EXPECTATION VS REALITY: COSMOPOLITAN AND INSULAR SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG MALAYSIAN CHINESE YOUTH

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Abstract: This article discusses the form of social capital present among Malaysian Chinese youth, comparing across those who are Chinese-medium educated and English-medium educated. The reason for comparison is because of the dichotomy of Confucian values in Chinese-medium education and Western liberal democratic values in English-medium education, which may influence their choice of social network. Using a self-designed survey questionnaire, I assessed whether Putnam's two forms of social capital, the bridging and the bonding social capital, are found in these two sub-ethnic groups. In terms of face-to-face interaction, it is found that ethnic identification remains a strong influence on respondents' choice of social network. However, respondents also demonstrate an aspiration to network on a more global scale if facilitated by information communication technology. Given Malaysia's present globalised environment, with strong migratory flows inside and outside, the reality of respondents' social capital does not match the expectations respondents have of themselves. While they express a desire to network in a global nexus, in order to be more connected to the rest of the world, they are still restrained by attributes like ethnic identification and language preference.

Keywords: social capital, Malaysian Chinese, globalisation, education, cosmopolitanism.

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian Chinese were originally migrants to Malaya (as Malaysia was then known) in the 1800s, the height of Malaya's British colonial era, due to the promise of jobs in tin mining. Despite this, they still maintained strong socio-cultural and economic ties with their kin in south China, their place of origin (Cheong, Lee and Lee 2013).

Scholars of the Chinese diaspora, particularly Wang Gungwu (Hirschman 1988) stressed the aspect of imagined community as central to Chinese identity formation in Southeast Asia. One of the pillars of this imagined community was the Chinese language, which was an important indicator of "Chineseness" for the Malaysian Chinese (Tan 1997). This strong ethnic identification led towards bonding social capital. With education acting as the socialisation agent facilitating

this process, it is thus necessary to understand a brief history of education opportunities for the migrant Chinese in Malaysia.

In the early 1900s, two education options were available to the Malaysian Chinese, which were Chinese-medium education and English-medium education (Purcell 1948). English-medium schools were introduced by the British during the colonial period in Malaya, while Chinese-medium schools were formed by the migrant Chinese community in Malaya, based on a syllabus derived from nationalist teachings in mainland China (Purcell 1948).

Chinese-medium schools emphasised Confucian doctrine, the knowledge of classical Chinese texts, calligraphy, skill with the abacus, and the ideology of Sun Yat-sen (Tan and Santhiram 2010). Meanwhile, English-medium schools had been established by missionary bodies with grants obtained from the British Government (Tan and Santhiram 2010). They placed an emphasis on literary aspects – focusing strongly on a strong humanities education, grooming its students to enter local civil service (Tan and Santhiram 2010).

Chinese-medium education produced graduates who were collectivist and who identified with mainland China, while English-medium education produced graduates who identified with Malaya and who developed a more cosmopolitan (and less ethnic-based) outlook. The former developed social capital based on ethnic identification particularly in Chinese language while the latter did not attach significant importance to such language-based ethnic identification. This correlates with scholars' dichotomy of "older" and "modern" Chinese identities, where the "older" type of identity refers to nationalist identification with mainland China, and the "modern" type of identity refers to localised national identities (Wang, in Hirschman 1988).

After Malaysia achieved its Independence in 1957, the demarcation between Chinese-medium schools and English-medium schools shifted slightly, because of reforms in the overall national education policy. From 1952 to 1975, the British transformed vernacular schools into English-Malay bilingual ones, and gradually replaced the English medium with the Malay medium in national schools (Tan and Teoh 2014). Schools which had converted from the Mandarin medium were known as "Chinese-conforming schools", while those which had converted from the English medium were called "English-conforming schools" (Ting 2013). A divide continued to exist between the two education systems, each acting as

socialisation agents for different sets of values (Tan and Teoh 2014). This may have continued to influence the students' social capital preferences, particularly if they had inherited from the schools an ethnic identification based on language.

