

## Malay Culture in Chinese Muslim Newly Convert (Muallaf) Perspective: Selangor Case Study

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### Abstract

*This study aims to identify the different understanding of Chinese converts groups on Malays culture in the Selangor state. Their understanding of Malay culture affects their Islamic practices. This study analyzes the understanding differences of 408 Chinese converts in the Selangor state based on age, gender, marital status, academic qualifications and employment. The study found that the group of Chinese converts in the age less than 20 years have higher understanding than the age of 21-30 years, 31-40 years, and older than 40 years. From the aspect of gender, there were no significant differences in understanding between men and women. In terms of marital status, the study found that Chinese converts single status have a higher understanding than the marriage, widows and widowers. While in terms of academic qualifications, those who graduated with a degree have higher understanding of cultural community of Malay as compared with those graduated having the approval of UPSR, PMR, SPM and Diploma. From the aspects of work, those who work at the government have a better understanding than self-employed, private and unemployment. The implication is, these contributing factors can give enlightenment to the Muslim Malay community to know that Chinese convert groups have better understanding on Malay cultural community to maintain the cultural integration between Chinese and Malays in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** Muallaf, Chinese, Malay, Culture, Malaysia, Religion, Selangor

### 1. Introduction

The Muslim convert understanding on Islam is one of important aspects that should be more intention. Islam is used to as synonymous with the Malay community. Thus, this study focuses on Chinese converts understanding of Malay community culture. However, it should be emphasized, not all Malay people are Muslim. This is due to the apostasy, heresy, and etc. (Seng, 2009; Bari, 2005; Chua, 2005). The researchers took into account the age, marital status, academic qualifications and work out in order to analyze the differences in their understanding on Malay community culture. These factors might told in more detail to the Malay Muslim community about their understanding on Malay community culture in achieving national integration in Malaysia

In Malaysia, a form of nature *asabiyyah* (tribalism, racism, nationalism and group sentiments) still exists among people. We have to take as concern that there are three major races in Malaysia: Malay, Chinese, and Indian. The Chinese and Indian came around in the year 1900, and the Malays were the earliest settlers. The emergence of the Malay ethnic from a similar origin, who were the descendants of great Malay empires of the past such as the Srivijaya, Majapahit and Malacca-Islamic kingdoms (Newbold, 1839: 193). The Chinese and Indians came mostly as workers in the rubber plantations and tin mines. Around 3 A.D, the Chinese traders made their presence felt at the Malay Peninsula, and they started to form social ties with the native Malays. When the Malay Peninsula fell under the British colony in the 19th century, the influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants was due to the shortage of labor force required by the British government. Through the Malays' tolerant and cooperative attitude, social relations with the Chinese and Indians were formed, and they were not ill-treated by the Malays (Cushman & Milner, 1979: 6).

The British ruled the country from 1874 until 1957 and were mainly responsible for bringing in the Chinese and Indians (Bissio, 1995). With the exception of two major racial clashes in 1945 and 1969, the races have generally lived side-by-side peacefully in many years. In the early 1950s and 1960s there were less apparent racial polarizations among the races, until the 1969 incident, the aftermath of which was the New Economic Policy, introduced to rectify the

economic and educational imbalances between the races (Ariffin, 1999).

Malaysian society still concerns with their interests and upholding their people. This causes the group of Chinese *Muallaf* facing the challenge after being Muslim. For Chinese people, when they converted their belief or faith especially to Islam, they are become less favored by their own people who are Buddhist, Taoist, Confucius or even Christian. They think Islam is a religion of the Malay, and now, from the point of politics, they considered at this case as a betrayal and an insult to the descendants and their struggle.

If someone who want to convert to Islam, He or She had prepared of all the terms and risks. Among other things that changes such are swapping identities and nature, such as name, food, games, celebration and so on. Similarly in terms of marriage, Muslim groups may only marry other Muslim and it is the legal provisions contained in the Islamic family law (al-Qaradawi, 2005). The changes they are facing in this circumstance have given little negative impact to their family members. This conversion makes them feel has betrayed the origin, ancestry, heritage and culture of their ancestors (Ismail and Ahmad, 2009; Chua, 2005; Che Ku, 2004). Moreover, according to Chua (2005), Lee & Beng (2000), and Abdullah and Leng (2003), the Chinese community has shown negative view of other China who embraced Islam compared to other religions.

