru, as well as Sabah and Sarawak. While the Hainanese dialect spoken in Malaysia is like that spoken in Hainan Island, it has been peppered with loanwords from local languages and dialects.

The Wu people came from Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shanghai, whereas the Mandarin people originated from Hebei (south of Beijing) and Shandong. Together, they are referred to as the San Jiang people after the northernmost rivers of China (Yangtze River, Yellow River, and Amur River). There is a small community of Mandarin people in Sabah and possibly in Penang, evidenced by the Penang San Kiang Association established since 1897.

Moreover, the Mandarin is one of the transnational languages in the world has been extensively used in the Greater China, namely, mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. It has become one of the core symbols of Chinese Identity, not only in the above areas, but also 10 Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese communities. As Osman Bakar et al. [3] claim, Mandarin Chinese has become the language of wider communication within the Chinese community 10 Miri, a City 10 Sarawak, East Malaysia. It is also true for the Chinese 10 the state of Johore, West Malaysia.

Last but not least, the Kwongsai. It is originating from Guangxi, the Kwongsai people came to Malaya in very small numbers. For Kwongsai people, they speak the Pinghua dialect. Most of Kwongsai people settled in Pahang, mainly Bentong, Mentakab,

and Raub where the communities remained in until today.

### **Chinese Culture as Public Attraction in Malaysia**

Over the years, every Malaysian regardless of race and religion has learned to embrace all culture and traditions of different ethnicities. Some of the main festivals or cultural events that are celebrated by the Chinese are Chap Goh Mei, Dong Zhi festival, Hungry Ghost festival, Festival of Nine Emperor Gods, Mid-autumn Festival and the most popular event is the Chinese New Year.

The Chinese New Year is celebrated in accordance with the Chinese lunar calendar, which is based on the cycle of the moon around the Earth along with its course around the sun. The Chinese calendar follows a 12-year cycle whereby each year represents one of the 12 animal symbols. The said animal symbols are rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. It is believed that those who are born under the sign of the animal possess the characteristics associated with it [4]. The Chinese New Year is celebrated for 15 days long and on the final day, also known as Chap Goh Mei is celebrated with much liveliness where legend has it that single ladies toss oranges into the ocean with their names written on it (in the modern day telephone numbers are written instead) if they wish for a good spouse. This tradition is still being carried out today in the spirit of having fun and spreading joy with friends and family.

Other than that, the Dōng Zhi festival or Winter Solstice Festival is celebrated on the winter solstice which is known to be the shortest day and the longest night of the year in the northern hemisphere. For the Chinese, it is a day of reuniting and feasting with family members as well as worshipping the ancestors [1]. The dining customs varies across different places in China; however, the most popular ones are dumplings and glutinous balls. In Malaysia, colourful glutinous balls also known as tang yuen are usually made with gula Melaka (palm sugar). Another festival that is famously associated with food is the Mid-autumn festival, also known as the Moon Cake festival which usually falls at the end of September or early October. This festival is celebrated to commemorate the downfall of the Mongol dynasty in

Ancient China. In many other Asian countries moon cakes of various flavour are exchanged as gifts among friends and relatives. Some of the famous flavours in Malaysia are White Lotus Seed paste, Snow Skin and Black Sesame with Yolk [2].

The Chinese cultural festivals and events are always celebrated grandly and with much enthusiasm that almost all of the festivals involve the lion dance. Although it is usually performed during Chinese New Year and other cultural events, the lion dance is also performed during important occasions such as weddings, opening of businesses and welcoming important guests in social events. Along with lion dances, firecrackers or known as baozhu (exploding bamboo) in Mandarin, is also set off in these occasions. According to a legend, it is said that loud explosive noises would scare off a monster called Nian that would come out to eat villagers and destroy their houses on Chinese New Year's Eve. Since then, it has become a tradition for fireworks to be set off during Chinese New Year or in any other important occasions. In Malaysia, it is common to see people of all races joining the Chinese to celebrate these events.

Moreover, the Chinese civilization during British colonization has introduced various Chinese cuisines in Malaysia. In Malaysia, the usual Chinese breakfast would include noodle soup, rice porridge or dumplings such as wonton noodle soup, curry noodles, char kuay teow (fried flat rice noodles), steamed buns or pau, loh mai gai (steamed glutinous rice with chicken) and congee (Chinese rice porridge). As for Chinese lunch, Malaysians indulge themselves with Hainan chicken rice, Chinese fried rice, hor fun (noodle made from rice), Cantonese yee mee (a type of fried noodle), fish ball noodle soup and dim sums.

Chinese cuisines for dinner are commonly served in separate dishes as this is the only time where all family members are able to eat together. Such dishes are fried kailan (Chinese broccoli), bak kut teh (pork rib dish), sweet and sour chicken, steamed fish, kung pao chicken (chicken cooked with peanuts and chilli peppers), stir-fried bok choy (Chinese cabbage) and deserts would usually include flavoursome soups and sweet foods such as tang yuen, tong sui (snow fungus soup) and steamed egg pudding.

It is also the Chinese who have introduced the use of chopsticks to the world. Even in Malaysia, Malaysians of other races also enjoy having Chinese foods with chopsticks. Although some Chinese cuisines contain alcohol and pork, there are many halal restaurants that serves halal Chinese food such as Amber Chinese Muslim Restaurant, Homst Restaurant, Haji Sharin Low, Mohd Chan Restaurant and Dolly Dim Sum to accommodate those who abstain from alcohol and pork for religious beliefs or personal preferences.

Being the second majority race in the nation, it is undeniable that there are abundant of Chinese temples in the country. Although most of the Chinese are Buddhists, there are temples influenced by other Chinese folk religions such as Taoist or combination of one or more religions such as Hindu-Buddha. Most of these temples are known as a tourist spot due to its intricate architectural structure. Such famous temples would include Thean Hou Temple in Kuala Lumpur,

Cheng Hoon Teng Temple in Melaka, Chin Swee Caves temple in Genting Highlands, Kek Lok Si temple in

Penang, Kek Long Tong Cave temple in Ipoh, Lim Fah San temple in Kuching and Lin Je Kong temple in Pangkor. Anyone is allowed to visit the temples provided that they visit without any ill-intention and they are to dress and behave modestly.

## CONCLUSION

With the Chinese cultural identity in Malaysia, the Chinese communities, especially from middle-class society, reinvented Chinese values and traditions. Thus, making the culture itself unique and interesting. This can be proven when Malaysia celebrated the festive Chinese New Year, we can see there's a lot of red decoration in the shopping mall and public spot in accordance to the belief of the Chinese that red color will bring "Ong" – luck. Not only that, in terms of the Chinese language, it has open up many economy opportunities in and outside Malaysia as the language is the 2nd most spoken language worldwide with 1,117 million speakers. It is worthy to note that the Chinese contribution has been found as attraction not limited to Malaysian Chinese, but also to all Malaysian and tourists.

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