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CULTURAL MEMORY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AMONG THE CHAMPA DIASPORA IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at explaining the role of diaspora experiences and cultural memory as it relates to the formation of identity by the descendants of Champa in Malaysia, especially in the philosophy of Islam. The study conceptualization of culture implies the notion that Islam could be the most important factor in the creation and perception of the memory or recollections of people on the cultural experiences. Diaspora areas such as avocation, marriage, occupation, and cooking styles are also compared with how they were used in assimilating the Champa culture into the mainstream Malaysian culture. Similarly, the language, customs, knowledge, and micro-practices of everyday life, known as cultural memory, are examined to understand how it is transmitted across the generations. This study demonstrates that Islamic values are a guideline used to bring together these conflicting forces and enable a shared identity to be sustained within the Champa society. The qualitative data was subjected to manual analysis involving identification of themes of recovery experience in the participants using the NVivo software.. Using the qualitative research paradigm and employing only thematic analysis, the study looks at how the Champa diaspora maintains and recreates the lost cultural and religious identity and adapts its place in the Malaysian sociocultural environment. By describing the experiences of the Cham people of Malaysia, this research adds to the existing global literature on Diaspora, cultural memory, and the formation of their identity, particularly within the Islamic context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora and cultural memory play a central role in understanding how people of a particular culture create, sustain, and adapt their identities in a new cultural terrain (Saleem, 2021). Of the vast diaspora population in Malaysia, the Champa descendants are one of the most interesting cases. Champa descendants in Malaysia are the majority Muslim; therefore, their cultural identity as descendants of the Champa civilization has incorporated Islamic elements into their identity formation (Gu, Lim, & O'Connor, 2020). The analysis of the phenomenon of cultural heritage's transformation into a significant element of religious identity is provided through the prism of the philosophy of Islam and concepts of secularization and de-secularization.

The experience of diaspora Champa descendants can be seen as a complex process of an attempt to interact with the host society (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021). Education, in general, provides a means for transforming people's outlook and experience and gives them a chance to interact with Malaysian Society. If education per se and especially girls' education is treated as a lever for change, it is possible to highlight some aspects of reality but the fact remains that education as a whole is the transformative force for both genders to normalize their integration into society and construct their identities. In the case of multicultural marriage, the assimilation of the Champa descendants with the significant population of Malaysia is discussed based on the dynamics between acculturation and transformation of the identity. Likewise, careers are as easily negotiable and mutable but still recognizable as aspects of self. Diaspora identity is influenced by careers which create the conditions to be adapted and culturally expressible to the host society (Azmi et al., 2021).

Constructing the identity of Champa's descendants also includes a significant dimension of cultural memory. Preserving the Cham language can save intergenerational connections with their roots (Hee, 2021). Rituals, which are in turn based on Islamic teachings, perform the key function of developing their custom (Hussein, 2021). Such daily practices, including Islamic values, extend the alignment of culture and religion in expressing their identity at the micro level. These practices also situate their past identity with their experiences in Malaysia (Zainal & Nasir, 2021). Since the Champa cultural practices are in agreement with the Islamic norms in the Malaysian context, which is dominated by the Islamic culture, it allows the processes to be incorporated into the wider Malaysian culture. This assimilation is the way religious values influence moral and ethical behaviour and bring about cohesion and identification to the society and this enables the Champa practices to exist within the Malaysian context of Islamic cultural beliefs. This paper employs qualitative techniques and thematic analysis because it explains the interaction of these factors in a fine manner with respect to the life experiences and identity construction of the Diasporic group (Hussein, 2021). It emphasizes the role of Islam and the longevity of culture elicited as primordial in shaping the markers of diaspora Champa descendants (Mat Nong, Idris, Wan Zakaria, & Mohd Nor, 2022).

Despite exploring the preservation of identity through Diaspora and cultural memory focusing on how cultural minorities maintain their identity on foreign territories. However, there has been limited research on Muslim diaspora communities and even less on the interplay between diaspora experiences, cultural memory, and the role of Islam in shaping the identities of Muslims within the Diaspora. Additionally, there is a dearth of research on how Malaysian Islamic persons' modernizing experience through education, mixed marriages, career opportunities, and culinary practices intertwines with the traditional cultural constraints imposed by language, knowledge, and behaviors.

Table 1 below outlines the following research questions and objectives

Table1: Research Questions & Objectives.

Research Questions	Research Objectives
How does Islam influence the preservation and transmission of cultural memories among Champa descendants in Malaysia?	To explore the impact of Islam on the preservation and intergenerational transmission of cultural memories among Champa descendants in Malaysia.
In what ways do diaspora experiences, such as mixed marriages and education, shape the religious and cultural identity of Champa descendants?	To analyze how diaspora experiences, particularly mixed marriages and educational opportunities, influence the construction of religious and cultural identity among Champa descendants.
How are traditional practices, including culinary customs, linked to the religious values of Champa descendants in Malaysia?	To examine the relationship between traditional practices, such as cuisine, and Islamic values within the Champa community in Malaysia.
What role does language, as part of cultural memory, play in maintaining the religious and cultural identity of the Champa diaspora?	To investigate how language, as a cultural and religious symbol, contributes to sustaining the identity of Champa descendants in Malaysia.

Using qualitative research tools and thematic analysis, hence, this study not only studies how Champa descendants and Malaysians balance the two imperatives of identity retention and incorporation in Malaysia, but further extending existing knowledge in the course of enriching discourses of diaspora, religion, and identity formation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, significant areas of diaspora concern, such as education, intermarriage, employment food preparation, and cultural practices, are examined to determine their role in shaping the Champa community of today. It also discusses many facets of culture, including language, customs, knowledge, behavior, and practices, to determine some of the parts others play in continually retaining a separate cultural identity. Specifically, the study demonstrates the continuity of the Islamic legacy as a cultural resource that interlinks Champa descendants' memory and identity.

2.1. Diaspora Experiences (Education, Mixed Marriage, Career, Culinary and Traditional Practices)

This paper suggests that education is fundamental in influencing the process of social identification of the Diaspora. The implication is that education plays a dual role in the act of assimilation into larger societal structures, whilst at the same time giving support to the preservation and transmission of the cultural heritage which informs the Diasporic identity. Since Malaysian Champa descendants have limited contact with the broader Society, educational institutions enable them to interact with Malaysian Society while at the same time, passing on Champa's Islamic values, as well as Champa cultural beliefs. The cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu explains how education enables the functioning of dual realities, both customs intermingled with the liberation of a traditional system and the implementation of postmodern practices (Lyu, Kay, & Olmedo Panal, 2024). Schools serve as fundamental institutions in preserving cultural consciousness by implementing mechanisms that uphold languages and traditions, thereby ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage (Ismail, Ahmad Zakaria, & Ramli, 2024).

