

Master's Thesis

**Malaysians' Perceptions and Socio-Cultural Behaviors to the Belt and
Road Initiative – a Perspective From the People-to-People Bond**

by

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“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.”

(Al-Qur'an 49:13)

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iii
Certification Page	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Abstract	ix
List of Tables	x
List of Diagrams	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Objectives	2
1.3 Research Questions	4
1.4 Significance of the study	5
1.5 Theoretical Framework	6
1.6 Structure of the study	13
Chapter 2: The Belt and Road Initiative	15
2.1 Name and Origins	16
2.2 Nature and Intention(s) – Defining the BRI	19
2.3 Coordination Areas	25
Chapter 3: Malaysia and the Belt and Road Initiative	36
3.1 History of Malaysia-China Relations	36
3.2 Malaysia under the Belt and Road Initiative	40

3.2.1	Socio-cultural studies and reception	42
3.2.2	The BRI in Malaysia after GE14	51
Chapter 4:	Methodology	54
4.1	Subjects of the study	54
4.2	Instrument - “Malaysians’ Perceptions and Socio-cultural Behaviors to the Belt and Road Initiative”	54
4.2.1	Demographic Questions.....	55
4.2.2	Questions on Socio-cultural dimension	56
4.2.3	Questions on Political dimension	59
4.3	Research Design and Data Collection	62
4.4	Ethics	64
4.5	Limitations	65
Chapter 5:	Results and Discussions.....	66
6.1	Respondents’ Demographics	66
6.2	Malaysians’ perceptions on the BRI.....	70
5.2.1	Levels of understanding on the BRI	72
5.2.2	Means of understanding to the BRI	74
5.2.3	Willingness of understanding to the BRI.....	79
5.2.4	Perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia.....	81
6.3	Malaysians’ Socio-cultural behaviors to the BRI	83
5.3.1	Language.....	84
5.3.2	Cuisine	90

5.3.3 International tourism.....	94
5.3.4 Overseas education	100
5.3.5 Social media and Instant Messaging.....	103
Chapter 6: Conclusion	104
6.1 Summary of findings	104
6.2 Implications to the BRI and China	105
6.3 Implications to Malaysia.....	112
6.4 Limitations of research and potential studies for future researchers ..	112
References	115
Appendices	126
Questionnaire for Research on “Malaysians’ Perceptions and Socio-cultural Behaviors to the Belt and Road Initiative”	127

Certification Page

I, Yuhan Kuek Bin Kamal Kuek (Student ID 51118613) hereby declare that the contents of this Master's Thesis / Research Report are original and true, and have not been submitted at any other university or educational institution for the award of degree or diploma.

All the information derived from other published or unpublished sources has been cited and acknowledged appropriately.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Yuhan KUEK Bin Kamal Kuek

15th June 2020

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In the end, all rights belong to the God, and the wrongs are from my side.

Abstract

This research looks onto an overlooked dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative, that is the local response towards the initiative from the perspective of people-to-people bond to achieve the research objectives of investigating the perceptions of Malaysians towards the BRI and discovering whether Malaysians' socio-cultural behaviors are likely to be influenced by the BRI, with possible discoveries of patterns as seen by social groups. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to 411 respondents to investigate their perceptions on the BRI and their socio-cultural behaviors in selected dimensions such as media, education, tourism, food, and languages under the BRI's people-to-people bond. The results show that most Malaysians' sentiments were either "neutral" or "unsure", with the ethnic Chinese are more likely to present "positive" attitude towards the BRI. Besides that, significant Chinese presence were only observed in language use and dining preferences with an increasing trend since the introduction of the BRI, while only the ethnic Chinese shows significant consumption of Chinese media. Hence, it can be concluded that the Chinese understanding of Malaysia is yet limited, and vice versa, and there is not much of a true people-to-people bond between the general Chinese and general Malaysians as most exchanges were still on a government-to-government level or similar to the interactions before the BRI.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, China, Malaysia, people-to-people bond, perceptions, socio-cultural behaviors

List of Tables

Table 1 Malaysian Chinese response towards the BRI as seen in Sin Chew Daily	45
Table 2 ACCCIM's survey findings on BRI-related topics	46
Table 3 Malaysians' Perceptions on the impact of China's rise in economy to Malaysia	47
Table 4 Malaysians' Perceptions on the impact of Chinese investments to Malaysia's economy	47
Table 5 Malaysians' awareness on the BRI.....	48
Table 6 Malaysians' opinions on Malaysia's participation in the BRI.....	48
Table 7 Median & Mean household income by household group	56
Table 8 Demographic statistics by state, third quarter 2019.....	63
Table 9 Respondents' Demographic	67
Table 10 Respondents' States of Residence in Regions	69
Table 11 Responses on questions on political dimensions (Perceptions on the Belt and Road Initiative)	70
Table 12 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (news and media).....	75
Table 13 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (language)	85
Table 14 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (cuisine)	90
Table 15 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (overseas tourism)	95
Table 16 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (overseas education)	100
Table 17 Perceptions on China-Malaysia relations by time-period, in percentage	110

List of Diagrams

Diagram 1 MERICS Belt and Road Tracker (Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2018)	
.....	23
Diagram 2 Malaysians' Level of Understanding on the BRI, by ethnicities.....	73
Diagram 3 Malaysians' Level of Understanding on the BRI, by religions	74
Diagram 4 Malaysians' Level of Understanding on the BRI, by regions.....	74
Diagram 5 Malaysians' Means of Understanding to the BRI, by ethnicities	77
Diagram 6 Malaysians' Means of Understanding to the BRI, by religions.....	78
Diagram 7 Malaysians' Means of Understanding to the BRI, by regions	79
Diagram 8 Malaysians' Willingness of Understanding to the BRI, by ethnicities.....	80
Diagram 9 Malaysians' Willingness of Understanding to the BRI, by religions	81
Diagram 10 Malaysians' Willingness of Understanding to the BRI, by regions	81
Diagram 11 Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia, by ethnicities	
.....	82
Diagram 12 Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia, by religions	
.....	83
Diagram 13 Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia, by regions	
.....	83
Diagram 14 Malaysians' willingness to learn a new language, by ethnicities	87
Diagram 15 Malaysians' Top 3 most wanted-to-learn languages, by ethnicities.....	88
Diagram 16 Malaysian's most wanted-to-learn language, by ethnicities.....	88
Diagram 17 Malaysians' frequency of using Mandarin Chinese in communications, by ethnicities	89

Diagram 18 Malaysians’ first attempt of using Mandarin Chinese in communications, by ethnicities	89
Diagram 19 Malaysians’ Top 3 most preferred cuisine, by ethnicities	91
Diagram 20 Malaysians’ most preferred type of cuisine, by ethnicities	92
Diagram 21 Malaysians’ most recent dining experience at a Mainland Chinese restaurant in Malaysia, by ethnicities	93
Diagram 22 Malaysians’ frequency of dining in a Mainland Chinese restaurant in Malaysia, by ethnicities	93
Diagram 23 Malaysians’ first attempt of dining in a Mainland Chinese restaurant in Malaysia, by ethnicities	94
Diagram 24 Malaysians’ willingness to travel abroad, by ethnicities	97
Diagram 25 Malaysians’ Top 3 preferred international destinations for tourism, by ethnicities	97
Diagram 26 Malaysians’ most preferred international destination for tourism, by ethnicities	98
Diagram 27 Malaysians’ most recent travel experience to Mainland China, by ethnicities	98
Diagram 28 Malaysians’ frequency of traveling to Mainland China, by ethnicities	99
Diagram 29 Malaysians’ first attempt of traveling to Mainland China, by ethnicities ..	99
Diagram 30 Malaysians’ Top 3 international destination for education, by ethnicities	102
Diagram 31 Malaysians’ most preferred international destination for education, by ethnicities	102
Diagram 32 Penetration of social media and instant messaging platforms among Malaysians, by ethnicities.....	103
Diagram 33 Perceptions on China-Malaysia relations by time period	110

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Under the Second Najib Administration, Malaysia has become an active player on the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, including the revival of Malacca Port, as it was once the emporium of trade in the 15th century, having served as a depot for *Zheng He's* (*Cheng Ho*) fleet for its seven voyages (Lim, 2018; Liu & Lim, 2018). However, on the 10th of May 2018, Najib's ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional* or BN (National Front), has been replaced by the opposition coalition, *Pakatan Harapan* or PH (Alliance of Hope), through the 14th General Election, which was the first party alteration in Malaysian history.

Partial effect of the election is the cancellation of three megaprojects amounted to US\$23 billion which were part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that was announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013 as the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Berger, 2018). One of the reasons of such cancellations was due to the project's involvement in Najib's several corruption scandals, some to the extent that the state's sovereignty was being questioned due to certain projects are selling off strategic territories including a former air force base, to the Chinese investors (Beech, 2018). As a result, such incident, together with other factors, were believed to have led to the failure of the then government, to win the election. However, just little more than eight months after the cancellation, the prime minister who ordered the cancellation accepted the invitation to attend the Second Belt and Road Forum, in which, the previously canceled projects are revived under revisions, and explicit statements supporting the initiative were expressed (Lo, 2019).

Against this backdrop, it is necessary and interesting to see how Malaysians perceive the initiative. In other words, do Malaysians really thought that previous administration's gesture of 'aggressively' participating in the initiative is harmful to the country, putting aside factors such as corruption scandals, leadership failures, or inappropriate administration. Also, given the recent development of the relations between Malaysia and China, especially the revival and revision of the previously canceled projects, to what extent are Malaysians influenced by the projects under the initiative and to what extent Malaysians are in support or against of the initiative. Given that Malaysians' perceptions towards a project of such scale will not only influence domestic politics especially through elections, but it also falls under the people-to-people bond, one of the five key cooperation areas under the BRI, which is an understudied area of the initiative.

Besides that, in contrary to most of the studies in the field of International Relations which focuses more on security, economy, or foreign policies, this study looks onto a largely untouched area of socio-cultural elements or socio-cultural influences of IR onto the perceptions and behaviors of a country's citizens, in this case, a host country's citizens' perceptions and behaviors towards the introduction of projects, advertisements, news, and signages under the brand of "Belt and Road Initiative".

1.2 Research Objectives

The introduction of the BRI has gained the attention from scholars of many fields, many questioned its intention and nature, while some dissect it from economics and legal perspectives. This main purpose of this research is to fill in the gap left by previous

researchers, while contributing to future researchers by fulfilling the following research objectives (RO):

RO 1: To investigate the perceptions of Malaysians towards the BRI, and its differences by ethnicities, beliefs, and locations.

Contrary to other countries, the gaps among Malaysians' ethnicities, beliefs, and their residing states, be it economic, socio-cultural, or political, are somehow significant, depending on the scenario or topic of discussion. This is largely due to the differences in their socialization process, lifestyles, and networks of personal relationships. In this case, BRI, as seen as a concept originated from China, can be considered as an extension or a brand of Malaysia's and Malaysians' relationship with China, in which, some Malaysians are already very familiar to due to personal, historical, or family links with China (such as the ethnic Chinese), while some are not due to the absence of such links (such as the ethnic Malays, Indians, or the indigenous people of *Sabah* and *Sarawak*). Hence, there could be a difference in perceptions among these groups, with the ethnic Chinese are assumed to be relatively in favor of the BRI, while the others might pose a relatively neutral or even are against the BRI especially the rightists and ethno-nationalists in cases discussed by Malhi (2018). As a result, the change in those dynamics will show Malaysians' extent of support to the BRI and the extent of BRI's influence on Malaysians.

RO 2: To discover whether Malaysians' socio-cultural behaviors are likely to be influenced by the BRI, and its differences by ethnicities, beliefs, and locations.

As described above, originally, prior to the introduction of the BRI, Malaysians may have had different kinds of preferences, lifestyle, and in this case, socio-

cultural behaviors as seen in dimensions such as tourism, education, media, food, and languages. For example, if a Malaysian who never had the intention to learn Mandarin Chinese, never dine in a restaurant that has links with China or the BRI, or never intend to travel to or study in China, suddenly or eventually, intentionally or unintentionally, starts to learn Mandarin Chinese, eat in the China or BRI-linked restaurant, or travels to China for leisure or education, especially after the BRI was launched, shows at least a change in lifestyle and culture, through his or her socio-cultural behaviors, which in turn draws the possible link to the BRI. These are some of the life aspects that can be influenced by the BRI, and its result might sustain for a time at least longer than the time needed to change the ruling coalition or the government's stance on the relationship with China and/or the BRI, or might not even sustain if the recipient, in this case, Malaysians, cannot get accustomed to changes to their original socio-cultural behaviors. As a result, the changes in those behaviors will directly or indirectly affect the level of acceptance and popularity of Chinese products in Malaysia.

1.3 Research Questions

To fulfill the objectives above, the following research questions and sub-research questions are formulated:

MRQ 1: How do Malaysians perceive the BRI? Are there any differences in perceptions of the BRI among ethnicity, religion, or state of residence?

MRQ 2: To what extent are Malaysians' socio-cultural behaviors likely to be influenced by the BRI?

Sub-RQ 2a: For Malaysians who are not able to converse in Mandarin Chinese, did Mandarin Chinese become their most preferred language to learn?

Sub-RQ 2b: What is Malaysians' most preferred type of cuisine?

Sub-RQ 2c: Where is Malaysians' most preferred destination of overseas travel?

Sub-RQ 2d: Where is Malaysians' most preferred destination of overseas education?

Sub-RQ 2e: What is Malaysians' most preferred social media or instant messaging platform?

1.4 Significance of the study

Malaysia is chosen as the case study in this research due to three reasons. First, are the historical and current ties with China, especially the existence of Chinese diaspora that has well preserved Chinese language and dialects, values, cultures, and beliefs, among all Chinese diaspora, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3. Second, is due to the geographical location Malaysia is located at, especially the strategic importance of Malacca strait as it is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world; and especially for China, as more than half of its oil import were shipped through this narrow strait (Kong, 2016). Finally, is Malaysia's multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-faith characteristics. This diverse nature provides different perspectives and voices on a similar event, in which researchers can identify its possible pattern according to its groupings, which will also be reviewed in Chapter 3.

Researchers such as Chen (2017), Tim (2016), Zhang (2018), and Zhou Xingtai (2017) have called for attention to the people-to-people bond aspect of the BRI, which highlights how understudied this aspect is. Other researchers such as Mayer and Zhang (2020) also recommended future researchers to focus on local responses to the BRI, which is exactly the focus of this research. Hence, this paper could be a timely contribution to scholars interested in exploring this area.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Constructing a theoretical framework has never been easy, especially with the addition of the BRI. BRI is a product born out of the mainstream theories within the traditional IR research cultures. Hence, there is the possibility of being difficult to be perceived by using the ‘holy trinity’ of IR theories, that are, realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Researchers such as Chen (2011) calls for a “political re-imagination that recognizes, understands and encourages differences, and fosters alternative ontological possibilities of social and political spaces for interactions within and between political communities at all levels”; while Sun (2019) argues that Asia’s history and culture cannot be effectively processed by Western theories, if the theories are not localized, relativized, and passed the test of time (Sun G. , 2019). Not only that, Miller and Saltzman (2016) even constructed a “novel conceptual classification” in recognition to the failure of the ‘holy trinity’ in explaining the significant changes in post-Cold War security order.

Also, Betts (2010) argued in his review of the three significant writings, namely *The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel P. Huntington, and *The Tragedy of Great*

Power Politics by John J. Mearsheimer, that the three bold visions proposed by these scholars might not predicts reliably some developments, in his case, in the world of 2010. However, Nau (2011), on the other hand, believes that there are no alternatives to “isms” in his criticism of another scholar, David Lake’s (2011) paper, in the same issue of the journal, which is just seven pages apart, who argued that “isms” impedes academic understanding and progress as it sectorized the academia into what he believed to be “sects”.

That said, the popular debate often includes BRI as a component of the rise of China since the 90s. As a result, theories for explaining the rise of China are often used for explaining the introduction of BRI as well. As early as 1998, realists’ attention on the China’s rise often stressed on their gains in economic and military power might cause China to be more ambitious to the extent of challenging the US’s position in the global balance of power (Callahan, 2016, p. 227; Walt, 1998, p. 30; Zhou & Esteban, 2018, p. 488). Some other scholars such as Michael Pillsbury, Martin Jacques, Michael Swaine, and David Shambaugh echoed such opinions (Mazarr, Heath, & Cevallos, 2018). On the other hand, providing the benefit that China enjoys by integrating with global markets, will the liberal democratic principle be somehow forcefully or willingly accepted by China (Walt, 1998)? As such will adjust the behavior as assumed by the realists. If accepted as what the liberal institutionalists argue, the liberal capitalist international order will only be strengthened instead of being replaced (Callahan, 2016). It is also too early to presume that China’s challenge to international order will be conflictual, although it is almost certain that China will challenge, its approach and which domains of the international order it chooses to challenge remain an understudied topic (Feng & He, 2017).

The BRI, against that backdrop, was identified by Han and Paul (2020) in their study of the balance of power politics as one of the two important factors whether hard balancing of power will occur by or against China, together with the factor of economic dependence built by China with potential power balancers such as the US, Japan, and India. They further suggested that the BRI is a tool intentionally adopted by China to prevent both hard and soft power balancing from other states. Besides that, one of the pioneers that first discussed the BRI under IR theories, William A. Callahan, adopted a constructivist approach in his paper, after reviewing the arguments by offensive realists and liberal institutionalists. He argues that the Chinese elites', particularly President Xi's idea of international politics within domestic politics should be taken more seriously as he believed that a constructivist 'identity dilemma' is more relevant to the discussion, that is, how Chinese elites identify itself and its roles in the current international order (Callahan, 2016). Another scholar, Feng Zhang (2019), specifically studied the influence of "Xi Jinping doctrine" on China's perspectives on international relations, by analyzing Xi's statements, documents, and orders. In which, the results showed that China's international relations are built upon the concepts of "national rejuvenation", "global community", and "Chinese contribution"; while finding its roots back to the imperial Chinese leaders (Zhang F. , 2019, pp. 22-23).

There are also scholars like Zhou and Esteban (2018) who first sees BRI as a tool for regional multilateral cooperation and then analyzed regional multilateralism from all three conventional IR theories of neorealism, neoliberalism, and constructivism, which are linked to the strategies of balance of power, transforming institutions, and promoting new values, ideas, and norms respectively.

Meanwhile, Joseph S. Nye's theories of hard and soft power were also widely used by scholars such as Lipovac (2018) and Yağcı (2018) in the discussion of the BRI. While Lipovac (2018) discussed using both hard and soft power, Yağcı (2018) focuses particularly on the concept of soft power. Though he admitted that hard power was also utilized by China to ensure the BRI's effectiveness, he argues that soft power might be the real factor that has more influence on the international system's political and security dimensions. Hence, he also referred to Joseph S. Nye's concept of "smart power" which utilizes the combination of both soft and hard power, which is often the case in the use of power (Nye, as cited in Yağcı, 2018). However, although he included some principles and values that China (especially President Xi and his team) proposed in their speeches and documents for the BRI as some characteristics of soft power, he did not really discuss on the forms of the soft power and how influential it is in influencing other states, especially the BRI member states other than stating how quickly the number of participating states grew and how swiftly the number of projects increased.

Other researchers such as Dahlia Patricia Sterling (2018) and Tim Winter (2016), however, identified characteristics of culture and cultural diplomacy as a soft power instrument. In which, Chinese propaganda of the BRI as seen in media has 'penetrated' to become bedtime stories for American children (Sterling, 2018, p. 110), the number of people learning Mandarin Chinese has increased among the BRI nations (Wong, as cited in Sterling, 2018, p. 111), and branches of Chinese university being opened in countries such as Malaysia (Liu & Sukumaran, as cited in Sterling, 2018, pp. 111-112). On the other hand, Tim Winter (2016) first argues that the "people-to-people" dimension, one of the BRI's "cooperation areas" has not been discussed in scholarly works, especially

outside China. Even if discussed, it was only seen as a component of China's soft power, while leaving its historical and cultural aspects unnoticed. As a result, he believed that through heritage diplomacy, history and memories of civilizations will play a more important role in influencing economic activities, infrastructures, and international security (Winter, 2016). In fact, Christian Reus-Smit (2019) even critically argued that IR theories "do not understand culture", as he states that culture has no or little status within conventional IR theory, and even if it does, it was largely based on "anthropologists and sociologists'" perspectives of culture "between the 1930s and 1950s", although what IR scholars always discussed is actually, culture. His arguments can be summarized as – the common practice within IR scholarship often neglects the view of cultures are diverse and heterogeneous, often conflicting and challenging, while are deeply interrelated to one another, what is in place instead is the vision of a world order that all states and nations will come under a "unified culture", which he believes is not possible (Reus-Smit, 2019).

Other than the conventional debates on the BRI, interestingly, an increasing trend of debates from unconventional perspectives can be identified, especially from scholars who acknowledge that the rise of China will bring about a rise of China International Relations Theories such as Shih and Huang's (2020) study on Role Relation from the case of Sino-US rivalry through Game of *Weiqi* (围棋) – often translated as the game of "Go"; and Ajzenhamer's (2018) study on the reasons behind the absence of authentic "Eastern" IR theories and if China could propose its own IR theories outside of conventional "Western" theoretical frameworks by dissecting the BRI's content – whether it contains the elements that may serve as the foundation for future Chinese IR theory. The core arguments that can be seen from Shih and Huang's use of *Weiqi* theories can be

summarized as below: in *Wei qi*, the relations between the players (the states) are fluid as opposed to the conventional IR theories assumption of states having fixed identities; *Wei qi* can reproduce Chinese philosophies of *guanxi* (关系), long-term orientation, *yin-yang* (阴阳), and the importance of *shi* (势); *Wei qi*'s strategies are/were used in "Chinese guerrilla warfare, the Cold War, the South China Sea issue, and the BRI" (Shih & Huang, 2020, p. 3).

Besides that, an interesting study by Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso (2018) discussed the Silk Roads from a more relational ontology perspective and the concept of entanglement through the use of language. They argued that existing IR theories often depends on individualist ontology which only focuses on particular states' interest, which is less likely to accommodate the possibilities of explaining different world orders, providing that the BRI might be capable of altering the world's power distributions (Fierke & Antonio-Alfonso, 2018).

The above examples are some of the analyses on the BRI from the perspectives of international order, IR theories, or Sino-US relationships, which are mostly from macro perspectives, and are relatively more significant and impactful. Nevertheless, there are also studies conducted on a relatively micro level, that is, the influence of the BRI on certain selected cases, that are usually a region or multiple countries such as the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Chen, Kiruppalini, & Chen, 2018; Gong, 2019; Klemensits, 2018; Oehler-Şincai, 2019), the BRICS (Thussu, 2018), Central Asia (Kohli, 2018), Central-Eastern Europe (Jakimów, 2019), the European Union (EU) (Ghiassy, Su, & Saalman, 2018), the Middle East (Sevilla, 2018), or South Asia (Chung, 2018); or a country such as Japan (Evron, 2018), Malaysia (Liu & Lim, 2018), Nepal

(Bhattarai & Ali Khan, 2020), Indonesia (Rahman, 2019), and Singapore (Ba, 2019), just to name a few.

Among the above mentions, what is particularly interesting to further explain, especially to this paper, is Bhattarai and Ali Khan's (2020) study on Nepal ties with China from the dimension of people-to-people by applying constructivist theories. Their study focuses on whether the states' interests in Nepal-China relations have been able to be influenced by their people-to-people relations or otherwise, in which, they concluded that the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China are mostly driven by the interests' of the two governments, instead of the intuitive dynamics of bilateral relations; providing the example of the increasing number of Confucius Institutes in Nepal (which was meant to reduce the language barrier as it is an essential tool in the people-to-people relations) that is not driven by people-to-people relations, but by states' interests instead (Bhattarai & Ali Khan, 2020).

However, in contrast to Nepal, Malaysia has a much more conducive environment for people-to-people relations with China with advantages such as the significant number of Chinese-speaking citizens, the familiarity with Chinese culture and people, or the favorable opinions on China as 78% of the respondents provided such response in Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey's latest available data in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2020), which is often cited by multiple scholars (Phoon, 2017). Hence, it will be interesting to see the extent of people-to-people relations in the case of Malaysia-China relations with the introduction of the BRI.

By referring to the theories that were being discussed in the above literature, it seems that this study's research objectives and research questions are best answered by applying constructivists ideas and the concept of soft power, especially from the perspective of cultural diplomacy.

1.6 Structure of the study

This paper will be organized in six chapters, including the first chapter – Introduction, that introduces briefly the background of this study that leads to the formulation of research objectives and research questions, and the appropriate selection of theories that this paper adopted upon a brief review of popular theories in the discussion of the BRI.

Chapter 2 will be dedicated to a brief introduction of the BRI in mainly three sections that will review the ontology and epistemology of the BRI, that is, how the BRI came into formation and how the BRI is understood and being understood by researchers. Finally, a section will be allocated to the introduction of the main cooperation priorities of the BRI that includes the people-to-people bond – the focus of this study.

Chapter 3 will discuss the BRI under the backdrop of Malaysia-China relations by reviewing studies related to the discussion of the BRI in Malaysian context or from Malaysia's perspective. The methodology adopted in this paper will be then introduced in Chapter 4 that outlines the subjects of the study and the instrument adopted in the methodology, followed by the presentation and discussion of results in Chapter 5.

Finally, the paper will conclude with some implications drawn from the results for the BRI, for China, and for Malaysia, together with the limitations of the research and potentials for future researches.

Chapter 2: The Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, refers to two ambitious plan, namely, the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” that Chinese President Xi Jinping has announced separately in September 2013 at Kazakhstan and October 2013 at Indonesia (Huang, 2016).

Other than the original speeches by President Xi, the first official document published in English that outlines the background, principles, framework, cooperation priorities and mechanisms, together with China’s actions and approaches were published by the NDRC, MoFA, and MoC in March 2015. The document entitled *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road* begin by briefly introducing the idea behind the BRI, which can be linked to trade and cultural activities on the Eurasian plate two millennia ago. It is said that the spirit that upholds the principles and values of “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”, coined as the “Silk Road Spirit”, that is being carried down generations after generations, is going to be jointly constructed into a “systematic project” – the Belt and Road Initiative, to “instill vigor and vitality into the ancient Silk Road”, and “connect Asian, European, and African countries more closely” by “promoting the orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets; encouraging the countries along the Belt and Road to achieve economic policy coordination and carry out broader and more in-depth regional cooperation of higher standards; and jointly creating an open, inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all” (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015b).

Originally, the “Silk Road Economic Belt” starts from Xi’an (西安) in the Shaanxi (陕西) Province and extends westwards to Central Asia, Russia, and the Baltic. The “Belt” also includes two branches which connect China with the Mediterranean Sea through the Persian Gulf, and with the Indian Ocean, via South and Southeast Asia. The “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” begins from the ancient port of Quanzhou (泉州) in the Fujian (福建) Province and ends at Europe through the maritime route linking involved countries at the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and the Mediterranean Sea (Fan, 2018). The Belt and Road Initiative spans over an area encompassing 4.4 billion people and the cumulative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) totals around US\$ 21 trillion (Lu, Rohr, Hafner, & Knack, 2018). Up until the end of October 2019, 197 cooperation documents that fall under the category of policy coordination were signed between China and 137 countries and 30 international organizations (Xinhua News Agency, 2019).

