

# ANALYSES OF COMMUNALITY AMONG ARTIFACTS IN DIVERSE CULTURES

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## ABSTRACT

*Malaysia is renowned for its cultural and traditional rich nature; an important factor for it to be in the list of fastest growing countries and a successful tourism hub in South East Asia. Thus, it is essential to maintain the cultural practices and even more to sustain the cultural artifacts. However, in the recent past global-cultural values has tremendously influenced the local cultural lifestyle. In line with that, in this study, literatures show that there is lack of common cultural evidences or common cultural understanding among multiracial Malaysians. This led to the question if we can establish or identify Malaysian communal cultural artifacts base on multi-ethnic preferences. As such this study aims to determine the communality in Malaysians cultural artifacts mainly among Malays, Chinese and Indians [1] in peninsular Malaysia. A case study, involving quantitative method was used in this research in investigating the cultural artifacts related to respondent's culture and life style. An online questionnaire was created and posted on social media website to Malaysians age 10 years and above. 165 samples which consist of equal numbers of Malay, Chinese and Indian respondents who took part in this survey were collected. The study was conducted for 5 consecutive days. Likert scale instrument in 5 scale with 26 items was used to generate responses. ANOVA test was conducted to find communality and significant acceptance towards cultural artifacts. Research findings proved that multi-racial and multi-cultural Malaysians do have communality in artifacts usage and has significant influence on their lifestyle.*

*Keywords: Communal, Culture, Cultural Artifact*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country with remarkable diversity. Its multiracial community together celebrate the country's diverse culture and tradition. [1]. the government also has introduced the concept of national culture to further strengthen the friendly relationship among the people [2], National culture is important for every nation that celebrates unity.

In Malaysia the concept of national culture should not become an issue especially after its independence more than half decades ago. Besides that the official language (Bahasa Malaysia) is national and used by all Malaysians. This national language would give every Malaysian access to one another to understand their cultures and rituals better. In line with that, it is believed that bilingualism is a door into biculturalism which influences and enhances mix-culture [3]. However, Malaysians various patterns and ways of life has grown to be a major obstacle in the advancement of common culture. Their practices of different cultures are still very strong and pose huge challenges to succeed in exercising national culture.

Generally humans practice cultures at different levels [2, 4]. This phenomenon is absolute due to the exposure and influence of foreign cultures such as Western, Central Asia and others in this case [5]. It is suggested to generalize the multi culture and practice as a common culture [6]. This has troubled the efforts to form a national culture. This is because although the National Cultural Policy gave space to the adoption of appropriate and acceptable elements of community culture of Malaysia but, desirable backbone of national culture is based on the original folk culture of the country. Thus, it is [7], risky to generalize a diverse set of culture and practices. Parallel to that local cultures are assumed as an outdated practice and Easterners or Asians profound to accept European culture better compared to their root

culture [8]. However, common cultural features of multi ethnics still permit us to view them in a broadly similar framework. Thus, this study formulates and identifies communality of cultural artifact's influence among multi-racial Malaysians mainly among the three main races; Malay, Chinese and Indian [1] of peninsular Malaysia.

The presence of the qualitative physical environment (such as development of tourists places' accessibility in terms of transportation links, and safety; tourism service facilities, and etc.) may help to the development of the tourism in the country.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Culture

Culture is commonly used to describe a way of life because it influences every individual's life as in [9]. Besides that culture is intertwined with our daily lives; helps to formulate interactions, routines and norms which translate into behaviours [10]. Culture is further defined as "a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours shared by a group of people, communicated from one generation to the next" [11]. Similarly, as in [9] culture defined as a pattern of behaviour, beliefs, actions, institutions and all other creation and thought that shared by specific communities for generations. Culture is believed as resemblance of human's uniqueness; thus it should be sustained or else humans will lose their identity [12].

Hence, it is suggested that cultures should be conserved because it resembles human civilization [13, 14]. However, the strength of the culture depends on the how thorough its belonging community practices it. As highlighted in [13], cultural values will determine people's attitudes and their behavioural pattern for the same situations. Culture also will determine its adherent's practices and plays an important role in shaping the work organization and other social institutions [15]. However, culture is not just a tool for coping but it is also a mean for creating awareness or learning [8]. In line with that culture is accepted as an important term of leadership because culture and leadership are the two sides of a same coin [10].