The mixed marriage affects the identity formation among Diaspora to a great extent because this process is a kind of mediator between native culture and assimilation experience. In the case of Champa

descendants in Malaysia, marrying among Malays helps them fit into the Malaysian Islamic environment (Machmudi, 2024). The cultures in mixed marriages are a source of values created from the hybridization of culture. Islam plays a uniting cultural role by becoming a base for the community in the Champa, despite its many different practices, which are all imbued with Islamic norms (Ullah, 2024).

Profession and work chances are essential to form the subjectivity of diasporic populations as they contribute to economic stability and give cultural direction to the community's life (Yahya, Untung, Nasif, Setiawan, & Fajari, 2020). Champa descendants in Malaysia try to balance their Malaysian identity and identity as the Champa civilization's descendants while engaging in professional activities (Sharifah Noorulhuda Binti Habib Elias, 2024). The patterns of innovative careers define the mobility and cultural integration of the migrant population (Chmil et al., 2024). For instance, Islamic values influence ethical work practices, while traditional Champa values aid in determining community roles and relationships in workplaces (Balzani, 2020). Careers provide the platform within which cultural memory and religion synchronously play a role in identity construction, particularly in Malaysian status.

This paper argues that diaspora experiences and cultural memories shape the identity construction of Champa descendants in Malaysia. In today's culture, Malaysian Indians easily integrate into Malaysian Society due to education, mixed marriage, and career paths. Food traditions like the Champa dishes pass down culture, while traditional methods such as language and cultural performance pass down narratives (Dwijayanto, Hasan, & Wildan, 2023). In interactions with the practice of Islam, alongside other cultural components, mainstream cultural nuances regulate behavior and religious practices and adopt Islamic practices into their cultural paradigm (Zulkifli, Hasyim, Zaki Mubarak, Khitam, & Helmi, 2023).

2.2. Cultural Memories (Language, Customs, Knowledge, and Daily Behavior)

Consequently, Champa descendants in Malaysia recognize language as an essential construct that forms an identity of memory. Although Malays and others use different languages in everyday conversation, the Champa language is an emblem to prove that they are still hosts, even with bloodlines from their ancestors (Zulkifli et al., 2023). Diaspora's education systems, marriage, and career choices are

described as changing linguistic patterns, facilitating switching, bilingualism, or attrition (Lesley, 2020). While external structures erode their ethnic practice, they continue to uphold culinary and religious practices incorporated in their daily practices. These elements integrate Islamic sensibility reasserting that identity is drawn from both the cultural archive and religious ideology (Mohammed, Mahmoud, Preko, Hinson, & Yeboah, 2023). The ethnicities of Champa are significant in maintaining the generational recall of Champa and in assembling people's identification of themselves and Malaysia's identification of its people by combining indigenous and Islamic cultures. Still, basic practices like conventional events such as rites of passage, feasts, and meetings remain firm and constant referencing apparatus to their roots (Kaya & Drhimeur, 2023).

The infusion of Islamic philosophy into cultural and pragmatic practices consolidates communal ties and acts as a scheme to course through multiculturalism in Malaysia. Social memory, diaspora experiences, and interpretation of Islamic teachings that form Champa heritage are preserved among Malaysian communities as Champa heritage, which has shaped the identity of the Champa people (Ho, 2023). While these influences exist, the community heavily depends on orally produced traditions that sustain heritage in culinary practices, language, and other cultural traits. Islamic religious knowledge is the dimension used to center the perception of existence and daily interaction among the dimensions of Islamic religiosity (Furoidah & Mawardi, 2023). They embody an ever-growing and grounded context of cultural and religious knowledge that allows the descendants of Champa to be rooted in both their heritage and Malaysian experience under Islamic modernity (Salleh, 2022).

Malaysian Champa's living culture and daily practice are thus a blend of cultural memory and Islamic culture that informs their identity. Those who are part of Malay diaspora education, intermarriages with other cultures, and career advances impact behaviors both in the public arena and in homes as they assimilate traditional Malay customs and postmodern Malaysian culture (Abdul-Jabbar, 2022). This dynamic continuity of culture and religion enables the Champa descendants to have an identity other than the one provided through multiculturalism in Malaysia (Sukenti, Ramadhan, Mukhaiyar, & Tambak, 2022).

The constituencies involved in the identity construction among Cham descendants in Malaysia are as follows: they work in an inner dynamic illustrated in Figure 1 below.
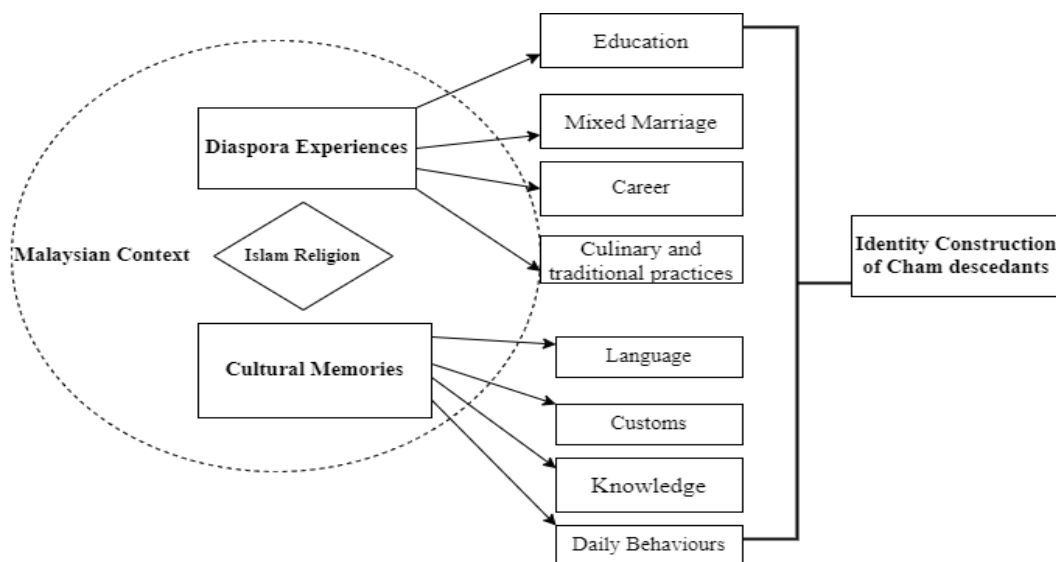
Figure 1: Factors Influencing the Identity Construction of Cham Descendants in the Malaysian Context.
Source: (Author)

Figure 2 depicts the cultural heritage of the Champa descendants in Malaysia, which features a convergence of local Champa tradition with Islamic values. It illustrates how cultural memory and Islamic traditions play a role in forming their identity in the modern Malaysian context (see Figure 2).

The image depicts a traditional Champa community space in Malaysia, featuring a "Surau" (prayer house) as a central symbol of Islamic practice and cultural identity. The architecture, with its simple design and vibrant colors, reflects Islamic values and Champa cultural heritage integration within the modern Malaysian setting. (Refer to Figure 3).