2.1 Name and Origins

Originally, even now, many scholars, especially pro-Chinese, prefer to translate or refer the initiative as “One Belt, One Road”. Linguistically, it makes no mistake, as the Chinese acronym of the initiative is named 一带一路 (*Yi Dai Yi Lu*), and a direct translation would produce the above result. While the official Chinese full name of the initiative 丝绸之路经济带和二十一世纪海上丝绸之路 (*Sichouzhilu Jingjidai He Ershiyishiji Haishang Sichouzhilu*) faces little discrepancies in translation, the translation of its short-form raises controversies as critics questions its “oneness” might bring the meaning of exclusiveness (Smith, 2018). To the extent that *The Economist* published an article entitled “Our Bulldozers, Our Rules” (Lin W. , 2019). As a result, in September 2015, the

NDRC, MoFA, and MoC, produced a guideline that is specific to the bilingual translation of key terms under the initiative, it stipulates that “丝绸之路经济带和二十一世纪海上丝绸之路” is to be translated as “the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road”; “一带一路” as “the Belt and Road” or “B&R”; the word “倡议” (*Changyi*) can only be translated as a singular “initiative”, and cannot be represented in plural forms, or “strategy”, “project”, “program”, or “agenda” (Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017a). The forbidding of especially the term “strategy” and promotion of the term “initiative” was proposed by Center for China and Globalization, a think tank composed of scholars graduated from the USA and Europe, to reduce suspicion and decrease resistance while advancing the Center’s own agenda, that is to integrate closer with the West (He B. , 2019).

However, it is almost agreed that the first person who coined the word “Silk Road” was accredited to the German historical geographer, Ferdinand von Richthofen who traveled to China between 1868 to 1872, and named the transcontinental trade and communication routes, *Seidenstrasse*, largely due to ancient Greeks recording of the road leading to *Seres* or *Serica* (country of silk) in between 114 BC to 127 AD (Dong, 2019b; Sidaway & Woon, 2017, p. 596). This time period overlaps with the records of the earliest official expedition originated from China to the west, that was known as *Zhang Qian’s* mission to the Western Regions (张骞出使西域), sent by Emperor *Wu* of Western Han (汉武帝), which was started in 138 BC and ended in 126 BC (Cau, 2018; Dong, 2019a; Su, 2017, p. 113). His mission, however, was neither to promote an initiative such as the BRI nor was it to formalize trade and communication routes that link to China, but to form alliances with nomadic tribes such as the Greater *Yuezhi* or *Rouzhi* (月氏) and *Wusun* (乌孙) to counter the also nomadic *Xiongnu* (匈奴) Empire, which was a major

threat to Western Han Empire since its founding (Dong, 2019a). Although he failed his mission to create the alliance, his mission stimulated the increase in trade, communication, and exchanges between China and the outside world on a network that is now known as “Silk Road” (Hu J. , 2017). As a result, *Zhang Qian’s* mission to the Western Regions has an important historical position in the discussion of Chinese diplomatic history, and the “Silk Road”, especially the overland “Silk Road”, to the extent that he was named as the “first person who traveled from China to the world”, as he broadens Chinese understanding and knowledge about the world, especially the information on the then equally influential Hellenistic culture (Yang J. , 2007).

However, another figure who also has the equal status in the Maritime Silk Road, if not higher in terms of expedition’s scale of a fleet of 318 vessels and a crew of 28000 personnel, which is more known to the world, and is more relevant to the case of Malaysia, is *Zheng He’s* Voyages to the Western oceans during the Ming Dynasty (Fu, 2017, p. 66). Similar to *Zhang Qian’s* mission in the Overland Silk Road, *Zheng He’s* expedition was built on top of previous unofficial exchanges and encounters between China and the outside world (Dong, 2019a, p. 61). The difference is *Zhang Qian’s* was marked as the official opening of the Overland Silk Road (Dong, 2019d, pp. 66-67), but *Zheng He’s* was “the peak but also the last” Chinese official event in the Maritime Silk Road (Liu, as cited in Dong, 2019c, p. 73).

Besides these two significant but short-lived official events, we can hardly find other events of equal significance or status in Chinese history. Hence, we can at least say that the ancient Silk Road was neither an intended creation of the Chinese courts nor was it a Chinese product. Instead, the ancient Silk Road was more of a collective creation

accumulated through times of ‘undocumented’, ‘insignificant’ individuals that have inhabited the Eurasian plate. Just as what Peter Frankopan has suggested in his writings such as *The Silk Roads* and *The New Silk Roads*, the Silk Road can be defined as “the ways in which people, cultures and continents were woven together” that has helped different elements, ideas, ideologies, goods, and services spread in the past which directly or indirectly influenced the rise and fall of empires (Frankopan, 2018, p. 2).

2.2 Nature and Intention(s) – Defining the BRI

Different from what the ancient Silk Road was, the BRI is indeed an intended proposal from the Chinese government, although the Chinese leaders claim that the initiative *is* a revival of, and is neither an analogy to nor a metaphor of the ancient Silk Road. Hence, it would be difficult, perhaps even for the proposers, to clarify, whether the BRI that they propose is a continuation of the ancient Silk Road as the BRI develops a context, creates a story, and assign members roles in a scenario which would otherwise be left operating without clear structure or boundaries (Fierke & Antonio-Alfonso, 2018).

However, interestingly, a study by Zhang and Zhou (2016) identified some similarities in the geopolitical context, national power, selection of domestic and foreign policies, leaders’ personalities, and the respective external challenges faced in the three scenarios of aforementioned *Zhang Qian’s* mission to the Western Regions, *Zheng He’s* voyages to the Western oceans, and the BRI. For example, in terms of the Overland Silk Road, the time gap between Western Han Dynasty’s establishment (202 BC) and the commencement of *Zhang Qian’s* mission to the Western Regions (138 BC) was 64 years. ‘Coincidentally’, the number of years between the People’s Republic of China’s

establishment (1949) and the launching of the Silk Road Economic Belt (2013) is also 64 years. Similarly, on the Maritime Silk Road, the time gap between Ming Dynasty's establishment (1368) and *Zheng He's* first voyage to the Western oceans (1405) was 37 years; and the number of years between the end of Cultural Revolution (1976) and the introduction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is also 37 years. Such particular timings also reflect the relative sufficiency in national power especially in terms of economic and military capabilities in the respective historical periods (Zhang & Zhou, 2016, p. 34).

Such ambiguity and lack of clarity has already attracted criticizing comments and raises questions on the BRI's intentions such as – “What security risks do China's investments in sensitive infrastructure pose?”, “How will the BRI amplify the growing global footprint of the Chinese military?”, or “How will host countries service the large amount of new debt they are assuming?”, just to name a few (Smith, 2018, p. 4). Similarly, Xing (2019) also listed out some of the Western leaders' concerns on the initiative, especially with the availability of hidden agenda under the initiative. Not only for Western leaders, leaders of developing nations, especially former colonies, also raised the question of whether this initiative will be another attempt of colonialism (Xing, 2019, p. 7). Nonetheless, Cheng's (2016) review of the initiative's real objectives listed some of the popular assumptions, such as:

1. To dominate world markets by liberating emerging and developing markets to solve China's capacity surplus, insufficiency in domestic demand, and to sustain and further expand developed economies' exports;

2. To secure resources supplies by directly investing in especially countries with natural resources, which is a continuation of the “going global” or “going out” policy since 2002;
3. To internationalize Chinese *Yuan Renminbi* (RMB);
4. To enhance relations and to increase Chinese popularity among partner countries;
5. To rival the US’ “Pivot to Asia” policy that formerly includes the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free-trade agreement that was announced during the Obama Administration (Cheng L. K., 2016, p. 310).

Based on such understandings, the BRI has been defined as an “international development program spearheaded by China” (Wang H. , 2019, p. 30), “a strategy that enhance trade and investment connectivity that also serves as a remedy for China’s economic and security challenges” (Tekdal, 2018, p. 373), “a grand global strategy for achieving the ‘Chinese Dream’” (Aoyama, 2016, p. 3), “a smart power strategy which aims to wrap the entire world” (Brînză, 2018), “far-reaching and long-term development strategy to increase connectivity between countries” (Sidaway, Rowedder, Woon, Lin, & Pholsena, 2020, p. 2), “the concrete manifestation of previous visions such as ‘harmonious world’ and ‘peaceful development’, as well as of Xi’s ‘Chinese dream’ of rejuvenation from national humiliation” (Nordin & Weissmann, 2018, p. 231), “a revitalisation, extension, and intensification of the ancient Silk Road” (Su, 2017, p. 107), “a call for an open and inclusive model of sustainable international economic, political and cultural cooperation and development under the guiding principles of the peaceful coexistence of sovereign states, achieved through multiple types of increased connectivity and financed by new multilateral financial instruments” (Dunford & Liu, 2019, p. 145), “a new global architecture designed by China to frame its new role as a leading world

power” (Alon, Zhang, & Lattemann, 2018), just to list some of the definitions from the long lists of suggestions.

Even with this pool of definitions and explanations, or perhaps because of this pool of definitions and explanations, that multiple researchers still find it difficult to comprehend what the BRI really is, what it includes and what it does not. For example, Alon, Zhang, and Lattemann’s (2018) claim that “consensus has not been reached about what BRI is, how it may affect others, and how it may evolve” (p. 12), Cau’s (2018) statement that “grasping the scope and meaning of the BRI is not an easy task” (p.50), or Brakman et al.’s (2019) recognition of the existence of “significant challenges when it comes to evaluating the BRI in detail” as “understanding what falls within the umbrella of the term itself is not always clear” (p. 8). To the extent that several researchers identified that there is not even an official BRI map (Narins & Agnew, 2019; Shepard, 2017; The Economist, 2018), although maps such as the one attached below in Diagram 1, published by Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) are widely used and cited by researchers (Lin, Sidaway, & Woon, 2019, p. 509; Sidaway, Rowedder, Woon, Lin, & Pholsena, 2020, p. 4).

Interestingly, Li (2018) suggested a three-level framework for analyzing the BRI that perceives the BRI from surface, middle, and deep level. He particularly proposes that the “deep-level substance” of BRI that most researchers overlooked could be a “global ecosystem for long-term symbiosis”, building on top of the surface level that sees the BRI as a China-centric initiative to solve China’s internal problems of overcapacity and production surpluses, and the middle level that believes that BRI is an inevitable course for China rise to sustain its influence, wealth, and power. Different from the surface and

On the other hand, researchers start to find projects that the BRI might be modeled upon. For example, Feng and Liang (2019), Narins and Agnew (2019), and Shen and Chan (2018) compare the initiative to Marshall Plan implemented by the U.S. government during the post-war period that was meant to be an initiative to provide development assistance particularly to rebuild Western Europe. Some of the similarities include the objectives of increasing exports to overcome the internal surplus problem, boosting international use of their respective currency, served/serves as a tool for power balancing against rivals that were the Soviet Union in the case of Marshall Plan and the US in the BRI's case (Xing, 2019, p. 13). Besides that, Narins and Agnew (2019) compare the two cases along ten factors ranging from the regional focuses of the two cases and the intention, mode and amount of the capital transfer, to the respective geopolitical architects and the respective models or ideologies of development. However, there are also opinions that suggest the incomparability of the initiative and the Marshall Plan due to the initiative's global scale and the theoretically "boundlessness" of the initiative (Shen & Chan, 2018). Besides that, there is even a section in *Routledge Handbook of the Belt and Road* that introduces plans introduced by other countries or organizations that could be similar to the BRI such as United Nations' Silk Road Tourism Programme, the United States' New Silk Road Plan, Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, Japan's Quality Infrastructure Partnership Plan, or India's Project Mausam Plan, just to name a few (Cai & Nolan, 2019). Besides that, Matsumura (2019) also made a comparison with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy from the perspective of propaganda.

Even the proposers struggled to define BRI's scope, motivations, and objectives, and there is also no official standard on which projects or investments can be called a "BRI project" or which does not (Smith, 2018, p. 3), how can the outsiders then know

what exactly BRI is? To the extent that there are suggestions that the definition of a program or project to be a BRI program or project, it fully depends on the initiator's will. If it is packaged as a BRI-related project or program, it immediately became a BRI-related project or program, and will increase the chance of getting funds from the Chinese government (Rosen and Parton, as cited in Ma, 2019).

However, there are researchers that explains the reasons behind the ambiguity and contested nature of the BRI. Summers (2020), for example, suggested that the absence of a clear geographical scope creates the possibilities of multiple futures for China's international relations. While Zeng (2019) argues that it could be due to the domestic forces that shape Chinese policymaking, which has caused the BRI to be a "catch-all policy slogan" to tolerate and justify domestic operationalizations (Zeng, 2019, p. 208). Besides that, there is also the explanation put forward by Narins and Agnew (2019) that the absence of an official map for the BRI creates a "useful fuzziness" for China by leaving room for creating new geopolitical identities, that the current models of sovereignty regimes might not be able to explain. Finally, as Brakman et al. (2019) pointed out, the ambiguity and vagueness could be unproblematic when looking back to the ancient Silk Road as its framework was loose so that the exchanges of goods and products would not be limited, networks were not limited to a geographical location to allow rooms for flexibility to accommodate the changes in preferences of goods and services, and when the consumers, suppliers, and intermediaries' identities and physical locations changed over time.

2.3 Coordination Areas

As summarized by Wang and Li (2019), the framework for the initiative is categorized in several slogans such as upholding the “four concepts” based on the “five types of connectivity” to build the “three communities” by including the “six corridors” (the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor, the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor) and “six means of communication” (rail, highways, maritime transport, aviation, pipelines, and aerospace integrated information network) through the “five routes”. As this paper only focuses on one type of connectivity from the five types of connectivity, this section will provide further discussions only on the five types of connectivity with more focuses on the people-to-people bond dimension, while briefly stating the contents of other concepts.

The “four concepts” above refers to the concepts of “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit”, which is also known as the “Silk Road spirit”, as introduced earlier (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017, p. 7; Wang & Li, 2019, p. 99). The “three communities” that the initiative aims to build claims to offer a “new mentality of global governance” that creates communities of “shared interests, shared responsibility, and shared future” (Wang & Li, 2019, pp. 99-100). Such proposal recalls Zhang’s (2019) argument that building a “global community”, or known as a “community with a shared future for mankind” (人类命运共同体) is one of the three frames of reference that guides the Xi Jinping doctrine, that serves as the fundamental concept of Xi’s foreign policy with a framework that encompasses all other concepts.

The five types of connectivity (五通), or also known as areas of cooperation, refers to the “policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bond (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017, p. 18).” Besides official documents mainly published by the NDRC, or the Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, this paper also refers to the (perhaps only) index on measuring the five types of connectivity, the Five Connectivity Index Report, jointly published by Taihe Institute and Peking University, to discover the contents of the types of connectivity (Taihe Institute, 2018).

Policy coordination (政策沟通) refers to the “intergovernmental cooperation”, “multi-level intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism” with the objectives of increasing shared interested, enhancing mutual political trust, and reach consensus (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015b). It is considered as the top priority (Qin, Policy coordination, 2019a, p. 174), and regarded as the basis for the initiative (Chen & Wu, 2019), as it builds the foundation for all other types of connectivity and will be needed throughout the entire process. In the Five Connectivity Index Report, this area of cooperation is measured by indicators organized into three categories, namely (Chen & Wu, 2019):

1. Basis of cooperation
 - a. Frequency of high-level exchanges
 - b. International cooperation mechanism under the framework of BRI
 - c. Number of embassies and consulates in China
2. Political mutual trust
 - a. Political stability of the host nation
 - b. Partnership with China

- c. Management of territorial disputes
3. Achievements of cooperation
- a. Strategic interfaces under the framework of BRI
 - b. Documents signed under the framework of BRI
 - c. Effectiveness of policy coordination

Facilities connectivity (设施联通), or known as connectivity of infrastructure, refers to the infrastructural connectivity among countries along the belt and road, including transportation infrastructure, communication infrastructure and energy infrastructure (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015b). It further expanded to include “postal services, commercial services, scientific research and technical services, landscaping, environmental protection, culture and education, health and other municipal utilities, and public living servicing facilities” (Li T. , 2019, p. 178). In short, this area of coordination provides the physical hardware that complements other areas of cooperation. The proposers believe that the slow economic growth seen in developing countries is due to the lack of infrastructure development. Thus, developing infrastructure can stimulate economic growth and provide the basis for further economic and social development (Li T. , 2019, p. 179). The Five Connectivity Index measures this cooperation area based on the three dimensions introduced in the NDRC document, that is (Zhang L. , 2019):

- 1. Transport facilities
 - a. Quality of the overall infrastructures
 - b. Level of connectivity of transport facilities
 - c. Level of connectivity of China-Europe Railway Express
- 2. Communications facilities

- a. Internet penetration
 - b. IT level and communications technology level
 - c. Infrastructure level of bilateral communications
3. Energy facilities
- a. Oil transmission capacity
 - b. Natural gas transmission capacity
 - c. Electric power transmission capacity

Unimpeded trade (贸易畅通) means the removal of investment and trade barriers by improving the facilitation of investment and trade and the increase in free trade areas, mutual cooperation in law enforcement, recognition of regulations, and information exchange. It also includes mutual recognition and/or establishment of customs, standards, certification and accreditations, regulations, and statistics (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015b). In short, and as summarized in Shen's (2019b) essay, this type of connectivity can be considered a consolidation and further promotion of the "rules-based multilateral trading regime with WTO at its core" (p. 182). This area of cooperation is measured by nine sub-indicators categorized into three indicators in the Five Connectivity Index as follows (Li Z. , 2019b):

- 1. Trade environment
 - a. Trade barrier
 - b. Investment barrier
 - c. Business environment
- 2. Level of unimpeded trade
 - a. Convenience of bilateral trade
 - b. Total bilateral trade volume

- c. Total bilateral investment volume
3. Production capacity cooperation
 - a. Projects contracted by China in host countries
 - b. China foreign labor cooperation
 - c. Labor force market control

Financial integration (资金融通) refers to the ease of fund transfer, the construction of a “currency stability system, investment and financing system and credit information system” among the member countries, including the promotion and globalization of the RMB. Besides that, strengthening cooperation in financial regulation, financial risk management and crisis response are also areas of cooperation (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015b). This cooperation area mainly provides the support for smooth funding of projects in the process of facilities connectivity, thereby closing the funding gap through organizations such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Fund, the BRICS Development Bank, and the SCO Development Bank, on top of the traditional financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) (Shen M. , 2019a, p. 187). In the Five Connectivity Index Report, this type of connectivity is measured by indicators as follows (Li Z. , 2019a):

1. Financial cooperation
 - a. Cooperation in currency exchange
 - b. Cooperation in financial regulation
 - c. Cooperation among development banks
 - d. Cooperation among commercial banks

2. Credit system
 - a. Credit convenience
 - b. Standardization of credit markets
3. Financial environment
 - a. Total reserve
 - b. Size of public debts
 - c. Currency robustness

Finally, the focus of this study – the people-to-people bond (民心相通), or also known as understanding between people, which is more abstract than the remaining coordination areas, is the foundation for successfully implementing the initiative as it gathers and provides the needed public support. It includes but not limited to “extensive cultural and academic exchanges, personnel exchanges and cooperation, media cooperation, youth and women exchanges and volunteer services” (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015b). Different from other cooperation areas, this dimension of the initiative can be participated by everyone, anyone, even unknowingly, to the extent that researchers such as Hillman (2018) quipped “If you traveled to China since September 2013, congratulations, you may have participated in the BRI. It includes tourism and other “people-to-people” ties such as education and cultural exchanges”. Indeed, the implementation of people-to-people bond has been categorized into categories such as “cultural and academic exchanges”, “tourism cooperation and sports exchanges”, “disease control and medical cooperation”, “language cooperation and talent training”, “double-track exchange between political parties and think thanks”, and “people-to-people exchange and media cooperation” (Qin, 2019b, pp.

192-194). The Five Connectivity Index measures this type of connectivity using the following indicators (Liu & Nie, 2019):

1. Tourist activities
 - a. Popularity of tourist destinations
 - b. Number tourists to China
 - c. Convenience of tourist visa
2. Exchanges in science and education
 - a. Scientific and developmental cooperation
 - b. Number of foreign students in China
3. Unofficial exchanges
 - a. Enthusiasm of host nations
 - b. Number of friendly cities
 - c. Public opinion dissemination
 - d. Level of friendliness of the mass

It can be identified from Qin's (2019b) summary of the concept that the main vehicle for driving Chinese efforts in the people-to-people bond is the Confucius Institute. Undeniably, gaining proficiency in Chinese language would allow individuals to increase their understanding of Chinese-originated concepts and culture. As of 2019, 134 Confucius Institutes and 130 Confucius Classrooms have been established in 51 countries and regions in the Belt and Road (Qin, 2019b, p. 194). However, according to the latest data, most of the Confucius Institutes are located in countries and regions that do not belong to the Belt and Road, as they are 541 Confucius Institutes and 1170 Confucius Classrooms in 162 countries and regions worldwide (Hanban, n.d.). If this figure presented on the Confucius Institutes' official website is the latest figure, the number of

Confucius Institutes would be at decrease as Wu and Wang (2020) cited that there were 548 Confucius Institutes and 1193 Confucius Classrooms worldwide, with countries such as Sweden, decided to terminate all operations of Confucius Institutes in April 2020 (Moody, 2020). One of the reasons to such decision is their concern on censorships and the authoritarian control from the headquarters to the respective branches, just as how Human Rights Watch (2019) listed “reject Confucius Institutes” as one of the twelve recommendations to “resist Chinese government efforts to undermine academic freedom abroad”. Similarly, in Wu and Wang’s (2020) paper, they also argue that the lack of autonomy in management and operation is one of the problems the Confucius Institutes is facing, together with the dependency on a single source of funding, and the lack of flexibility in the positioning of the institute especially under the framework of the BRI. In fact, they cited Malaysia’s progress in Chinese education that solely depended on the community’s donation without the funding of governments as one of the recommendations to reduce the dependency on government’s funding, while personalizing and localizing the syllabus to become more respectful and mindful of local cultures (Wu & Wang, 2020).

Not only Liu and Nie (2019) argue that this type of connectivity, among others, provides the most solid and lasting connectivity, Chinese scholars placed the people-to-people bond at a very important, if not vital position under the BRI, as Chinese President Xi Jinping made the famous statement “国之交在于民相亲, 民相亲在于心相通” in his speech at the opening of the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (Xi, 2017b). Although the statement is officially translated as “Friendship, which derives from close contact between the people, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations” (Xi, 2017a), the literal meaning perhaps implies that relations between countries depend on

the closeness between people, and the closeness between people depends on the synchronization between their hearts. As a result, Chinese scholars eventually pay more attention to the element of culture, stressing the importance of culture, and becoming more sensitive to cultures. Hu (2017) for example, perceives the BRI as China's economy opening version 2.0 that has added the element of cultural development to complement the economic development that has been the main rhythm since the opening up of the economy and economic reforms in the 70s. However, in the same paper, he also identified that there was not even a single study recorded in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) that investigates the cultural risks that the BRI might face. Similarly, Yang's (2018) review of the articles published on CNKI related to the BRI discovered that most of the conducted studies were on the economic dimension of the BRI, while culture-related studies were only about 3% as of June 2017. Nonetheless, in another study by Sun (2017), an increasing trend in the research on the BRI and culture was identified, through a literature review on the articles published on CNKI using the keywords “一带一路” (“*Yi dai yi lu*”) and “文化” (Culture).

That said, scholars such as Guo and Jiang (2015) and Zhuang (2017) pointed out some of the misunderstandings on the concept and practices of people-to-people bond that still exist even today. For example, treating the people-to-people bond as a byproduct of economic growth, that resulted in overemphasis on economic cooperation while treating the people-to-people bond lightly. Such misconceptions born out of the thinking of the betterment of the quality of life due to economic cooperation will naturally create the bond between people (Guo & Jiang, 2015). Besides that, treating the people-to-people bond as a government project that should be funded, organized, and operated by the

government is one of the practices that individuals, organizations, and even government bodies have get used to (Guo & Jiang, 2015; Zhuang, 2017).

Chapter 3: Malaysia and the Belt and Road Initiative

3.1 History of Malaysia-China Relations

The Malaysian identity, if it really exists, often finds its roots in the history of Malacca Sultanate, as it was regarded as the “golden age” of the Malay peninsula, especially for the Malay kingdoms. Prior to the establishment of Malacca Sultanate, Malay peninsula together with other parts of *Nusantara* (Malay Archipelago) were under the influence of Indian cultures, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, through the maritime trade routes and the kingdoms of *Srivijaya* and *Majapahit* (Cohen, 2000; Ngoi, Teo, & Show, 2017). Faced by threats since its founding from the neighboring *Majapahit* and *Ayutthaya* (*Siam*), early Malacca Kingdom looked to the Ming Dynasty as a counterbalance by paying tributes to the Ming emperor. As a result, most (some say five (Zhou X. , 2019, p. 82)), if not all of *Zheng He's* seven voyages docked at Malacca (He S. , 2018, pp. 105-106), which reflects and further strengthens Malacca position as one of the world's then leading post cities (Cohen, 2000, p. 175). However, state-to-state relations between Malacca and the Ming Dynasty came to a halt when the Chinese court decided to end expeditions of such kinds citing lack of funds and minimal economic benefits. As a result, the tributary state of Malacca was longer able to receive support from the Ming Dynasty when it was attacked and eventually colonized by Portuguese in 1511 (Cohen, 2000, p. 190). Due to its important location, Malacca was then captured by the Dutch in 1641 (Cohen, 2000, p. 202), and the British in 1795 (Cohen, 2000, p. 234). On the other hand, the Chinese migrants from both *Zheng He's* voyages and traders, in which some were not able to return to their motherland due to maritime restrictions, began to assimilate into local cultures through interracial marriages and eventually introduce new ethnicities such as the *Peranakans* that include *Baba* and *Nyonya* (Cohen, 2000, p. 205; Lim, 2018).

Yet, although history might cause one to recall its past relations, its influence to recent developments cannot be equated with the relations newly formed, especially since the formation of Malaya in 1957 and Malaysia in 1963 (Balakrishnan, 2014), especially when millions of Chinese migrated from China due to internal turmoil to the Southeast Asian region, especially in the late 19th century and the first half of 20th century (Andaya & Andaya, 2017), in which some were brought by the colonial British as immigrant workers (Husin Ali, 2017, p. 35).

Balakrishnan (2014) summarizes well the post-war and post-colonialism bilateral relations between Malaysia and China. In which, he argued that the spread of communist ideology in Southeast Asia and the significant presence of the Chinese in the region were the two important factors affecting such relations, especially when the then governments questioned the Chinese eligibility of citizenship and loyalty to the country as they were seen more active in communist activities (Baker, 2015, pp. 221-227; Balakrishnan, 2014, pp. 70-71). Indeed, both Balakrishnan (2014) and Selat (2014) summarizes Malaysia's foreign policy from its independence in 1957 to 1970 as pro-West and anti-Communist. Similarly, China's view of Malaya's independence and the formation of Malaysia was also negative due to Malaya's history as a British colony and the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman's foreign policy that was inclined towards the West (Balakrishnan, 2014, pp. 70-71).

Such posture was altered since 1970 as Tun Abdul Razak succeeded Tunku Abdul Rahman as the Prime Minister as a result of the ethnic disturbances of 13th May 1969, which was regarded as "an important landmark in Malaysia's modern history" (Selat, 2014, p. 83). In fact, Tun Abdul Razak himself outlined the concept of 'Zone of Peace,

Freedom and Neutrality' (ZOPFAN) at the Non-Aligned Movement Conference at Lusaka in the same year, just nine days before he replaced Tunku as the Prime Minister. In the following years, Razak's foreign policy has been emphasizing the need for including China as a member in mainstream world politics to the extent that ZOPFAN Declaration was eventually adopted by the five ASEAN founding members in 1971, although they all were initially reluctant due to their respective concerns. The Declaration became an important milestone not only in Malaysia-China relations, but also in ASEAN-China relations (Selat, 2014).

Finally, in 1974, Malaysia formally establishes diplomatic relations with China following Razak's visit to Beijing in May (Balakrishnan, 2014; Yang, Yin, Xi, & Xu, 2017). Coincidentally, or purposely, that year was also the year a general election was held. Such gesture was considered an attempt to capture votes from the ethnic Chinese to erase the negative effect haunted by the 13th May tragedy just 5 years ago. In fact, Razak's visit to China not only paved the way for establishing diplomatic relations, but also received the consent from the Chinese side to overcome the internal "Chinese problem" that includes the issue of Malaysian Chinese citizenships and delinking Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM) from Communist Party of China (CPC). That said, relations with China were then still restricted to the government-to-government level as the CPC was reluctant to totally terminate its relationship with CPM. As a result, people-to-people exchanges were then limited by government restrictions (Selat, 2014).