Nevertheless, the Chinese was forced to accept their people who convert into Islam and practice the Malay culture. If we observe further, the poor conditions of the Malay Muslims on various aspects such as social phenomena, bribery and various kinds of negative elements that had raised negative feedback which led to non-Muslims did not interested and put away from Islamic teachings. However, various agencies are trying to raise the Malay-Muslim reputation in term of their cultural aspect. A good culture could be one of interest factor to embrace Islam, as in the study of Kasimin (1985) in which the converts of Chinese group because they interested in the Malay culture which often cooperate and uphold mutual help, for example, in the Marriage event, and death ceremonial. From here, it can realize the integration and fusion among the community.

Prior to this form of integration and fusion between people, the group of Chinese Muslims need to foster the culture of understanding towards the Malay community. Amri (2007) states that if the depth of understanding has formed, it will be built up behaviors and actions that are accommodative, which willing to accept differing ethnic groups who have differences in various aspects of life, habits, customs and religions. And it was very important as a gateway to have mutual cooperation and agreement. Indeed, this study aims to know on the understanding of Chinese *muallaf* about Malay culture based on their age, gender, marital status, academic background and employment. Finally, it helps to the Malay people to enlighten and to encourage and assist the community of Chinese *muallaf* in understanding the Malay culture and to the religion of Islam itself.

## 2. Concept and Definition

*Muallaf* (convert) are those who exchanged the previous religion to Islam and become a Muslim (Muhamat, Puteh & Tan, 2013). Recent definition says *muallaf* are those who persuaded and the heart is tamed with hope able to strengthen their grip on Islam or those who persuaded so keen to embrace Islam (Kasimin, 1985). Moreover, *muallaf* also as the brand new brother who embraced Islam and are entitled to receive charity (*zakat*) and the aim for that charity is to soften their hearts and strengthen their believe in Islam (Mohd Yunus and Abd. Karim, 2005; Tan, 2007). So, the Chinese *muallaf* can be defined as the group of Chinese who converted to Islam and before that they were born and raised in a non-Islamic family.

The purpose of giving *zakat* to *muallaf* neither to strengthen them as a Muslim nor to motivate them to practice Islamic teachings. It is an aspect that should be emphasized in which if an individual has the problem of life such hardship and poverty in their lives, then by giving *zakat* could be restore their confidence in Islam as a result of other Muslims concerns. Therefore, that would not arise in a person to come out of Islam and find new understanding, which could give him-self something better.

Some scholars have defined culture in various dimension such as Sulaiman, (2007) which state that culture is a way of life shared together by a group of people or social groups in life and environments which built by humans as a result of practice and human relations within an environment that includes material and non-material culture. Hofstede (1984) said "*Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another*", while Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) defined as consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action. Hence, according to these definitions, Shepard (1994) asserted that

the community group will act in accordance with the form required by the culture such deeds and thoughts, beliefs, clothing, food, shelter, transportation and arts because the culture involving matters of community itself.

The concept of Malay community can be defined as a group of Malays people who are practice the teachings of Islam, which is carrying out errands and leave Allah's prohibitions. In Malaysia, Malays defined are Muslims who live together with non-Muslim community within a community by implementing a life based on Islamic values. This labelling of Malay may be related to theory on how to define identity such as the labelling theory to understand the fundamental scenario among the Malays in Malaysia, because 'labelling' will enhance ones identity, in this case Malay (Ritzer, 2001).