Figure 2: Preserving Heritage: Champa Descendants in Malaysia.
Source: (Author)

Figure 3: A Mosque Built by Cham Descendants in Kelantan.
Source: (Author)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a qualitative research design to analyze the sociocultural aspects of Champa descendants in Kelantan and Selangor in Malaysia. These states are essential, as first and later, some of the Champa minority came to Malaysia after they fled Cambodia in 1975. Kelantan remains a critical base for the Champa people, while others moved to Selangor for better economic opportunities. This research intends to discuss cultural memory, culturally constructed identity, and artistic community from multiple perspectives.

In total, 30 participants were interviewed semi-structurally and observed as participants: all of whom came from different ages, genders, backgrounds, and duration of stay in the community. These participants constitute diverse experiences

within the Champa diaspora. This study also included participant observation conducted between December 2023 and June 2024 in both states, where participant observation was done to observe the daily activity, rituals, and festivals to get close to the realities of the concerned community. Coded interviewing was employed to analyze topical patterns of cultural memory and changes in the identity of the Champa community (Imtiaz, Arif, Nawaz, & Shah, 2024).

Table 2 below shows the admission and exclusion criteria for studying the identity construction of Champa descendants in Malaysia and the diaspora experience and other cultural memories affected by Islam. They underscore the processes underpinning the constitution of participants' identities while erasing others.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Identity as Champa Descendants	Participants who identify as Champa descendants living in Malaysia.	Individuals who do not identify as Champa descendants.
Diaspora Experiences	Includes experiences such as education, mixed marriages, career trajectories, and engagement in culinary and traditional practices.	Participants whose experiences do not reflect diaspora experiences.
Cultural Memory	Cultural memory elements such as language, customs, knowledge, and daily behavior related to Champa heritage.	Individuals whose cultural memory does not reflect Champa heritage.
Religious Influence	Individuals whose identity construction is influenced by the practice and integration of Islam in Malaysia.	Participants who do not practice or are not influenced by Islam in their identity construction.
Active Engagement	Participants actively engage with or reflect on cultural practices and religious influences.	Individuals who are not actively engaged with or do not reflect on the cultural practices or religion.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Respondents.

Demographic Variables	Category	Number of people	Percentage
Gender	Male	17	56.67%
	Female	13	43.33%
Age	20-29	13	43.33%
	30-39	6	20.00%
	40-49	2	6.67%
	50-59	2	6.67%
	60 and above	7	23.33%
Place of residence	Kelantan	23	76.67%
	Selangor	7	23.33%
Religion	Islam	30	100%
Educational Attainment	Primary School	6	20.00%
	Secondary School	18	60.00%
	University or Higher	6	20.00%
Career and Income	Housewife (No income)	4	13.33%
	Students (No income)	2	6.67%
	Employed or retired (Income 1500-5000 MYR, average: 3000 MYR)	24	80.00%
Duration of Residence (years)	20-49 Average: 30)		

Interviews will provide specific information concerning the formal or informal interpretive challenges individual professions encounter, and focus groups will discuss how such stories can be preserved and have significance in the present. Interviews and discussions will be recorded and transcribed, and different themes will be noted. Afterward, the collected data will be analyzed for patterns and variations in perceptions of the same data. Validity will be confirmed through triangulation, whereby the information received from the participants will be compared with other sources, such as electronic journals, books, and scholarly articles. To ensure the practice was ethical, all the participants will sign the informed consent, and confidentiality will be upheld throughout the study. Through this process, some of the ways in which cultural memory and identity are sustained and shifted in the Champa community in Malaysia were identified.

4. DATA COLLECTION

In the context of this study, the research methodology used is qualitative, and for analysis of the collected data, the study will use NVivo software. To create themes in NVivo, import your data (e.g., interview transcripts), and get familiar with them. From this data, then, create nodes to represent potential themes, and link nodes to code relevant sections of the data. Advance in upgrading the themes, merging or telling them if needed. Explore and interpret data with NVivo's analysis tools queries and visualizations. Secondly, memo out your insights, and lastly, export and report on the results. By analyzing interview content combined with the researcher's suitable demographic data, the author discussed that relatively senior people are the major constituents of inheriting the unique culture and tradition of Cham. For instance, those heads of households above 50 still use traditional cooking and weaving equipment, intending to bequeath skills handed down for generations. While the elders no longer have to engage in traditional organized celebratory processes, they still remember and hold the Rija Nagar, the Cham New Year, solemnly. They also use social media to access Champa-related content, such as videos of Champa news. Table 4 below has information about the 30 participants, their gender, age, and place of residence, level of education, occupation, income level, and years of residence.

Table 4: Demographic Profile of Respondents for Data Collection.

Participant	Gender	Age	Place of Residence	Religion	Educational Attainment	Career and Income	Duration of Residence (years)
P1	Female	21	Kelantan	Islam	Primary School	Housewife (No income)	20
P2	Male	25	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 2000 MYR)	25
P3	Female	28	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 3000 MYR)	23
P4	Male	35	Kelantan	Islam	University or Higher	Employed (Income: 3500 MYR)	18
P5	Female	32	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 4000 MYR)	20
P6	Male	33	Selangor	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 2500 MYR)	15
P7	Female	45	Kelantan	Islam	Primary School	Retired (No income)	30
P8	Male	42	Selangor	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 3000 MYR)	22
P9	Female	52	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 2800 MYR)	28
P10	Male	55	Kelantan	Islam	Primary School	Housewife (No income)	35
P11	Male	63	Selangor	Islam	University or Higher	Retired (No income)	40
P12	Female	60	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 2200 MYR)	38
P13	Female	22	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 3000 MYR)	21
P14	Male	35	Kelantan	Islam	Primary School	Student (No income)	18
P15	Female	41	Kelantan	Islam	University or Higher	Employed (Income: 3500 MYR)	25
P16	Male	54	Selangor	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 4000 MYR)	20
P17	Female	60	Kelantan	Islam	Primary School	Employed (Income: 2500 MYR)	30
P18	Male	25	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 2700 MYR)	23
P19	Female	34	Selangor	Islam	University or Higher	Employed (Income: 3500 MYR)	15
P20	Male	43	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Retired (No income)	32
P21	Female	53	Kelantan	Islam	University or Higher	Employed (Income: 4000 MYR)	27
P22	Male	65	Selangor	Islam	Secondary School	Retired (No income)	40
P23	Female	24	Selangor	Islam	Secondary School	Housewife (No income)	15
P24	Male	32	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Employed (Income: 3000 MYR)	22
P25	Female	45	Kelantan	Islam	Primary School	Retired (No income)	30
P26	Male	52	Selangor	Islam	University or Higher	Employed (Income: 3800 MYR)	25
P27	Female	63	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Housewife (No income)	33
P28	Male	28	Kelantan	Islam	University or Higher	Employed (Income: 2900 MYR)	20
P29	Female	31	Selangor	Islam	Primary School	Employed (Income: 2500 MYR)	18
P30	Male	41	Kelantan	Islam	Secondary School	Retired (No income)	28

Table 5: Interview Guidelines.