It was not until the 1990s that the relations between the two countries advanced from state-to-state level to business trades, investments, movements of people, and cross-border crime prevention (Phoon, 2017, p. 53). A remarkable event was the discussion on

the establishment of cultural exchanges between the two countries by the then Malaysian Education Minister Anwar and the then Director of the State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China in October 1990. The result of the discussion was the mutual agreement on exchanging university lecturers, and academic interactions in the fields of science and technology (Hu C. , 2016, p. 28). It was also only in 1999 that the Chinese government began its "Go Out" policy to promote Chinese companies' overseas investment (Yeoh, Chang, & Zhang, *China–Malaysia Trade, Investment, and Cooperation in the Contexts of China–ASEAN Integration and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Construction*, 2018, p. 314). 1999 was also the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Malaysia. It was also the year when both countries signed the "Joint Statement of Future Coordination Framework between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Malaysia" (Hu C. , 2016, p. 27). Although "Look East" was the main tune of First Mahathir Administration's foreign and economic policy, the frequency of Mahathir visiting China increases as China economic attractiveness grew, as he made six trips to China during his 22-year tenure as Prime Minister, in which five of the six trips were made in the second half of his tenure, namely in 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999 and 2001 (Balakrishnan, 2014, p. 74).

At that point of time, that was 2000, the trade volume between Malaysia and China was US\$12 billion. 13 years later, in 2014, when the BRI was just announced, that figure nine-folded to US\$108 billion, and since 2009, not only China has become Malaysia's largest trading partner for the following years consecutively, Malaysia also became the third country in Asia to achieve US\$100 billion trading volume with China after Japan and South Korea (Kong, 2016; Zhou X. , 2017). Hence, it can be seen that even prior to the introduction of the BRI, both China and Malaysia have realized each other's

importance to their respective country, to the extent that the bilateral relationship was upgraded to the status of “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” in 2013 (Oh & Han, 2016, p. 2).

3.2 Malaysia under the Belt and Road Initiative

During the Second Najib Administration, although there are occasional tensions between Malaysia and China originating from issues such as the kidnapping of Chinese tourist in Malaysian island, the disputes in the South China Sea, the incident of MH370 (Oh & Han, 2016), and China’s request for returning Uighur refugees (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2019), it did not stop the then Prime Minister Najib Razak to sign 14 Memorandums of Understanding during a visit to China in 2016, that cumulatively worth RM 144 billion (approximately US\$33.7 billion) that welcomes Chinese investments and projects under the BRI to Malaysia that includes mega-scale projects such as the Bandar Malaysia, Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ), Melaka Gateway, Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP), the Kuantan Port, the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), the Double Tracking upgrade of railways from Gemas to Johor Bahru, and the Forest City (Cheng C. , 2019).

Simultaneously happening was the increase of attention and literature on the topic of the BRI in Malaysia, especially from Chinese and Malaysian Chinese researchers, mostly written in Chinese, and published in Chinese journals. While there are also some English written literature in the same discussion such as University of Malaya’s scholars Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh, Le Chang and Yemo Zhang’s (2018) study on China-Malaysia trade, investment and cooperation in the context of China-ASEAN integration and the

21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Singapore's Nanyang Technological University's Hong Liu and Guanle Lim's (2018) study of Malaysia's response to the BRI from a political economy perspective, or Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux's (2019) long essay on the institutional dynamics of Malaysia-China relations after the 14th General Election, studies from ethnic Malay and ethnic Indian scholars have remained minimal, especially made published in journal articles. Although ethnic Malay scholars such as Farish Noor and Shahrizan Lockman have expressed their opinions on the issue, their writings were either seen in periodical articles such as newspapers or reports published by think tanks such as the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), and were in English (Ngeow, 2016). Perhaps the only scholar that contributes towards the discussion in Malay language is Muhamad Azwan Abd Rahman (2019) in his study on the Maritime Silk Road's implications for states' autonomy using the cases of Malaysia and Indonesia by conducting interviews with significant individuals including Mahathir Mohamad, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (Tun Abdul Razak's envoy to China in the early 1970s), and Abdul Majid Ahmad Khan (former ambassador to China from 1998 to 2005). In another paper co-authored with Sity Daud and Abdul Rahman Embong, they discussed the Maritime Silk Road's policy implication on ASEAN's strategic communication, in which they argued that ASEAN does not have a comprehensive policy in the context of ASEAN-China cooperation (Muhamad Azwan Abd Rahman, Sity Daud, & Abdul Rahman Embong, 2018).

However, the literature above mostly discuss from the international, state, and some individual level of analysis, which are the conventional levels of analysis within IR debates, and seems to fit in the discussion of the BRI from the cooperation areas of especially policy coordination, and impeded trade, facilities connectivity, and financial

integration to some extent, but it would be difficult to further the debates if perceived under the people-to-people bond dimension. Hence, there is a lack of English literature in this area. Fortunately, Chinese and Malaysian Chinese scholars explored this area to some extent besides the conventional discussion from the general perspective (Zhou X. , 2017, 2019), political dimension (Zhang Y. , 2020; Zhou F. , 2017), economic dimension (Ngeow, 2016; Zhong, 2018), or the security dimension (Pang, 2018; Xue, 2019). However, there is still a lack of co-authored studies between Chinese and Malaysian scholars, as most of the articles were written unilaterally (Chen H. , 2017). That said, although these dimensions are important, they will not be discussed in detail in this paper due to two reasons. First, they are relatively well discussed if compared to the focus of this study, that is, the people-to-people bond and the reception of the BRI in Malaysia. Second, the core arguments in this literature generally follow the debates as discussed in the theoretical framework section in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 that introduced the BRI. Hence, the remaining of this chapter will be organized in two sections starting with a comprehensive literature review on the socio-cultural dimensions and the reception of the BRI in Malaysia, followed by the most recent studies on the BRI-related issues in Malaysia.

3.2.1 Socio-cultural studies and reception

Studying the BRI in Malaysia from the socio-cultural perspective and in cultural studies is becoming a phenomenon especially in Chinese and Malaysian Chinese researchers. Perhaps Malaysia can be one of the perfect cases to reflect Chinese soft power in Asia, if not the world due to three reasons that Phoon (2017) suggests. First, Malaysia did not perceive China as the destabilizing factor in the region. Second, there are a significant number of common values in the political institutions and administration of society

between Malaysia and China. Third, the existence of a large number of ethnic Chinese population that possess Chinese cultural background (Phoon, 2017, pp. 45-46).

Most, if not all the researchers cited the importance and significance of the significant number of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. For example, Xie and Luo (2019) investigated Malaysian Chinese understanding and participations in the BRI based on a database constructed with the community's opinion and response towards the BRI as captured in mainstream newspapers, namely Nanyang Siang Pau (南洋商报), Oriental Daily News (东方日报), and Sin Chew Daily (星洲日报). They hypothesized that Malaysian Chinese support of the BRI should be a "most likely" case due to the government's inclination towards China and the ethnic Chinese cultural ties with China. They discovered that the BRI was generally welcomed by Malaysian Chinese with different "density of interaction" identified according to their affiliations, roles, organizations, and sub-groups. As a result, they suggested that dissemination on BRI-related information should be more specific, more localized, and tailored according to the recipients' characteristics (Xie & Luo, 2019).

Besides Xie and Luo (2019), other researchers such as Jiang (2015), Xu and Chen (2016), Hu (2016), Phoon (2017), Yang, Yin, Xi and Xu (2017), Liu and Lim (2018) and Zhou Xingtai (2018), also recognized the influence and unique existence of Malaysian Chinese as it represents a quarter of Malaysia population, politically represented by multiple political parties including the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Democratic Action Party (DAP), People's Movement Party (GERAKAN), and the Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP), economically represented by magnates such as Robert Kuok, Teh Hong Piow, Lee Shin Cheng, and Jeffrey Cheah, socially represented

by over 10000 registered societies and associations. On top of that, Malaysia also possesses the world's most complete and comprehensive Chinese education system besides Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, with about 1300 primary schools, 61 independent high schools, and 5 universities with courses taught in Chinese (Jiang, 2015; Xu & Chen, 2016).

In another paper, Luo (2017) investigated the response provided by Malaysian Chinese to the Belt and Road Initiative from 2015 to the first half of 2017 as published in Sin Chew Daily, the most influential newspaper in Malaysian Chinese community. Of the retrieved 1610 responses, 71.7% were published in 2017 as the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held in May of that year. In fact, in May alone, as many as 425 responses were recorded, which represents 26.4% of the total responses. The situations in which the responses were provided were then categorized in five categories, namely in official exchanges, economic exchanges, cultural exchanges, academic exchanges, and civil society exchanges, in which 58.3% of the responses were provided in cultural exchanges, followed by 35.5% in economic exchanges, and 3.3% in official exchanges. Hence, most people express their opinions on the BRI in cultural exchanges. However, most of the contents were more concerned on economic and trade as it comprises 68% of the contents, followed by cultural contents at 19.2%, and politics at 11.7%. As a result, more attention was placed on the cooperation area of unimpeded trade at 61.7%, followed by people-to-people exchanges at 23.5%, and policy coordination at 11.6%. The overall perception and attitude towards the BRI were positive as 81.1% of the responses were either supportive or very supportive of the BRI, the details are shown in Table 1 below (Luo, 2017).

Table 1 Malaysian Chinese response towards the BRI as seen in Sin Chew Daily

Perception/ Year	Very Supportive	Supportive	Supportive with doubts	Against	Strongly against	Not sure
2015	3.7%	5.2%	2.1%	0.2%	0%	0%
2016	6.0%	9.6%	1.5%	0.1%	0.1%	0%
1st half of 2017	18.6%	38.0%	12.1%	1.5%	0.1%	1.4%
Total	28.3%	52.8%	15.7%	1.8%	0.2%	1.4%

(Luo, 2017, p. 93)

In another paper co-authored with Chin, Luo and Chin (2019) detailed some of the concerns voiced out by Malaysian Chinese associations and societies towards the BRI. The concerns were categorized in two categories, namely concerns towards Malaysia, and concerns towards Chinese counterparts. The domestic concerns include lack of understanding especially among ethnic Malays and ethnic Indians towards the BRI, worrying increase of competition, the politicization of investment projects, and the government's incapability of protecting local interests. On the other hand, the associations and societies also hope that Chinese counterparts should put more effort in other ethnicities, increase understanding in Malaysia's socio-cultural dynamics, and pay more attention to sharing resources and technological transfer (Luo & Chin, 2019).

Luo's (2017) findings were mainly extracted from responses and articles posted in newspapers, which were less direct in surveying the peoples' attitudes and perception on the topic. In fact, the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (ACCCIM) conducted several surveys that included direct questions on topics related to the BRI, in 2015, 2016, and 2017. The findings were cited by Zhou Xingtai's

(2018) study on Malaysian Chinese contributions in promoting Malaysia-China cooperation under the BRI, in which 70.7% of the respondents the BRI will bring a positive impact on the Malaysian economy and 47% of the respondents believed that BRI will benefit their businesses (Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia, 2017). A summary of the findings is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 ACCCIM's survey findings on BRI-related topics

Year	How much do you understand about this initiative?			Can our country and our businesses benefit from this initiative arising from better business opportunities?		
	Fully understand	Partly understand	Do not understand at all	Yes	No	Not sure
1st half of 2015	17%	54%	29%	43%	12%	45%
2nd half of 2015	10.2%	61.1%	28.7%	43.6%	11%	45.4%
1st half of 2016	18.9%	61.7%	19.4%	53.8%	38.3%	7.9%
1st half of 2017	What is BRI's impact on Malaysia economy?			What is the impact of BRI on your business?		
	Positive	Negative	No impact	Positive	Negative	No impact
	70.7%	8.8%	20.5%	47.0%	14.9%	38.1%

(Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce And Industry of Malaysia, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017; Zhou X. , 2018)

However, ACCCIM's surveys were only answered by Malaysian Chinese businesspersons which cannot represent both the ethnic Chinese and Malaysians as a whole. That said, Zhou Xingtai's (2018) study only includes Luo's (2017) findings and the surveys conducted by ACCCIM as evidence that reveals the understanding and reception of BRI from the Malaysian Chinese community.

Perhaps a more representative and more comprehensive survey could be the one jointly conducted by Ngeow (2016) representing University of Malaya's Institute of China Studies, and Merdeka Centre, an influential opinion research firm in Malaysia, as its sample included other ethnicities such as Malay, Indian, Muslim and non-Muslim *Bumiputeras*, and is proportionately representative of Malaysia's population. The survey entitled "Malaysia's Public Opinion on China" included 70 questions encompassing dimensions such as politics, foreign policy, security, culture, and economy, in which its BRI-related components were well summarized in Ngeow's (2016) paper, and are presented in tables below.

Table 3 Malaysians' Perceptions on the impact of China's rise in economy to Malaysia

China's rise in economy will bring ... to Malaysia?							
Ethnicities	<i>n</i>	Serious threat	Potential threat	No impact	Benefits	Not sure	No answer
Total	1109	6.1%	14.9%	18.6%	45.5%	14.6%	0.2%
Malay	555	7.7%	18.0%	18.0%	48.1%	8.3%	0%
Chinese	333	2.7%	10.5%	20.1%	51.5%	14.9%	0.3%
Indian	89	9.4%	11.8%	9.4%	12.9%	55.4%	1.1%
Muslim Bumiputera	66	5.6%	12.4%	26.4%	44.4%	11.2%	0%
Non-Muslim Bumiputera	67	6.7%	18.2%	21.5%	38.6%	15.0%	0%

(Ngeow, 2016, p. 56)

Table 4 Malaysians' Perceptions on the impact of Chinese investments to Malaysia's economy

Do you agree that Chinese investment is vital to Malaysia's economy?							
Ethnicities	<i>n</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not sure	No answer
Total	1109	6.0%	12.6%	42.5%	33.2%	5.7%	0.1%

Malay	555	7.5%	14.7%	39.7%	35.4%	2.5%	0%
Chinese	333	2.1%	6.9%	48.3%	30.5%	12.2%	0.3%
Indian	89	10.7%	17.8%	46.8%	19.9%	4.7%	1.1%
Muslim Bumiputera	66	6.9%	16.5%	36.0%	39.1%	1.4%	0%
Non-Muslim Bumiputera	67	5.0%	13.2%	36.6%	40.3%	5.0%	0%

(Ngeow, 2016, p. 56)

Table 5 Malaysians' awareness on the BRI

Have you ever heard of the Belt and Road Initiative?				
Ethnicities	<i>n</i>	No	Yes	No answer
Total	1109	79.4%	19.5%	1.2%
Malay	555	79.7%	18.3%	2.0%
Chinese	333	75.1%	24.9%	0%
Indian	89	87.0%	10.6%	2.4%
Muslim Bumiputera	66	86.0%	14.0%	0%
Non-Muslim Bumiputera	67	81.4%	18.6%	0%

(Ngeow, 2016, p. 56)

Table 6 Malaysians' opinions on Malaysia's participation in the BRI

If you ever heard of the BRI, do you think Malaysia should participate?							
Ethnicities	<i>n</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not sure	No answer
Total	216	4.2%	11.1%	40.7%	34.6%	9.0%	0.4%
Malay	102	2.9%	16.5%	44.6%	29.2%	5.9%	0.9%
Chinese	83	6.1%	3.7%	36.3%	39.1%	14.8%	0%
Indian	9	0%	22.2%	77.8%	0%	0%	0%
Muslim Bumiputera	9	9.7%	10.3%	29.8%	50.2%	0%	0%
Non-Muslim Bumiputera	12	0%	9.2%	18.4%	63.3%	0%	0%

(Ngeow, 2016, p. 57)

From the four tables above, Ngeow (2016) argued that Malaysians generally welcome China's rise in economy and investments in Malaysia but there were only a handful of respondents ever heard of the BRI. However, those who have ever heard of the initiative, generally presents a positive attitude towards Malaysia's participation in the initiative. Ngeow (2016) also made a special mention of Chinese unique responses in which Chinese had the largest percentage of positive responses towards Chinese investments in Malaysia and understandings on the BRI, but their responses were similar to responses provided by other ethnicities probably due to the fear of competition from China especially in the business sector, which is similar to the comments provided by Malaysian Chinese associations and societies in Luo and Chin's (2019) study.

On the other hand, Ling's (2017) study on newspaper reports from five main Malay newspapers on the BRI discovered that there is a lack of coverage in related topics causing the Malay society, which represents the majority of Malaysia's population, to be in a relatively alienated position towards the BRI, to the extent that major developments in the BRI were not even reported in Malay newspapers. However, this also reflects Malay society's trust and dependence on the government being their representative in decision makings (Ling, as cited in Ngeow, 2016).

Besides Ling (2017), Zhang (2020) also conducted a similar study on the responses of Malaysia mainstream media towards the BRI by selecting reports from influential media companies such as *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian*, *Malaysiakini*, and *Astro Awani*, in the year 2018. As a result, 85 articles were found, in which most of the reports were on economic dimensions while reports on the people-to-people bond were minimal. Zhang's (2020) report also shows that a majority 68% of the articles carried positive

responses to the BRI, while the remaining 27% were neutral and 5% were against the initiative.

However, Yeoh (2018) argued that the sentiments captured in mass media might distort the real depth of the discussion if the dynamics of the Malaysian society is not taken into account. In his study of Malaysians' perception of contemporary China from economic, political, and societal perspectives, he argued that the complexity of Malaysian society is reflected in its perceptions towards China's rise as the perceptions are equally complex due to the differentiated fragments and sub-fragments composition of Malaysian society. What lies beneath Malaysians' response could be domestic politics, the transitions between generations, and the government's limitations on public discourse (Yeoh, 2018).

Besides the Malaysian Chinese factor, another factor that caught scholars' attention is the Islamic factor. Surprisingly, in Zhou Xingtai's (2017) paper, considerable length was explaining the importance and significance of Islamic culture in Malaysia-China relations, in which he traced back to *Zheng He's* identity as a Muslim, similar to that of the then royalties of the Malacca Sultanate. Hence, he argued that Malaysia could be a bridge linking China to the Islamic world due to the availability of a comprehensive Islamic Finance institution and the mature accreditation system of Halal products and manufacturing. A similar recommendation was also observed in Xu and Chen's (2016) essay in which they stressed that most of the member countries along the BRI, especially the Maritime Silk Road, are Muslim majority countries, and China is still in its early steps in Islamic Finance compared to countries such as the United Kingdom, Russia, and

Singapore. Hence, they suggested that China could cooperate with Malaysia in developing talents in Islamic Finance for China.

3.2.2 The BRI in Malaysia after GE14

On the 9th of May 2018, the ruling coalition has been changed for the first time in Malaysian history to the then opposition. The transition has brought one of the world's longest-ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional* (BN) to an end. One of the factors that have said to caused such transition is China's influence, which has been discussed by Malhi (2018), in which she disagrees with the views that such comments and actions on China's influence and its investment projects in Malaysia are some acts of 'push back' against China, it is only an electoral strategy that *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) has adopted to capture votes, by creating 'imaginations' of voters through communicating and organizing a range of economic risks, and cannot be considered a 'foreign policy' issue. In other words, the initial concerns mainly posed by the ethnic Malay voters influenced by PH's opponents on local ethnic Chinese gaining political power if PH is voted is transferred by Mahathir Mohamad to the People's Republic of China instead, using his opponents' networks with China and the deals under the BRI, effectively linked the then Prime Minister Najib Razak's issues of corruption and the national debt levels to the projects under the initiative as a threat to sovereignty.

Such link became more solid when we examine the mainland Chinese firms' choice of coalition partners for their investment in Malaysia as Lim (2015) suggested that such choice reflects the "capitalist development and state-society relations" of Malaysia, and the result of Malaysia's wealth distribution by ethnic's political economy. Lim's (2015) findings show that more than half of the sample used in his study chose Malaysia's

government-linked companies (GLC) as their partner, which can not only reflect the influence of GLCs in Malaysia but also open the doors for issues of state corruption especially under a figure like Najib Razak. Hence, in relation to the paper by Malhi (2018), such relationship between both parties is successfully propagated by PH as an act of manipulation and abuse of power exhibited especially by Najib Razak. This is in tune with Liu and Lim's (2018) identification of the three conditions that determine the BRI's projects' success in Malaysia after studying the cases of ECRL, Bandar Malaysia, and Forest City, that are namely, the "fulfillment of Malaysia's longstanding pro-ethnic Malay policy", the existence of "a mutual vision between the state and federal authorities" and the "advancement of geopolitical interests for both China and Malaysia".

That, however, is likely to be continued even the new government is installed as Lafaye de Micheaux (2019) suggests that GE14 might bring structural change in Malaysian Capitalism, the agreed-upon dependency on China will still persist but with adjustments and recalibrations to distant itself from the previous corrupt administration who embezzled the relations with China.

Coincidentally, the GE14 was held in between the two Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation which somehow gave China the chance to reconfigure its approach in the BRI. Hence, it is popular to recognize the BRI prior to such reconfigurations as BRI 1.0, and the reconfigured BRI as BRI 2.0. Cheng (2019) summarized some of the commonly-reported issues and concerns towards BRI 1.0 in Malaysia such as the lack of localization and integration with the local economy, the superficial understanding on Malaysia's contexts especially socio-political and socio-economical dynamics, the lack of transparency in governance, finance, and sustainability,

and the concerns on becoming over-dependent on China. As a result, BRI 2.0 commits to becoming more transparent in governance, finance, and sustainability, and increase multilateral cooperation while integrating to the local economies (Cheng C. , 2019).

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Subjects of the study

As this research aims to find out the Malaysians' perceptions and socio-cultural behaviors on the Belt and Road Initiative, the population of this study would be Malaysian citizens seen in sociocultural groups such as ethnicity, religion, income and education level, and distribution by state.

4.2 Instrument - “Malaysians’ Perceptions and Socio-cultural Behaviors to the Belt and Road Initiative”

A questionnaire entitled “Malaysians’ Perceptions and Socio-cultural Behaviors to the Belt and Road Initiative” (see Appendix) was designed and distributed, only in English language, in partnership with Vase.ai, a market research startup based in Malaysia with more than 300,000 Malaysians in its panel (Vase.ai, 2019c). Vase.ai has worked with Fortune 500 companies to local brands in Malaysia and some of the results were published in news articles, including one that surveyed 1,029 nationally representative respondents on their knowledge and opinions of events related to the 13th May incident (Nair, 2019). The data in that survey is also made available publicly via the link (Vase.ai, 2019a): <https://vase.ai/data-trust/projects/13may1969/summary?cues=1>

The questionnaire designed for this study was largely modeled upon Vase.ai's study on the 13th May incident to ensure the sampling to be at least representative by ethnicity.

The questionnaire consists of 39 questions categorized into three sections, namely, demographic questions, questions on socio-cultural dimensions, and political dimensions.

4.2.1 Demographic Questions

The demographic questions consist of 7 questions to help identify the respondents' demography in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, highest education level, the current residing state, and monthly personal income bracket.

Ethnicities were grouped according to the following four main selections: “*Bumiputera – Malay*”, “*Bumiputera – Sabah & Sarawak*”, “Chinese”, and “Indian”. A fifth selection of “Others, please state” was also provided to leave rooms for respondents to state their ethnicity if he or she could not be identified by the categories above. Another characteristic worth to note is the designed income brackets of the questionnaire, that are: “RM 1100 and below”, “RM 1101 – RM 4500”, “RM 4501 – RM 7900”, “RM 7901 – RM 11300”, and “RM 11301 and above”. Besides that, an option of “Not willing to disclose” was also provided in respect to possible privacy concerns of the respondents. Such categorization is modeled upon the estimation of household income brackets by the household groups based on latest available data published by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DOSM), and the RM1100 minimum wage policy. The DOSM categorizes household into three groups, namely, B40 (Bottom 40), M40 (Medium 40), and T20 (Top 20). The data is summarized in Table 7 below, and an excerpt of the question is shown in Figure 1.

Table 7 Median & Mean household income by household group

Category	Median Household Income	Mean Household Income	Income Share
T20	RM 13,148	RM 16,088	46.2%
M40	RM 6,275	RM 6,502	37.4%
B40	RM 3,000	RM 2,848	16.4%

(Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2016)

3. What is your ethnicity? Please select one answer.

- A. *Bumiputera – Malay*
- B. *Bumiputera – Sabah & Sarawak*
- C. Chinese
- D. Indian
- E. Others, please state: _____

7. What is your monthly personal income? Please select one answer.

- A. RM 1100 and below
- B. RM 1101 – RM 4500
- C. RM 4501 – RM 7900
- D. RM 7901 – RM 11300
- E. RM 11301 and above
- F. Not willing to disclose

Figure 1 An excerpt of the demographic questions

To avoid being partisan, ethnicity and residing state selections were ranked in alphabetical order, religion selections were ranked in descending order from the religion that has the most believers, and highest education level and monthly personal income were ranked in ascending order.

4.2.2 Questions on Socio-cultural dimension

The questions on the socio-cultural dimension consist of 10 questions to identify respondents' socio-cultural behaviors in terms of languages, preferences and tastes in cuisines, choice of international destinations for leisure trips and overseas education, the

main sources of news, and the usage of social media and instant messaging platforms. All main questions in this section were provided with a “Others:_____” selection to allow a certain degree of freedom and autonomy for respondents to provide their response, in the event that the provided options could not construct their best response.

In the question about respondents’ linguistic or multilingual ability, all six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) were included, together with the official language of Malaysia, that is, the Malay language; and Tamil – the native language for Malaysian Indians, and some possible popular languages among Malaysians such as Hindi, Japanese, and Korean. Besides that, Chinese language was further categorized into five main dialects – Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Mandarin, and Teochew, which are the main dialects spoken by Malaysian Chinese.

Cuisine selections include the mainstream Malaysian cuisines categorized in “Chinese (Malaysian style)”, “Malay/Indonesian”, and “Indian”; together with popular types of cuisine seen in Malaysia such as “Middle Eastern”, “Western”, “Korean”, and “Japanese”; and the recently mushrooming Chinese cuisine originated from Mainland China, represented by 拉面 (translated as *Mee Tarik*, *La-mian*, or simply “Pulled Noodles”) and 火锅 (usually referred to as hotpot or steamboat). However, these hotpots or steamboat differs from the previously existed variants that were mostly homegrown or Taiwan-influenced, they can be represented by 四川火锅 (*Sichuan Style*) or 麻辣火锅 (*Mala Style*) which were previously unseen, especially before the opening up of China. Besides that, 拉面 (*La-mian*) in this case also differs from the Japanese Ramen or the Taiwanese variants, they are better known and introduced as 兰州拉面 (*Lanzhou La-*

mian) or 青海拉面 (*Qinghai La-mian*) mainly from Hui Muslims from the Chinese provinces of *Lanzhou* and/or *Qinghai*.

On the other hand, the selections provided for the question on respondents' top three sources of news include all the mainstream news publishers, both online and offline, official and unofficial. It includes multilingual news publishers such as *Malaysiakini*; Malay news publishers such as *Bernama*, *Berita Harian*, and *Harian Metro*; Chinese news publishers such as China Press (中国报), *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商报), and *Sin Chew Daily* (星洲日报); English news publishers such as Malay Mail, New Straits Times, and The Star; and even unofficial news sources such as Facebook (Excluding Official Pages of News/Media Company), Twitter (Excluding Official Pages of News/Media Company), and WhatsApp.

Similarly, all major social media and instant messaging platforms were included as the selections for the question on the usage of social media and instant messaging platforms. Included in the list were Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, WeChat, WhatsApp, to name a few.

To avoid being partisan, all selections were ranked in alphabetical order. On top of that, the word 'destination' was used instead of 'country' for the international destinations to avoid controversies, especially in the case of "Mainland China", "Taiwan", "Hong Kong", and "Macao". Besides that, Chinese names for some of the news sources such as "China Press (中国报)", social media such as "Weibo (微博)" and instant messaging platforms like "WeChat (微信)" were also provided for the convenience of some respondents. An excerpt from the questions is shown in Figure 2 below.