The cultural integration between the Malay communities to the converted Chinese shall be seen from multiple perspectives. At least there are four different side of cultural integration may be seen such religious practices, funeral practices, moral practices and from the nature of art. The fourth-cultural practices encompassed to see the cultural integration of the converted Chinese. Here indeed, this study would like to see a distinction level of understanding of Chinese *muallaf* towards the four cultural practices. Therefore the Malay people may comport oneself and wisely understand each other in term of realizing national unification in Malaysia.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study is a conceptual review in recognizing distinction of understanding about *Chinese muallaf* towards the Malay culture based on age, marital status, academic background and occupation. In this study, there are about 408 Chinese *muallaf* who involved as respondents. The used instrument was a set of questionnaire and spread among respondents. By using software *SPSS 19* and Kruskal Wallis formula, this study analyses data to identify the distinction of understanding those Chinese *muallaf* to Islam towards the Malay culture based on age and academic qualification. This analysis was carried out due to the number of samples between the factors studied unbalanced and the number of samples in the collection of less than 30 (Pallant, 2005). Whereas, the data which based on the marital status and occupation had been analyzed by one way *anova*.

#### 3.1 Research Finding

##### 3.1.1 Respondent demography profile

###### 3.1.1.1 Age

Description of respondent's age in Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of 408 Chinese *muallaf* respondents. The age of respondents was divided into four levels, e.g. younger than 20 years, 21-30 years, 31-40 years and 41 years or older.

**Table 1.** The distribution of age Chinese *Muallaf* Group in Selangor

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Less than 20	29	7.1%
21-30	135	33.1%
31-40	57	38.5%
More than 41	87	1.3%

The table 1 shows the Chinese *muallaf* respondents in age 31- 40 years around 38.5% (57 people) following by age 21-30 years which around 33.1% (135 people). Then, for age older than 41-year old was around 1.3% (87 people), while the smallest respondent or younger than 20-year was around 7.1% (29 people).

###### 3.1.1.2 Gender

In side of gender, the male group frequency and percentage was more higher than female, and around 56.9% (232 people) while female group is around 43.1% (176 people) as seen in table 2.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Gender Chinese *Muallaf* Group in Selangor

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	232	56.9%
Female	176	43.1%

### 3.1.1.3 Marriage Status

For marital status, table 3 shows that majority of respondents in this study were marriage and around 247 people (60.5%), while single status was around 115 people (28.2%). The with widower respondents was around 46 people (11.3%).

**Table 3.** The Marital Status of Chinese *Muallaf* Groups in Selangor

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Marriage Status</i>		
Single	115	28.2%
Marriage	247	60.5%
Widower	46	11.3%

### 3.1.1.4 Academic Qualification

From inside of academic qualification, it has divided into five levels. Majority of this study was in SPM/PMR/SRP graduates which around 202-people (49.5%) as seen in table 4. Follow by UPSR graduate in 79-people (19.4%). Then, the respondents with Diploma/STPM holders in 73-people (17.9%). The second lowest respondents was bachelor degree in around 40-people (9.8%). And Master or PhD graduate was the lowest respondents or 14-people (3.4%) only.

**Table 4.** Academic levels of Chinese *Muallaf* Groups in Selangor

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Academic Qualification</i>		
Master/PhD	14	3.4%
Degree	40	9.8%
Diploma/STPM	73	17.9%
SPM/PMR/SRP	202	49.5%
UPSR	79	19.4%

### 3.1.1.5 Employment

Table 5 shows that the most respondents are self-employ which around 146-people (35.8%). The respondents with private job was 111-people (27.2%) following by unemployment respondents by 103-people (25.2%). The fewest job respondents are the government around 48-people (11.8%).

**Table 5.** Employment Descriptions of Chinese *Muallaf* Groups in Selangor

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Job</i>		
Government	48	11.8%
Private	111	27.2%
Self-employed	146	35.8%
unemployment	103	25.2%

### 3.1.2 Understanding of Chinese *Muallaf* groups on Malay community culture

#### 3.1.2.1 Age

The differences of Chinese *Muallaf* groups understanding on Malay community culture based on age as seen in the table 6.

**Table 6.** Chinese *Muallaf* Groups understanding on Malay culture based on age

Age	N	Min Rank	Chi Square	Df	Sig.
Less than 20 years	29	278.86	26.401	3	0.000
21 - 30 years	135	219.36			
31 - 40 years	157	172.05			
more than 40 years	87	215.22			

Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference in 0.000 ( $p < 0.005$ ) based on age, with Chi Square = 26.401. In side of min rank shows that Chinese *muallaf* in age less than 20-year (Min rank = 278.86) have higher understanding than Chinese *muallaf* with age 21-30-year (Min rank = 219.36), Chinese *muallaf* with age more than 40-year (Min rank = 215.22) and Chinese *muallaf* 31-40-year (Min rank = 172.05).

