

# ***Cultural Communication Strategies and Ethnic Identity in Malaysian Chinese Education: A Historical Analysis from the 1980s to the 1990s***

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**Abstract:** Traditional traditions and cultural interactions shape ethnic identity and communication within Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, especially among Malaysian Chinese. The role of indirect communication methods is examined as a factor influencing ethnic identity through cultural practices, intercultural communication tactics, and the era of the 1980s and 1990s. The study seeks to investigate the correlations among cultural practices, intercultural communication methods, and ethnic identity, emphasising the mediating role of indirect communication style in these interactions. A quantitative study design was employed, utilising a structured questionnaire survey administered to 100 Malaysian Chinese adults possessing experience in Chinese teaching. Spearman's rho correlation and regression analysis were employed to examine relationships, while mediation effects and mediation analysis were conducted using SPSS. Cultural practices and intercultural communication methods are positively correlated with ethnic identification, with the indirect communication style serving as a mediating variable in these associations. Significant correlations between ethnic identity and cultural participation, including the use of festivals and specific languages, were identified. Cultural practices and communication methods exerted an indirect, communication-mediated influence on ethnic identification. The results illustrated the employment of indirect communication methods in preserving and negotiating ethnic identity, especially in mixed regions. This study elucidates the integration of cultural practices and communication tactics in the identity construction of Malaysian Chinese, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers in multicultural settings.

**Keywords:** Cultural Communication, Ethnic Identity, Chinese Education, Indirect Communication Style.

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## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society comprising substantial Malay, Chinese, and Indian populations, rendering the backdrop of ethnic identification and cultural communication in education intricate. As a prominent ethnic minority, Malaysian Chinese have historically navigated their ethnic identity amid national policies that endorse Malay cultural dominance (Yow, 2017). This debate gained significance in the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by numerous social and political transformations, during which the preservation of ethnic identity through education was increasingly prioritised, as noted by Choubey and Sharma (2024). Malaysian Chinese vernacular schools not only offered scholastic advantages but also served as a cultural conduit for the transmission of the Chinese language, values, and customs to subsequent generations, as noted by Dalib, Harun and Yusof (2017). The indirect communication style of Malaysian Chinese is shaped by the Confucian cultural emphasis on harmony and respect, which facilitates their comfort in intercultural communication and the expression of their ethnic identity, as noted by Ismail (2017). Mahadir et al. (2019) assert that these communication tactics integrate and affect the relationship between students and instructors about ethnic identity and the broader Malaysian national identity. Intercultural communication in these situations serves as both a product and a counteraction to national integration initiatives, resulting in a complex interplay of individual and social identities, as articulated by Razali and Hands (2017). Yusof and Esmaeil (2017) contend that cultural practices, including festivals, language, and rituals in the Malaysian Chinese educational context, are crucial for reinforcing ethnic identity and serve as an indirect communication medium to foster group cohesion. These traditions exist within a broader discourse of Malaysian nationhood, wherein various ethnic groups express their identities through acts of national unity, as noted by King (2021). Muslim (2020) indicates that this dynamic illustrates the evolution of ethnic relations in Malaysia, wherein cultural communication serves as a means to establish membership and identity. Ali (2022) asserts that the Malaysian Chinese community's experiences illustrate the intersection of cultural communication, indirect communication strategies, and ethnic identification within the educational context, notably throughout the 1980s and 1990s. These relationships must be comprehended to grasp the essence of ethnic identity development within Malaysia's heterogeneous culture. Previous research highlights the importance of cultural practices and ethnic identity for Malaysian Chinese, yet there is limited specific insight into how indirect communication style mediates these relationships within an educational context from the 1980s to the 1990s, as noted by Dalib et al. (2017). Although Ismail (2017) emphasised the importance of intercultural communication tactics in larger ethnic encounters, their impact in shaping ethnic identity among Malaysian Chinese in schooling remains largely unexamined. Yow (2017) indicated that this gap obstructed comprehension of how Malaysian Chinese students and instructors articulated ethnic identity through communication at a period of continual political and socio-cultural transformation in Malaysia. To comprehend the maintenance and adaptation of ethnic identity through cultural and communicative practices, it is essential to examine the communication dynamics pertinent to Malaysian Chinese schooling.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

- Examine the relationships of cultural practices with ethnic identity and indirect communication style.