Culture is believed to be a representation of the intellectuality and artistic ability of a society [16]. However, as in [16] culture is a term which is difficult to achieve the ultimate purpose of it. Thus, it is believed that there is an endless diversity to culture [17]. However, due to the role of the culture and its benefits, various efforts had been undertaken by the leading scholars for cultural terminologies to be defined. For instance, in 1952 members of the

anthropology like Kroeber and Kluckhohn has collected about 164 definitions of culture. However, until early 1990s, there is no agreed upon definition for culture [16]. Matthew Arnold's (1867) believed that aesthetics and culture has a close relationship [16].

However Edward Tylor (1870) as in [16] stresses on scientific as a basis for culture rather than aesthetics. He highlighted that culture is made out of capabilities of a particular ethnic or social group projecting their knowledge. Thus, Edward Tylor interested on universal characteristic of a single culture. The concept of universal characteristics was sustained for long period among anthropological practices [16].

In the beginning of twentieth-century Franz Boas and his students challenged the terms of culture introduced by Matthew Arnold's (1867) and Edward Tylor (1870) [18]. [18]. As in [18] Franz Boas introduced new concept and definition to culture by emphasizing the uniqueness of many cultures of different people or society. On the other hand, assessment and views on Arnoldian and Tylorean which distinguished high and low culture or its civilizations were rejected [18]. This is because Boas believed that all culture have their own values, characteristics and similarities.

In this paper, the researcher has combined four different interests of leading scholars about culture as shown in Figure 1. Communality of cultural artifacts are identified through common usage (universal) and 'basic truths' of artifacts as believed by scholars, Edward Tylor, and Sigmund Freud. Besides that Matthew Arnold's aesthetics and Franz Boas's uniqueness and similarities of various cultures are also considered on the process of identifying communal cultural artifacts.

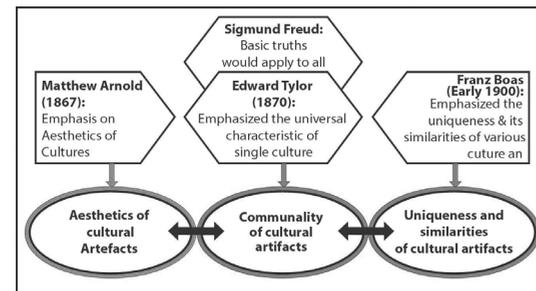


Figure 1: Research direction towards communal artifacts. (Adopted from Spencer-Oatey, 2012 and McCandless & Trotter, 1977)

## 2.2 Cultural Artifact

The considerations of artifacts are categorized in different groups' which are environment, architecture, production technology and the underlying messages. [10].

Director General of the Department of Museums Malaysia, Dato' Ibrahim Ismail, described that artifacts at Museums reflects on the history of a country's development since its inception. [19]. In addition, the artifacts also represent the art and style of clothing, civilization, emotional display, observable rituals, ceremonies and its values. Handicrafts or human creatures which are important for archaeological task or historical interest are also considered as artifacts [20]. Besides that artifacts are significant to a culture because they reflect the history of belonging group of people [21]. In line with that artifact are also believed to be the most visible level of the culture in reference to the constructed physical forms and social environment [10].

However artifacts may change from time to time by history of its existence, method of usage and its consumption benefits [20]. Thus, it is paramount to identify a preventive measure to preserve the cultural values of these artifacts. [22]. this is vital because cultural artifacts could reflect on the culture of its inceptors and adherents [20].

Cultural objects, or artifacts, can serve a functional purpose as well as a symbolic one. Determining the function of an object is not always straightforward. For instant, 'Keris' is a Malay ethnic's traditional weapon. Beyond then a weapon, it is considered as invaluable artifact in the realm of Malay culture. As stated in [23,24] "The incomparable uniqueness is analysed through physical and non-physical attributes of the 'Keris' that includes the distinctiveness of its remarkable strength, profound greatness, decorous standing in society, fearfulness and aspects of mystical elements synonymous with this relic". Thus, it is believed that in interpreting culture, implicit and explicit meanings could differ [10]. In line with that, ancient Egypt and Maya both built highly visible pyramids, but the meaning of pyramid and their role are different. In Egypt, these pyramids were tombs for great kings, while in the kingdom of the Maya, pyramids have been used for religious ceremonies and also as a grave [10,25].

## 2.3 Communal Artifacts

The online FreeDictionary defined communal as "used or shared in common by everyone in a group or belonging to the people of a community". Artifacts or ideology of artifacts is tagging concept of partnership [26].

Thus the possibilities on communality in culture often not clear due to the influences and acceptances within one another cultures. On the other hand, hypothetically, it could be predicted that there are traces of similarities within various cultures especially on cultural artifacts. Thus, as in [27] 'earth prince' (Bumiputera) which comprises of Malay and non-Malay indigenous people's culture lies at the core of the Malaysian identity while other ethnic cultures are recognised too in creating the Malaysian identity. However, there is no evidence showing the existence of characteristics or identity of product design agreed by the multi-racial Malaysia [7].