Section	Questions
1. Personal Background	1. Can you tell me a little about your family background, including your age, place of birth, and how long you've lived in Malaysia?
	2. What is your highest level of education, and how has it influenced your views on Cham identity?
	3. How do you identify yourself culturally (Cham, Malaysian, or a mix of both)?
2. Diaspora Experience	4. What led your family to migrate to Malaysia (economic opportunities, safety, etc.)?
	5. How long has your family been in Malaysia, and how has your experience of being Cham in Malaysia changed over time?
	6. Do you maintain connections with the Cham community abroad (in Cambodia or other countries)?
3. Cultural Memory	7. How do you and your family preserve Cham cultural practices, rituals, and customs?
	8. How significant is the Cham language in your daily life, and have you seen its use change over generations?
	9. How do you view the integration of Islam with Cham traditions and cultural memory?
4. Identity Construction	10. How would you describe your Cham identity as an individual (e.g., influenced by education, career, or community)?
	11. Does your identity differ based on age or experiences (youth vs. older generations)?
	12. How do you balance Cham heritage and the surrounding Malaysian culture daily?
5. Education and Career	13. How has your educational background (primary, secondary, or higher education) influenced your understanding of Cham's identity?
	14. How does your career (whether employed, housewife, or student) affect your engagement with Cham cultural practices?
	15. Can you explain how your income level and occupation (e.g., housewife, employed) impact your ability to engage with and preserve Cham traditions?
6. Social and Community Life	16. How do you engage with fellow Cham descendants in your community (e.g., religious activities, cultural gatherings)?
	17. How does your place of residence (Kelantan or Selangor) shape your connection to Cham identity and traditions?
	18. Given your age, career, or education, do you think there are any challenges in maintaining Cham cultural memory in the community?
7. Impact of Age and Life Stages	19. How has your view of Cham identity evolved as you've aged (compared to younger generations)?
	20. How do you think the Cham community in Malaysia should adapt to preserve its cultural memory for future generations?
8. Community and Future Generations	21. How do you feel about the level of cultural continuity among younger Cham generations in Malaysia (compared to your generation)?
	22. What measures could be taken to ensure Cham culture continues to thrive, considering the influence of your age and family situation?
Conclusion	23. Is there anything else you want to share about how your demographic factors (age, education, and career) influence your Cham identity in Malaysia?

In this study, semi-structured interviews will serve as the primary data collection method, focusing on the identity construction of Champa descendants in Malaysia. Semi structured interviews provided structure and flexibility, and allowed for both depth of exploration into the Champa community's experiences and for the participants to speak out naturally. We designed per client specifications, ensuring that the data was reliable and valid. A qualitative approach was selected in the attempt to obtain deeper results, and thus the number of potential biases was reduced, and they could derive the more subtle details using thematic and narrative analysis. A sample of 30 participants will be identified in Kelantan and Selangor with a wide range of opinions about the population being sampled with respect to gender, age, education, career status and length of residence. It will be possible to get a thorough view of the determinants of cultural memory and identity formation among the Cham people through this. Such participants as P1 (female, 21, housewife, primary education, 20 years of residence) and P3 (female, 28, employed, secondary education, 23 years of residence) will give information about younger generations as they are economically active and have a different education level. The participants such as P7 (female, 45, retired, primary school education, 30 years of residence) and P17 (female, 60, employed, primary school education, 30 years of residence) will provide the views of older generations who have lived most of their lives in Malaysia.

Such participants as P4 (male, 35, employed, university education, 18 years of residence) and P12 (female, 52, employed, secondary school education, 28 years of residence) will provide information about the people with higher education levels and multiple career experience. The study will also make sure it represents Kelantan (76.67%) and Selangor (23.33) to get the needs of the region in cultural practices and

experiences. The study will use these 30 participants to investigate how education, career, and length of residence determine the identity of the Cham descendants in Malaysia and cultural memory. Thematic analysis will extract the main trends and present a subtle perspective on the way the Cham community manages the construction of identity, coping mechanisms, and how culture changes across generations.

The interview protocols used in this study were purposely based to consider the aims of this study and to create identity building and cultural memory among the descendants of Champa in Malaysia. The five principles are attentiveness to cultural practices, memory maintenance, identity creation, multicultural demographic representation, and contextual sensitivity. These guarantee the in-depth insight into the experience of participants and their views.

These guidelines are constructed in consideration of qualitative approach so that, the experiences and views of the participants are fully comprehended. Cultural practices, preservation of memories, and identity formation will be discussed in the interviews keeping enough variety of perspectives of the diverse demographic groups. Table 5 shows the logic of the study interviews where flexibility is accorded in the structure to explore issues that arise during the process of research.

5. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

NVivo is applied to code and identify themes on the basis of data analysis and triangulation is carried out to provide assurance of reliability. This strategy promises to enhance the knowledge of the Cham cultural memory, either theoretically or practically. This thematic critical analysis examines how the experiences experienced by the Cham descendants in

Malaysia interact with cultural memory to shape identity-construction processes among them. Analysis of the data collected will be made based on the themes that determined the impact of age, education, work and socio-economic status of respondents on the Chams engagement. The results were measured through thematic analysis with the help of NVivo and coded data was utilized to seek patterns that might explain the difference based on age, education, work, or socioeconomic status. Triangulation also validated the reliability of the engagements with these themes. The analysis of the data was based on four major themes, namely: (1) Navigating Language and Cultural Identity Across Generations, (2) Culinary and Traditional Practices as a Bridge Between Past and Present, (3) Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices Balancing Integration and Heritage, and (4) Islamic Religious Identity and Cultural Fusion as a Source of Unity. These themes offer a narrow context into examination of Cham cultural conservation and adjustment within Malaysia.

5.1. Transcription and Data Preparation

The first data analysis procedure was the writing of the interview tapes. Each interview was transcribed to the finest detail, including all the participants said and even the gestural dialogues. The transcriptions used were verbatim to enhance the identification of a participant's comments as genuine. As per the study's intention to closely keep participants anonymous, all the identifiers relating to participants were carefully deleted from the transcripts. Each participant was subsequently assigned a unique alias, and the study was conducted to preserve confidentiality.

Too much emphasis should be placed on the fact that the transcripts were arranged correctly and cleaned for further analysis, as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6: Transcription and Data Preparation.

Step	Description
Transcription	Verbatim transcription of the interview recordings, capturing participants' responses and expressions in a textual format.
Removal of Identifying Information	All identifiable information of participants (names, locations, etc.) was removed to ensure confidentiality. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity.
Organization	Transcripts were carefully organized and labeled to facilitate easy access and retrieval during data analysis.