- Examine the relationships of intercultural communication strategies with ethnic identity and indirect communication style.
- Investigate the mediating effect of indirect communication style on the relationships between (a) cultural practices and ethnic identity, and (b) intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.

This research is notable due to the absence of studies on the communication tactics influencing ethnic identity formation among Malaysian Chinese, particularly among school-aged children in the 1980s and 1990s, as highlighted by Dalib et al. (2017). This study contributes to the literature on multicultural communication and education by analysing the mediating role of indirect communication styles in identity negotiation among minority communities within the context of national integration policies, as articulated by Choubey and Sharma (2024). Mahadir et al. (2019) shown that the findings will assist education policymakers and practitioners in comprehending the importance of mainstream communication for the preservation of ethnic identity and the enhancement of intercultural competency. This study seeks to investigate how cultural practices and communication techniques influence ethnic identity, providing new perspectives on the dynamics within Malaysian Chinese education. This study examines the correlation between cultural practices, communication techniques, and ethnic identity in Malaysian Chinese schooling, mediated by an indirect communication style. It aligns with the objectives of *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* to examine cultural and historical impacts on education and to enhance the historical analysis of education and the establishment of ethnic identity. The research elucidates how minority communities interpret their evolving ethnic identity in response to socio-political changes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Cultural Practices with Ethnic Identity and an Indirect Communication Style

Cultural traditions, ethnic identity, and indirect communication patterns are intricately linked within a heterogeneous community. Cultural activities exemplify individuals' ethnic identity, foster group attachment, and facilitate communication with members of different communities. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2017) assert that these complex identity frameworks elucidate the connection between cultural interaction methods and communication styles, noting that in collectivist societies, indirect communication frequently fosters unity and strengthens interpersonal relationships. This indicates that ethnic identity is not solely conveyed through explicit indicators but is intricately negotiated through communication styles that embody fundamental cultural values. Balakrishnan (2022) posits that ethnicity influences communication methods across cultures, supporting the notion that indirect communication may be more prevalent or esteemed in some ethnic groups due to socially accepted standards. This view pertains to the premise that communication style traits are immutable. It emphasises that communication styles are dynamic and influenced by the culturally and ethnically specific practices to which they belong. In a similar vein, Gong et al. (2021) discovered in their research on cultural adaptation that students' participation in cultural rituals was associated with their identity integration and communication strategies. Engagement in cultural customs reinforced identity validation and facilitated indirect communication as a method of navigating a novel

intercultural environment. Mollah et al. (2018) elucidate the complexities involved in the operationalisation of cultural competency in professional practice, asserting that cultural competence entails an understanding of indirect communication styles and cultural practices essential for effective interactions in diverse contexts. The research indicates that indirect communication serves to alleviate potential face-threatening actions; professionals must comprehend the symbolic significances associated with cultural traditions to communicate effectively. Shepherd (2019) contends that cultural style workshops face challenges, as comprehending culturally distinct behaviours may be shallow and overlook the diverse modes of communication associated with ethnic identity, resulting in a lack of practical consequences. Warren and Lee (2020) illustrate how cultural practices in professional and business environments influence preferred communication styles, such as indirectness, which may promote respect and adherence to hierarchy and impact intercultural communication. The findings of their study align with the notion that communication modes are maintained through cultural practices, culturalism, and interethnic interactions within an intercultural context. Yoon et al. (2017) empirically demonstrate that the development of ethnic identity among East Asian adolescents is associated with their engagement in cultural rituals, which influence their communication patterns and subsequently affect their acculturation experience. Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) examine the opinions of Latina/o college students and discover that ethnic identity, rooted in cultural engagement, affects coping mechanisms and communication tactics, with indirect communication methods avoiding perceived obstacles. This finding aligns with the research of Sanchez, Smith and Adams (2018), which indicates that gendered cultural norms and ethnic socialisation affect communication behaviours and mental health outcomes, implying that indirect communication serves as a protective mechanism for the preservation of ethnic identity. Radke, Kutlaca and Becker (2022) examined the influence of communication styles, particularly indirectness, on assessments within marginalised groups and support for allies. Their research indicates that indirect communication stems from cultural practices and serves as a strategic mechanism for regulating group borders and asserting identity. These cultural traditions and communication approaches exemplify group cohesion and social interaction.