Thus, as believed by scholar Edward Tylor, a single ethnic culture and its values are easier to put in practice. Hence, parallel to privileges set out in the Social Contract, and the Constitution of Malaysia Reid Commission, it is suggested to use the cultural and Malay heritage as an identity of Malaysia's product design [7]. However, scholars in the beginning of 1900s expressed that every culture have their own values, characteristics and some similarities with other cultures [18]. Thus it is essential to identify the similarities in diversity to ensure the essence of national culture and national cultural based design identity is accomplished.

On the other hand, Malay culture has influences of Arabian, Thai, Javanese, Chinese, India and Sumatrans and other Asian societies and cultures [1, 5, 20, 28, 29 and 30]. Besides, it is highlighted that Malaysia and Singapore belong to the South Asian cultures [19]. Malays in Peninsula Malaysia originally came from all over the South East Asian archipelago and intermarriages happened from generations to generations which resulted in strong cross cultural values [1].

Traditional practice of cultural expression, especially on visual forms and performing arts in Malaysia shows mix-cultural values. Also believed that there are strong importations happened from South Asia, Middle and near East besides cross cultural exchanges and inter-ethnic marriages [31]. Multi-cultural society has its own culture that is very different from each other, but in fact they share some similar cultural characteristics [27].

These could have been taken as a motivation to identify the communality on cultural artifacts preferences among Malaysian. The researchers believed that the communal characteristics of Malaysian cultural artifacts could be the character of Malaysia's product identity.

However, there are challenges in studying cultural practices among multi-races. This is because there are differences in the way some races perceive a similar artifact. Cultural artifacts are easy to obtain but hard to interpret

[16]. However there are ways to interpret because human naturally has some universal inborn characteristics and sensitivities [16].

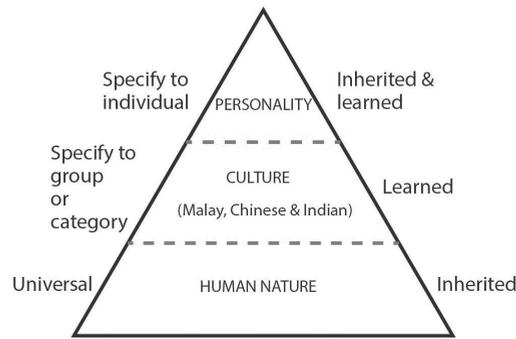


Figure 2: Levels of uniqueness in human mental programming (Adapted from Spencer-Oatey, (2012))

This happened due to three levels of uniqueness in human mentality [16]. Whereby, every child in its birth is gifted and inherited with universal human characters. In the process of growing, human exposed to various cultural input beside their own culture. For example, a Malaysia born baby is easily exposed to atleast three cultures. However the level of acceptance of own and other culture will differ based on its personal sensitivity, learning capacity, thinking ability, interpretive skill, analysis skill and its different level of exposure and influences. Thus, the situation could be, people in the same cultural group might practice their culture differently due to all the above mentioned factors. Therefore researcher hypothetically assumes that there will be communality on cultural artifacts usage and influences among multi-racial Malaysians

### 3. THE STUDY

In view of the current state of the literature, this study explores and identifies the existence of communality in using cultural artifacts. Specifically, it determines the agreement of multiracial Malaysians to the extent to which cultural products influence and had an impact on their lifestyle

#### 3.1 Methodology

A mixed method sequential exploratory design was utilized in this study in which community-based participatory research was used [32]. The study focused on communality in Malaysian cultural artifacts usage, which received

little attention among scholars. Whereby, [32] suggests that exploratory studies are most beneficial when “not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied”. There are 30 cultural artifacts comprises traditional games items, household products, decorative accessories, crafts and others were listed from primary resources such as books, internet and museums displays. These artifacts images were given to six elderly Malaysians comprise of Malays, Chinese and Indians to identify most communal cultural artifacts. Out of 30 artifacts, 20 scored high rate of communality as shown in Figure 3.0.



Figure 3: Cultural Artifacts

Using a survey instrument, quantitative data were collected from a random samples of 165 Malaysians comprise of the three main races; Malay, Chinese and Indian [1, 27]. An online questionnaire was created and the link (<http://goo.gl/forms/Zj42bRh91Q>) was sent out to friends and students by the researcher. All participants responded through an online survey. The study was conducted for five consecutive days. A Likert scale instrument in 5 scale was used to generate responses. ANOVA test was conducted to find significant acceptance towards cultural artifacts.