1. What are the languages you are able to converse in? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Arabic
- ☐ Chinese – Cantonese
- ☐ Chinese – Hakka
- ☐ Chinese – Hokkien
- ☐ Chinese – Mandarin
- ☐ Chinese – Teochew
- ☐ English
- ☐ French
- ☐ Hindi
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Malay
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Tamil
- ☐ Others: _____

Figure 2 An excerpt of the questions on Socio-cultural dimension

4.2.3 Questions on Political dimension

22 questions were included in the political dimension of the questionnaire to identify respondents' perceptions, opinions, and behaviors on foreign relations and China-Malaysia relations, interactions and connections with China and (cultural) products from China, and the Belt and Road Initiative.

Of which, five questions were allocated to the Belt and Road Initiative, that is, to question respondents' self-evaluated understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, the sources of informing respondents about the Belt and Road Initiative, the respondents' willingness to know more on the BRI, the respondents' opinion on whether the BRI is beneficial for Malaysia, and whether the respondents' agree or disagree on the statement that the BRI has been misused by politicians in Malaysia for political reasons or interests.

These five questions are designed to indicate the BRI's level of acceptance in Malaysia and Malaysians' perceptions towards it.

Another six questions were dedicated to identifying respondents' perceptions or rating of the relations between Malaysia and China in six different time periods, that are, in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, from 2013 to 2018 (GE14), and from post GE14 (2018 until today), on a scale from "Very Bad or Deteriorating significantly" to "Very Good or Improving significantly" with an option of "Neutral" and "Not sure". The classifications of the time period are based on the history of China-Malaysia relations, which was discussed in Chapter 3. The remaining questions focus on the respondents' experience or occurrence of interactions with Chinese language, Chinese people, Chinese cuisine, Chinese social media and instant messaging platforms, education in China, and tourism to China.

To avoid being partisan, all selections were ranked in alphabetical order or chronological order, with a selection of "Not sure", in the events that respondents' might not be able to recall or unable to determine his or her selection. An excerpt from the questions is shown in Figure 3 below.

- 7. From when have you started traveling to China (Mainland)? Please select one answer.**
- A. Before the year 2000
 - B. Since 2000 – 2007
 - C. Since 2008 – 2012
 - D. Since 2013 – 2018
 - E. Since 2019
 - F. Not sure
- 8. When is the last time you had Mainland Chinese cuisine or been to a Mainland Chinese cuisine restaurant in Malaysia (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (Mee Tarik/La-mian/Pulled Noodles), 火锅 (Hotpot/Steamboat), etc.)? Please select one answer.**
- 1. In the past week
 - 2. In the past month
 - 3. In the past quarter (3 months)
 - 4. In the past 6 months
 - 5. In the past year
 - 6. More than a year ago
 - 7. I never had a Mainland Chinese cuisine or been to a Mainland Chinese cuisine restaurant
 - 8. Not sure

Figure 3 An excerpt of the questions on Political dimension

4.3 Research Design and Data Collection

The survey described in the section above was planned to be distributed to 385 Malaysians in Vase.ai's database, proportionately representing the population by ethnicity. The figure 385 was chosen is based on a simple calculation of sample size through the tool provided by SurveyMonkey at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error at 5% to represent the approximately 32 million Malaysians (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). According to the latest available data by DOSM, Malaysia's population stands at 32.6 million with 29.4 million citizens and 3.2 million non-citizens as of August 2019. Only the citizens of Malaysia were included in this study. Of which 14.8 million (50.34%) were male and the remaining 14.5 million (49.32%) were female, leaving approximately 0.1 million unidentified (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2019c). In another publication, DOSM estimates the sex ratio for citizens as 102 males per 100 females (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2019a). This is the ratio that the sample of this study aims to achieve.

However, the more significant percentage that might bring meaningful discussion is the distribution of the population by ethnic group, which was the main characteristic the sample look to emulate. According to DOSM (2019a), the population of citizens was categorized into the ethnic groups as follows: *Bumiputera* (69.3%), Chinese (22.8%), Indian (6.9%), and others (1.0%).

Next, there is the distribution of the population by state. In one of the latest publications by DOSM, the demographic statistics by state is as follows (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2019b):

Table 8 Demographic statistics by state, third quarter 2019

State	Population ('000)	Percentage
Johor	3,768.2	11.55%
Kedah	2,185.0	6.70%
Kelantan	1,892.0	5.80%
Melaka	932.7	2.86%
Negeri Sembilan	1,132.1	3.47%
Pahang	1,677.1	5.14%
Perak	2,514.3	7.71%
Perlis	254.6	0.78%
Pulau Pinang	1,777.6	5.45%
Sabah	3,904.7	11.97%
Sarawak	2,818.1	8.64%
Selangor	6,541.9	20.05%
Terengganu	1,250.1	3.83%
W.P. Kuala Lumpur	1,778.4	5.45%
W.P. Labuan	99.4	0.30%
W.P. Putrajaya	105.4	0.32%
Total	32,631.6	100.02%

(Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2019b)

The questionnaire was then launched by Vase.ai in a redesigned online version to targeted respondents within their panel, and the data collection process was held on 25th October 2019 to 30th October 2019. A real-time tracking link was provided by Vase.ai to keep track of the progress. Initially, 460 samples were collected, but that included uncleaned data. Vase.ai, then cleaned the data by cross-checking their basic demographic information such as age, gender, and ethnicity to its database to verify responses' authenticity. In cases where the information does not match, those responses will be eliminated. Also, respondents were removed to match the sample size, and to ensure a good representation of different age, gender, and ethnicity. As a result of this process, a total of 411 responses were collected, a little more than the planned 385 sampling size.

The process ended when Vase.ai produces a raw data report and an organized version of the raw data in a dashboard under the link: <https://insights.vase.ai>, which the researcher can gain access to.

4.4 Ethics

The questionnaire was designed and distributed according to the principles outlined by the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University Guideline of Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Human Subjects. The core principles stipulated by the guidelines are risks, informed consent, privacy, deceptive research methods, conflict of interest, remuneration, and procedures.

Before the respondents click to answer the questionnaire, a statement describing the purpose of the survey and the use of the data is presented to the respondents. Respondents were not asked to provide their names in any part of the survey and privacy is at the utmost concern of both the researcher and respondents as in almost any questions that might reveal the identity of the respondents or might reveal respondents' sensitive information, an option of "Not willing to disclose" or "Not sure" is provided to protect the privacy of the respondents. Although it might not produce meaningful data for the study, it is better than producing unauthentic responses or obtained by causing discomfort, confusion, distress, or harm to the respondents.

Besides that, the respondents always have all the ability and right to terminate the process of answering the questionnaire, even in the process of answering, and will not face any adverse effects. Also, the questionnaire will also be terminated if the

respondent's age is below 18, the legal age of consent in Malaysia. Hence, none of the research participants will be minors.

Direct payments were not provided to the respondents, but a survey distribution fee was paid to Vase.ai based on a Service Agreement for Vase.ai for assisting in designing, hosting, distributing the survey and the management of panelists and panelists rewards fulfillment. For one valid response collected by Vase.ai, RM 8.42 was paid to Vase.ai, and it is as of Vase.ai's right and disposal on the usage of the fund. The researcher is also aware that Vase.ai is paying its respondents for all their surveys, mostly in the range of RM 3 or below, but can get up to RM 100 at most, depending on their clients. However, the researcher is not informed about the amount of compensation paid by Vase.ai to the respondents in this study.

4.5 Limitations

While surveys and questionnaires can be a useful tool for capturing a population's characteristics and perceptions, it brings several limitations too. First, it only reveals the responses on the individual level of analysis, which is less likely to be influential in IR discussions. Besides, the results gathered from a survey might not necessarily explain the process that links to such phenomena (Lamont, 2015).

Chapter 5: Results and Discussions

There was a 106.75% response to the questionnaire. The results are presented and discussed below in three sections. The first section shows the participants' demographic statistics. The second section provides results extracted mostly from questions on political dimensions that addresses Malaysians' perceptions on the BRI. The final section outlines Malaysians' socio-cultural behaviors to the BRI by analyzing the related results from questions on both socio-cultural behaviors and political behaviors. To begin, it is necessary to reiterate the assumption of (traditional/natural) differences as seen especially in ethnicities as introduced under the research objectives in Chapter 1.2, that is, the ethnic Chinese are likely to have more relationships, connections and ties, and were already relatively familiar with China even prior to the introduction of the BRI, while other ethnic groups might not. Hence, based on this assumption, it will be interesting to note whether the dynamics of socio-cultural behaviors and perceptions of ethnic groups other than Chinese have changed after the introduction of the BRI.

6.1 Respondents' Demographics

Out of the 411 samples, 213 (51.82%) were males and the remaining 198 (48.18%) were females, which largely resembles the sex ratio provided by DOSM. The breakdown of the samples in terms of age group is as follows: 11 respondents were below 20, almost half of the respondents (n=195) were in the age bracket of 20 to 29, while 106 respondents fall under the age group of 30 to 39. 60 respondents were between the age of 40 to 49, and the remaining 39 respondents were 50 years old and above, with the maximum age being 75. In terms of ethnicity, 67.40% of the respondents were identified as *Bumiputera*,

23.11% were Chinese, and about 9.24% were Indian, while the remaining 2 respondents were identified as others. Among the *Bumiputeras*, 224 respondents were of ethnic Malay, and the remaining 53 belongs to other ethnicities from Sabah and Sarawak. Similar to the population, 60% of the samples were Muslims, 16% were Christians, 15% were Buddhists, 7% were Hindus, and 2% were classified under others, not sure, or not applicable. The results also show that 9% of the respondents had not achieved secondary school education, while a quarter of the respondents' highest education level was secondary school graduates, and a 23% of the sample had education level similar to A-Level or holding a Diploma. The remaining 44% were classified as follows: 38% holding a bachelor's degree and the remaining 6% were either master's degree holder or above or categorized as others. This is summarized in Table 9 below.

Table 9 Respondents' Demographic

<i>Samples' Characteristics</i>		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	213	51.82%
	Female	198	48.18%
<i>Age Range</i>	18-19 years	11	2.68%
	20-29 years	195	47.45%
	30-39 years	106	25.79%
	40 and above	99	24.09%
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Bumiputera	277	67.40%
	Chinese	95	23.11%
	Indian & others	39	9.49%
<i>Religion</i>	Islam	248	60.34%
	Christianity	64	15.57%
	Buddhism	62	15.09%
	Hinduism	28	6.81%
	Others	2	0.49%
	Not sure / Not applicable	7	1.70%
<i>Highest Education Level</i>	Below SPM / O-Level / IGCSE	35	8.52%
	SPM / O-Level / IGCSE	103	25.06%
	Diploma / A-Level	94	22.87%
	Bachelor's Degree	156	37.96%

	Master's Degree	13	3.16%
	Doctorate / PhD	3	0.73%
	Others	7	1.70%
<i>Residing State</i>	Johor	45	10.95%
	Kedah	17	4.14%
	Kelantan	31	7.54%
	Melaka	11	2.68%
	Negeri Sembilan	20	4.87%
	Pahang	21	5.11%
	Penang	35	8.52%
	Perak	31	7.54%
	Perlis	2	0.49%
	Sabah	37	9.00%
	Sarawak	53	12.90%
	Selangor	59	14.36%
	Terengganu	13	3.16%
	WP Labuan	1	0.24%
	WP Putrajaya	1	0.24%
	WP Kuala Lumpur	34	8.27%
<i>Monthly Personal Income</i>	RM 1100 and below	105	25.55%
	RM 1101 - RM 4500	192	46.72%
	RM 4501 - RM 7900	45	10.95%
	RM 7901 - RM 11300	15	3.65%
	RM 11301 and above	1	0.24%
	Not willing to disclose	53	12.90%

Due to some states' small population that has resulted in the insignificant number of responses for state such as Perlis (n=2), and Federal Territories of Labuan (n=1) and Putrajaya (n=1), the results that groups the respondents based on their state of residence will be presented as a combination of few states and Federal Territories that is largely modelled upon the regional economic corridors that has launched in between 2006 and 2008, that are, namely, the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) that consists of the states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and Perak (Northern Corridor Implementation Authority, 2020); the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) that includes the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and the district of Mersing in Johor (East Coast Economic

Region Development Council, 2018); Iskandar Malaysia (IM) that encompasses a part of the state of Johor (Iskandar Regional Development Authority, 2016); the Sabah Development Corridor (SDC) that includes the state of Sabah (Sabah Economic Development and Investment Authority, 2012); and the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) that is located at the central region of the state of Sarawak (Regional Corridor Development Authority, Sarawak, 2018). As a result, the combinations that are adopted for this analysis and its respective number of respondents for this analysis are outlined in Table 10 below.

Table 10 Respondents' States of Residence in Regions

<i>Respondents' States of Residence</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
North Malaysia	85	20.69%
<i>Perlis</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0.49%</i>
<i>Kedah</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>4.14%</i>
<i>Penang</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>8.52%</i>
<i>Perak</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>7.54%</i>
Malaysia East Coast	65	15.81%
<i>Kelantan</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>7.54%</i>
<i>Terengganu</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>3.16%</i>
<i>Pahang</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>5.11%</i>
Greater Kuala Lumpur	114	27.74%
<i>Selangor</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>14.36%</i>
<i>WP Kuala Lumpur</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>8.27%</i>
<i>WP Putrajaya</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0.24%</i>
<i>Negeri Sembilan</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>4.87%</i>
South Malaysia	56	13.63%
<i>Melaka</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>2.68%</i>
<i>Johor</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>10.95%</i>
East Malaysia North	38	9.24%
<i>Sabah</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>9.00%</i>
<i>WP Labuan</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0.24%</i>
East Malaysia South	53	12.90%
<i>Sarawak</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>12.90%</i>

6.2 Malaysians' perceptions on the BRI

This section will mainly address Research Objective 1 and its respective research question, which is numbered as Main Research Question 1 by analyzing the results gathered from the responses to the questions on political dimensions in the questionnaire.

MRQ 1: How do Malaysians perceive the BRI? Are there any differences in perceptions of the BRI among ethnicity, religion, or state of residence?

The first half of MRQ 1 is mainly answered by Table 11 below. More than half of the respondents (53.52%) indicated that they do not have a good understanding on the BRI, while 47 respondents believed that they know very much on the BRI. 46.08% of the respondents obtain their input on the BRI from social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, followed by the newspaper at 30.41%, and friends at 25.71%. The willingness to gain more knowledge on the initiative sees an almost equal divide between those who would like to know more (52.31%) and those who would not (12.65%) including the respondents who are unsure (35.04%). While a quarter of the respondents (26.52%) are unsure about whether the BRI is beneficial to Malaysia, 32.85% of the respondents welcome the initiative. However, most respondents (33.58%) remained neutral for such question, with a small number of respondents (7.06%) believed that the initiative is not beneficial. A similar pattern is observed for the final question, in which 27.98% of the respondents are unsure whether the BRI has been misused by politicians in Malaysia for political reasons, while 32.60% of the respondents believe it has been misused.

Table 11 Responses on questions on political dimensions (Perceptions on the Belt and Road Initiative)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
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<i>Do you have a good understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路? Please select one answer.</i>	Yes, very much	47	11.44%
	Yes, a little	90	21.90%
	Not really	128	31.14%
	No	92	22.38%
	Not sure	54	13.14%
<i>Where did you learn about the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路? Please select all that apply.</i>	Books	41	12.85%
	Friends	82	25.71%
	Home (From family members or relatives)	34	10.66%
	Journal Articles	58	18.18%
	Newspaper	97	30.41%
	News applications	32	10.03%
	Radio	30	9.40%
	School, University or Education Institutions	19	5.96%
	Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	147	46.08%
	Television	57	17.87%
<i>Would you like to know more on the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路? Please select one answer.</i>	YouTube	71	22.26%
	Others	2	0.63%
	Like it very much	83	20.19%
	Like it a little	132	32.12%
	Not sure	144	35.04%
<i>Do you think the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路 is beneficial for Malaysia? Please select one answer.</i>	A little not like it	22	5.35%
	Not like it very much	30	7.30%
	Very beneficial	38	9.25%
	Beneficial	97	23.60%
	Neutral	138	33.58%
	Not beneficial	14	3.41%
<i>Do you agree that the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路 has been misused by politicians in Malaysia for political reasons? Please select one answer.</i>	Very not beneficial	15	3.65%
	Not sure	109	26.52%
	Strongly agree	42	10.22%
	Agree	92	22.38%
	Neutral	143	34.79%
	Disagree	10	2.43%
	Strongly disagree	9	2.19%
	Not sure	115	27.98%

The second half of MRQ 1 provide further revelations of the dynamics behind the data are provided in the table above, that is, the differences between ethnicities, religions, and states of residence.

The main difference in perceptions towards the BRI is identified along different ethnicities as compared to religions or state of residence. This is similar to the original assumption, that is, the ethnic Chinese are likely to present a relatively positive posture to the BRI while other ethnicities such as the *Bumiputera* and ethnic Indians generally carries a relatively cautious and conservative stance. While differences are also observed among different religions, this is probably due to the ethnicity of the respondents, instead of his or her religion. As there is a high correlation between ethnicity and religion in Malaysia, that is, most Muslims belong to the same ethnicity – Bumiputera – Malay, most Buddhists belong to the same ethnicity – Chinese, and most Hindus belong to the same ethnicity – Indian. This is similar to Hew’s (2016) observation of the highly interwoven relationship between ethnicity and religiosity in Malaysia. The detailed explanation will be provided below in four categories: levels of understanding, means to understanding, willingness to understanding, and perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia.

5.2.1 Levels of understanding on the BRI

The diagrams below show the differences in levels of understanding on the BRI by ethnicities, religions, and regions. The general pattern for responses provided by ethnic Chinese is largely similar to the results gathered by ACCCIM’s surveys. However, that is different from Ngeow’s (2016) study that show most of the Chinese were unaware of

the initiative. That said, if compared to ACCCIM's survey the level of understanding on the BRI among ethnic Chinese seems to be the same as it was in 2016, but in general, the level of understanding on the BRI have increased among other ethnicities if compared to the results gathered by Ngeow (2016).

Besides that, it is also apparent that respondents from South Malaysia have higher level of understanding on the BRI, as compared to other regions. This is probably due to the high number of BRI-related projects are in South Malaysia such as the Forest City, Melaka Gateway, and the Gemas-Johor Bahru Double Track Railway.

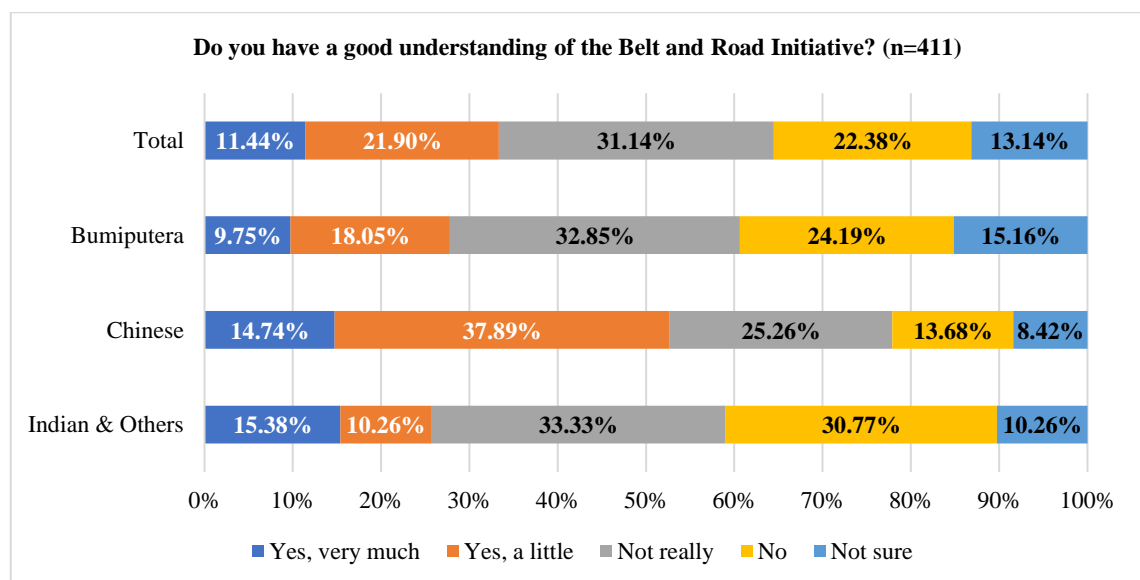


Diagram 2 Malaysians' Level of Understanding on the BRI, by ethnicities

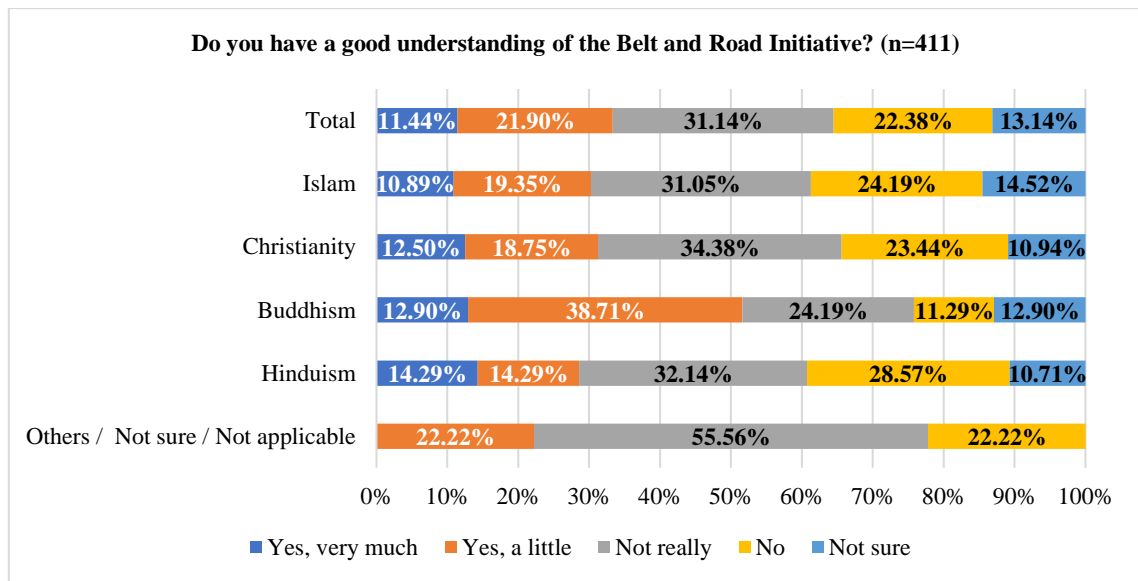


Diagram 3 Malaysians' Level of Understanding on the BRI, by religions

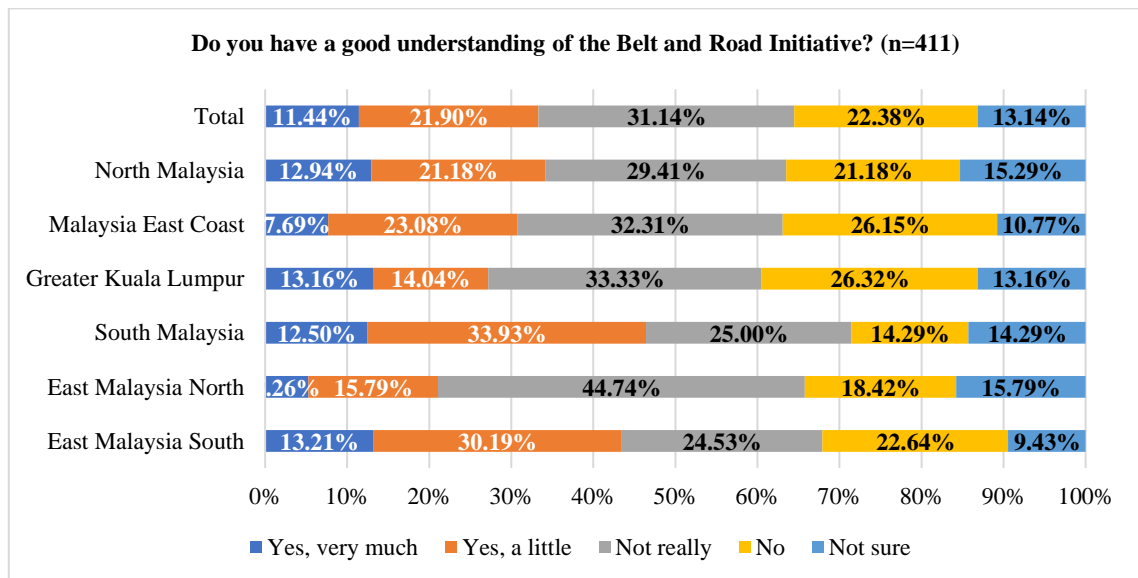


Diagram 4 Malaysians' Level of Understanding on the BRI, by regions

5.2.2 Means of understanding to the BRI

Table 12 below shows the results on questions identifying respondents' preferences, choice, and behaviors in news sources, which is one of the means of understanding to the BRI, and is often being studied and analyzed by researchers in identifying the sentiment, perception, or the level of attention paid towards a topic. In this case, respondents were first filtered out based on their news reading behavior, only those who read the news are

required to answer the following questions. It turns out that 89.05% of the respondents have the habit of reading news. Of the 366 respondents who read the news, Berita Harian was listed either as the first, second, or third choice of news source for nearly half of the respondents at 48.36%, followed by Facebook pages, posts, or threads, that are not posted by an official news or media organization at 43.44%. The result is similar for the first choice of news sources, with Berita Harian at 23.84% and Facebook (Excluding Official Pages of News/Media Company) at 17.52%.

Table 12 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (news and media)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Do you read any news? Please select one answer.</i>	Yes	366	89.05%
	No	45	10.95%
<i>What are your top 3 sources of news?</i>	<i>Berita Harian</i>	177	48.36%
	<i>Bernama</i>	34	9.29%
	Borneo Post	49	13.39%
	China Press (中国报)	29	7.92%
	Facebook (Excluding Official Pages of News / Media Company)	159	43.44%
	<i>Harian Metro</i>	136	37.16%
	Malay Mail	16	4.37%
	<i>Malaysiakini</i>	73	19.95%
	<i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i> (南洋商报)	17	4.64%
	New Straits Times	71	19.40%
	Oriental Daily News (东方日报)	8	2.19%
	Sin Chew Daily (星洲日报)	49	13.39%
	The Edge	10	2.73%
	The Star	103	28.14%
	The Sun	12	3.28%
	Twitter (Excluding Official Pages of News / Media Company)	55	15.03%
	WhatsApp	90	24.59%

<i>What are your top 3 sources of news? - Top Rank</i>	Others	10	2.73%
	<i>Berita Harian</i>	98	23.84%
	<i>Bernama</i>	3	0.73%
	Borneo Post	22	5.35%
	China Press (中国报)	13	3.16%
	Facebook (Excluding Official Pages of News / Media Company)	72	17.52%
	<i>Harian Metro</i>	30	7.30%
	Malay Mail	2	0.49%
	<i>Malaysiakini</i>	19	4.62%
	<i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i> (南洋商报)	2	0.49%
	New Straits Times	13	3.16%
	Oriental Daily News (东方日报)	3	0.73%
	Sin Chew Daily (星洲日报)	16	3.89%
	The Edge	1	0.24%
	The Star	28	6.81%
	The Sun	3	0.73%
	Twitter (Excluding Official Pages of News / Media Company)	21	5.11%
	WhatsApp	16	3.89%
	Others	4	0.97%
	No, I do not read any news	45	10.95%

Diagram 5, 6, and 7 below shows the means of understanding to the BRI that Malaysians have chosen, grouped by ethnicities, religions, and regions. In general, online media as represented in social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have overtaken offline media as represented mainly by newspapers, which is similar to the results gathered in a recent survey conducted by Vase.ai on Malaysians' media consumption that reveals 89% of their respondents have frequent access to social media platforms (Vase.ai, 2019b). However, there is still a large percentage of respondents among ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indian and other ethnicities who are still dependent on newspapers as their

main source of information on the initiative. That said, newspaper might no longer be sufficient to reflect Malaysians' sentiments on an issue, that is, in this case, the BRI. Hence, the studies conducted by Luo (2017), Xie and Luo (2019), and Luo and Chin (2019) might no longer reflect the true perception on the BRI, even among the ethnic Chinese, as most ethnic Chinese are also now dependent on social media platforms as their source of information. Moreover, based on the results in Table 12 above, the newspapers used in their researches namely Nanyang Siang Pau (南洋商报), Oriental Daily News (东方日报), and Sin Chew Daily (星洲日报), collectively account for a mere 5.11% of the respondents in this study.