CONFUCIAN VALUES AND WESTERN LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Confucian values have long been mentioned in numerous studies of ethnic Chinese. Behaviour and attitudes unique to the Chinese have been said to stem from the practice of this philosophy, which rooted itself in ancient China more than 2,000 years ago. A recent study by Huang and Gove (2012) described Confucianism as practiced by Chinese families and the education process. Based on a study in the US, they noted several characteristics central to Confucianism that pertains specifically to the interdependence between family structure and education. According to Huang and Gove, Confucianism is embedded in Chinese culture and places value on education at the societal, familial, and individual levels. Chinese cultures value the collectivist ideology, which affects family functions and behaviours. Education is considered a family business and an interdependent process for many Chinese families. Fillial piety is a very significant virtue in Chinese families. The Chinese education system is highly structured. Family hierarchy and harmony is highly valued. From this collection of values, the Confucian individual is subservient to the family's wishes (especially the parents and elders), is collectivist and emphasizes group harmony, and places great importance on individual achievement through education, acknowledging the family's crucial role in the latter.

Confucian values have also been contrasted to the West, creating an East vs. West dialectic. Dalton and Ong (2005) wrote about how Confucian values are often credited for the creation of "Asian values", which was said by Lee Kuan Yew to be the reason why Asian nations differ in terms of orientation towards the Western concept of "democracy". Indeed, much of the literature has compared Confucian values (or its subset "Asian values") against Western democratic principles. These studies claim that because of Confucian traditions, "East Asian societies are paternalistic, accept hierarchic authority, and community-oriented characteristics that promote order and consensus". They claim that conversely, Western

societies are "rights-based and individualistic, which is congruent with the competitive elements of democratic competition".

Positioning myself as a researcher within this existing breadth of work, I notice there is a similarity with regards to indicators of identity among the Malaysian Chinese. These may range from the tastes of individuals to their viewpoints and values. Also, the gap has been addressed by Lee (2014) to be that of a lack of microsociological studies focusing on the subjective, actor-oriented perspective. Thus cultural capital, being inclusive of viewpoints, values, as well as consumption tastes, and applicable to both macrosociological as well as microsociological contexts, with its embodied aspect allowing for indication of subjective values, is a suitable framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of social capital was said to have developed originally in the writings of Hanifan (1916) to describe the "tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit" (Keeley 2007). Three landmark studies have operationalised this often ambiguous concept, each offering definitions of their own (Tzanakis 2013). According to Tzanakis (2013), the three studies are Bourdieu's, Coleman's and Putnam's, with Bourdieu defining social capital as the "aggregate of actual potential resources linked to a network of institutionalised relationships"; Coleman defining it as "aspects of social structure which facilitate certain actions"; and Putnam defining it as "features of social organisations which facilitate action and cooperation" (Tzanakis 2013). Meanwhile, Portes (1998) highlighted that political scientists had equated social capital with the level of "civicness" in communities.

These point to the fact that social capital, while useful as a conceptual construct, has suffered from difficulty in operationalisation, much like its closely related counterpart, cultural capital. Debates of its measurement have ranged across whether it should be quantitative or qualitative, and whether it has a causal effect. My study, originally derived from an extensive cultural capital questionnaire measuring differences in graduates of Chinese-medium and English-medium education, has taken the mixed-method approach. Although cultural capital is my study's main focus, there is overlap with some at-

tributes of social capital, where preference in social networks is concerned.

In this paper I wish to elucidate how social capital works as a subset of cultural capital with relevance to Confucian and Western liberal democratic education values. A demarcation can be made along this value dichotomy, particularly where it aligns with Putnam's classification of bonding and bridging social capital.

Bridging social capital is defined as outward looking ties that encompass people across diverse social cleavages, while bonding social capital is defined as inward looking connections that promote in-group solidarity and reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups (Putnam 2000, in Knudsen et.al). Individuals who are confined by bonding social capital may display a strong ethnic identification which leads them towards exclusivity to outsiders, thus giving themselves insular characteristics. Individuals who possess bridging social capital, on the other hand may be predisposed stronger towards cosmopolitanism and endeavour towards going beyond ethnic identification boundaries to experience a variety of cultures. My study thus assesses the type of social capital possessed by Chinese-medium and English-medium educated Malaysian Chinese, to note if the ethnic identification formerly present in Chinese-medium schools continue to provide bonding social capital, and likewise for the other.