#### 3.1.2.2 Gender

Table 7 shows the differences of Chinese *Muallaf* groups on Malay community culture based on gender.

**Table 7.** T-test the differences of Chinese *Muallaf* groups on Malay culture based on gender

Gender	N	Min	Standard Deviation	T	Df	Sig.
Male	232	2.85	0.473	-0.291	406	0.771
Female	176	2.86	0.499			

Table 7 shows that there are no significant differences of Chinese *Muallaf* groups on Malay community culture based on gender which t value = -0.291 and sig = 0.771 ( $p > 0.05$ ). In side of min, it shows that Chinese female *muallaf* (min = 2.86) have higher understanding than male (min = 2.85), however the differences not significant.

#### 3.1.2.3 Marital Status

Table 8 shows the understanding of Chinese *Muallaf* groups on Malay culture based on their marital status.

**Table 8.** The differences of understanding of Chinese *Muallaf* groups on Malay culture based on marital status

Marriage Status	Total authority Two	df	Min authority Two	F	Sig.
Between Group	2.675	2	1.337	5.839	0.003
Within Group	92.759	405	0.229		
Total	95.434	407			

Table 8 shows that there is significant differences of understanding Chinese *muallaf* group on Malay community cultural based on their marital status, with F = 5.839 and sig = 0.003 ( $p < 0.05$ ). In side of min, it shows that single Chinese *muallaf* have a better understanding than widower.

#### 3.1.2.4 Academic Qualification

Table 9 shows *Kruskal Wallis* test of differences of Chinese *muallaf* understanding on Malay culture based on academic qualification.

**Table 9.** Understanding of Chinese *Muallaf* Groups on Malay Culture based on Academic Qualification

Academic Qualification	N	Min Rank	Chi Square	Df	Sig.
Master /PhD	14	203.18	12.947	4	0.012
Bachelor	40	247.03			
Diploma/STPM	73	231.64			
SPM/PMR/SRP	202	188.75			
UPSR	79	198.41			

Table 9 shows that there are significant differences of understanding Chinese *muallaf* group on Malay community cultural based on academic qualification, with Chi Square value = 12.497 and sig = 0.012 ( $p < 0.05$ ). In side of min rank, it shows Chinese *muallaf* who hold Bachelor degree (Min ranking = 247.03) have higher understanding compared to Chinese *muallaf* with Diploma/SPM (Min rank = 231.64), Master/PhD (Min rank = 203.18), UPSR (Min rank = 198.41) and SPM/PMR/SRP (Min rank = 188.75).

### 3.1.2.5 Employment

Table 10 shows anova one way test to identify the differences of Chinese *muallaf* understanding on Malay culture based on their employment.

**Table 10.** Chinese *Muallaf* understanding on Malay culture based on employment

Employment	Total authority Two	Df	Min authority Two	F	Sig.
Between Group	7.763	3	2.588	11.925	0.000
Within Groups	87.671	404	0.217		
Total	95.434	407			

Based on table10, there are significant differences of Chinese *muallaf* group understanding on Malay community culture based on employment, with F = 11.925 and sig = 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). In side of min, it shows that Chinese *muallaf* with government employment have better understanding than *muallaf* with private employment, self-employ and unemployment.

## 4. Discussion and Research Implications

The results showed that one factor to know the difference of understanding of Chinese *muallaf* groups towards Malay culture is their age. Due to the age shows significant differences with the chi square = 26,401 and sig = 0.000. We can see here, respondents who in 20-year or younger have a higher understanding if compared with the respondents in age 21-30-year, 31-40-year and more than 40-year. From here, the age at youth level for the Chinese *muallaf* are more vulnerable to the culture of Malay community. Although, based on the percentage below 20-year was the least percentage, but the level of their understanding of the culture of the Malay higher than other age levels.