5.2. Coding and Thematic Analysis

The methodology of data analysis was tested and found to represent the process of coding. In accordance with the research questions and objectives, to organize the preliminary coding

framework, the data was coded and interpreted. The secondary analysis of the data recorded was performed by our research team who then chose selections based on the major themes. They were numerically categorized and coded in respect to the themes or concepts in which they were associated.

The reliability and consistency of the coding process were ensured by means of such measures as inter-coder reliability. A subset of the interviews had been coded by multiple coders, differences were resolved with coder triangulation. In this way, the iterative process was a very essential instrument in refining the framework of the codes, and thus, it was possible to produce a complete list of the codes that would reflect the breadth and depth of the experiences of the participants, beyond the specific themes to create such a list. In addition, the thematic analysis method was used to find out the common patterns in the coded data. Themes that were synthesized using these findings were systematically categorized and formed the basis of analysis. These themes are discussed in detail in Table 7 and categorized in which they relate to the coding system that is applied in the thematic analysis of the study. It describes the main themes found in the study, as well as the relevant codes and description. The themes have been attached to the appropriate interview questions and as a result, the data to be gathered in the semi-structured interviews will be well-organized. The table 7 shows a clear picture of how the themes developed out of the primary data and this aids the analysis of the experiences of diaspora, cultural memory, and identity building by Cham descendants in Malaysia.

Table 7: Coding and Thematic Analysis.

Theme	Code(s)	Relevant Interview Questions
Navigating Language and Cultural Identity Across Generations	L1, L2, L3 (Generational perspectives on language retention and community cohesion)	Q8, Q9 (Cham language significance, generational change, and Islamic integration)
Navigating Language and Cultural Identity Across Generations	I1, I2, I3 (Islamic practices and cultural fusion)	Q9 (Integration of Islam with Cham cultural memory)
Culinary and Traditional Practices: A Bridge Between Past and Present	C1, C2, C3 (Traditional food practices, rituals, adaptation to modernity)	Q7 (Preserving Cham customs and food-related rituals)
Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices: Balancing Integration and Cultural Heritage	D1, D2, D3 (Career choices, balancing cultural heritage with integration)	Q14, Q13, Q15 (Career choices, education, and cultural preservation)
Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices: Balancing Integration and Cultural Heritage	D1, D2 (Impact of education on cultural integration and identity)	Q13 (Educational backgrounds influence on Cham identity)
Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices: Balancing Integration and Cultural Heritage	D3 (Impact of mixed marriages on cultural identity)	Q14 (Impact of career choices and family on Cham identity preservation)
Islamic Religious Identity and Cultural Fusion: A Source of Strength and Unity	I1, I2, I3 (Role of Islamic practices in fostering unity and resilience)	Q9 (Islamic identity as a source of unity and strength)
Impact of Age and Life Stages	L1, D3 (Generational perspectives on cultural identity evolution)	Q19 (Changing views of Cham identity across generations)
Impact of Age and Life Stages	D1, D2, D3 (Balancing Cham heritage with Malaysian society's integration)	Q10, Q11, Q15 (Balancing heritage and integration through age, career, and education)
Impact of Age and Life Stages	D3 (Challenges in maintaining Cham cultural memory among generations)	Q18 (Challenges in preserving Cham cultural memory across generations)
Community and Future Generations	L1, L2, L3 (Generational perspectives on Cham identity continuity)	Q21 (Cultural continuity across generations, compared to youth)
Community and Future Generations	D1, D2 (Efforts to maintain Cham cultural memory for future generations)	Q22 (Measures to preserve Cham culture among younger generations)
Community and Future Generations	D3 (Impact of age and career on cultural engagement)	Q22 (Role of demographic factors in cultural continuity and identity)
Conclusion	L1, D3 (How demographic factors influence Cham identity construction)	Q23 (How demographic factors influence Cham identity construction)

6. THEMATIC ANALYSIS RESULTS

After a thorough analysis of the interview in form of a conversation, the researcher found that there were three important themes raised by the participants through their stories and they included (1) Navigating Language and Cultural Identity Across Generations, (2) Culinary and Traditional Practices: A Bridge between Past and Present, (3) Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices: Balancing Integration and Cultural Heritage, (4) Islamic Religious Identity and Cultural Fusion: A Source of Strength and Unity.

Figure 4 illustrates participant responses across four key themes: Language and cultural identity, religious identity and cultural fusion, diaspora experiences, and culinary practices. Each bar segment represents one participant's contribution to these themes of action themes, with the x-axis indicating the frequency or intensity of responses.
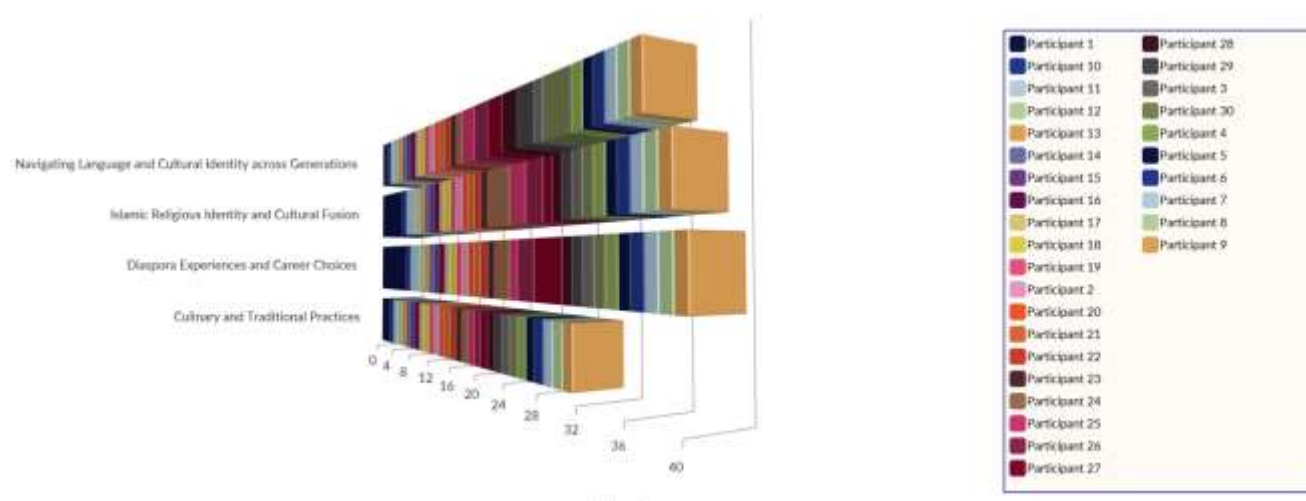
Figure 4: Matrix Coding Query: Distribution of Themes by Participant Responses.