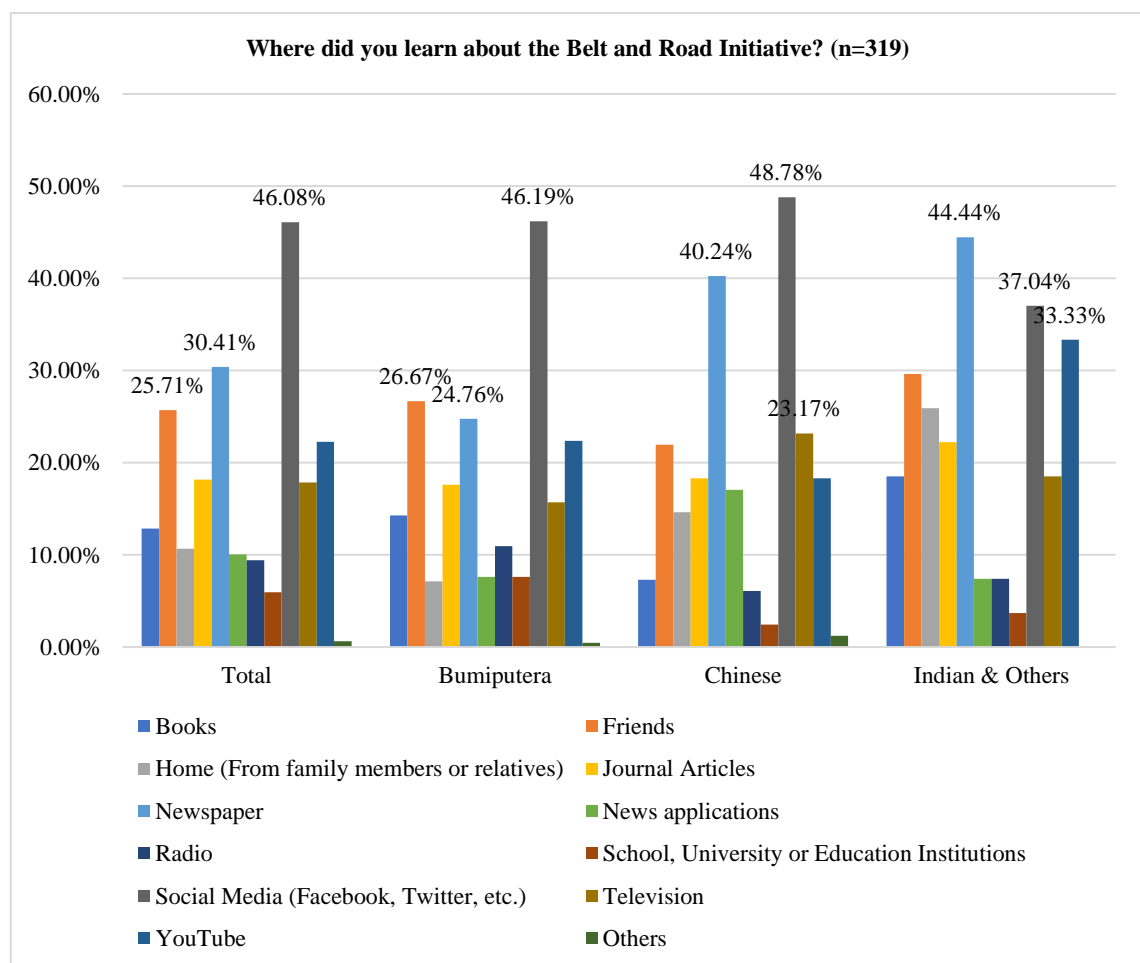


Diagram 5 Malaysians' Means of Understanding to the BRI, by ethnicities

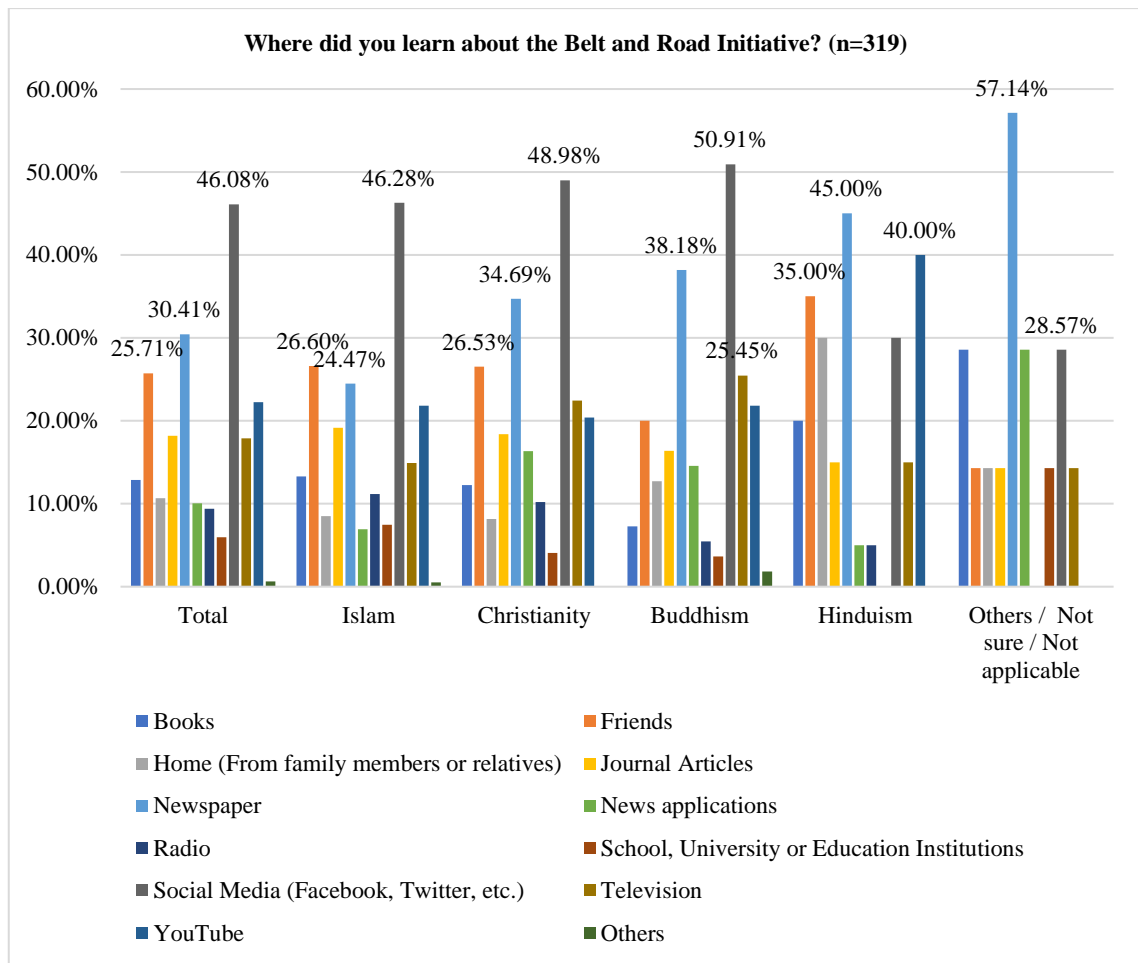


Diagram 6 Malaysians' Means of Understanding to the BRI, by religions

Surprisingly, the most urbanized region of the country, that is, the Greater Kuala Lumpur region, maintains a high level of dependency on offline media as represented by newspapers as compared to other regions. In fact, it has the highest percentage of respondents who have chosen newspapers as their means of understanding to the BRI.

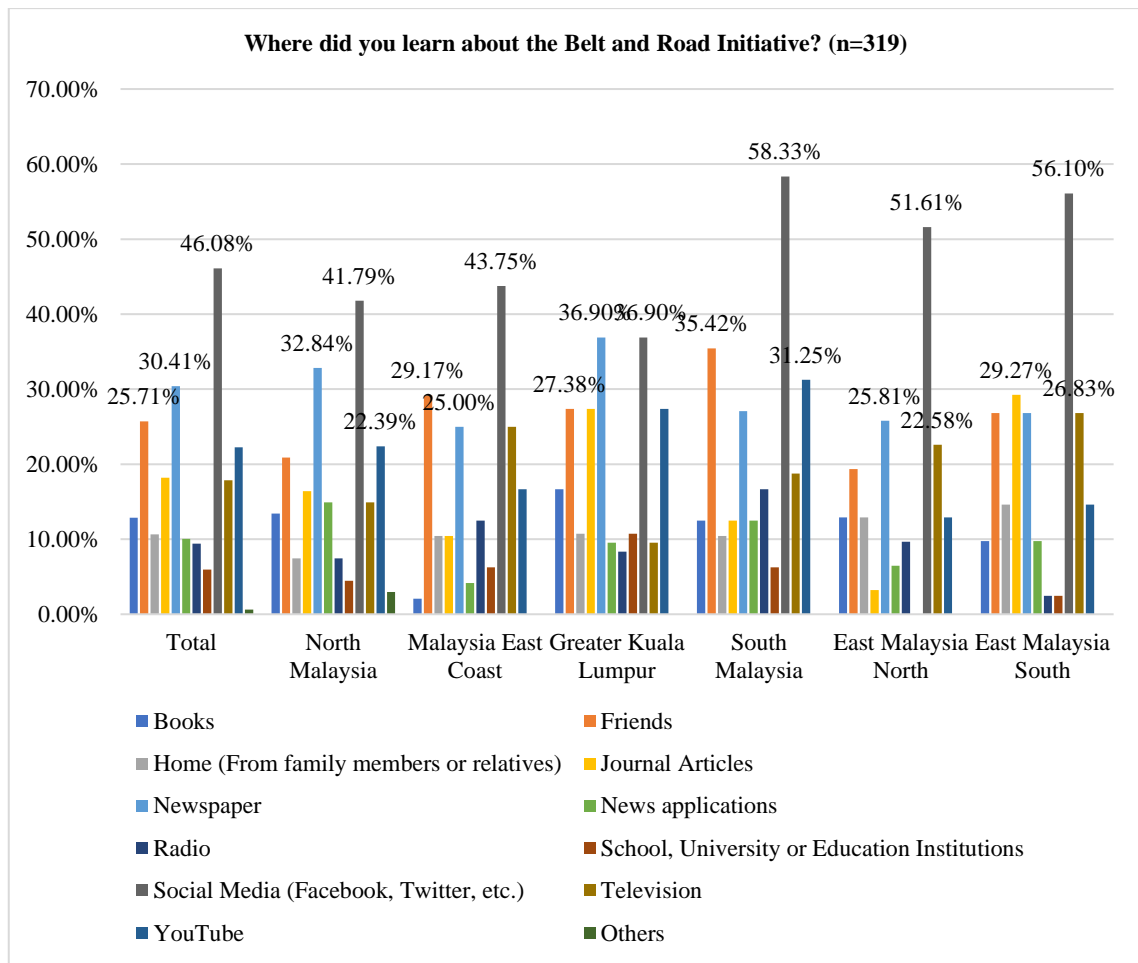


Diagram 7 Malaysians' Means of Understanding to the BRI, by regions

From the table and diagrams presented above, it is known that online media as represented by social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and video sharing platforms as represented by YouTube here has dominated Malaysians' means of understanding to the BRI, but a high percentage of 43.44% of the respondents depended on unofficial sources of news on Facebook and 24.59% of the respondents used WhatsApp as their source of news, which are more prone to unprofessional reporting of news that might not reflect the actual happening of events or include misleading statements and opinions.

5.2.3 Willingness of understanding to the BRI

As Diagram 2, 3, and 4 have presented the current levels of understanding on the BRI among Malaysians, the diagrams below show their willingness to further expand their understanding on the BRI by ethnic, religions, and regions grouping. That is, whether they are interested to know more on the initiative. In general, it shows similar pattern to Diagram 2, in which the ethnic Chinese are more interested in the initiative while ethnic Indians are least interested with the majority *Bumiputera* in between the two. The percentage of *Bumiputera* is somehow surprising as it was previously reported that there is still a lack of coverage on news on the BRI in Malay newspapers as shown in Ling's (2017) study. However, it could also be the reason that drive *Bumiputeras*' willingness to know more on the initiative.

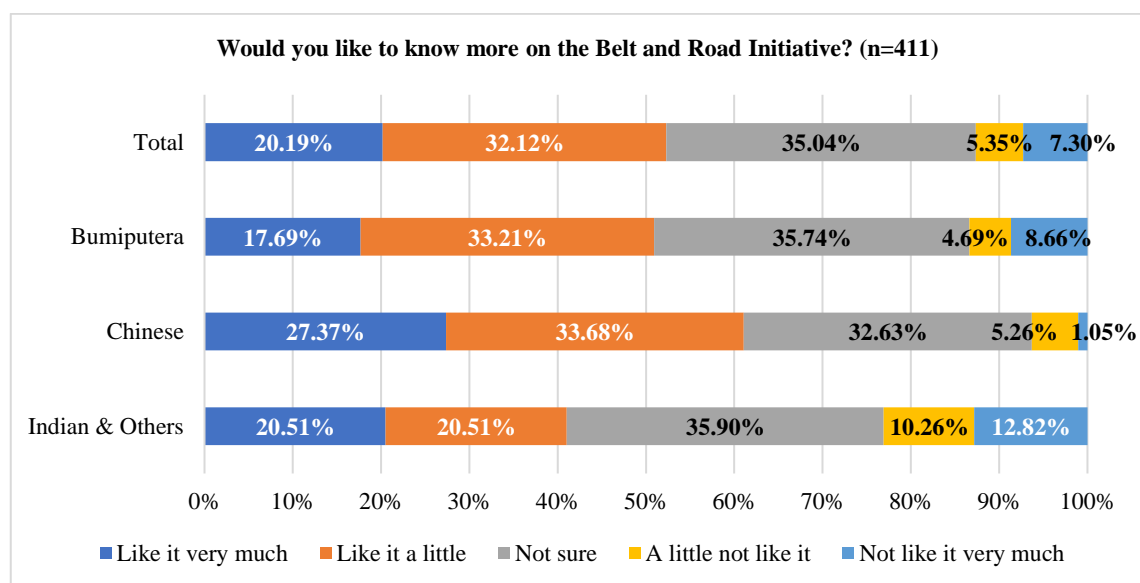


Diagram 8 Malaysians' Willingness of Understanding to the BRI, by ethnicities

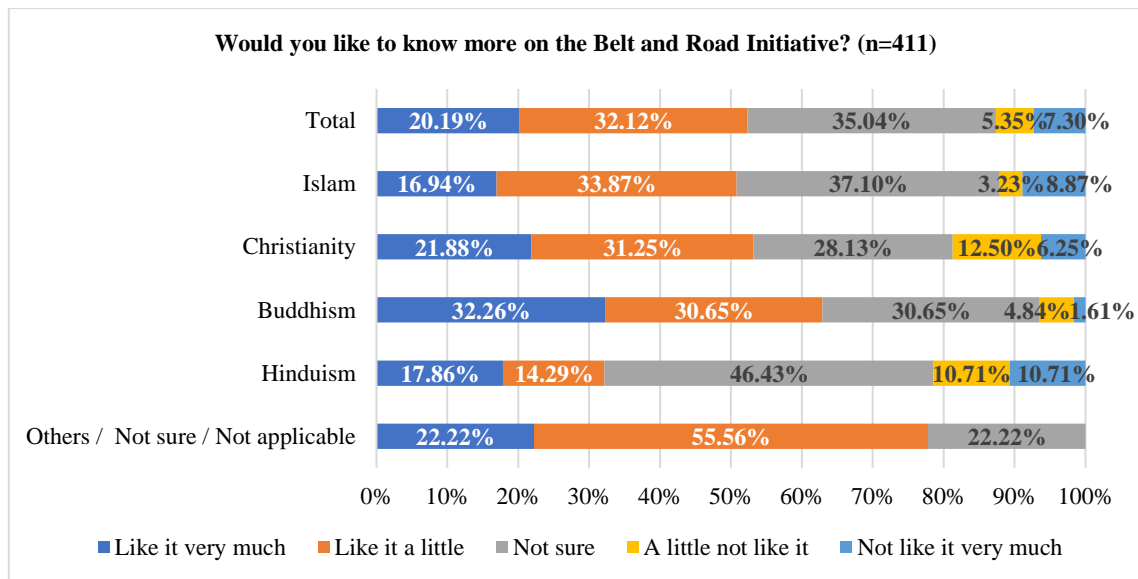


Diagram 9 Malaysians' Willingness of Understanding to the BRI, by religions

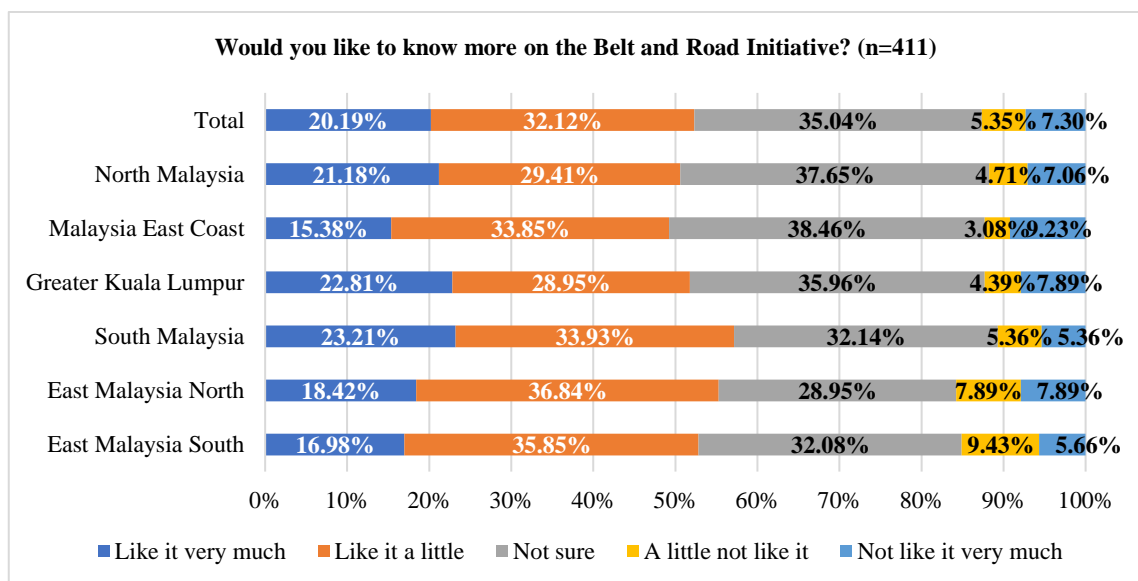


Diagram 10 Malaysians' Willingness of Understanding to the BRI, by regions

5.2.4 Perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia

The diagrams below show Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia. Two similar studies that the results can compare to is the one conducted by Ngeow (2016) and the surveys conducted by ACCCIM. However, the question in this study is slightly different from the one asked by Ngeow (2016) and ACCCIM. Perhaps because of this

difference, that the results in this survey shows significant difference with the aforementioned studies, in which the largest portion of respondents in this survey were either neutral or were unsure on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia. This is different from the 78.3% of respondents in Ngeow's (2016) study who agreed that Malaysia should participate in the BRI. This result also indirectly shows the indecisiveness that Malaysians generally poses and the relatively high level of tolerance towards pressing issues, in this case, the BRI. This can also reflect the relatively low occurrences of democratic demonstrations towards possible unjust and unfair incidents which in other countries might have already ignited rallies. A recent mention could be the movements 'inspired' by the death of George Floyd due to difference in treatments along ethnic lines, which can be considered the 'norm' in Malaysia, and Malaysians 'have get used to'.

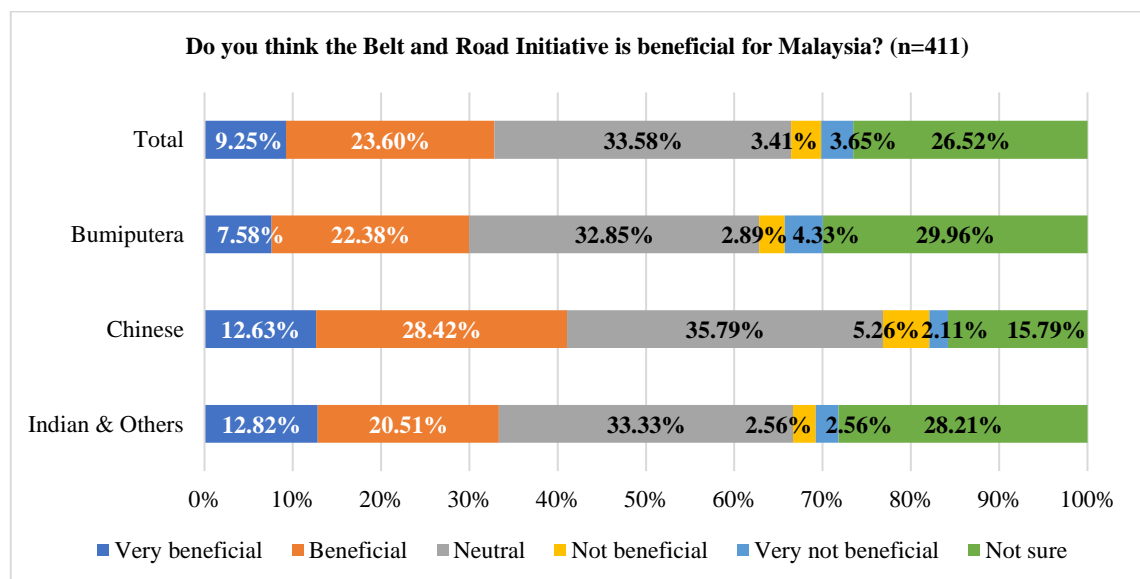


Diagram 11 Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia, by ethnicities

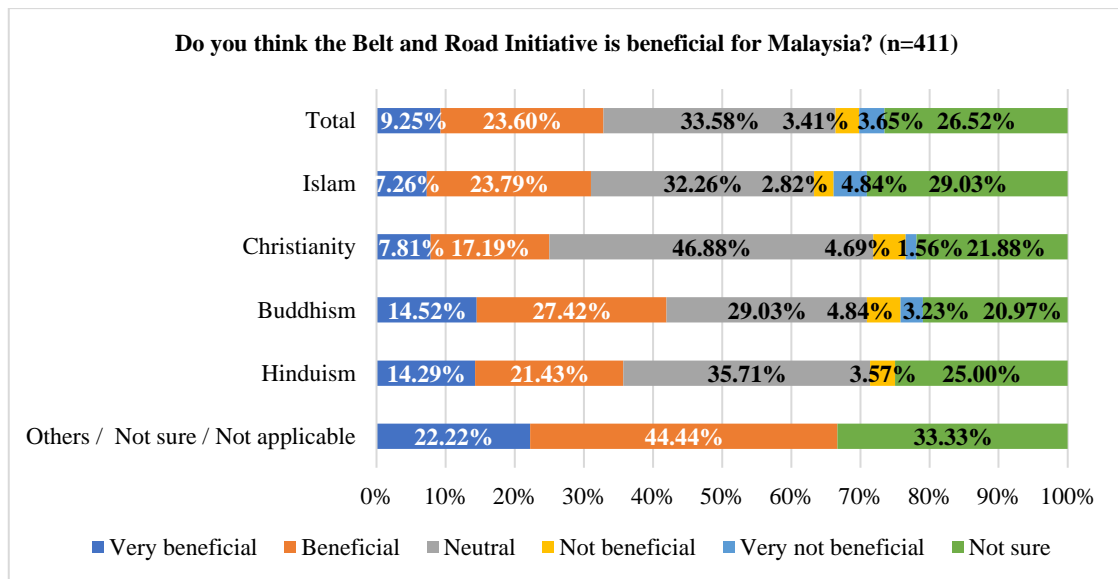


Diagram 12 Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia, by religions

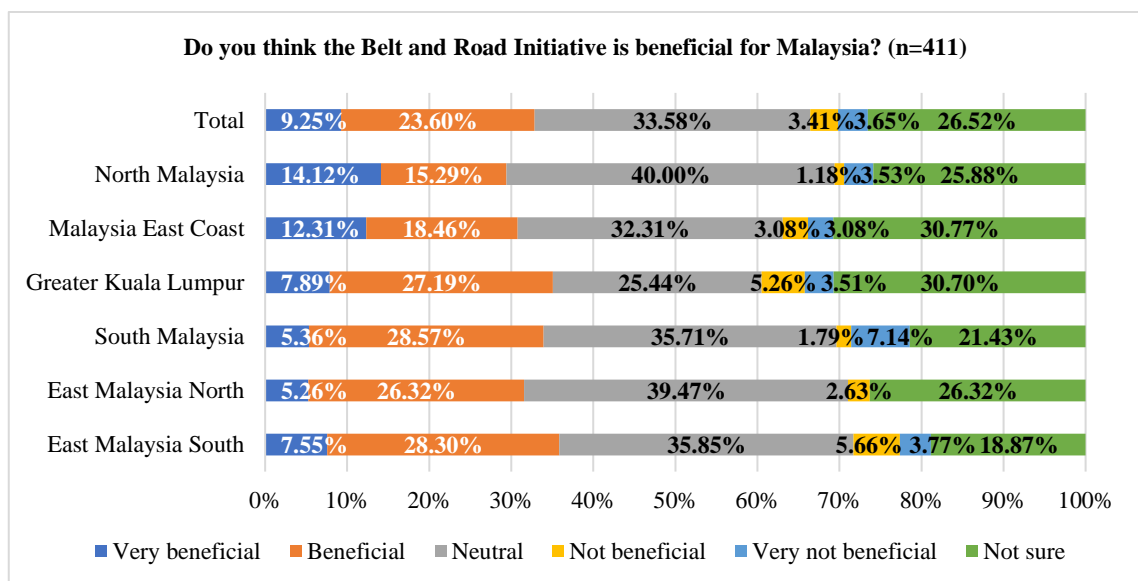


Diagram 13 Malaysians' perceptions on the benefits of the BRI to Malaysia, by regions

6.3 Malaysians' Socio-cultural behaviors to the BRI

This section mainly corresponds to Research Objective 2 and its research question, that is numbered as Main Research Question 2, and its respective Sub-Research Questions 2a,

2b, 2c, 2d, and 2e, by analyzing the results gathered from the responses to the questions on both political and socio-cultural dimensions in the questionnaire.

MRQ 2: To what extent are Malaysians' socio-cultural behaviors likely to be influenced by the BRI?

Based on the five sub-research questions below that categorizes the results into five dimensions, that are, language, cuisine, international tourism, overseas education, and social media and instant messaging platforms. It can be seen that Chinese presence is significantly observed only in the dimensions of language and cuisine, while the remaining dimensions have little presence of Chinese products, with the exception of social media and instant messaging platform that has partially presence among ethnic Chinese. However, among the dimensions that have strong Chinese presence, that is, language and cuisine, an increasing trend in the use of Mandarin Chinese and the experience of having Mainland Chinese cuisine is observed especially between the year 2013 to 2018, which could be indirectly linked to the increase presence of internalization of Chinese products and the BRI as a whole.