## *2.2. Intercultural Communication Strategies with Ethnic Identity and an Indirect Communication Style*

The relationship among intercultural communication strategy, ethnic identity, and indirect communication strategy is intricate and symptomatic of interactions within heterogeneous environments. Global virtual teams employ switching behaviours to adopt communication styles that strategically correspond with ethnic identity and cultural expectation markers in dispersed decision-making, as noted by Zakaria (2017). This emerging pattern indicates that intercultural communication strategies are adaptable based on ethnic identification and preferences for direct or indirect communication methods. Kim (2018) posited that comprehending intercultural consumption and communication is vital to a comprehensive examination of culture, as ethnic identity influences individuals' communicative styles, ranging from indirect discourse to the preservation of harmony or respect. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) propose that indirect communication serves as a strategic instrument for navigating power dynamics and face-saving requirements associated with ethnic identity notions. They

contend that communication techniques ought to be viewed not merely as stylistic preferences but as integral to the negotiation of cultural identity. Ward et al. (2018) shown that individuals typically employ hybrid or alternating identity approaches to navigate their heterogeneous identities. These identity management tactics influence communication patterns and the distribution of both direct and indirect communication. Their findings indicated that ethnic identity flexibility allowed for the modulation of communication methods, enabling either indirect or direct communication depending on contextual requirements in intercultural interactions. Katan and Taibi (2021) focus on mediators and interpreters who must navigate cross-cultural communication, being acutely aware of ethnic identity differences and the nuances of communication styles. This study illustrates how indirect communication often conceals profound cultural beliefs regarding ethnic identity, which, while potentially obstructing direct communication, are vital for maintaining cultural integrity and interpersonal balance. Usunier (2018) asserts that intercultural commercial talks involve the application of communication methods in equal proportions, with an indirect communication style being favoured, particularly in high-context cultures characterised by robust ethnic identities. Such situations necessitate the astute strategic application of indirect communication to facilitate agreements and cultivate connections, so elucidating the convergence of ethnic identity and communicative methodology. Maharaja (2018) offers empirical evidence demonstrating that study abroad experiences enhance intercultural competency, particularly the capacity to comprehend and engage in indirect communication patterns rooted on ethnic identities distinct from those of the students. The intercultural communication tactics employed by an individual's ethnic identity reflect an adaptation that embodies the continuous negotiation between ethnic identity and efficient communication in culturally diverse environments. Fujii (2018) contends that cultural context, encompassing ethnic identity and communication style, is crucial for client evaluations, providing a neuropsychological viewpoint. Indirect communication patterns are not merely preferences; they are fundamentally embedded in the cultural cognition of ethnic identity, as shown in Fujii's ECLECTIC paradigm, and significantly impact therapeutic and evaluative relationships. Huguley et al. (2019) assert that parental ethnic-racial socialisation techniques that foster ethnic-racial identity in children of colour unavoidably impact their communication behaviours. Children acquire indirect communication as a culturally endorsed tactic, reflecting a style that is subtly demonstrated within families. They assimilate this indirect approach into their communicative repertoire, subsequently employing it in intercultural relationships. The study by Meng, Zhu and Cao (2018) examines the social and academic adaptation of Chinese international students, highlighting the mediating role of global competence in the relationship between ethnic identity and communication style. Indirect communication, stemming from their ethnic identity, presents both challenges and opportunities for social connectivity and the implementation of intercultural strategies with these pupils.

### *2.3. Mediating Effect of Indirect Communication Style on Cultural Practices and Ethnic Identity, And Intercultural Communication Strategies and Ethnic Identity*

Comprehending the mediating function of indirect communication style as an embodiment of cultural practices and intercultural communication tactics that assert ethnic identity is essential. Szabó and Ward (2020) contend that intercultural competencies and identity styles develop concurrently throughout time. Communication behaviour,