Theme 1: Navigating Language and Cultural Identity across Generations This theme developed around preserving the Cham language and cultural identity among descendants and its difficulties and/or solutions. P13, P18, and P19 mentioned that as most of them do not have a fluent command of Cham or have mixed marriages, they may have some problems in passing down the language to generations, but P7, P10, and P9 stressed the significance of the language. That is why this theme will focus on the conflict between fluent communication in the dominant language (Malay/English) and the maintenance of the Cham language in the multicultural Society, and the function of the language in the unity of the Society and the passing of the memory on the cultural heritage.

The relationship between language and cultural identity and changes in generations is depicted as per figure 5. It brings out how language is also a demonstration and a carrier of culture values, which can shape the perception and enactment of the cultural identity through the generations. The figure, through the intergenerational analysis of language use, helps to understand the difficulties and the possibilities in maintaining cultural heritage and living in the modern society under the impact of its factors.
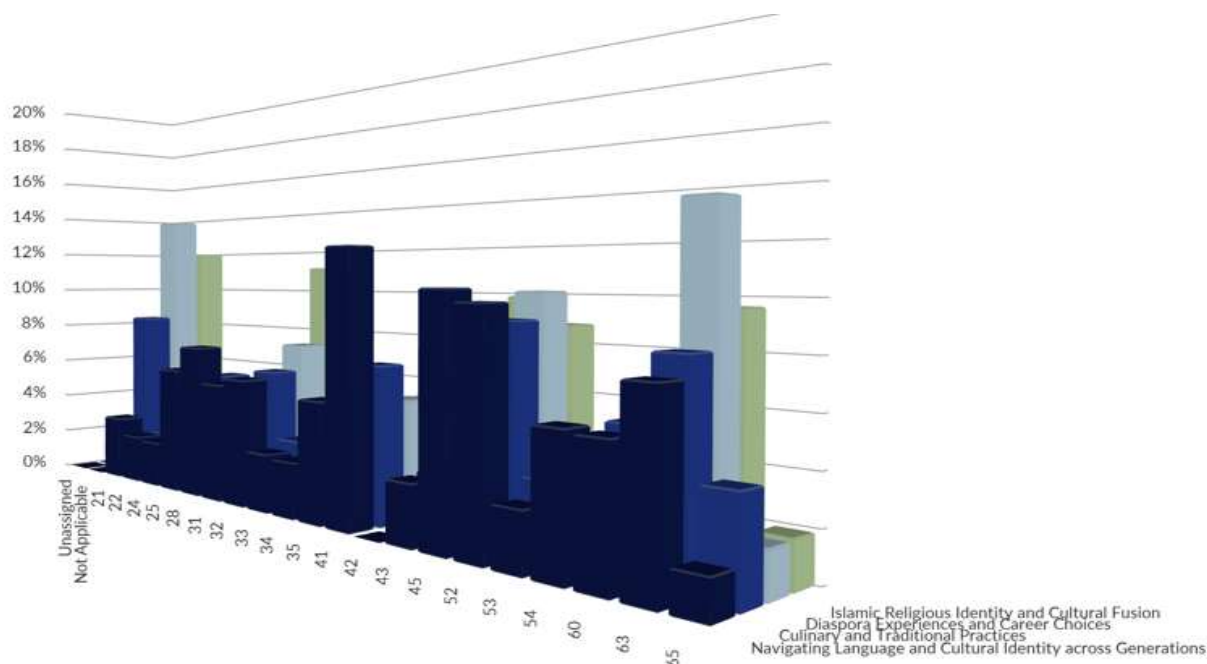
Figure 5: Age-Based Distribution of Cultural and Identity Themes in Coding Analysis.

Theme 2: Culinary and Traditional Practices: A Bridge Between Past and Present This theme explores the way food is used and prepared to form identity and remember culture in the day-to-day life. As an example, P5, P12, P28 and P9 also convey the expression that food can discover the youth and disorient them towards their heritage. The theme will also examine how such practices have changed with the process of integration in the Malaysian society and the blend of the Malay and Cham cultures of the community.

Figure 6 will discuss the use of culinary and traditional practices as an essential connection between the past and the present that helps to maintain cultural identity over generations. It imagines the ways in which such practices are sustained, modified and transmitted across communities, traversing communities as well as adapting to new environments. In addition, it is reinforced in Figure 6 that shows the number of participants by the length of their residence in the country and how long-term exposure to such culinary traditions affects the participants in relation to the cultures they integrate into their identities. These statistics combined illustrate how cultural practice is changing and at the same time remains constant.
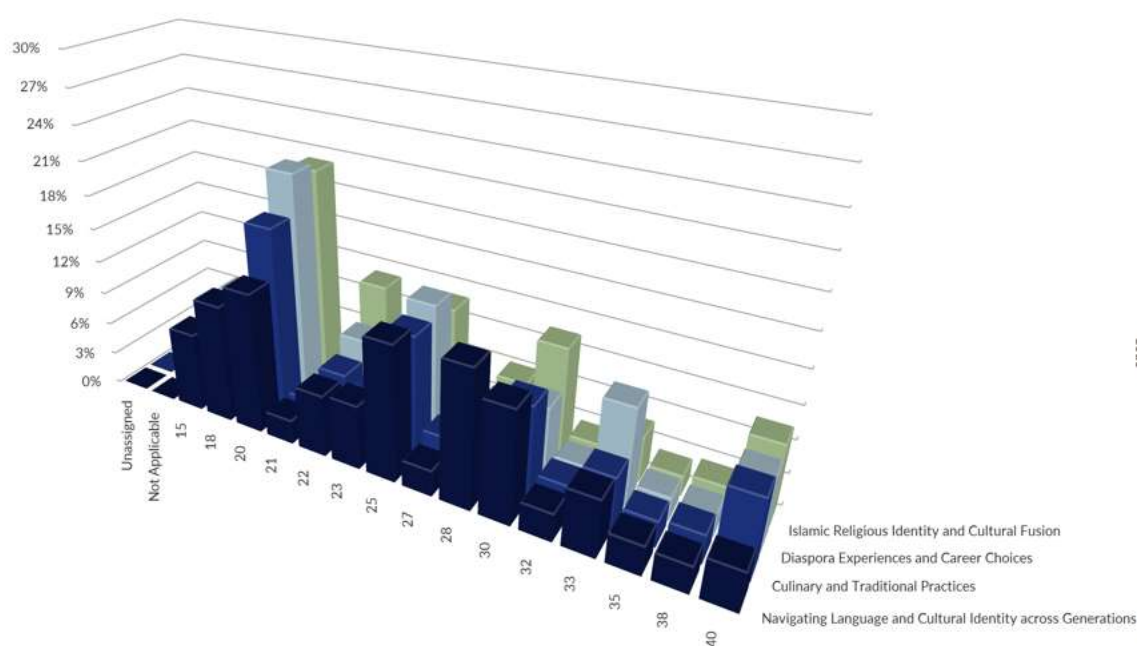

Figure 6: Duration of Residence and Thematic Coding Distribution among Participants.