### 3.2. Organization of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions which were grouped into 2 categories as below:

- i. Category A: Personal characteristics of respondent
- ii. Category B: Likert scale questions supported by cultural artifacts images.

The Likert scale was used to rate participant's agreement towards cultural artifacts and its connections to respondent's lifestyle. The queries in the survey questionnaire were in national language (Bahasa Malaysia). Participants can choose from a set of predetermined questions accompanied by choice of answers using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was designed to be simple and concise. Same questions were posted for all 20 types of artifacts to confirm the respondent's connection towards the given cultural artifacts.

The survey included age, sex and working status. Age is important in this study because the younger generations lack in their own cultural and traditional practices [1, 8,30,32]. Through this study, researcher was able to identify whether Gen-Y in Malaysia aware of their culture and their relationship towards cultural artifacts through the Likert scale agreement. This is important because culture and cultural artifact's practices and its sustainability depend on the new members or youngsters of the particular culture [9]. A culture without successors will lose its root and disappear from practices. Occupation, working status and salary can be used to predict participant's wealth. It is important because cultural lifestyle always assumed as an outdated method of living by modern generations and financially stable peoples [8].

### 3.3 Finding

Total respondents were 165, whereby 44% were males while 56 % were females. The age of respondents were 10 and above, whereby 14.6% (24) were within 10-20 years old; 57% (94) were within 21–30 years old, about 23.6% (39) of the respondents were 31-40 , 3% (5) were 41-50 years, 1.8% (3) were 51 or older. Participant's responses on their working status showed that 63% (104) of them are working while the rest of 37% (61) are studying. However from the total number of students, 14 are working as part timers and earning less than RM2000 per month. All of the respondents reported that they have had experience with cultural artifacts.

### 3.4 Discussion

#### 3.4.1 Community in Cultural Artifacts

Table 1 shows that communality level within usage of cultural artifacts among multi-racial Malaysians are significantly high; most of the mean score were more than 3.00. These proved that there is communality in cultural artifacts usage among Malaysians. However individual mean score among Chinese shows slightly lower than Malays and Indians. This could be due to the wide exposure of Chinese community to modern world compared to the cultural practices. This was supported by their financial stability. For instance 84.6% of the Chinese respondents are generating a stable monthly income. Consequently financially stable people tend to prefer modern life rather than cultural practices [8].

*Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Communality in Cultural Artifacts Usage*

| Cultural Artifacts  | Malay |      |      | Chinese |      |      | Indian |      |      |
|---------------------|-------|------|------|---------|------|------|--------|------|------|
|                     | n     | M    | SD   | n       | M    | SD   | n      | M    | SD   |
| 1. Congkak          | 55    | 4.19 | .66  | 55      | 3.05 | 1.26 | 55     | 3.57 | 1.39 |
| 2. Gasing           | 55    | 4.02 | .99  | 55      | 3.11 | 1.28 | 55     | 3.23 | 1.21 |
| 3. Penampi Beras    | 55    | 4.00 | .86  | 55      | 3.33 | 1.24 | 55     | 4.00 | .80  |
| 4. Batu Lesung      | 55    | 4.25 | .84  | 55      | 4.08 | .80  | 55     | 4.31 | .52  |
| 5. Kukur Kelapa     | 55    | 3.86 | .89  | 50      | 2.91 | 1.20 | 55     | 4.18 | 1.00 |
| 6. Cerek            | 55    | 3.91 | .69  | 55      | 4.13 | .79  | 55     | 3.76 | 1.10 |
| 7. Pasu             | 55    | 3.61 | .96  | 55      | 3.61 | 1.15 | 55     | 3.18 | 1.13 |
| 8. Bakul            | 55    | 3.83 | .97  | 55      | 3.61 | 1.04 | 55     | 3.15 | .97  |
| 9. Caping           | 55    | 3.19 | .88  | 55      | 3.05 | 1.01 | 55     | 3.26 | 1.36 |
| 10. Seterika        | 55    | 4.05 | .79  | 55      | 3.77 | .92  | 55     | 4.34 | .74  |
| 11. Kualiti         | 55    | 4.25 | .43  | 55      | 4.00 | .97  | 55     | 4.44 | .68  |
| 12. Tombol Pintu    | 55    | 3.77 | .72  | 55      | 3.47 | 1.08 | 55     | 3.52 | 1.00 |
| 13. Perkakas Teh    | 55    | 3.86 | .93  | 55      | 3.72 | 1.03 | 55     | 3.76 | .81  |
| 14. Rantang         | 55    | 4.11 | .82  | 55      | 4.13 | .89  | 55     | 4.28 | .69  |
| 15. Lesung          | 55    | 3.75 | 1.15 | 55      | 3.05 | 1.24 | 55     | 4.07 | .94  |
| 16. Bolaraga        | 55    | 4.02 | .94  | 55      | 3.36 | 1.26 | 55     | 3.13 | 1.33 |
| 17. Pengisar Beras  | 55    | 3.47 | .90  | 55      | 3.50 | 1.32 | 55     | 4.05 | 1.11 |
| 18. Pengiling Cili  | 55    | 3.83 | .87  | 55      | 3.63 | .86  | 55     | 4.50 | .68  |
| 19. Pengiling Beras | 55    | 3.61 | .83  | 55      | 3.55 | .93  | 55     | 4.47 | .68  |
| 20. Pemulas Murukku | 55    | 3.38 | .83  | 55      | 3.00 | 1.24 | 55     | 4.63 | .63  |