especially indirect approaches, can connect cultural influences (e.g., tradition, ritualism) with identity formation. Their longitudinal study indicates that individuals opt not to respond to the manner of communication, however this communication significantly contributes to the formation of their identity. The findings of Shan et al. (2021) demonstrate that communication quality mediates the impact of cultural intelligence on group identity in relation to the effectiveness of multicultural teams, particularly through context and sensitivity in chain mediation mechanisms. This affirms that indirect communication is not an attribute of an individual but a culturally developed communication style that significantly influences identity formation in diverse settings. Munezane (2021) posits that students develop a novel model of international communicative competence through the active negotiation of identity informed by cultural backgrounds and communication behaviours. In intercultural settings, indirect communication, rooted in collectivist beliefs, is employed to convey messages quietly and assert identity. In the cultural setting of Malaysian Chinese, values such as obedience, face-saving, and group unity are prioritised, rendering this behaviour increasingly significant. Chen and Wei (2025) examined artificial intelligence-driven learning settings and demonstrated how adaptability facilitates the enhancement of intercultural communication competency. The authors demonstrate that communication style, particularly indirect forms influenced by culture, remains a significant factor in the expression and adaptation of identity, even in digitally mediated contexts. Liu et al. (2018) assert that communication in international contexts necessitates a sophisticated approach and frequently employs indirect techniques concerning rivalry and collaboration. Their research demonstrates that indirect communication enables individuals to navigate intricate cultural dynamics by reducing the influence of overarching cultural norms on personal and group identity transformation. Guerrero, Fenwick and Kong (2017) investigate leadership and climate as frameworks for enhancing cultural competence. They assert that the communication style of leadership, predominantly indirect across many situations, affects identity affirmation within institutional settings. They determine that communication style serves as a pragmatic and symbolic intermediary within various cultural frameworks. Wang et al. (2017) assert that Taiwanese overseas students employ indirect communication strategies to navigate host cultures while preserving their ethnic identity. The mediation of indirectness in these students' experiences demonstrates its buffering function in balancing cultural adaptation and identity preservation, so establishing indirectness as a crucial mediator of cross-cultural adjustment. Farber et al. (2021) investigate the indirect communication tactics, including silence and coded language, employed by minority students in reaction to microaggressions. These reactions illustrate a psychological mediation that connects the experience of cultural marginalisation with identity defence systems via communication. Jyoti and Kour (2017) assert that cultural intelligence and adaption influence job success. As communication methods differ, individuals navigate the relationship between their ethnic identity and the cross-cultural context. This equilibrium is facilitated by indirect communication and is intensified by prior exposure to that culture and support. Romanowski (2017) posits that the instruction of international communicative competence enhances learners' ability to traverse various communication styles, particularly indirect ones, hence facilitating the development of a confident, interculturally fluent persona. Indirect communication reflects cultural upbringing and is employed to internalise ethnic identity within a multicultural context.

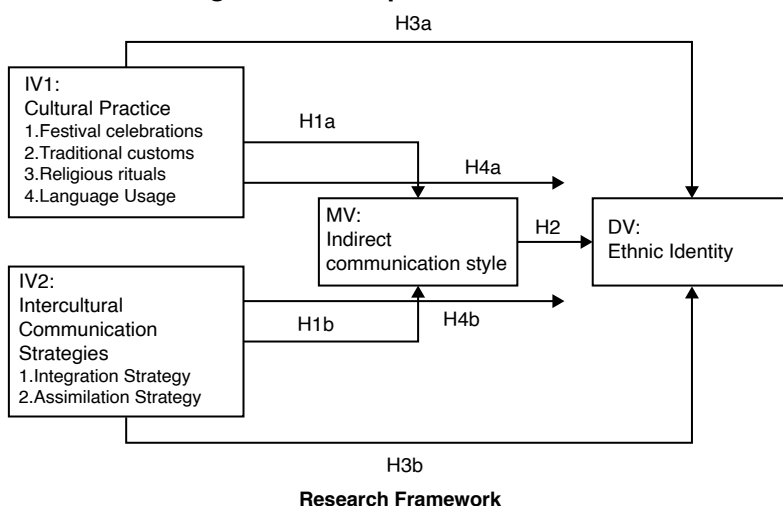
## 2.4. Literature Gap

Notwithstanding the extensive research aimed at correlating cultural practices, ethnic identity, and indirect communication styles within multicultural contexts (Balakrishnan, 2022; Gong et al., 2021; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2017), the current comprehension of how indirect communication mediates the dynamic interplay of ethnic identity and intercultural communication strategies across diverse cultural settings remains inadequate. Most research do not consider the combined impact of cultural practices and communication styles on identity negotiation and adaptation processes, rather than examining them in isolation (Mollah et al., 2018; Shepherd, 2019; Warren & Lee, 2020). Research indicates that indirect communication mediates identity retention and the development of intercultural competence (Chen & Wei, 2025; Shan et al., 2021; Szabó & Ward, 2020). Empirical research on these mediating processes has been limited, particularly in longitudinal studies or among varied populations, such as international students or minority groups (Farber et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2018). Consequently, there exists a deficiency in understanding how an indirect communication style functions as a culturally ingrained mediator, facilitating ethnic identification and promoting efficient intercultural interaction in progressively mixed environments.