Theme3: Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices: Balancing Integration and Cultural Heritage: The theme is concerned with the way young and older Chams perform themselves in the Malaysian labor market as citizens of the land and bearers of distinct ethnic identities. Workers possessing various levels of education and work experiences (P2, P4, P16, P6) will also communicate how the occupations influenced their belonging and cultural identity. As an example, the youths can go to school, take one, or multiple courses and compete in the job marketplace as they seek to define themselves as the children of the Cham. The other theme is how administrative categorization and assimilation of the participants into the Malaysian nationhood define/notion of citizenship, displacement, and integration in the region, mixed marriage (P14, P23), and the way in which refugee relationships facilitates the cultural sustainability.

As shown in Figure 7, the relationship between diaspora experiences and career options is rather complicated, as people strive to strike a balance between the need to integrate into societies in which they live and the need to maintain their cultural tradition. It has an aesthetic portrayal of the things that affect the career choices of the diaspora communities based on the ambition of economic development and also the dedication in preserving the cultural connection. These decisions are further contextualized by Figure 7 that displays the distribution of thematic coding categories in terms of career and income categories, demonstrates the intersection of cultural heritage and career paths and shapes the socio-economic placement of diasporas
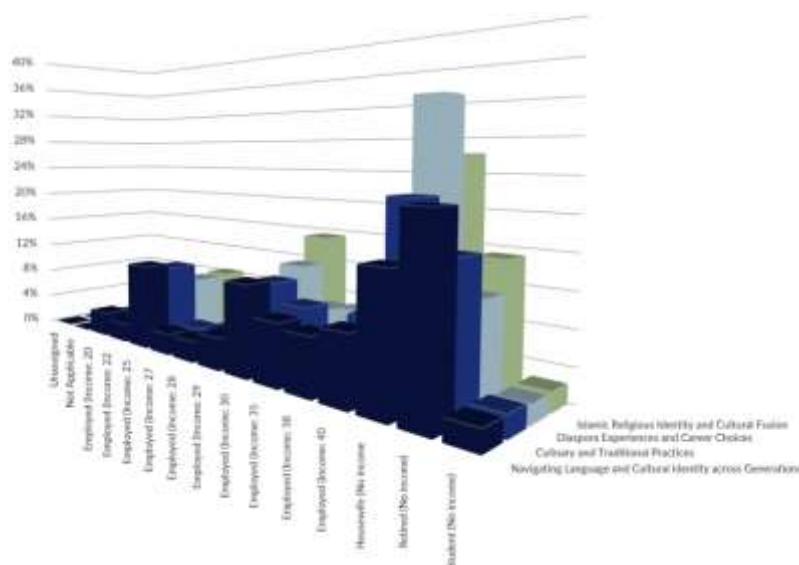
individuals.

Figure 7: Thematic Coding Distribution Based on Career and Income Categories.

Theme 4: Islamic Religious Identity and Cultural Fusion: A Source of Strength and Unity: The paper will elaborate on the role of Islam in identity of Cham descendants, though the special attention will be given to the role of Islam as a means of building religion and culture. The theme will be the prayer, fasting, and organization in establishing a collective Cham ethnicity because all participants will be Muslims (P1 to P30). It will also find out the parallels of procedural Islamic teachings with the ordinary pre-Islamic Cham cultural practice, an activity that does not eradicate but promotes cultural replacement. Indicatively, just like in the case of P5, P12, and P19 discussing the topic, the participants explained how Islamic values defined their behaviors

and culture and how they even united people in both local and Diaspora communities.

Figure 8 also points out that Islamic religious identity, coupled with cultural fusion, is strength and uniting factor to the diaspora communities. It graphically studies the significance of faith in ensuring culture continuity as it adjusts to different social settings. Figure 8 that requires the thematic coding distribution in terms of the residence of the participants gives another understanding of the role of different place of residence to determine the balance between religious identity and cultural integration, which reveals the different levels of cultural fusion among the geographical places.
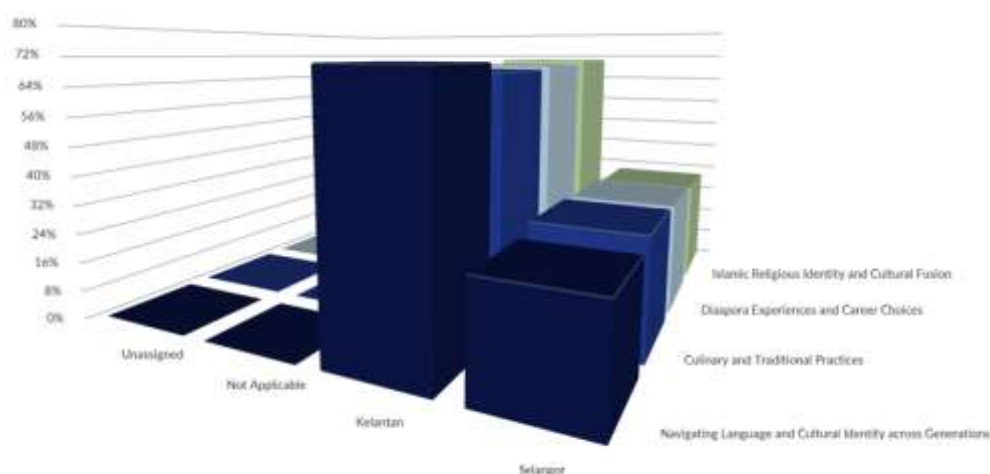

Figure 8: Thematic Coding Distribution Based on People's Place of Residence.

Table 8 presents four categories that were created when researching the experience of the Cham descendants in Malaysia and their cultural memory. These themes are mainly centered around identity construction in language, food, work and spirituality how the struggle between culture and the new life in Malaysia is revealed.

Table 8: Themes and Their Description.

Theme	Short Description
Navigating Language and Cultural Identity Across Generations	This theme explores the challenges of preserving the Cham language and cultural identity across generations. It examines the tension between maintaining the Cham language and adapting to the dominant language in Malaysia. The role language plays in fostering community cohesion and transmitting cultural memory among younger and older generations.
Culinary and Traditional Practices: A Bridge Between Past and Present	Focused on the role of traditional food and practices in linking Cham descendants to their heritage, this theme explores how culinary traditions and daily practices help preserve Cham's identity. It also highlights how these practices adapt and evolve in response to integrating Malay and Cham cultures, fostering continuity and community among the Diaspora.
Diaspora Experiences and Career Choices: Balancing Integration and Cultural Heritage	This theme investigates how Cham descendants navigate their careers in Malaysia while balancing cultural heritage and integration into Malaysian Society. It addresses the impact of education, career choices, and mixed marriages on identity construction and how the diaspora experience influences cultural preservation within a modern, competitive society.
Islamic Religious Identity and Cultural Fusion: A Source of Strength and Unity	Explores how Islam shapes the identity construction of Cham descendants and how Islamic practices interact with traditional Cham customs. This theme discusses the role of religious practices in fostering a unified cultural identity and how Islam helps reconcile traditional Cham practices with contemporary Malaysian Society, promoting cultural fusion and spiritual strength.