CONTEXT

This study of a specific ethnic group is rooted in a world described as culturally globalised. I adhere to Waters' (2001) definition of globalisation, which includes social and cultural arrangements that result in awareness of geographical constraints receding. Malaysia's globalisation starting point has been termed by scholars as beginning in the 1970s, based on its rapid and extensive integration into the world economy (Nelson 2008). Due to such erosion of geographical constraints, migratory flows have been occurring both into and out of Malaysia since then. Malaysia, already known worldwide as a multicultural nation, continues to experience an increasing diversity of cultures and social arrangements as a result of this process. A question that can be pondered is whether this will affect Malaysians' bonding social capital, transforming it into bridging social capital instead? In this specific

case of the Malaysian Chinese, who are privileged to have the option to pursue either Chinese-medium or English-medium education, this is a pertinent question to be answered.

Migratory flows in Malaysia have increased with the nation's integration into the globalised world. Migratory statistics were obtained from the latest Malaysian Migration Survey Report (2013). In 2013, the total percentage of migrants within the Malaysian population was 2.4 per cent, with international migrants to Malaysia making up 11 per cent out of this figure. The largest group of migrants was the age cohort of 25 to 34 years, followed by the age cohort of 15 to 24 years, both of which are considered youth. The employment rate of migrants exceeded that of non-migrants, showing that mobility increases employability. Conversely it can also be seen that people become more mobile as a result of being employed. Career was the third most common reason for migration, after the family and the environment. In other words, those who are most mobile in Malaysia are youth seeking employment, an age group which likely has the strongest reliance on social capital for advancement.

METHODOLOGY

Scholars like Knudsen, Florida and Rousseau have noted the difficulty of operationalising a measurement of social capital. As Putnam had provided a multidimensional breakdown of social capital made up of social ties, connections, networks, and norms, Knudsen et. al. conceived a multidimensional approach to operationalising social capital, in their Social Capital Benchmark Survey, which covered topics ranging from politics, religion, social involvement and engagement, attitudes towards contemporary social issues, and personal relationships.

My methodology involved a survey questionnaire which I had self-designed, originally to measure possession of cultural capital to be compared across these two Malaysian Chinese groups. However, I had also included several questions on social capital, with relation to composition of respondents' intimate peer group, and reasons for preferences in social media. My questionnaire differs from Knudsen et.al.'s comprehensive survey, limiting myself to only ethnic composition of respondents' peer groups, language spoken within these groups, conversation topics, and choice of as well as reasons for choices of

social media. The reasons for respondents' preference represent their attitudes towards the globalised context.

The population studied was Malaysian Chinese youth of the 18 to 25 age cohort, studying in tertiary education institutions within Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city. This age cohort is of interest because they have the most autonomy and financial freedom to develop their own identities free from the control of other social institutions such as the family. As mentioned in Malaysia's migratory statistics, this age cohort is also the most mobile. The capital city was chosen because of its proximity to global influences from a variety of technologies, such as higher-speed Internet access and transportation.

For comparison purposes, the population needed to include one Chinese-medium institution, and one English-medium institution. This population itself is a sample within larger Malaysian Chinese society. In this stage, purposive sampling was used to define the population. Within the selected institutions, convenience sampling was used to identify individual respondents. Because this study is specific and not intended to generalise, probability sampling was not required. Often social science researchers cannot perfectly meet the requirement of randomising, especially in studies which involve human beings (Farrokhi 2012).

Two institutions of higher education were therefore selected, situated within the capital city. As I wanted to measure the differences in cultural capital among the Chinese-educated and non Chinese-educated tertiary students, the study required an institution of higher education that practiced a Chinese-language syllabus and one that practiced an English-language syllabus.