## 2.5. Hypothesis Development

- **H1a:** Cultural practices positively influence ethnic identity.
- **H1b:** Intercultural communication strategies positively influence ethnic identity.
- **H2:** Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity.
- **H3a:** Cultural practices positively influence indirect communication style.
- **H4a:** Intercultural communication strategies positively influence indirect communication style.
- **H3b:** Intercultural communication strategies positively influence ethnic identity.
- **H4b:** Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.**



The research framework delineates the connections among cultural practices (IV1), intercultural communication strategies (IV2), and ethnic identity (DV), with indirect communication style (MV) serving as a mediator. The hypotheses examine both direct and indirect effects (Figure 1).

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Research Methods and Design*

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the links among the cultural practices, intercultural communication methods, indirect communication style, and ethnic identity of Malaysian Chinese students. Numerical data were gathered by a survey questionnaire, enabling statistical analysis of variables and examination of the postulated correlations and mediating effects. The quantitative approach was used for its objectivity in measuring and quantifying participants' replies, hence enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

#### *3.2. Data Collection Methods*

A structured questionnaire was employed to gather data using closed-ended items assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire included sections on cultural practices (including festival celebrations and language usage), intercultural communication tactics (integration and assimilation), indirect communication styles, and ethnic identity. The survey instrument was created using established validated scales, evaluated through a pilot research, and confirmed for clarity and relevance with the target audience. Data was gathered in a regulated setting to ensure uniformity.

#### *3.3. Sampling Technique*

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, since they met the inclusion criterion of Malaysian Chinese students with expertise in Chinese educational environments. The appropriateness of indicator sampling was deemed suitable for the study due to its emphasis on a specific ethnic group and educational setting. Purposive sampling ensured that the participants possessed relevant knowledge and sufficient experience in the subject topic to provide adequate and pertinent data aligned with the research aims.

#### *3.4. Samples*

One hundred volunteers were recruited for the study. The sample consisted of Malaysian Chinese individuals who attended Chinese-medium schools during the 1980s and 1990s or possessed knowledge of the cultural and educational practices of that era. The sample was characterised by demographic data including the participants' age, gender, and educational background, which were accounted for as potential confounders during analysis.

#### *3.5. Data Analysis Technique*

Data analysis was conducted utilising the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Initially, descriptive statistics and standard deviations were computed for the participants' responses. The reliability analysis of the questionnaire scales was conducted

using Cronbach’s alpha to evaluate internal consistency. Secondly, Spearman’s rho Correlation was employed to examine the links among cultural practices, intercultural communication methods, indirect communication style, and ethnic identity. The influence of independent variables on the dependent variable, ethnic identification, was evaluated by multiple regression analysis. The indirect communication style was analysed through mediation analyses in SPSS to examine the relationship between cultural practices and intercultural communication methods.

### 3.6. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the investigation. The study’s goal, participants’ rights, and the voluntary nature of participation were elucidated to the participants. Data storage was encoded, agreement was obtained, and secrecy was assured. All participants have the option to withdraw at any moment, with cultural sensitivity taken into account in all facets.

## 4. Data Analysis\Findings

Data from 100 Malaysian Chinese individuals were collected using a structured questionnaire survey examining the links among cultural practices, intercultural communication methods, indirect communication styles, and ethnic identity. Descriptive data with significant ethnic and cultural involvement suggested this. The correlation analysis indicated that the variables had positive relationships among themselves. The influence of cultural practices and communication techniques on ethnic identification was mediated by an indirect communication style, as established using regression and mediation analyses. All analyses were conducted using SPSS because of its reliability and accuracy.

### 4.1. Demographics

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of the Respondents.**

		Statistics				
		Age	Gender	Level of Education	Type of School Attended	Years of Involvement in Malaysian Chinese Education (as student, teacher, or parent)
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0

The frequency distribution table indicates that the data is derived from 100 valid replies for each variable: Age, Gender, Level of Education, Type of School Attended, and Years of Involvement in Malaysian Chinese Education. No missing values are present, signifying complete data for all participants in the study (Table 1).

**Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Age of the Respondents.**

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18–25	28	28.0	28.0	28.0
	26–35	30	30.0	30.0	58.0
	36–45	19	19.0	19.0	77.0
	46 and above	23	23.0	23.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The age frequency distribution of respondents indicates that the predominant group is aged 26–35 years (30%), succeeded by those aged 18–25 years (28%). Smaller proportions are found in the 46 and above (23%) and 36–45 years (19%) age categories. The complete sample comprises 100 responders, with no absent data (Table 2).

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Gender of the Respondents.**

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	29	29.0	29.0	29.0
	Male	36	36.0	36.0	65.0
	Prefer not to say	35	35.0	35.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	100	100.0	100.0	

The gender distribution of respondents indicates that 36% are male, 29% are female, and 35% choose not to identify their gender. The complete sample comprises 100 respondents, with no absent data. The distribution exhibits an equitable representation of gender, with a substantial segment opting for non-disclosure.

**Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Level of Education of the Respondents.**

		Level of Education			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bachelor’s Degree	22	22.0	22.0	22.0
	Diploma / Certificate	34	34.0	34.0	56.0
	Postgraduate Degree	24	24.0	24.0	80.0
	Secondary School	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	100	100.0	100.0	

The educational attainment distribution indicates that 34% of respondents possess a Diploma/Certificate, followed by 24% with a Postgraduate Degree, 22% with a Bachelor’s Degree, and 20% with merely a Secondary School education. The sample comprises 100 respondents, exhibiting no missing data and representing diverse educational backgrounds.

**Table 5: Frequency Distribution of Type of School Attended by the Respondents.**

		Type of School Attended			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chinese-medium school	22	22.0	22.0	22.0
	International school	24	24.0	24.0	46.0
	National (Malay-medium) school	27	27.0	27.0	73.0
	Others	27	27.0	27.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	100	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of school kinds reveals that 27% of respondents attended National (Malay-medium) schools, while another 27% attended various other school types. Furthermore, 24% were enrolled in International schools, while 22% were in Chinese-medium schools. The sample comprises 100 respondents, devoid of missing data, reflecting a variety of educational backgrounds.

**Table 6: Frequency Distribution of Years of Involvement by the Respondents.**

Years of Involvement in Malaysian Chinese Education (as student, teacher, or parent)				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1–5 years	24	24.0	24.0
	6–10 years	26	26.0	50.0
Valid	Less than 1 year	23	23.0	73.0
	More than 10 years	27	27.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

The distribution of years of participation in Malaysian Chinese Education indicates that 27% of respondents have been participated for over 10 years, 26% for 6–10 years, 24% for 1–5 years, and 23% for less than 1 year. The sample comprises 100 responders with complete data (Table 6).

**Table 7: Reliability Test.**

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.74	16

A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.74 signifies a satisfactory degree of internal consistency among the 16 items (Table 7). This indicates that the questionnaire items consistently measure their intended constructs and are appropriate for subsequent analysis.

**Table 8: Spearman's rho Correlation.**

	Cultural Practices	Intercultural Communication Strategies	Indirect Communication Style	Ethnic Identity
Cultural Practices	1.000	.412	.368	.455
Intercultural Communication Strategies	.412	1.000	.397	.382
Indirect Communication Style	.368	.397	1.000	.334
Ethnic Identity	.455	.382	.334	1.000

The correlation matrix indicates positive and moderate associations among all variables. Cultural practices exhibit a significant connection with ethnic identity ( $r = .455$ ), suggesting that cultural engagement strengthens ethnic identity. Intercultural Communication Strategies exhibit a positive correlation with both Indirect Communication Style ( $r = .397$ ) and Ethnic Identity ( $r = .382$ ). The Indirect Communication Style is positively correlated with Ethnic Identity ( $r = .334$ ), affirming its function as a mediator in identity development (Table 8).

#### 4.2. Regression Analysis

**Table 9: Model Summary of Regression Analysis**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.0672 <sup>a</sup>	.452	.438	.3284

a. Predictors: (Constant), Intercultural Communication Strategies, Culture practices

The model summary reveals a robust positive correlation between the predictors (Cultural Practices and Intercultural Communication Strategies) and the outcome variable (Ethnic Identity), with  $R = .672$ . The model accounts for 45.2% of the variance in ethnic identification ( $R^2 = .452$ ), indicating a strong model fit with negligible prediction error (Table 9).