7. DISCUSSION

The results of the research are compared to the literature and discussed to determine the similarities and differences. Language is one of the key points of continuity of the culture, which is manifested in the sense of the Cham descendants who attempt to preserve their native language despite the challenges (Zakaria, Legino, & Abdul Aziz, 2022). The literature also recognizes the erosion of language over generations due to the pressure of social integration. Also, one of the findings is that the role of education in cultivating the young generations' social and economic integration through education remains essential for the Cham people, with education as a two-edged sword for the group (Lopes & Hasnan, 2022). The Cham descendants in Malaysia use food and traditional rituals to keep in touch with their cultural roots. While these practices still matter, they are becoming increasingly influenced by modern Malaysian culinary trends, the study found. Such a statement is consistent with the idea of "invention of tradition" (Raihanah & Idrus, 2022). In the sense that the newly invented traditions are a redefinition of the old traditional practices in the new context (at the latest time and space), simultaneously representing adaptation and preservation (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022). Hence, the argument for better cultural integration and reinforcing cultural distinctive features of Cham and Malays makes its way into the study, and it is recommended that future practices embrace both cultures. Based on this study, career choices, especially in the public sphere, have become a way to integrate into the wider Malaysian Society without compromising a cultural link to the Cham legacy (Mustafa, Mukhiar, Jamaludin, & Mohd Jais, 2022). Religious identity is a unifying force in diaspora communities, and this study found that it is through everyday religion that the Cham descendants draw strength in their shared practices. Islamic principles have been blended with traditional Cham practices, creating a cultural hybrid identity that is a source of strength and unity for the community (Mat Nong et al., 2022). Trading activities, especially those based on traditional arts and crafts and Islamic fashion, play an imminent role in the cultural representation of the Cham community. In fact, in Kelantan, these businesses are associated to a great extent with income and the preservation of culture. However, the change in Selangor's occupational structure towards low-skill ones has altered the cultural practices based on arts and craftsmanship (Awang, Ramli, & Rahman, 2022).

The economic activities associated with these changes suggest that a younger generation in urban areas may not practice the tradition like their elders today. This culture shift also reinforces the existing complement between cultural resource management and economic development to sustain the art of craft making (Library, Journals, & Imcra, 2022). Whereas some previous generations insist on the protectiveness of the cultural heritage, new generations, for the most part, tend to aim for a better social standing (Shao et al., 2023). This is a problem of generational culture preservation. In addition, the

support of community leaders, planners, and other teachers on the enhanced cultural sensitivity could help put better opportunities in place for the subsequent representation of the Cham culture in Malaysia (Husein, Nik Abdullah, & Al-Hidabi, 2022). Despite the potential for the Chams to establish themselves anew in Malaysian Society as Malaysians, threats exist to the continuity of the heritage. Consequently, the results of this study enhance the existing literature on diaspora identity and cultural maintenance for Diaspora and Postcolonial studies to further the identified conceptual frameworks in future research for policy promotion and cultural representation for minorities (Azis, Amalina, & Azharotunnafi, 2021).

7.1. Implications

Based on the data of the present research, it is possible to identify the following recommendations regarding the prospects for preserving and integrating the Champa diaspora in Malaysia. However, the Malay integration mustn't overshadow the preservation of Cham heritage. This will allow the younger generation to have simultaneous harmony with both cultures without definite segregation parts. Economic growth should also collaborate on utilizing traditional customs for chams and providing viable means of sustaining them. Besides, there will be opportunities for dialogue between the young and the old, which will help avoid gaps in cultural experience transmission. Lastly, using technology, specifically social media, to adopt and sensitize the youths on culture and embark on activities that will enhance Cham culture in the current Society is an intelligent idea. All these strategies fit into the narratives on Diaspora and cultural imperatives in multicultural societies. The strategies have the objective of achieving the balance between preservation and integration of cultures.

7.2. Limitations

Some attributed informative restrictions deserve to be noted concerning the current study. Moreover, the sample size is relatively small, and the participants have been identified only from Kelantan and Selangor, so we cannot be sure whether our findings are fully generalizable for the Champa diaspora across Malaysia. The comparability of the study results is limited because of how different the experience of Cham descendants in other regions may be, depending on levels of assimilation with local cultures and religious influences. Second, the study is based on surveys, which can cause particular bias since the participants might provide somewhat

positive or negative perceptions of the cultural practices and the attempts at cultural identity preservation. Finally, the research is cross-sectional, and as such, it cannot trace the processes through which cultural identity can document the paths through which samples of the Cham population name their cultural identity at any given point in time, making it difficult to grasp fully how the Cham construct their culture in changing contexts of migration, social pressure and globalization at different ages. Such limitations create the need for additional studies that would give a deeper understanding of the successive processes of identity formation in diaspora populations.

7.3. Suggestions for Future Research

The present study of the identity construction of the Champa descendants may be helpful in future expansions with a prevalence of larger samples in terms of region and age to compare different experiences and perceptions. More longitudinal work would give insight into the developmental process of CI and how it responds to migration pressures, intergenerational social changes, etc. Also, investigating how people apply social media and other digital technology to maintain cultural patterns and standards, as well as language among the young generation, might provide insight into contemporary methods of cultural transference. If a field study of the Champa descendants in Malaysia could be compared and contrasted with other diaspora chronicles. Other research study sources could also help deduce the roles of the local governments, education systems, and religious institutions in integrating and conserving cultural heritage. They would include the following: Finally, it is also suggested that operating with a broader scope of identity variables, including class, gender, and socio-economic status, may offer a more nuanced view of the process.

8. CONCLUSION

They include cultural memory, Champa roots, and general diaspora experience as the main theoretical concepts used to analyze the identity construction processes of Champa descendants in Malaysia. The study shows why cultural memory is essential in constructing and preserving Cham's cultural identity within contexts of displacement and assimilation. However, the Oldsters attracted dissatisfaction about the possible accommodation of Cham culture, unlike the Youngers, who show a decreased preoccupation with traditions through rising integration into Malaysian Society.

Nevertheless, the Champa community is relatively strong, and integration into the Society of Malaysia is observed in terms of education, marriage, and employment. Cuisine has also become important in creating culture, showing fluid cultural transmission. The work also reveals that though integration is essential for social advancement, it contains the danger of demagnification of the community. The opportunity to comprehend the different circumstances that Champa descendants encounter will likely help create the right policies to protect traditions without compromising involvement in Society. This work also adds to the existing literature on Diaspora and cultural memory and helps understand how groups shape the concept of culture during modernization. Therefore, the Champa descendants have forged their identity for several generations due to migration, memory, and functioning tradition in the present context. It provides insights into the state and essence of multiculturalism in Malaysia and enlightenment on keeping up with culture in the global village.

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