Based on finding above, in term of gender, there are no significant differences of Chinese *muallaf* on Malay culture community. Although the respondents show that male more than female, but Min shows level of female understanding higher than male. However, the differences not significant and cannot be as direction to know which party have better understanding than others.

The findings also indicate that Chinese *muallaf* single-status higher than married or widowers. This is because there are many factors driving the group of Chinese *muallaf* to Islam. Among them are rightly of God, the desire to marry Muslims, expecting amenities such as scholarships, loans and so on, they have been long in close interactions with and affected the Muslims lives and political objectives, hence they are recognized as indigenous and privileges as other indigenous. A study conducted by Kasimin (1985), has also stated that the main factor of Chinese converts to Islam in Selangor are based on their own understanding of Islam.

However, even the percentage of single respondents were fewer compared with married respondents, the understanding of single status higher than other marital status. It may be noted, many of the Chinese converts to Islam in Selangor caused by the guidance of God against the marriage factor to assess in advance of Islam and Malay culture. In the conversion process, at least through five phases before they can appreciate and understand as well as possible understand about Islam and Islamic Malay culture itself (Abd. Ghani, 2006). So, the preacher (*Dai*) should intensify

propaganda to give more understanding to the Chinese *muallaf* in Selangor in all marriage status to increase their understanding itself.

In addition, the study also shows that there are significant differences based on academic qualifications. The study found that respondents with academic degree have a higher understanding than the respondents with academic qualification UPSR, PMR / PMR / SRP, Diploma / STPM and Masters / PhD. Academic qualifications that have highest number of respondents are SPM / PMR / SRP graduates. However, they are among less understood on Malay culture. If we look at the surveys, it found that Chinese *muallaf* with higher education is still lacking. This shows the lack of disclosure of Chinese's educated classes to convert to Islam. However, it is expected that the parties who responsible for providing understanding to the Chinese *muallaf* to allocate a lot of programs, seminars, forums and etc to explain about Islam and Malay culture indirectly, so that they can cultivate deeper understanding and be able to distinguish between culture and religion. The media should also play a role, such as radio and television to provide a forum about the beauty of Islam who specializes in Chinese Muslim convert.

The study also shows that there is differences Chinese *muallaf* understanding of Malay cultural community based on employment. The results showed that Chinese *muallaf* who work under government sector has a higher understanding than private employment, self-employ and unemployed. Chinese *muallaf* respondents with private working only 48 people compared with other groups. This is because, in economic sectors, the Chinese dominate nearly all economic sectors, whether large or too small (Chin, 2003; Phang, 2000). Meanwhile, most of the Malays working in the public sector (Azhar, 2006). So it's not surprising that of Chinese Muslim converts who work in the public have better understanding on Muslim Malay culture. The Chinese *muallaf* understand the Malay culture based on observations and their relation with the Malays.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, it can be conclude that there are differences of understanding of Chinese *muallaf* groups on Malay community culture based on demographics in the Selangor state, such as age, marital status, academic qualifications and employment, while in terms of gender, no difference of understanding. By this information, the Malays in general and missionaries in particular could be a bit of enlightenment in relation to the group of Chinese Muslim converts in order to create a cohesive integration between the Malays and Chinese.

Some recommendations expressed here may be as direction to the relevant parties to improve their missionary work (*Da'wah*), especially related to the non-Muslim and *muallaf* groups, in the cultural integration of Malay community, as below:

- MAIS (Islamic institutions of Selangor) can customize the module of understanding Islam for the converted Chinese in any difference language and educational background
- Make sure teaching staff whose obligated to deliver message about Islam to the group of converted Chinese to Islam is given good incentive so that they remain committed in conveying messages and supervising the *muallaf*.
- MAIS provides *Da'i* from their community so that their spirit to understand Islam increase and so does with Malay culture to assimilate easily with people around.
- Group of converts need to play its role in order to provide an understanding and explain to their non-Muslim family members about Malay culture.

This suggestion is expected to benefit the integration of cultural practices and serve as a means of *da'wah* to non-Muslim communities. Also, the findings of this study can contribute to the improvement of missionary efforts to Muslim *muallaf* and non-Muslim groups in Malaysia generally and the Selangor state particularly.

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