I therefore chose an institution named New Era College as the representative Chinese-medium institution, being that it was founded by the most prominent Malaysian Chinese educationist organisation, Dong Jiao Zong. The association is concerned with the operation of Chinese-language schools and upholds Chinese language education and culture in Malaysia strongly. New Era College was established as a Chinese tertiary educational institution for the realization of a complete Chinese education system in Malaysia. As the syllabus is conducted in Mandarin Chinese, students who attend New Era College need to have attended at least Chinese-medium primary school, if not also Chinese-medium secondary school to become literate in Mandarin Chinese. The assumption is that

respondents from this institution have undergone at least one level of Chinese-language education.

I chose HELP University as the representative English-medium institution, due to its reputation of being the first private institution in Malaysia to offer the University of London (UOL) External Programme, a British distance learning programme established in 1858. Respondents were selected from students of this programme. In order to enrol in the UOL programme, a respondent needs to have attained at least a credit in English in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), a compulsory secondary-school leaving examination. If they attended Chinese-medium Independent School, and have sat for the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) examinations, they must have attained at least a Band 6 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). It can be assumed then, that respondents from this institution must have experienced English-language education to an extent even if they have attended a Chinese-medium primary or secondary school.

In the Chinese-medium institution, print questionnaires were handed out to several respondents from each faculty and department. I was assisted by the staff of the institution to approach students of the different faculties and departments. In the English-medium institution, I handed out print questionnaires to students from the University of London programme. In total, 60 hard copy filled questionnaires were obtained from each institution, totalling 120 hard copy filled questionnaires.

In the paragraphs that follow, I shall begin by first comparing the respondents' social media preferences according to the Chinese-medium and English-medium educated dichotomy. Then, I delve into the reasons for respondents' social media preferences. Next, I compare the ethnic composition of respondents' peer groups. Finally, I discuss these patterns of behaviour within the culturally globalised social context, applying the analysis of bridging and bonding types of social capital. Whether the expectations of participants match the reality of their social interactions shall be observed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the ways in which a Malaysian Chinese individual, regardless of education medium, can enrich their possession of bridging social capital is through being active on social media.
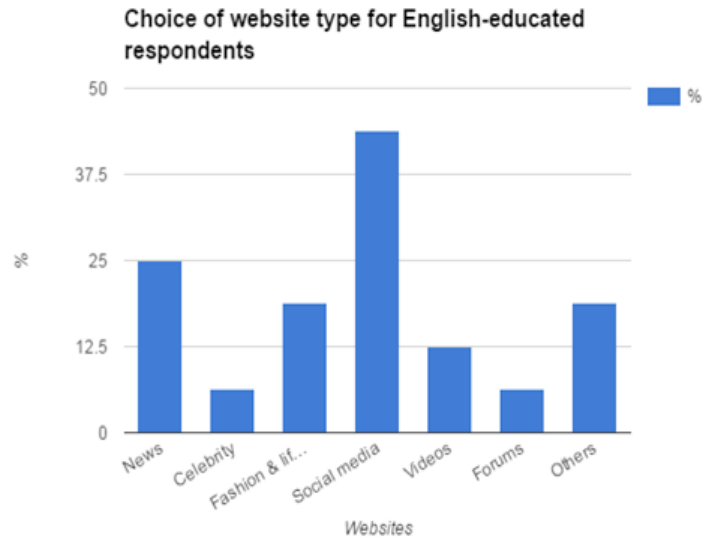
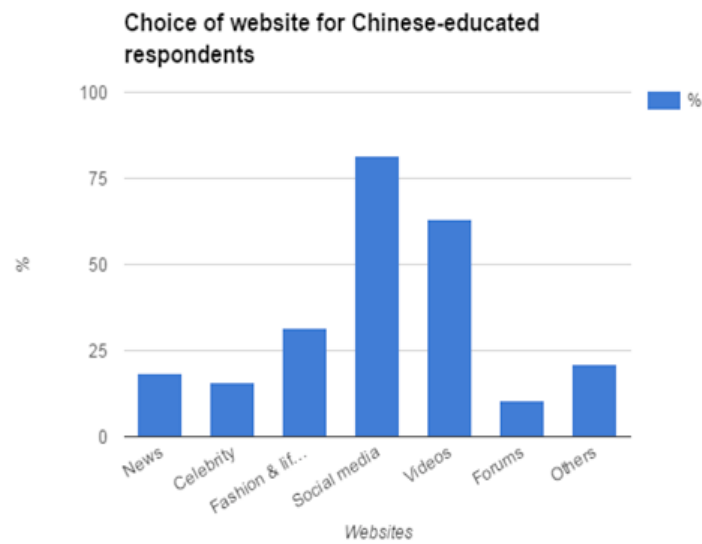Figure 1. *Internet usage among English-medium educated respondents.*