5.3.1 Language

Sub-RQ 2a: For Malaysians who are not able to converse in Mandarin Chinese, did Mandarin Chinese become their most preferred language to learn?

Table 13 below shows the current state of language use among Malaysians based on the results on questions identifying respondents' willingness, preferences, choice, and behaviors in terms of language usage. Respondents were asked to select all available options for the languages they can converse in, and three languages they are willing to learn or are currently learning. It can be seen that there is no single language that all

respondents are able to converse in, the lingua franca, or the most spoken language among the respondents, is Malay language at 87.59%, followed by English language at 73.24%, with Mandarin Chinese being at a distant third at 24.09%. However, most of the respondents (87.84%), are willing to learn at least one new language or are already in the process of learning new language(s). A little more than half of the respondents chose Mandarin as one of the top three languages they wished to learn, followed by Japanese at 43.77% and Korean and English, being tied at 37.95%. Among them, 23.11% of the respondents selected Mandarin as their most wanted language to learn, nearly ten percentage points more than the respondents who chose English language as their most wanted language to learn (13.38%).

Table 13 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (language)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>What are the languages you are able to converse in? Please select all that apply.</i>	Arabic	30	7.30%
	Chinese - Cantonese	47	11.44%
	Chinese - Hakka	23	5.60%
	Chinese - Hokkien	56	13.63%
	Chinese - Mandarin	99	24.09%
	Chinese - Teochew	14	3.41%
	English	301	73.24%
	French	1	0.24%
	Hindi	4	0.97%
	Japanese	11	2.68%
	Korean	5	1.22%
	Malay	360	87.59%
	Russian	0	0.00%
	Spanish	1	0.24%
	Tamil	29	7.06%
	Others	20	4.87%
<i>Would you like to learn or are you</i>	Yes, would like to learn but not currently learning any language	262	63.75%

<i>currently learning any language? Please select one answer.</i>	Yes, currently learning any language	99	24.09%
	No	50	12.17%
<i>What are the 3 languages that you would like to learn or are currently learning?</i>	Arabic	106	29.36%
	Cantonese	51	14.13%
	English	137	37.95%
	French	72	19.94%
	Hakka	6	1.66%
	Hindi	24	6.65%
	Hokkien	23	6.37%
	Japanese	158	43.77%
	Korean	137	37.95%
	Malay	58	16.07%
	Mandarin	200	55.40%
	Others	14	3.88%
	Russian	8	2.22%
	Spanish	60	16.62%
	Tamil	24	6.65%
	Teochew	5	1.39%
<i>What are the 3 languages that you would like to learn or are currently learning? - Top Rank</i>	Arabic	54	13.14%
	Cantonese	20	4.87%
	English	55	13.38%
	French	11	2.68%
	Hakka	1	0.24%
	Hindi	2	0.49%
	Hokkien	7	1.70%
	Japanese	43	10.46%
	Korean	24	5.84%
	Malay	28	6.81%
	Mandarin	95	23.11%
	No, I am not interested to learn any language	50	12.17%
	Others	5	1.22%
	Spanish	12	2.92%
	Tamil	3	0.73%
	Teochew	1	0.24%

The three diagrams below show that Mandarin Chinese is the most wanted-to-learn language among Malaysians in general, especially among *Bumiputeras* and ethnic Indians. As most of the ethnic Chinese are already proficient in Mandarin Chinese, they are more interested in learning Japanese. Surprisingly, Mandarin Chinese have surpassed Arabic as the most preferred language to learn for *Bumiputeras*. It is important to note that Arabic is regarded as the language of Islam and were more popular among Muslims in general, as it would be easier for them to understand the meaning of Islamic teachings as presented in the Qur'an and Hadith. Besides Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean and English, are also listed among most respondents top three wanted-to-learn languages. The only difference is that Mandarin Chinese is most respondents' top priority, while other languages might be listed as second or third choice.

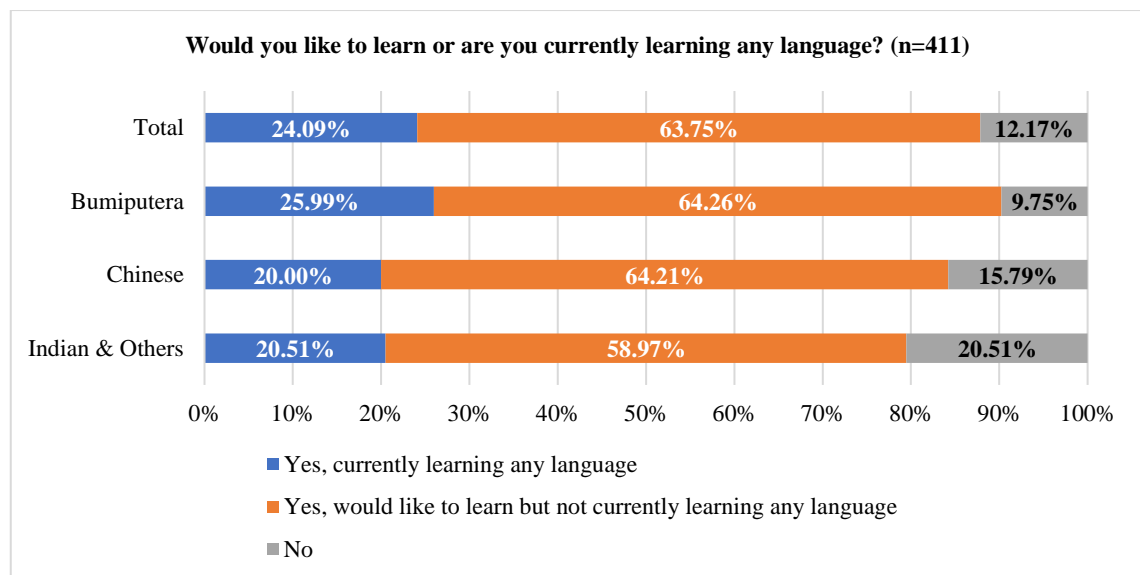


Diagram 14 Malaysians' willingness to learn a new language, by ethnicities

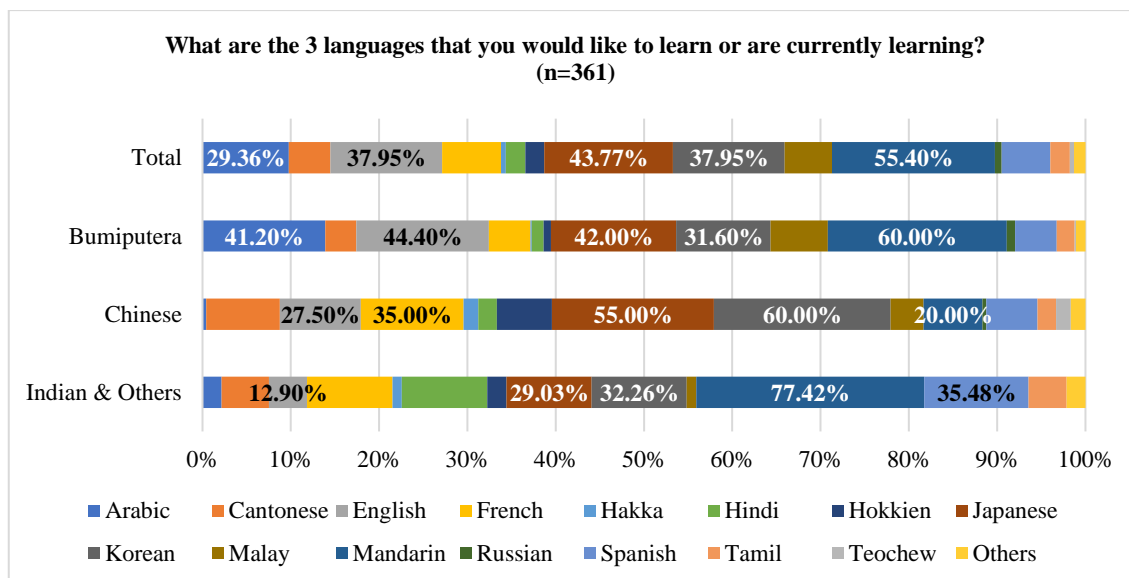


Diagram 15 Malaysians' Top 3 most wanted-to-learn languages, by ethnicities

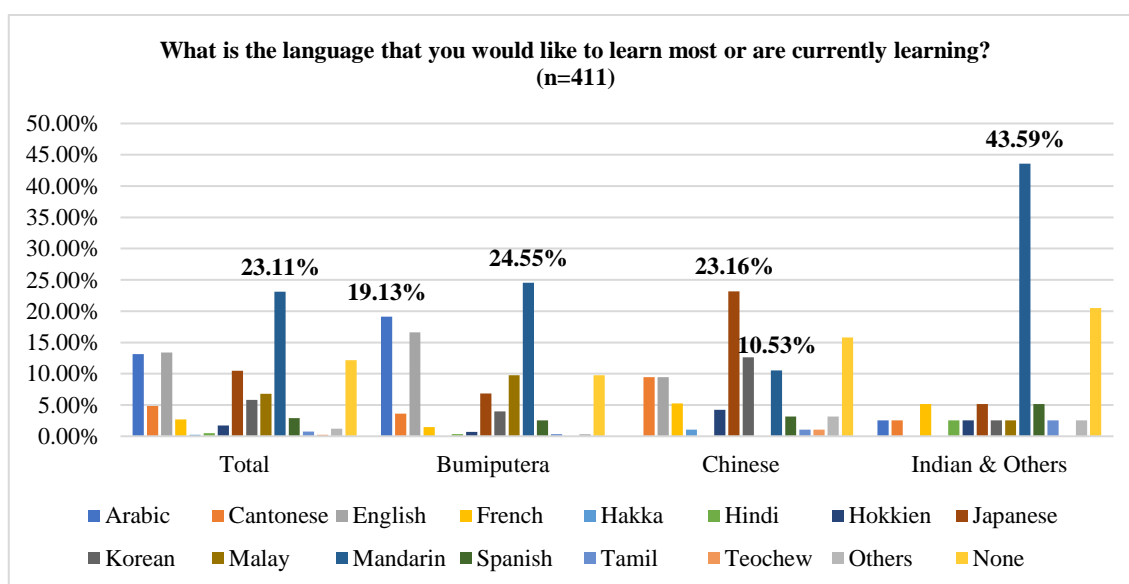


Diagram 16 Malaysian's most wanted-to-learn language, by ethnicities

The two diagrams below show the frequency of using Mandarin Chinese in communications and the first attempt of using Mandarin Chinese in communications. While it is obvious that most Chinese is using Mandarin Chinese in their communications, a significant percentage of *Bumiputeras* (20.21%) and ethnic Indians (28.2%) are also using Mandarin Chinese at least every week, if not every day. It is also interesting to note

that among the Malaysians who have used Mandarin Chinese in their daily communication, most of them started using the language since 2013, while 75% of ethnic Chinese have been using Mandarin Chinese before the year 2000 as they have been learning the language since their birth.

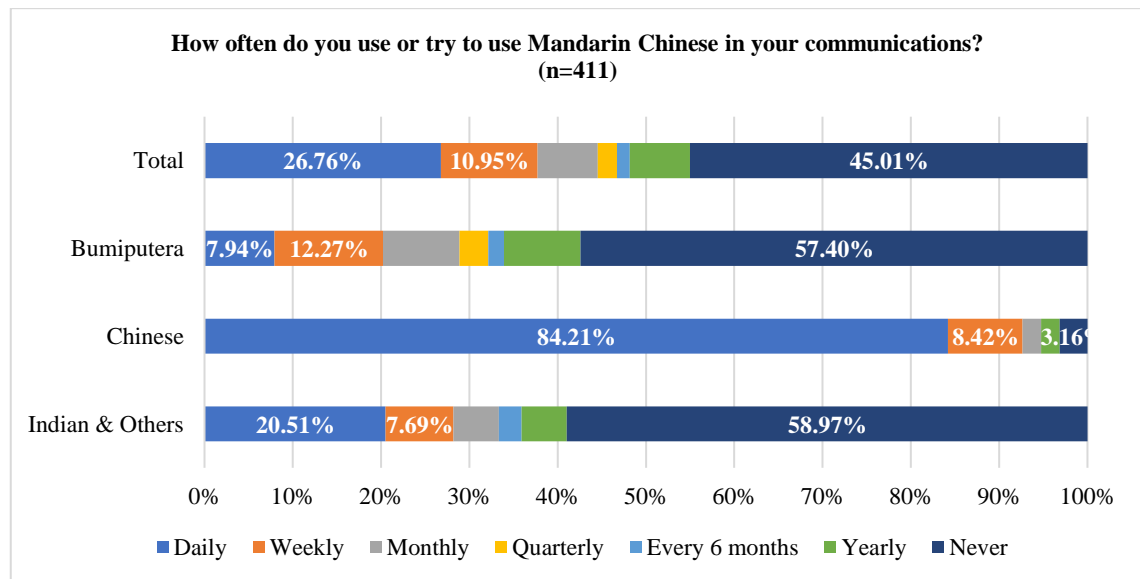


Diagram 17 Malaysians' frequency of using Mandarin Chinese in communications, by ethnicities

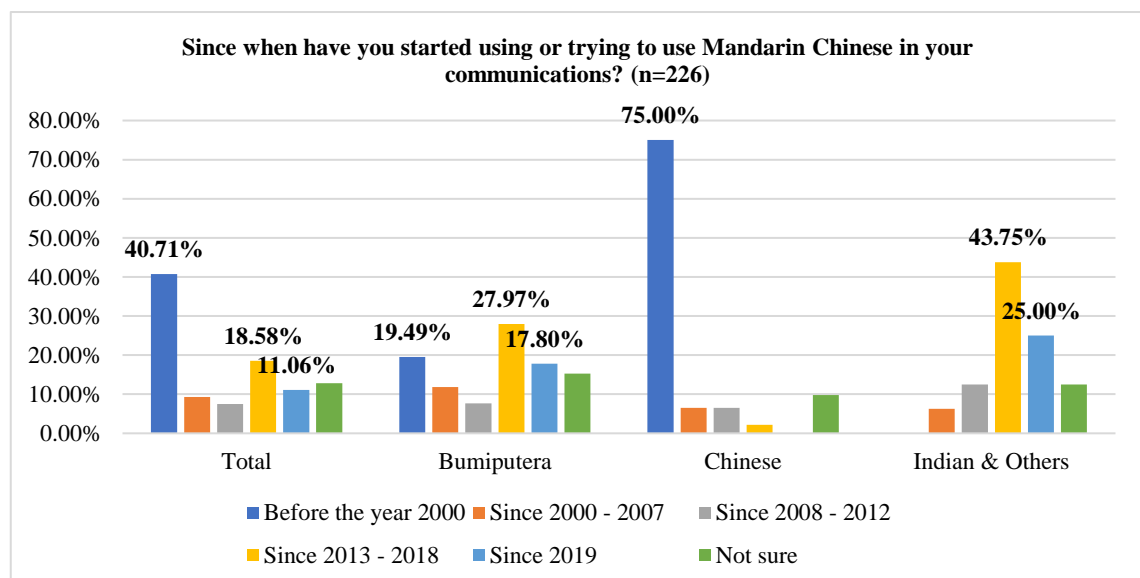


Diagram 18 Malaysians' first attempt of using Mandarin Chinese in communications, by ethnicities

Hence, we can conclude that Mandarin Chinese is the most preferred language to learn for Malaysians who were not able to communicate in Mandarin Chinese, with an increasing trend since 2013.

5.3.2 Cuisine

Sub-RQ 2b: What is Malaysians' most preferred type of cuisine?

The results on questions identifying respondents' preferences, choices, and behaviors in terms of types of cuisine are summarized in Table 14 below. Respondents were asked to select the top three cuisines that they prefer the most. There is no single type of cuisine that all respondents unanimously prefer, with Malay/Indonesian cuisine, Chinese (Malaysian style) cuisine, and Western cuisine being at close numbers at 58.64%, 57.91%, and 49.39% respectively. In terms of the type of cuisine that most respondents chose as their top preference, Malay/Indonesian continues to top the list at 36.01%, followed by Chinese (Malaysian style) at 25.55%, and Chinese (From Mainland China) at 11.44%.

Table 14 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (cuisine)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>What are the 3 cuisines that you prefer the most?</i>	Chinese (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (<i>Mee Tarik / La-mian / Pulled Noodles</i>), 火锅 (<i>Hotpot / Steamboat</i>), etc.)	118	28.71%
	Chinese (From Taiwan)	58	14.11%
	Chinese (Malaysian style)	238	57.91%
	Indian	65	15.82%
	Japanese	128	31.14%
	Korean	108	26.28%
	Malay / Indonesian	241	58.64%
	Middle Eastern	64	15.57%
	Western	203	49.39%
	Others	10	2.43%

What are the 3 cuisines that you prefer the most? - Top Rank

Chinese (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (<i>Mee Tarik / La-mian / Pulled Noodles</i>), 火锅 (<i>Hotpot / Steamboat</i>), etc.)	47	11.44%
Chinese (From Taiwan)	15	3.65%
Chinese (Malaysian style)	105	25.55%
Indian	18	4.38%
Japanese	25	6.08%
Korean	24	5.84%
Malay / Indonesian	148	36.01%
Middle Eastern	3	0.73%
Western	24	5.84%
Others	2	0.49%

While Malay/Indonesian cuisine is still most Malaysians' preferred type of cuisine, Malaysian Chinese cuisine and Mainland Chinese cuisine is also popular among Malaysians' most preferred. Besides that, while Western cuisine and Japanese cuisine are also often listed among the top three preferences of cuisine among respondents, most of the respondents only treat them as second or third choice.

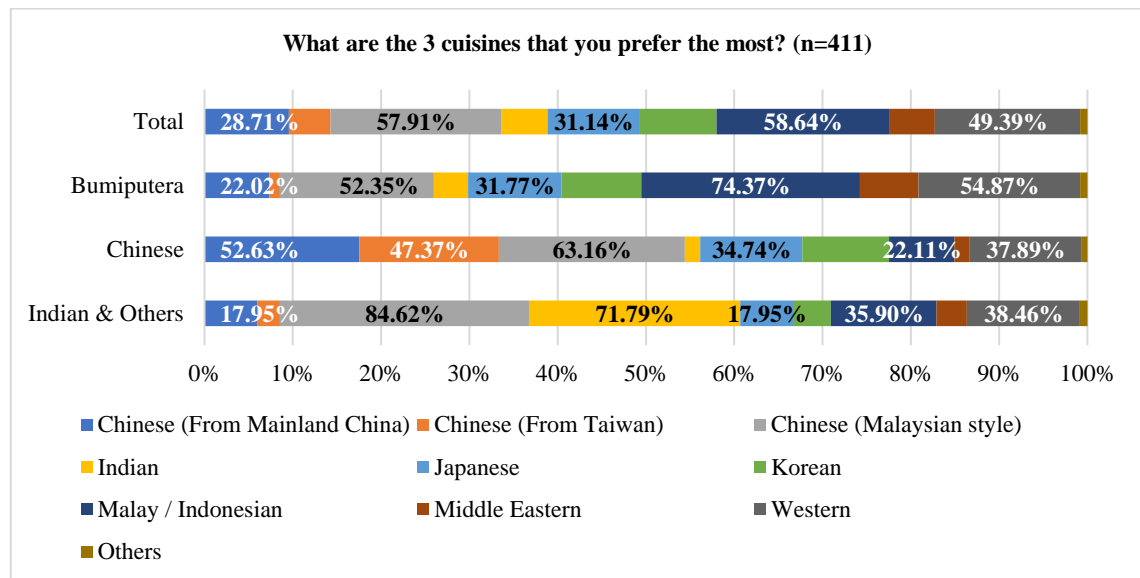


Diagram 19 Malaysians' Top 3 most preferred cuisine, by ethnicities

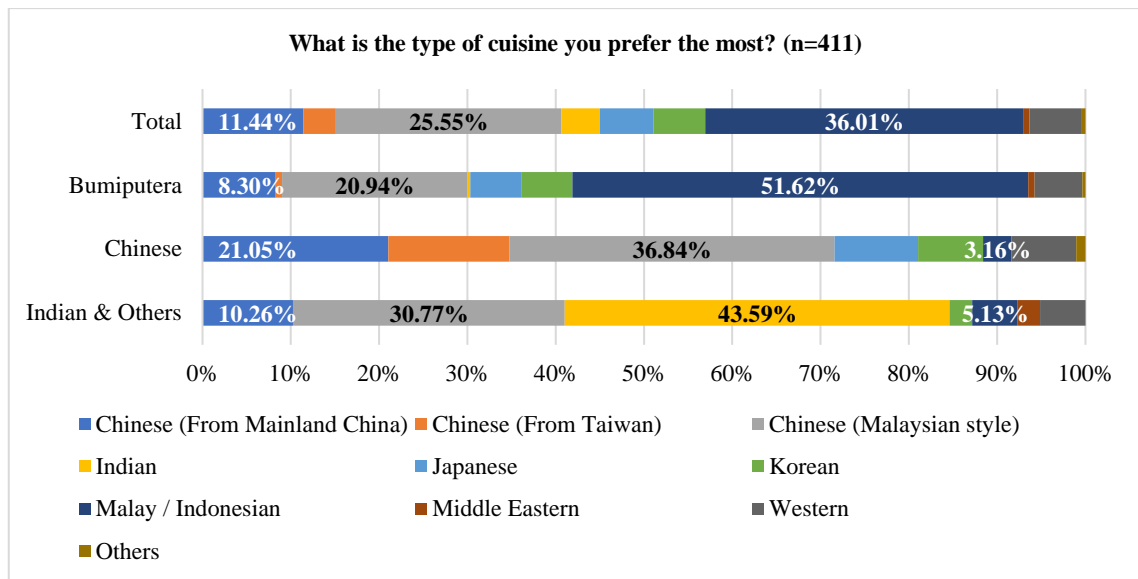


Diagram 20 Malaysians' most preferred type of cuisine, by ethnicities

It is also important to note the significant differences in dining habits among ethnicities, in which the ethnics' own type of cuisine is still the most preferred among the ethnic, that is Malay/Indonesian cuisine for the *Bumiputeras*, the Malaysian Chinese cuisine for the ethnic Chinese, and Indian cuisine for the ethnic Indians. However, a diverse range of cuisines are selected as Malaysians' second or third choice of cuisine, which reflects Malaysia's multicultural environment and Malaysians' multicultural familiarity.

If the results are limited to Mainland Chinese cuisine, 68.86% (n=283) of the respondents had an experience in eating Mainland Chinese food. In which, 26.28% of the respondents have had Mainland Chinese cuisine either in the past month or past week. Surprisingly, ethnic Indians and others appears to have higher frequency to dine in a Mainland Chinese restaurant than other ethnicities.

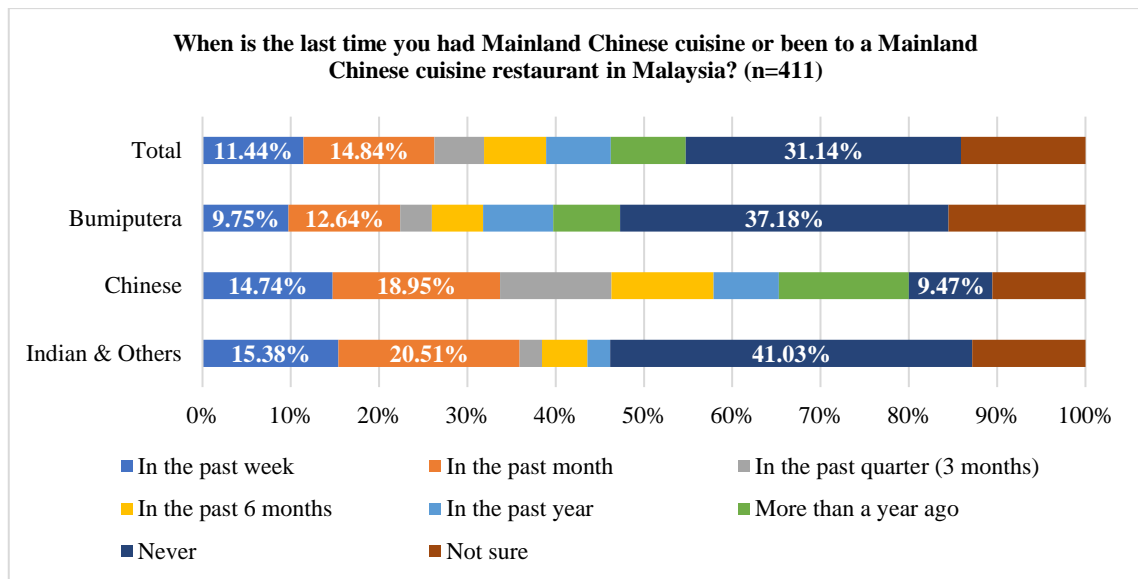


Diagram 21 Malaysians' most recent dining experience at a Mainland Chinese restaurant in Malaysia, by ethnicities

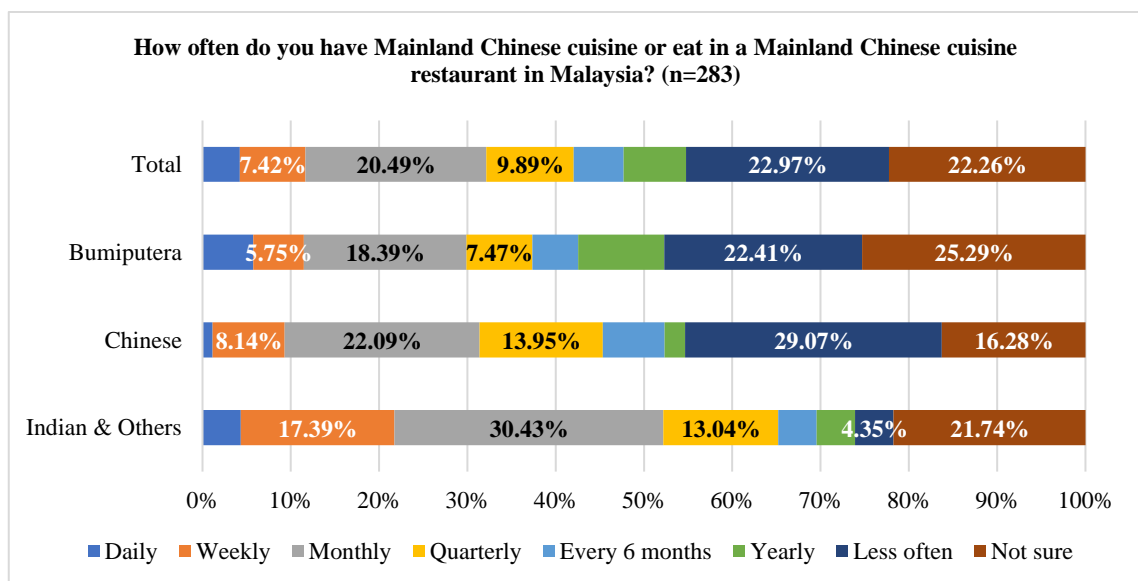


Diagram 22 Malaysians' frequency of dining in a Mainland Chinese restaurant in Malaysia, by ethnicities

Similar to the use of Mandarin Chinese in communications, the first experience of dining in a Mainland Chinese restaurant for most Malaysians were between 2013 and 2018, while 34.78% of ethnic Indians were unsure of their first experience.