3.0 - 3.5 (Fair)    3.5 - 4.0 (Good)    4.0 - 4.5 (Very Good)    4.5 - 5.0 (Excellent)

“Batu Lesung” is one of the most culturally influenced artifacts among 20 other artifacts. There were no statistically significant difference on influences of “Batu Lesung” among the three main races, Malay (M=4.25, SD.84), Chinese (M=4.08, SD.80) and Indian (M=4.31, SD.52). “Rantang” is also highly influenced Malay (M=4.11, SD.82), Chinese (M=4.13, SD.89) and Indian (M=4.28, SD.69).

‘Caping’ was fairly agreed by all the three races as a culturally influencing artifact. However, Malay respondents showed ‘Caping’ as much closer (M=3.19, SD=.88) cultural practices compared to Chinese (M=3.05, SD1.01), and Indians (M=3.26, SD1.36) respondents. However, [19] stated that “Caping” is not belong to Malay culture. It is believed that it originated from India and brought into Malaya between the seventh and thirteenth century. This has proven that in multicultural society, the cultural influences go beyond the ethnical boundaries.

Traditional silversmithing shaded by courtiers centuries ago. Silver was initially reserved specifically for the usage of royal families. Silver products were also used by aristocracy before it was used by the common people. Later on, silver products become everyday items such as teapot sets, rays, spoons, knives, containers and fruit trays among the Malay ethnic. However the research findings shows that silver teapot sets (Perkakas Teh) were also ranked ‘good’ culturally influenced artifacts among the peninsular Malaysia’s three main races; Malay (M=3.86, SD.93), Chinese (M=3.72, SD1.03) and Indian (M=3.76, SD.81). Therefore the findings reject and null the hypothesis that there is no one single cultural artifact that is able to influence multi-cultural respondents.

An artifact or behaviour is considered as a cultural belonging, when it is shared by a social group or society. Thus, it is urged that human actions, behaviour or thinking should be shared by a group of people or society to be claimed as a culture [33]. For example the coconut grater (kukur kelapa) represents Malay cultural identity [7] and it is proven in this survey statistics (M=3.86, SD.89). Whereby, coconut grater recorded high score with 73% Malay respondents agreed that it is related to their lifestyle. However, due to the tremendous advancement in technology, it lacks exposure among young generation of Malay populations. This study’s findings show that 14% of Malay respondents disagreed that coconut grater is related to their lifestyle. On the other hand, 13% of the Malay respondents expressed their doubt on relation to coconut grater and its cultural influences.

However, coconut grater is highly accepted by Indian (M=4.18, SD1.00) respondents with 76.4% of them agreed of its existence as part of their lifestyle.

This proves that even though coconut grater believed as an identical artifact among Malays it also has strong influence in Indian’s lifestyle. This again proves the existence of communality in cultural artifacts among Malaysians.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper draws a major conclusion that communality do exist in cultural artifacts usage among Malays, Chinese and Indians in Peninsular Malaysia. This is an exploratory sequential design [32] method incorporate with cultural probes [34] in identifying key patterns and themes that might emerge participant’s cultural practices. It is an essential research because a culture will be established and endowed with the absorption of various cultures and customs. For instance, it is believed that Kelantan’s culture is respected as a “Cradle of Malay Culture.” due to its richness with a mixture of Thai, Chinese, Indian and Malay cultures. On the other hand Malaysia’s culture in total has become unique and rich due to the borrowing, adaptation and acceptance of multi-cultural artifacts and values. The author recognizes the importance of studying the communality among cultural artifacts to preserve the design and its values in the process of ‘form giving’ for user preference Malaysia design. If it is not preserved, this uniqueness will vanish in time and fast changing practices.

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