Figure 2. *Internet usage among Chinese-medium educated respondents.*

Social media provides a channel through which geographical boundaries can be traversed, at an extremely low cost. Needing to travel across regions, despite the existence of budget airfare, may still pose a barrier to enlarging one's global social network. The relationship between use of social media and social capital has been supported by several studies. Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2007) found that there was a strong association between Facebook usage and the acquisition of bridging social capital. Valenzuela (2009) found that the use of Facebook had a positive relationship to the development of social trust and civic engagement. Burke, Kraut and Marlow (2011) found that on Facebook, the act of receiving messages from friends is associated with an increase in bridging social capital. Finally, Sabatini and Sarracino (2014) found that interestingly, the online networking revolution allows the Internet to support sociability and face-to-face interactions.

In terms of Internet usage, social media is the most common type of online social activity across both groups, with 35 per cent of Chinese-medium educated respondents and 31 per cent of English-medium educated respondents claiming so. The following figures depict the choice of online social activity among respondents from both Chinese-medium and English-medium educated backgrounds.

Respondents use the Internet mainly to access social media. The majority of respondents claimed they use social media most frequently because they wish to feel more connected to the rest of the world. This was the most commonly cited option out of the other options, which included peer influence, identifying strongly with the contents, being in their favourite language, and wanting to impress other people. Among the Chinese-educated respondents, 41 per cent claimed they wished to feel more connected, while among the English-educated respondents, 29 per cent claimed the same.

In the case of the English-educated respondents, the importance of bonding social capital is also witnessed, because the third most common reason for using social media was peer influence, and impressing others. These "peers" are the same "offline peers" whose ethnicity is depicted in Figures 5 and 6, where the respondents' reply to the question, "Are more than fifty per cent of your peers of the same ethnicity as yourself?" This question revolves around the peers respondents spend their time with in day-to-day life.
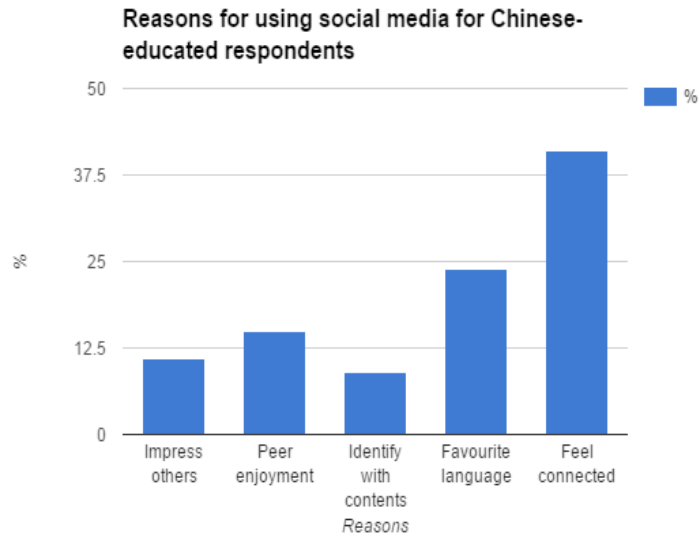
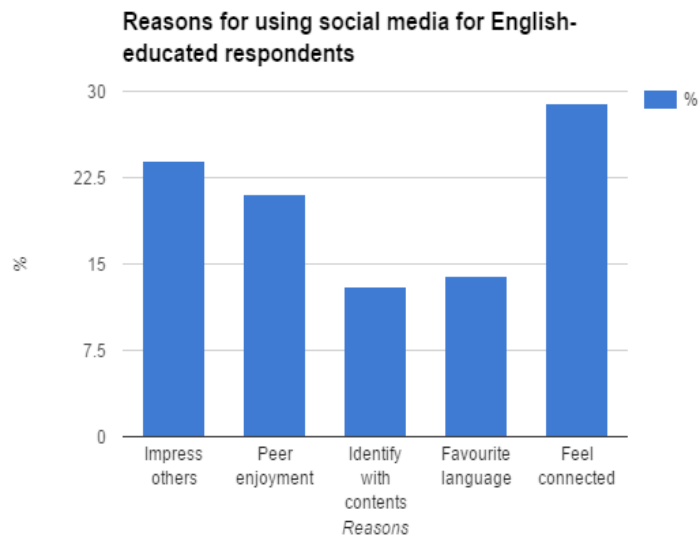Figure 3. *Reasons for choice of social media activity among Chinese-medium educated respondents.*