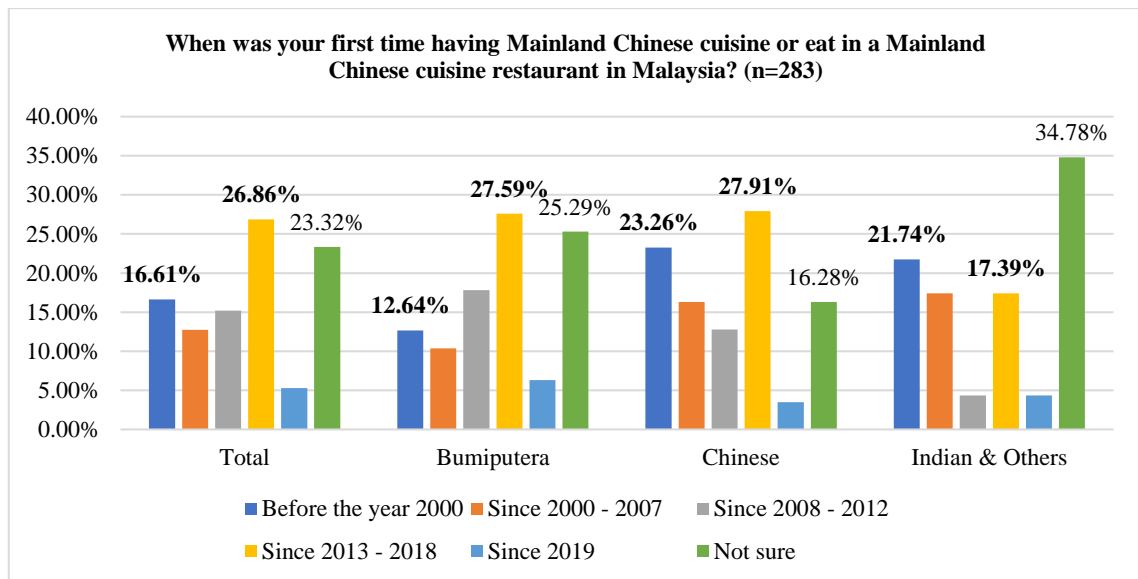


Diagram 23 Malaysians' first attempt of dining in a Mainland Chinese restaurant in Malaysia, by ethnicities

A reason behind the rise in *Bumiputeras'* attempt to dine in Mainland Chinese restaurant is the influx of China's Hui ethnic group into Malaysia. As reviewed by Hew (2016) and Ma (2017), Southeast Asia has been not only a popular migrate destination for Chinese Hui Muslims due to the similarity in religion, but also for pursuing knowledge in Islamic studies, as options are limited and regulated in China. As a result, there is a significant rise in the number of Hui restaurants in Malaysia, often represented by the *Lanzhou* hand-pulled noodle, or known as *La-mian*. The introduction of this new type of cuisine offers the Muslims in Malaysia a new option for dining, especially for the Malays where their dining habits are still relatively dependent on Malay/Indonesian cuisine.

5.3.3 International tourism

Sub-RQ 2c: Where is Malaysians' most preferred destination of overseas travel?

Table 15 below shows the results on questions identifying respondents' willingness, preferences, and choice in terms of international destinations, in the event that they are

provided with the chance to travel abroad for leisure purposes, excluding business and/or religious reasons and obligations. Respondents that were not willing to travel abroad even they were provided with the chance and ability were first filtered out, leaving 396 (96.35%) respondents for the next question. The remaining respondents were then required to select their top three choices of international destinations that they prefer for their next trip of leisure purposes. The results show that Japan is included either as the first, second, or third choice of international destination at 46.97%, followed by Australia (43.94%) and the United Kingdom (30.81%). However, when it comes to the most preferred destination of choice, Australia became the most preferred international destination for overseas tourism with 22.14% of respondents selected it as their first choice, and Japan became the second most preferred international destination at 18.25%.

Table 15 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (overseas tourism)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>If you are given a chance, are you willing to travel abroad? Please select one answer.</i>	Yes	396	96.35%
	No	15	3.65%
<i>What are the 3 international destinations that you prefer the most for your next trip for leisure (trips besides business or religious reasons)?</i>	Australia	174	43.94%
	France	75	18.94%
	Germany	44	11.11%
	Hong Kong	29	7.32%
	Indonesia	54	13.64%
	Italy	52	13.13%
	Japan	186	46.97%
	Macao	8	2.02%
	Mainland China	29	7.32%
	Philippines	16	4.04%
	Singapore	57	14.39%
	South Korea	103	26.01%
	Spain	20	5.05%

<i>What are the 3 international destinations that you prefer the most for your next trip for leisure (trips besides business or religious reasons)? - Top Rank</i>	Taiwan	46	11.62%
	Thailand	44	11.11%
	United Kingdom	122	30.81%
	United States	79	19.95%
	Vietnam	22	5.56%
	Others	28	7.07%
	Australia	91	22.14%
	France	23	5.60%
	Germany	8	1.95%
	Hong Kong	11	2.68%
	Indonesia	22	5.35%
	Italy	11	2.68%
	Japan	75	18.25%
	Macao	2	0.49%
	Mainland China	11	2.68%
	Philippines	1	0.24%
	Singapore	16	3.89%
	South Korea	25	6.08%
	Spain	3	0.73%
	Taiwan	13	3.16%
	Thailand	11	2.68%
	United Kingdom	35	8.52%
	United States	21	5.11%
	Vietnam	1	0.24%
	Others	16	3.89%
	No, I am not willing to travel abroad	15	3.65%

Different from the strong presence of Mainland Chinese cuisine in dining habits and Mandarin Chinese in the use of language, China is not among the top preference as the international destination for Malaysians. Interestingly, the divide between ethnicities in preferences of international destination is relatively small with the exception of Taiwan being a one of the popular destination for ethnic Chinese, and the United Kingdom and

the United States being the two of the most popular destinations for ethnic Indian and others.

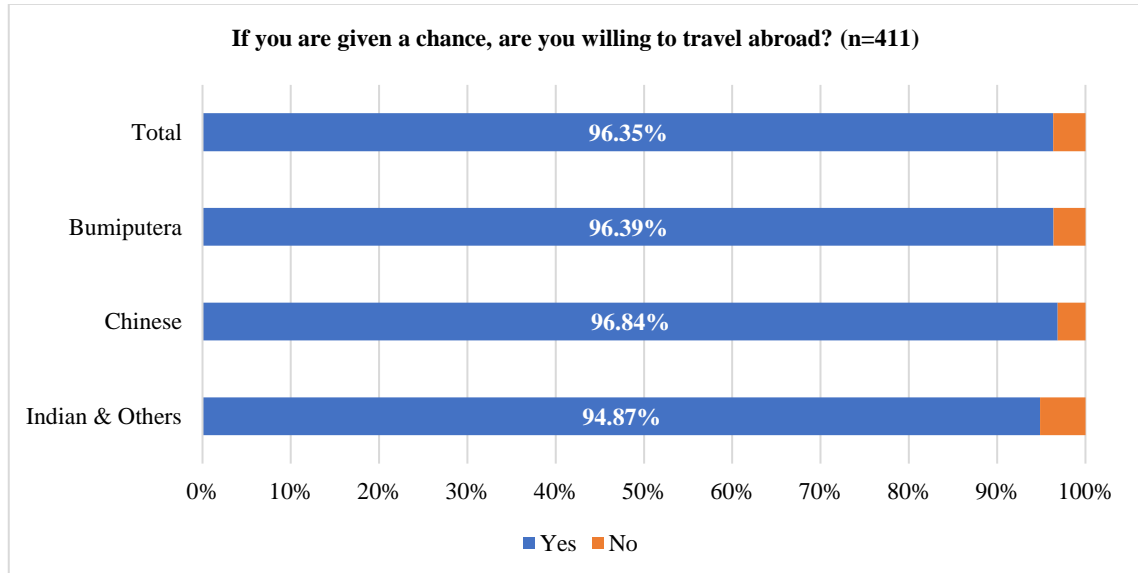


Diagram 24 Malaysians' willingness to travel abroad, by ethnicities

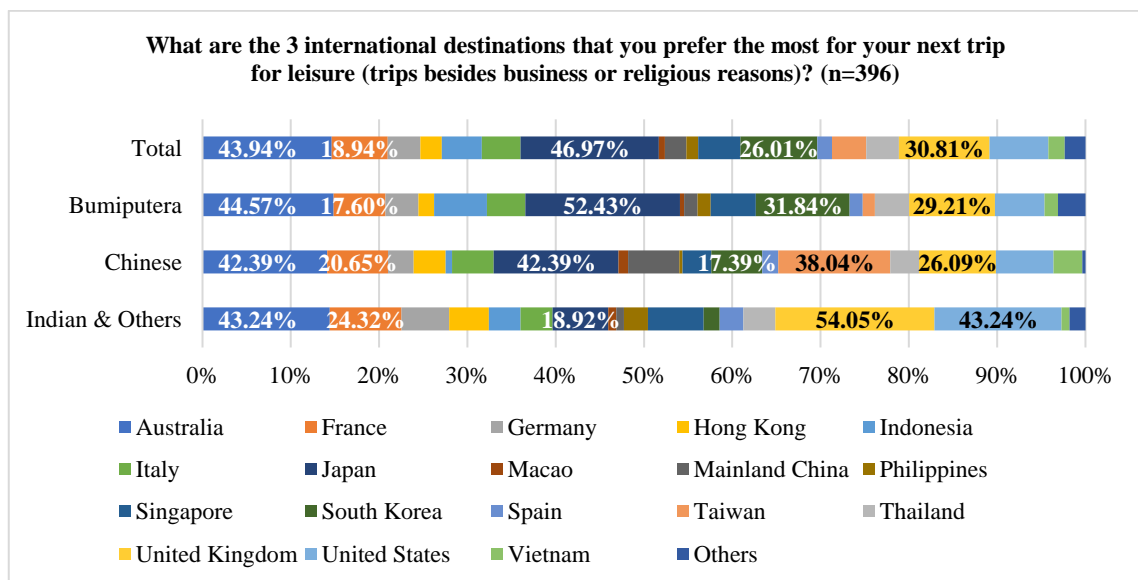


Diagram 25 Malaysians' Top 3 preferred international destinations for tourism, by ethnicities

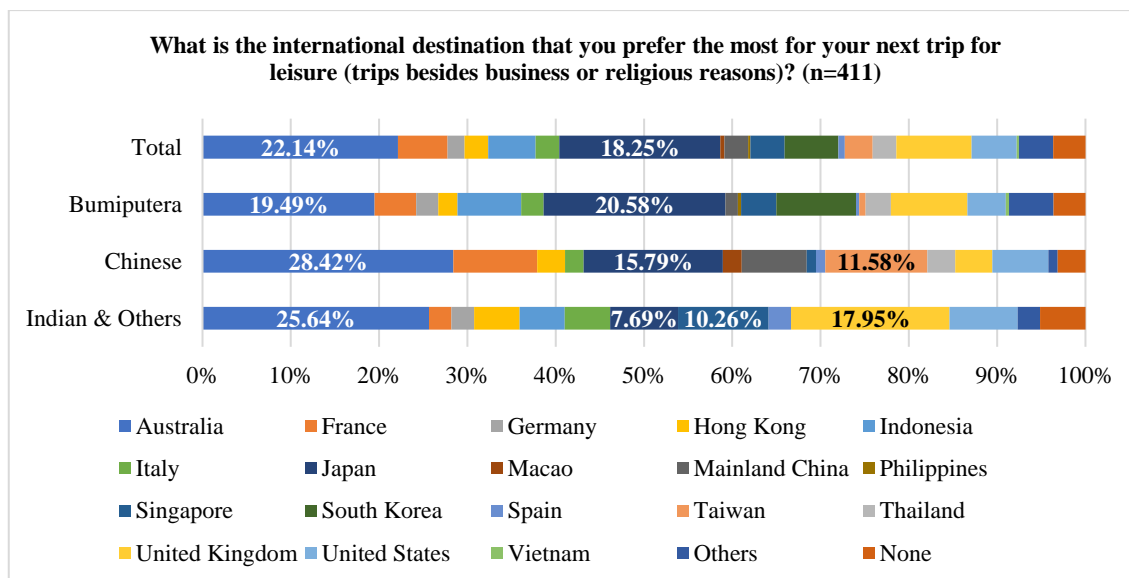


Diagram 26 Malaysians' most preferred international destination for tourism, by ethnicities

In general, Australia top the list as the most preferred international destination for tourism among Malaysians, followed by Japan. Although Australia is the top choice for both the ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indians and others, Japan is slightly more popular among the *Bumiputeras*.

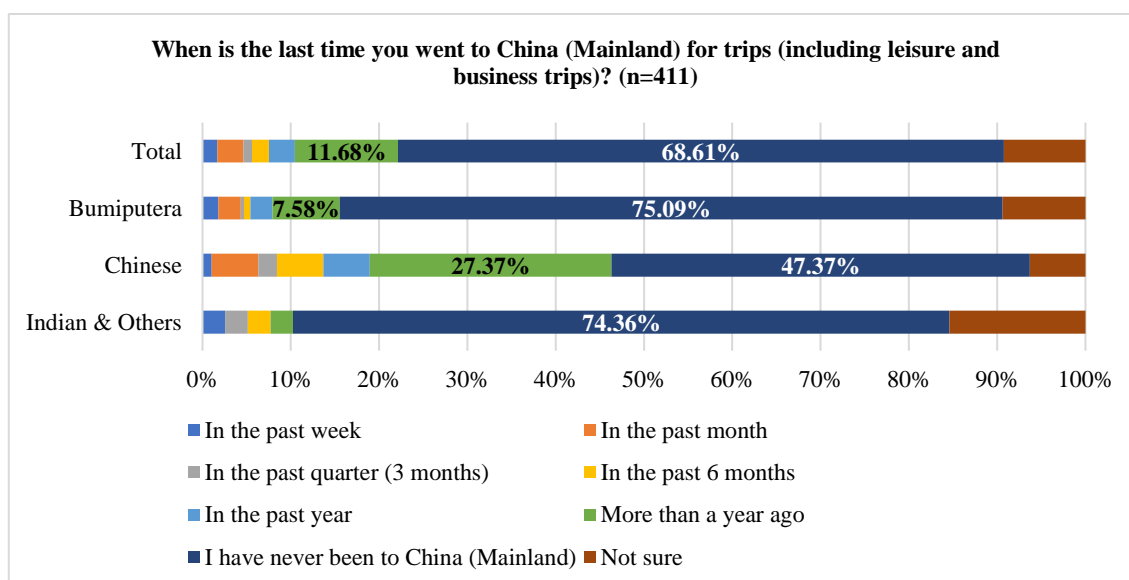


Diagram 27 Malaysians' most recent travel experience to Mainland China, by ethnicities

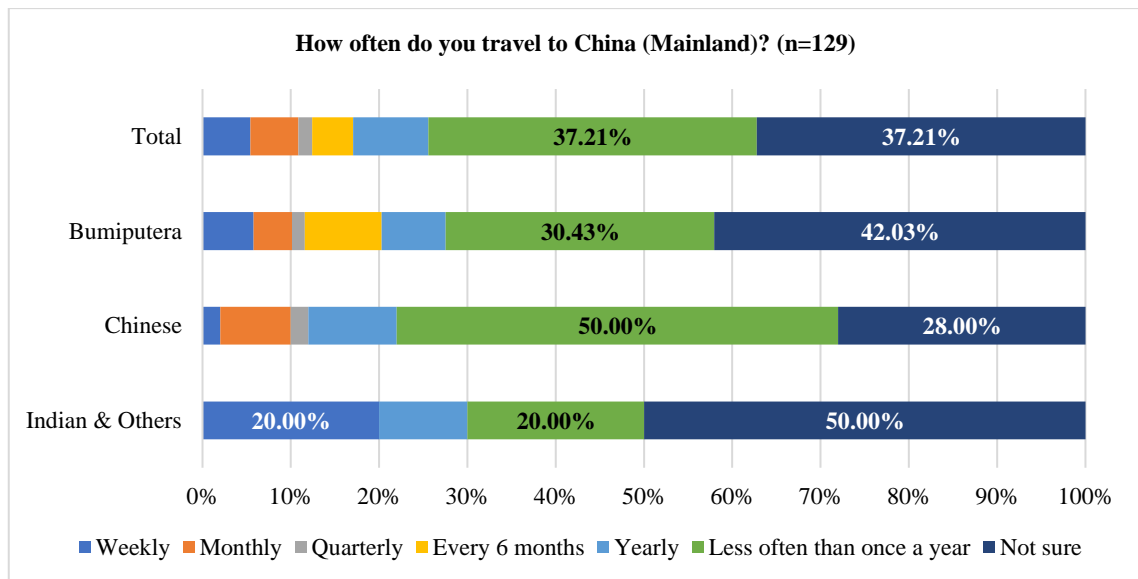


Diagram 28 Malaysians' frequency of traveling to Mainland China, by ethnicities

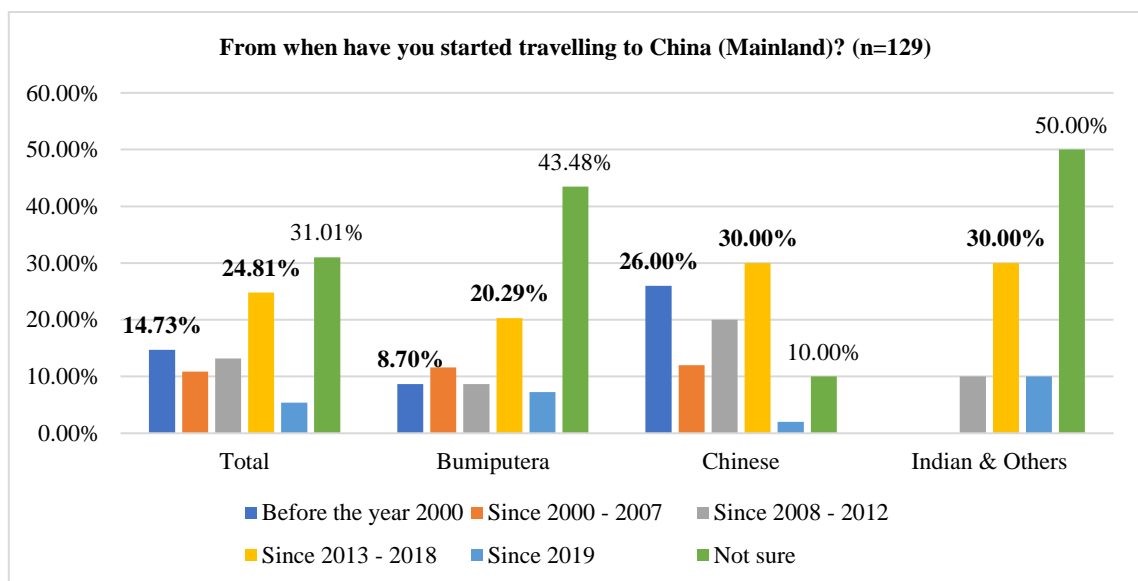


Diagram 29 Malaysians' first attempt of traveling to Mainland China, by ethnicities

Among the 411 respondents, only 129 had an experience of traveling to Mainland China. In which, unsurprisingly, most are ethnic Chinese. Surprisingly, the frequency of traveling to Mainland China is higher among the *Bumiputera* than that of ethnic Chinese. Similar to the trend in the use of Mandarin Chinese in language and Mainland Chinese

cuisine as a dining option, most Malaysians' first travel experience to Mainland China fell between the year 2013 to 2018.

5.3.4 Overseas education

Sub-RQ 2d: Where is Malaysians' most preferred destination of overseas education?

Similar to Table 15, Table 16 below shows the results on questions identifying respondents' preferences and choice of international destinations for overseas education. Respondents were asked to select the top three international destinations that they prefer the most for overseas education either for themselves or for their child(ren). The top three selection is similar to the choices made for overseas tourism, with Australia top the list with 54.74%, followed by the United Kingdom (49.15%) and Japan (38.20%). Among them, 28.47% of the respondents selected Australia as their first choice, while only 18.73% selected the United Kingdom as their first choice and Egypt as the first choice for 10.71% of the respondents, just one respondent ahead of Japan at 10.46%.

Table 16 Responses on questions on socio-cultural dimensions (overseas education)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>If you are given a chance for you or your child(ren) to study abroad, which 3 destinations would you choose?</i>	Australia	225	54.74%
	Egypt	75	18.25%
	France	51	12.41%
	Germany	75	18.25%
	Hong Kong	11	2.68%
	Indonesia	23	5.60%
	Italy	23	5.60%
	Japan	157	38.20%
	Jordan	50	12.17%
	Mainland China	18	4.38%
	Singapore	96	23.36%
	South Korea	52	12.65%

<i>If you are given a chance for you or your child(ren) to study abroad, which 3 destinations would you choose? - Top Rank</i>	Spain	15	3.65%
	Taiwan	37	9.00%
	United Kingdom	202	49.15%
	United States	114	27.74%
	Others	9	2.19%
	Australia	117	28.47%
	Egypt	44	10.71%
	France	9	2.19%
	Germany	16	3.89%
	Hong Kong	3	0.73%
	Indonesia	5	1.22%
	Italy	2	0.49%
	Japan	43	10.46%
	Jordan	9	2.19%
	Mainland China	7	1.70%
	Singapore	35	8.52%
	South Korea	9	2.19%
	Spain	1	0.24%
	Taiwan	7	1.70%
	United Kingdom	77	18.73%
	United States	23	5.60%
	Others	4	0.97%

Similar to the pattern in overseas tourism, Mainland China has little presence in the choice of Malaysians' preferences of overseas education. Although the importance of Malaysian students to tertiary education in China is cited by scholars such as Phoon (2017), the numbers remained minimal. It is also stated in Husin Ali's (2017) writing that most Chinese pursue who pursued their tertiary education in overseas were either in the UK, the US, or Australia (p. 7). In other words, ethnic Chinese being the most possible group of Malaysians to study in China did not even choose Mainland China as their preferred choice of overseas education, how can then the other ethnicities get used to Chinese

culture, especially overcoming the language barrier, if they chose to study in Mainland China.

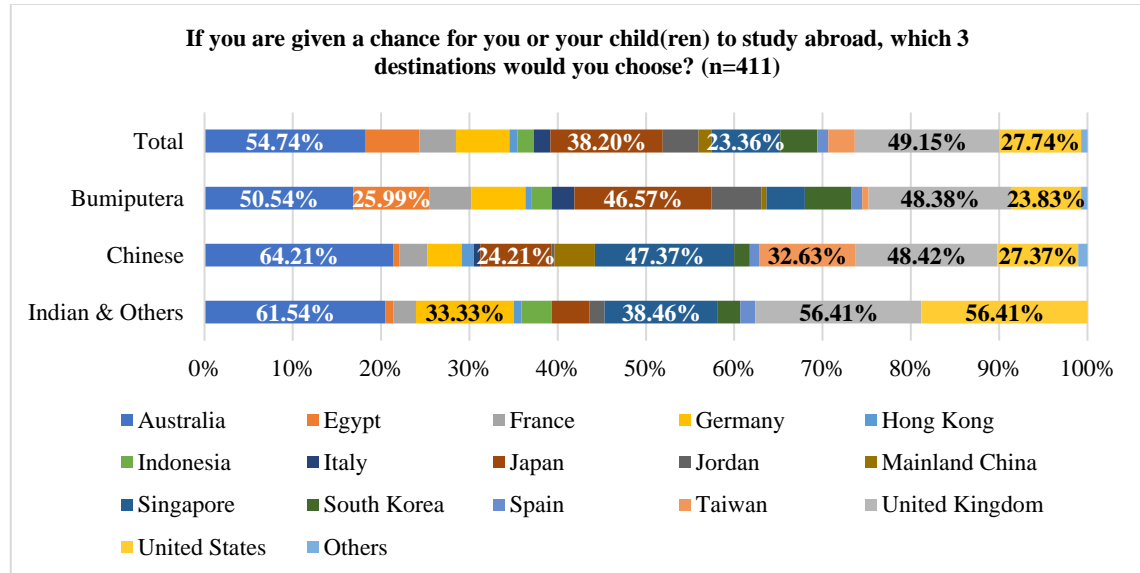


Diagram 30 Malaysians' Top 3 international destination for education, by ethnicities

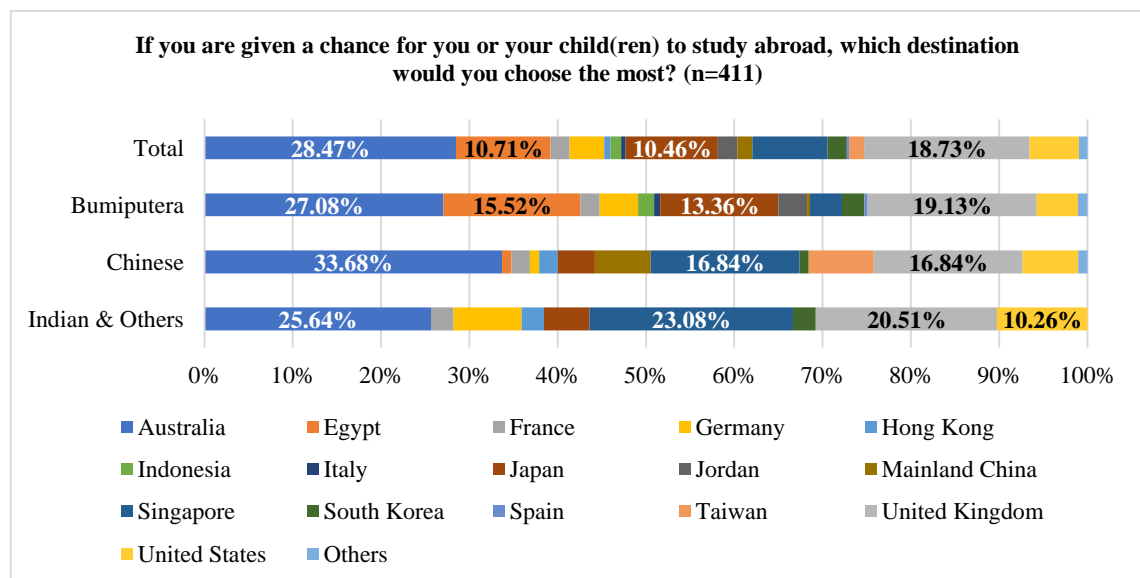


Diagram 31 Malaysians' most preferred international destination for education, by ethnicities

Besides that, it is also important to note that Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Egypt, in which their combined percentage (28.88%) is higher than that of

Australia among the *Bumiputeras*. This is probably due to the Islamic factor among Muslim *Bumiputeras*, in which they are more inclined to further their studies in Islamic studies or Arabic.

5.3.5 Social media and Instant Messaging

Sub-RQ 2e: What is Malaysians' most preferred social media or instant messaging platform?

The diagram below shows the penetration of social media and instant messaging platforms among Malaysians by ethnicities. It can be seen that most Malaysians, regardless of ethnicities, often use Facebook and WhatsApp as their preferred choice of social media or instant messaging platforms. Similar to the patterns observed in international tourism and overseas education, Chinese applications presents a lower penetration rate as compared with competitors' products. In which, WeChat and Weibo, the two social media and instant messaging platform that has dominated most of Chinese life in China, only gained moderate presence among the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia.

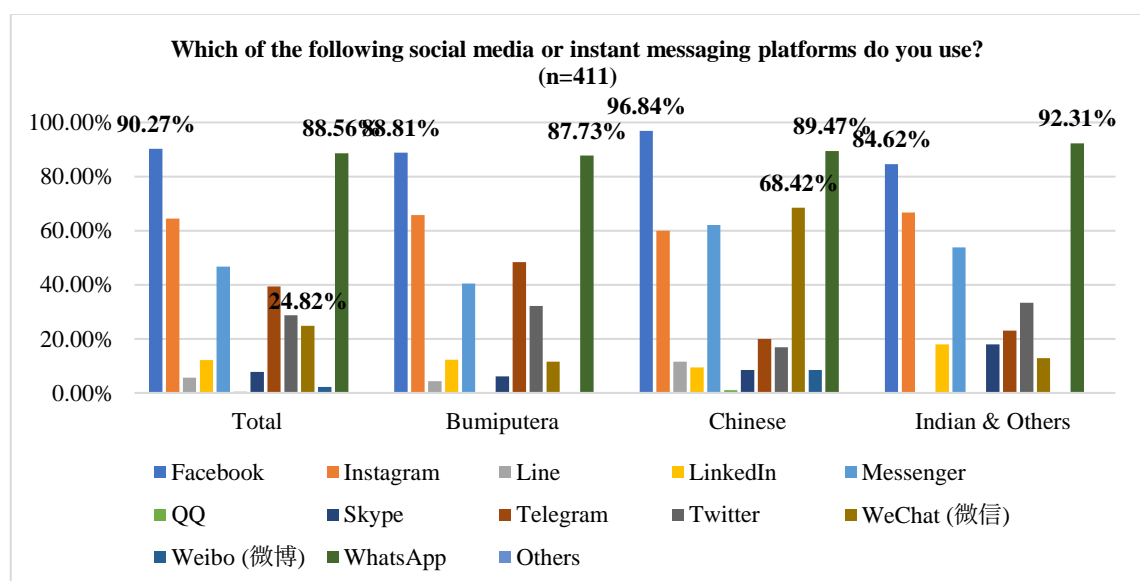


Diagram 32 Penetration of social media and instant messaging platforms among Malaysians, by ethnicities

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter will begin a section that sums up the important findings from the analyses of the results, followed by their implications to the BRI and China, and implications to Malaysia. Finally, this chapter will end by identifying the limitations of this research and suggesting potential studies for future researchers and researches before summarizing the main contributions and arguments in this study.

6.1 Summary of findings

In short, the main findings that can be identified after analyzing the results are as follows:

1. Malaysians generally poses a neutral (33.58%) stance or are unsure (26.52%) on whether the BRI is beneficial for Malaysia while 32.85% of the respondents believed that the BRI is beneficial or very beneficial for Malaysia, and a minimal 7.06% of the respondents thought that the BRI is not beneficial or very not beneficial for Malaysia.
2. The main differences in perceptions were observed along ethnic lines, as compared with religions or states of residence.
3. Ethnic Chinese generally have higher levels of understanding, are more willing to know more on the BRI, and are more optimistic on the BRI's benefit to Malaysia, as compared with other ethnicities.
4. There were little influences of China and Chinese products towards Malaysians' socio-cultural behavior in international tourism and overseas education while Mandarin Chinese is the most popular language to learn for respondents who were unable to converse in the language and

Mainland Chinese cuisine is gaining popularity among Malaysians with ethnic Chinese have experienced it earlier than other ethnicities.

5. Chinese social media and instant messaging platforms gained moderate presence among the ethnic Chinese while only a small percentage of respondents of other ethnicities are using Chinese social media and instant messaging platforms.
6. Most Malaysians first attempt of travelling to Mainland China and first experience of having Mainland Chinese cuisine were observed in the years after the BRI was introduced, especially between 2013 and 2018.
7. Other than the ethnic Chinese, most Malaysians first attempt of using Mandarin Chinese in their communications were also observed after the BRI was launched, notably between 2013 and 2018.
8. The perceptions and socio-cultural behaviors of Malaysians towards the BRI generally follows the pattern of Malaysians' familiarity with China and Chinese products prior to the introduction of the BRI.

6.2 Implications to the BRI and China

The persistence of the traditional patterns of familiarity with China and Chinese products as denoted by a higher familiarity and positive sentiments among the ethnic Chinese towards China and Chinese products while the majority of Malaysians as represented by other ethnicities continues to maintain a low to moderate level of familiarity and positive sentiments towards China and Chinese products have implied that the BRI have not grew beyond Chinese traditional sphere of influence that includes soft power among Malaysians. In this view, the BRI as a tool to promote Chinese ideas and influence (that

includes the popular argument of increasing soft power), and increase market share and dependence on Chinese goods and services have seen not to be very effective and influential in Malaysia – a case which is regarded by Xie and Luo (2019) as the “most likely” case to support the BRI.

This is perhaps, in contrary to the general perception of Chinese aggressive push of the BRI that flexes its political, economic, diplomatic, and even military muscles will influence and bring impact to peoples’ perceptions and socio-cultural behaviors. In fact, the aggressive promotion of the BRI as seen in BRI 1.0 had faced a significant number of backlashes from host countries, with Malaysia being one of them at one point. One of the explanations for such happening is Chinese underestimation of the host countries’ resistance, calculations of interests, and inability to adapt and accept to the sudden influx of ‘alien’ ideas, concepts, goods and services. This underestimation is rooted in lack of understanding of host countries, in the case of Malaysia for example, Chinese researchers have largely overlooked the influence of the *Bumiputeras* majority, especially in domestic politics while often magnifying the influence and significance of Malaysian Chinese in Malaysia, to the extent that some scholars sees overseas Chinese, in this case, Malaysian Chinese support to the BRI, as ‘obligatory’ due to their ‘links with China’ and the wrong perception that still believes that Malaysian Chinese still perceive China as their ‘motherland’. In other words, Chinese thinkers sees overseas Chinese as an extension of natural Chinese influence, who belongs to the Chinese nation but only possess the legal identity and citizenship of another state, which are obliged to serve the ‘motherland’. In fact, such gestures also pose certain level of risks for the Malaysian Chinese as it might jeopardize the trust among ethnicities in Malaysia, which other ethnicities might question the Malaysian Chinese loyalty to the country. Hence, it is in dire need that China,

especially its academia can open their minds by perceiving Malaysia as a multiethnic, multicultural country with Malaysian Chinese being a minority of the population instead of a tool for extending Chinese influence.

Unfortunately, such gestures are also seen throughout Chinese scholars' narrative and understanding of the BRI, in which, they often over stressed that the BRI is 'China's' and the initiative will only bring benefits to the world. It seems that other countries have no reason of objecting the initiative, and all objections are often being politicized as the country will be seen as 'an enemy of China' and a 'friend of the West'. Perhaps this is an example of "politics of pleasing" that researchers such as He (2019) and Zhuang (2017) have warned about.

The BRI is claimed to be a revival of the ancient Silk Road and its Silk Road Spirit that was an accumulated, transgenerational effort of multiple parties and actors that was not dominated by states or empires, but more by the spontaneous exchanges of people and citizens which has expanded their views and increased their understanding of the world. Unfortunately, such vital elements are not seen in the BRI.

In Zhuang's (2017) study that questions whether the Chinese style "people-to-people exchange" (中国式“人文交流”) can effectively promote "understanding between people" (民心相通), he outlines some common mistakes and misunderstanding on these two concepts and the operationalization of these two concepts. First, the equation of "people-to-people exchange" as "cultural diplomacy". He argued that "people-to-people exchange" should focus on the important position and role of "people" instead of "cultural activities" such as arts, education, sports, tourism, or media. Second, there is a popular

misconception especially among Chinese academia on the dimension of people-to-people bond as a tool to exhibit China's friendly, advanced country, and Chinese foreign policies are "correct". Third, the "people-to-people exchange" is a government's initiative and project that is mainly financed and executed by the government. Finally, through Chinese style "people-to-people exchange" can increase soft power, thus promoting "understanding between people" (Zhuang, 2017).

The people-to-people bond and understanding between people can only be advanced when the people are willingly taking the initiative without governments' prompts and notices, just like how Zhuang (2017) has suggested that the core of "people-to-people exchange" is at a numerous, spontaneous, private, two-way "people-to-people" interactions instead of the commonly practiced one-way exhibition, showing off, or indoctrination of Chinese culture that was largely dependent on government's effort. Such concept has been popularized by Hillary Clinton (as cited in Zhuang, 2017) as "civilian power" – that redefines American Diplomacy and development and complements the leading position in military power. Besides that, non-governmental organizations and voluntary organizations such as America's Peace Corps, the United Kingdom's VSO and Oxfam, Japan's JICA, and even Taiwan's Tzu Chi are some of the examples that promote their home countries' image that some were self-established without the influence of governments, or even are contrary to their governments' interests, aims to serve transnational interests by promoting universal values, which China is still lack of (Zhuang, 2017). However, this require the people themselves to first internalize the values and principles of the BRI. But, if they presents a different image or a negative image to the world, especially in the host countries, even if the (Chinese) government is not related, it will somehow distant the host countries' people from the initiative and from China as a

whole. For example, criminal gangs that consists of Chinese nationalities that has been caught in Malaysia as reported in newspaper The Star by Murali and Mahrom (2016), is just one of the many examples that smears Chinese image as a whole. Ultimately, the so called Chinese ‘soft power’ will be decreased and Chinese products will not be accepted. Hence, only when governments disappear into the background, that the BRI can advance. And only when the BRI disappear into the background, only the principles and values can be internalized by the world.

From a constructivist perspective that stresses the importance of ideas, ideologies, values and social norms, that is constantly shaping and constructing the perception and understanding of the world and the relations between countries, nations, states, and peoples, BRI attempts to offer an alternative package of ideas, ideologies, values and social norms for the world to choose and customize according to their needs and interests while sustaining the current international order, just like how Benabdallah (2019) have summarized – China attempts to contest the international order by integrating it through the BRI.

Also from a constructivist perspective that not only emphasizes the role of the state, but also organizations, individuals, and ideas, the BRI and its cooperation areas theoretically encompasses exactly all of these actors, although the results in this study shows that the participation of organizations, individuals, and ideas in the construction of BRI are still minimal.

That said, from another perspective, we cannot say that the BRI was worthless and ineffective as it not only did manage to attract some Malaysians to learn Mandarin

Chinese, to travel to Mainland China, or eat Chinese food especially between the year 2013 to 2018, but also to a certain percentage improved Malaysians' perceptions on Malaysia-China relations to the extent that the percentage of respondents who thought that Malaysia-China relations were on the positive side is the largest also between the year 2013 to 2018 as shown in the diagram and table below, which then the BRI was introduced.

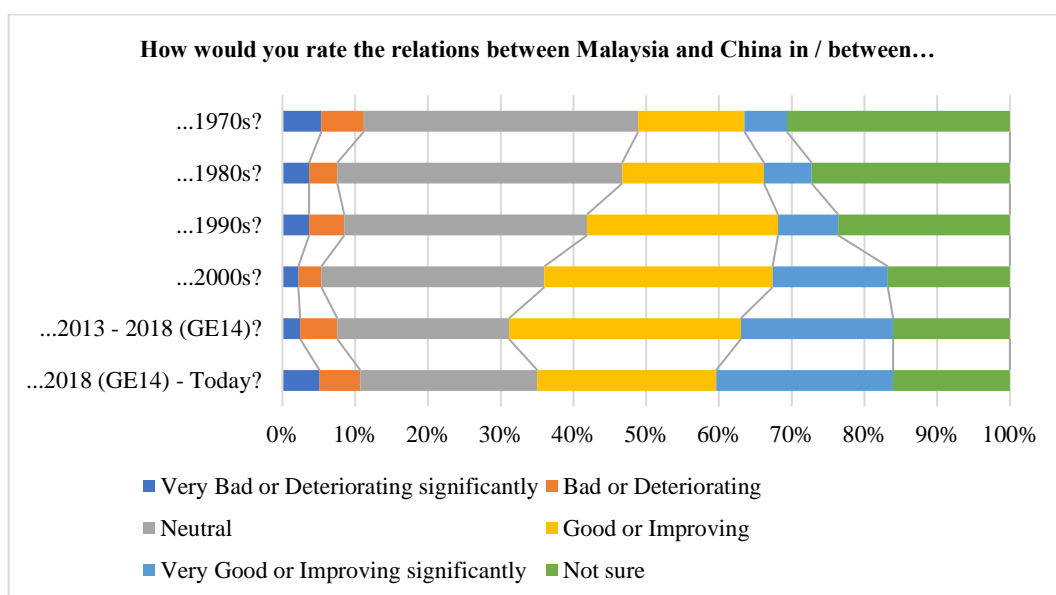


Diagram 33 Perceptions on China-Malaysia relations by time period

Diagram 33 above and Table 17 below shows the respondents' perception of China-Malaysia relations by time period in bar charts and in percentage, respectively. The results show that only a small number of respondents believed that the relations between China and Malaysia were either "Very Bad or Deteriorating significantly" or "Bad or Deteriorating".

Table 17 Perceptions on China-Malaysia relations by time-period, in percentage

...1970s?	...1980s?	...1990s?	...2000s?	...2013	...2018 (GE14)

					- 2018 (GE14)?	- Today?
<i>Very Bad or Deteriorating significantly</i>	5.35%	3.65%	3.65%	2.19%	2.43%	5.11%
<i>Bad or Deteriorating</i>	5.84%	3.89%	4.87%	3.16%	5.11%	5.60%
<i>Neutral</i>	37.71%	39.17%	33.33%	30.66%	23.60%	24.33%
<i>Good or Improving</i>	14.60%	19.46%	26.28%	31.39%	31.87%	24.57%
<i>Very Good or Improving significantly</i>	5.84%	6.57%	8.27%	15.82%	20.92%	24.33%
<i>Not sure</i>	30.66%	27.25%	23.60%	16.79%	16.06%	16.06%

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in the 1970s, negative perceptions on the bilateral relations had never exceeded 11%. While a significant percentage of respondents are not quite sure on the relations between the two states, especially before the 2000s, the percentage of “Not sure” almost halved from 30% in the 1970s to 16% today. A similar pattern is observed for the respondents who answered “Neutral”, from 38% in the 1970s to 24% today. Conversely, the positive perceptions, obtained from combining the percentages of the two answers “Good or Improving” and “Very Good or Improving significantly” doubled from 21% in the 1970s to 49% today. The positive sentiments peaked from 2013 to 2018 with 53% of the respondents believed that the then relations were on the good side, before it slightly dipped to 49% in the post-GE14 period, which can be considered an effect of the revisions, cancellations, and terminations of BRI or China-related projects.

6.3 Implications to Malaysia

The results that still shows the difference along the ethnic lines not only bring implications to the BRI, but perhaps more significantly, to Malaysia as well. Especially from the perspective of nation building. Scholars such as Qi (2008) has long paid attention to Malaysia's stark divide between ethnicities, especially between the *Bumiputeras* and the ethnic Chinese, to the extent that it was coined as a nation with two imaginations (Qi, 2008). As a result, to this day, the concept of a "Malaysian identity" is still left vague and unexplained. The difference in culture, lifestyle, values, and norms among ethnicities and religions, the lack of understanding between ethnicities and religions cannot even be resolved and reconciled through a change of governing coalition. In fact, the previously substituted *Barisan Nasional* have been resurrected with cooperatives from the short-lived governing coalition *Pakatan Harapan* in February 2020 through the political agenda named as "Sheraton Move" with a new name *Perikatan Nasional*. In short, it seems that the efforts of the significant party alternation in May 2018 have been reversed, as the successful installation of the new coalition *Perikatan Nasional* that is composed of a less diverse members than the *Pakatan Harapan* without resistance or civil demonstrations symbolizes that diversity and understanding between people, especially between ethnicities and religions have not yet been accepted by most Malaysians over the conservatives that continues the status quo of "one nation, two imaginations".

6.4 Limitations of research and potential studies for future researchers

Although this paper has attempted to identify the perceptions and socio-cultural behaviors that Malaysians have presented towards the BRI, some limitations are identified. First, the method used for analyzing the data is oversimplified and might not be robust enough

to draw the relationships between the variables and factors. Quantitative methods such as regression and correlations calculations are the appropriate methods that should be applied in this kind of study, but due to the reasons listed below, they are not performed:

1. The selection of most of the variables and factors in this study have no precedent. As a result, this study serves as a preliminary study to find out some of the possible factors and variables.
2. Perhaps due to my incapability, I find the data collected difficult to be organized into the format that is suitable for performing regression and correlations tests.
3. I have to confess that I am unfamiliar and incapable of performing quantitative methods such as regression and correlation.

Besides, the options provided to represent social media and instant messaging platforms did not include the becoming popular video-sharing social networking platform Tiktok which have been recently banned in India alongside with 58 other Chinese applications including WeChat and Weibo (Iyengar, 2020).

Other than that, recent global development and unfolding of events such as the Covid-19, which is not included in this discussion, might influence the results as conflicting views on the origins of the pandemic, and on the approaches to the pandemic have increased tensions among major powers especially between the US and China.

Finally, although this paper has provided a general snapshot of Malaysians' perceptions and socio-cultural behaviors to the BRI, it does not explain much the dynamics and reasons of such happenings. In short, this paper only tells what is happening,

but did not answer how it has happened. Yet, the data produced in this study have not being fully utilized and analyzed. I hope and I am willing to work with future researchers to better understand the data produced in this study which will ultimately contribute to the discussion. That said, this paper has attempted to produce a tool to measure the reception of a host country's citizen towards the BRI from the perspective of people-to-people bond through surveying their perception and socio-cultural behaviors towards the BRI, which has found that the BRI is still in its early stages and might be too early to conclude its success and effectiveness. But, multiple repetitions of applying the questionnaire adopted in this paper can reveal the changes of BRI's reception over time.

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Appendices

Questionnaire for Research on
“Malaysians’ Perceptions and Socio-cultural Behaviors to the Belt and Road
Initiative”

Dear Participant,

This is a part of research that is required for partial fulfillment of the requirement for Master’s Degree in Asia Pacific Studies (International Relations) at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. This research aims to find out the relationship between the Belt and Road Initiative and Malaysians’ sociocultural and political behaviors. This survey will take approximately five minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may stop answering the survey anytime. Rest assured that the survey will be analyzed on an aggregate level and all information will remain confidential. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide useful information for the research.

Sincerely,
Yuhan Kuek
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A. Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender? Please select one answer.

- A. Male
- B. Female

2. What is your age? Please insert numbers only.

[TERMINATE IF BELOW 18 YEARS OLD]

3. What is your ethnicity? Please select one answer.

- A. *Bumiputera – Malay*
- B. *Bumiputera – Sabah & Sarawak*
- C. Chinese
- D. Indian
- E. Others, please state: _____

4. What is your religion? Please select one answer.

- A. Islam
- B. Christianity
- C. Buddhism
- D. Hinduism
- E. Not sure / Not applicable
- F. Others: _____

5. What is your highest education level? Please select one answer.

- A. Below SPM / O-Level / IGCSE
- B. SPM / O-Level / IGCSE
- C. Diploma / A-Level
- D. Bachelor's Degree
- E. Master's Degree
- F. Doctorate / PhD
- G. Others: _____

6. In which state do you currently live in? Please select one answer.

- A. Johor
- B. Kedah
- C. Kelantan
- D. Melaka
- E. Negeri Sembilan
- F. Pahang
- G. Penang
- H. Perak
- I. Perlis
- J. Sabah
- K. Sarawak
- L. Selangor
- M. Terengganu
- N. W.P - Kuala Lumpur
- O. W.P - Labuan
- P. W.P – Putrajaya

7. What is your monthly personal income? Please select one answer.

- A. RM 1100 and below
- B. RM 1101 – RM 4500
- C. RM 4501 – RM 7900
- D. RM 7901 – RM 11300
- E. RM 11301 and above
- F. Not willing to disclose

B. Socio-cultural dimension

1. What are the languages you are able to converse in? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Arabic
- ☐ Chinese – Cantonese
- ☐ Chinese – Hakka
- ☐ Chinese – Hokkien
- ☐ Chinese – Mandarin
- ☐ Chinese – Teochew
- ☐ English
- ☐ French
- ☐ Hindi
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Malay
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Tamil
- ☐ Others: _____

2. Would you like to learn or are you currently learning any language? Please select one answer.

- A. Yes, would like to learn but not currently learning any language
- B. Yes, currently learning any language
- C. No

[ASK Q3 IF Q2=YES]

3. What are the 3 languages that you would like to learn or are currently learning? Please rank 1 as the most preferred and 3 as the least preferred.

- ☐ Arabic
- ☐ Chinese – Cantonese
- ☐ Chinese – Hakka
- ☐ Chinese – Hokkien
- ☐ Chinese – Mandarin
- ☐ Chinese – Teochew
- ☐ English
- ☐ French
- ☐ Hindi
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Malay
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Tamil
- ☐ Others: _____

4. What are the 3 cuisines that you prefer the most? Please rank 1 as the most preferred and 3 as the least preferred.

- ☐ Chinese (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (Mee Tarik/La-mian/Pulled Noodles), 火锅 (Hotpot/Steamboat), etc.)
- ☐ Chinese (From Taiwan)
- ☐ Chinese (Malaysian style)
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Malay/Indonesian
- ☐ Middle Eastern
- ☐ Western
- ☐ Others: _____

5. If you are given a chance, are you willing to travel abroad? Please select one answer.

- A. Yes
- B. No

[ASK Q6 IF Q5=YES]

6. What are the 3 international destinations that you prefer the most for your next trip for leisure (trips besides business or religious reasons)? Please rank 1 as the most preferred and 3 as the least preferred.

- ☐ Australia
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Hong Kong
- ☐ Indonesia
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Japan
- ☐ Macao
- ☐ Mainland China
- ☐ Philippines
- ☐ Singapore
- ☐ South Korea
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Taiwan
- ☐ Thailand
- ☐ United Kingdom
- ☐ United States
- ☐ Vietnam
- ☐ Others: _____

7. If you are given a chance for you or your child(ren) to study abroad, which 3 destinations would you choose? Please rank 1 as the most preferred and 3 as the least preferred.

- ☐ Australia
- ☐ Egypt
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Hong Kong
- ☐ Indonesia
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Japan
- ☐ Jordan
- ☐ Mainland China
- ☐ Singapore
- ☐ South Korea
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Taiwan
- ☐ United Kingdom
- ☐ United States
- ☐ Others: _____

8. Do you read any news? Please select one answer.

- A. Yes
- B. No

[ASK Q9 IF Q8=YES]

9. What are your top 3 sources of news? Please rank 1 as the most preferred and 3 as the least preferred.

- ☐ *Berita Harian*
- ☐ *Bernama*
- ☐ Borneo Post
- ☐ China Press (中国报)
- ☐ Facebook (Excluding Official Pages of News/Media Company)
- ☐ *Harian Metro*
- ☐ Malay Mail
- ☐ *Malaysiakini*
- ☐ *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商报)
- ☐ New Straits Times
- ☐ Oriental Daily News (东方日报)
- ☐ Sin Chew Daily (星洲日报)
- ☐ The Edge
- ☐ The Star
- ☐ The Sun
- ☐ Twitter (Excluding Official Pages of News/Media Company)

- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Others: _____

10. Which of the following social media or instant messaging platforms do you use? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Line
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Messenger
- ☐ QQ
- ☐ Skype
- ☐ Telegram
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ WeChat (微信)
- ☐ Weibo (微博)
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Others: _____

C. Political dimension

1. Who do you think is the most responsible for relations between countries? Please select 3 answers.

- ☐ Companies / Business Organizations / Industries
- ☐ Governments
- ☐ International Organizations (United Nations, World Trade Organization, etc.)
- ☐ Media
- ☐ Myself
- ☐ Non-governmental Organizations
- ☐ Schools & Educational Institutions
- ☐ Society
- ☐ Others: _____
- ☐ Not sure

[ASK Q2 IF Q1=Not Sure is not selected]

2. Please drag and rank the answer below where 1 is the most responsible and 3 is the least responsible.

(answer list is carried forward from Q1)

- ☐ Companies / Business Organizations / Industries
- ☐ Governments
- ☐ International Organizations (United Nations, World Trade Organization, etc.)
- ☐ Media
- ☐ Myself
- ☐ Non-governmental Organizations
- ☐ Schools & Educational Institutions
- ☐ Society
- ☐ Others: _____

3. How often do you use or try to use Mandarin Chinese in your communications? Please select one answer.

- A. Daily
- B. Weekly
- C. Monthly
- D. Quarterly
- E. Every 6 months
- F. Yearly
- G. I never communicate in Mandarin Chinese before

[ASK Q4 IF Q3=I never communicate is not selected]

4. Since when have you started using or trying to use Mandarin Chinese in your communications?

Please select one answer.

- A. Before the year 2000
- B. Since 2000 – 2007
- C. Since 2008 – 2012
- D. Since 2013 – 2018

- E. Since 2019
- F. Not sure

5. When is the last time you went to China (Mainland) for trips (including leisure and business trips)?

Please select one answer.

- A. In the past week
- B. In the past month
- C. In the past quarter (3 months)
- D. In the past 6 months
- E. In the past year
- F. More than a year ago
- G. I have never been to China (Mainland)
- H. Not sure

[ASK Q6 IF Q5=I have never been to China is not selected]

6. How often do you travel to China (Mainland)? Please select one answer.

- A. Weekly
- B. Monthly
- C. Quarterly
- D. Every 6 months
- E. Yearly
- F. Less often than once a year
- G. Not sure

[ASK Q7 IF Q5=I have never been to China is not selected]

7. From when have you started travelling to China (Mainland)? Please select one answer.

- G. Before the year 2000
- H. Since 2000 – 2007
- I. Since 2008 – 2012
- J. Since 2013 – 2018
- K. Since 2019
- L. Not sure

8. When is the last time you had Mainland Chinese cuisine or been to a Mainland Chinese cuisine restaurant in Malaysia (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (Mee Tarik/La-mian/Pulled Noodles), 火锅 (Hotpot/Steamboat), etc.)? Please select one answer.

- 1. In the past week
- 2. In the past month
- 3. In the past quarter (3 months)
- 4. In the past 6 months
- 5. In the past year
- 6. More than a year ago
- 7. I never had a Mainland Chinese cuisine or been to a Mainland Chinese cuisine restaurant
- 8. Not sure

[ASK Q9 IF Q8=I never had a Mainland Chinese cuisine is not selected]

9. How often do you have Mainland Chinese cuisine or eat in a Mainland Chinese cuisine restaurant in Malaysia (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (Mee Tarik/La-mian/Pulled Noodles), 火锅 (Hotpot/Steamboat), etc.)? Please select one answer.

- A. Daily
- B. Weekly
- C. Monthly
- D. Quarterly
- E. Every 6 months
- F. Yearly
- G. Less often
- H. Not sure

[ASK Q10 IF Q8=I never had a Mainland Chinese cuisine is not selected]

10. When was your first-time having Mainland Chinese cuisine or eat in a Mainland Chinese cuisine restaurant in Malaysia (From Mainland China, i.e., 拉面 (Mee Tarik/La-mian/Pulled Noodles), 火锅 (Hotpot/Steamboat), etc.)? Please select one answer.

- A. Before the year 2000
- B. Since 2000 – 2007
- C. Since 2008 – 2012
- D. Since 2013 – 2018
- E. Since 2019
- F. Not sure

11. Do you have a close family member or close friend(s) from China? Please select one answer.

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Not sure

For questions 12 to 17, please read each statement and circle a number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 which indicates how much the statement applies to you.

The rating scale is as follows:

- 1** Very Bad or Deteriorating significantly
- 2** Bad or Deteriorating
- 3** Neutral
- 4** Good or Improving
- 5** Very Good or Improving significantly
- 6** Not sure

How would you rate the relations between Malaysia and China in/between... Please select one answer for each row.

12. ...1970s?	1 2 3 4 5 6
13. ...1980s?	1 2 3 4 5 6
14. ...1990s?	1 2 3 4 5 6
15. ...2000s?	1 2 3 4 5 6
16. ...2013 – 2018 (GE14)?	1 2 3 4 5 6
17. ...2018 (GE14) – Today?	1 2 3 4 5 6

18. Do you have a good understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路?

Please select one answer.

- A. Yes, very much
- B. Yes, a little
- C. Not really
- D. No
- E. Not sure

[ASK Q19 IF Q18=No is not selected]

19. Where did you learn about the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Books
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Home (From family members or relatives)
- ☐ Journal Articles
- ☐ News Applications
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ School, University or Education Institutions
- ☐ Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- ☐ Television
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Others: _____

20. Would you like to know more on the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路?

Please select one answer.

- A. Like it very much
- B. Like it a little
- C. Neutral
- D. A little not like it
- E. Not like it very much

21. Do you think the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路 is beneficial for Malaysia?

Please select one answer.

- A. Very beneficial
- B. Beneficial
- C. Neutral
- D. Not beneficial
- E. Very not beneficial
- F. Not sure

22. Do you agree that the Belt and Road Initiative / One Belt, One Road / 一帶一路 has been misused by politicians in Malaysia for political reasons? Please select one answer.

- A. Strongly agree

- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree
- F. Not sure