Figure 4. *Reasons for choice of social media activity among English-medium educated respondents.*
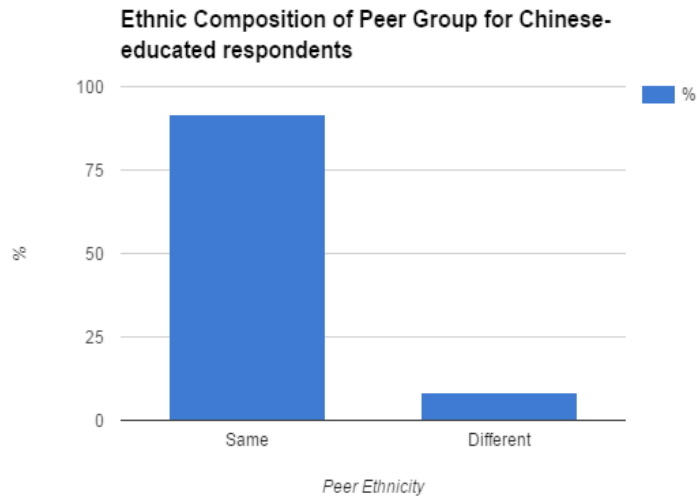
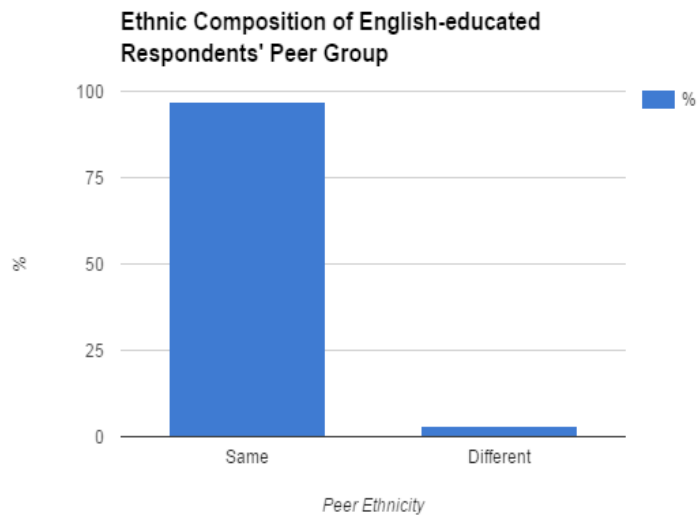Figure 5. *Ethnic composition of Chinese-medium educated respondents' peer group.*

Figure 6. *Ethnic composition of English-medium educated respondents' peer group.*

Two options were provided for the response, which were "Yes" and "No". Respondents either agreed or disagreed with the statement that more than 50 per cent of their peers were from the same ethnic group. The following discusses their orientations towards making "real-life", offline friends.

"SAME ETHNICITY": MY PEER GROUP IS ETHNICALLY HOMOGENEOUS

In the Chinese-medium institution, 91 per cent out of 60 respondents claimed that more than 50 per cent of their peers were from the same ethnic group. In the English-medium institution, 99 per cent out of 60 respondents claimed that more than 50 per cent of their peers were from the same ethnic group. In both cases, the respondents claimed that more than 50 per cent of their peers were from the same ethnic group. This indicates that in general the Malaysian Chinese youth in this study have a high preference for mixing with peers of the same ethnicity. While this opens a possibility that they do have peers from other ethnic groups, it is less than half of their closest friends, and thus most of their socialised norms and values are received from peers of the same ethnic group. Thus, if respondents also came from a Chinese-educated background, with a family that speaks most commonly in Chinese, and they spend most of their time with peers who do the same, they are consistent in their lifelong values of embracing "Chineseness". This "Chineseness" is expressed through ethnic group affiliation, language, and education, but not so strongly through Confucian values such as filial piety. However, in all groups, there is a small minority who claim that more than 50 per cent of their friends are of a different ethnicity.

"DIFFERENT ETHNICITY": MY PEER GROUP IS ETHNICALLY HETEROGENEOUS

In the Chinese-medium institution, 9 per cent out of 60 respondents claimed that more than 50 per cent of their peer group are of a different ethnicity. In the English-medium institution, 2 per cent out of 60 respondents claimed that more than 50 per cent of their peer group are of a different ethnicity. This shows that the English-educated respondents are interestingly the most insular in their choice of peers, preferring

to stick to mixing with members of their own ethnic group. This is also surprising as this institution accepts foreign students from many world regions - including Southeast Asia, East Asia, West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe. However, the Chinese-educated are slightly less insular, despite the usual stereotype of pragmatism attached to them. Their institution however, does not have such a global student mix as the English-medium institution, thus limiting their opportunity to choose peers of a different ethnicity.

IMPLICATIONS

In comparison to a similar study by Ooka and Wellman (2003), there are several differences. Ooka and Wellman (2003)'s study examined the way five ethnic groups in Toronto, Canada, used interethnic or intra ethnic social networks to search for jobs. They found that higher educational attainment was associated with having more ethnically heterogeneous social networks. More recent immigrants were also more likely to utilise interethnic social networks, because of the lack of access to more diverse social networks, which they could only accomplish over a longer period of time. This is not observed in my study, as the Malaysian Chinese have been residing in Malaysia for over a century and yet still prefer interethnic social networks. This ties in with the collectivism observed in most majority-Chinese societies (Wong 2001).

The assumption was that in multicultural Malaysia, especially in the capital city, respondents would develop friendships with individuals of different ethnicities. As migrants from abroad intermingle with the local people, and the English language is spoken widely, there is no insurmountable barrier for this to happen.

While there is no clear-cut differences across both groups, we can see that the respondents' high expectations for seeing themselves as global citizens surprisingly do not match their social networking reality. While social media may enable people to build "friendships" which are purely online, this does not translate into real-world interaction. Globalisation theorists advocate the existence of a global phenomenology in which citizens all over the world may be led to share the same frames of reference as a result of such social networking technologies. While this may indeed occur through the exchange

of messages online, it can only be seen on a superficial basis. When faced with reality, the preferences of individuals return to what is familiar, thus identification with ethnicity.

It appears that primordial identification with ethnic markers continue to withhold Malaysian Chinese youth from attaining truly bridging social capital. Confucianism has often been attributed to collectivist societies. Hofstede (1984) classified Chinese-majority societies such as China, Taiwan and Singapore as collectivist, and this was echoed by many others such as Leung and Bond (1984), Shenkar and Ronen (1987), and Lockett (1988) who found a strong group orientation particularly in China (Wong 2001). The influence of looking towards mainland China may have been pivotal in educating local ethnic Chinese towards embracing similar group orientations.

Nonetheless, this is not a generalisation as it applies only to a very small subset of the population. The good news is that the respondents do possess an interest in embracing cosmopolitanism. This may due to messages promoting it as a global ideal, evidently regardless of education medium. Yet respondents remain conflicted between ethnic identification and these global ideals that are increasingly being sung through the mass media.

However, this generation may socialise their children or future generations into embracing these global ideals. With advanced technology, the influence of global phenomenologies may yet outweigh the influence of longstanding ethnic traditions. With more people across the world learning and speaking the Chinese language, language will not continue to separate identities. Alternatively, there may be hybridisation of phenomenologies which may also shift the relations of social capital. In such a climate, the acquisition of bridging social capital may well be inevitable.

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