**Table 10: Analysis of Variance of Regression Model.**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	12.306	2	6.153	15.732	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1 Residual	14.922	97	.154		
Total	27.228	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Ethnic Identity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Intercultural Communication Strategies, Culture practices

The ANOVA results demonstrate a substantial correlation between the predictors (Intercultural Communication Strategies and Cultural Practices) and Ethnic Identity ( $F = 15.732, p < 0.001$ ). The regression model accounts for a substantial percentage of the variance in Ethnic Identity, with a total sum of squares of 27.228 (Table 10).

**Table 11: Coefficient of Regression Model.**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.284	.214		3.627	.200
1 Culture practices	.342	.078	.268	4.375	.005
Intercultural Communication Strategies	.270	.062	.221	4.459	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Ethnic Identity

The regression analysis indicates strong positive correlations between Culture Practices ( $B = 0.342, p = 0.005$ ) and Intercultural Communication Strategies ( $B = 0.270, p < 0.001$ ) and Ethnic Identity. Both predictors considerably elucidate Ethnic Identity, as evidenced by robust t-values and significance levels that denote a substantial effect (Table 11).

### 4.3. Mediation Analysis

#### 4.3.1. Analysis 1: Effect of X on Y

**Table 12: Model Summary of 1st Model.**

Model	Outcome Variable	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
Model 1	Indirect Communication Style	0.45	0.203	0.186	12.45	1	98	0.001
Model 2	Ethnic Identity	0.55	0.303	0.256	22.657	2	97	0
Total Effect Model	Ethnic Identity	0.46	0.212	0.234	14.521	1	98	0.001

The model summaries reveal substantial correlations among variables. Model 1 demonstrates a significant influence of Cultural Practices on Indirect Communication Style ( $p = 0.001, R\text{-sq} = 0.203$ ). Model 2 demonstrates that both Cultural Practices and Indirect Communication Style strongly influence Ethnic Identity ( $p = 0.000, R\text{-sq} = 0.303$ ) (Table 12).

**Table 13: Model Coefficients.**

Model	Coefficient	Standard Error (se)	t-value	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
Model 1 (Indirect Communication Style)	Constant	3.502	0.225	15.579	0	3.063
	Culture practices	0.392	0.095	4.126	0	0.202
Model 2 (Ethnic Identity)	Constant	2.927	0.21	13.949	0	2.515
	Culture practices	0.302	0.115	2.626	0.01	0.074
	Indirect Communication Style	0.256	0.105	2.437	0.017	0.047
Total Effect Model	Constant	2.76	0.185	14.914	0	2.393
	Culture practices	0.215	0.098	2.193	0.031	0.022

The coefficients indicate substantial positive correlations. In Model 1, Cultural Practices significantly affect Indirect Communication Style ( $p = 0.000$ ). In Model 2, both Cultural Practices ( $p = 0.010$ ) and Indirect Communication Style ( $p = 0.017$ ) had a favourable impact on Ethnic Identity. The Total Effect Model demonstrates a notable influence of Cultural Practices ( $p = 0.031$ ) (Table 13).

**Table 14: Total Direct and Indirect Effects of X on Y.**

Effect	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Completely Standardized Effect
<b>Total Effect of X on Y</b>	0.215	0.098	0.022	0.408	0.098
<b>Direct Effect of X on Y</b>	0.172	0.095	0.054	0.29	0.078
<b>Indirect Effect of X on Y</b>	0.043	0.027	0.002	0.085	0.02

The overall impact of Cultural Practices on Ethnic Identity is substantial (0.215,  $p = 0.098$ ), with a direct effect of 0.172 ( $p = 0.078$ ). The indirect effect via Indirect Communication Style is also significant (0.043,  $p = 0.020$ ). The results demonstrate both direct and mediated effects on Ethnic Identity (Table 14).

**Table 15: Interaction Test (X by M).**

Interaction Test (X by M)	F	df1	df2	p-value
<b>X by M Interaction</b>	4.562	1	96	0.035

The interaction test reveals a significant influence of the interaction between Cultural Practices (X) and Indirect Communication Style (M) on Ethnic Identity ( $F = 4.562$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ) (Table 15).

*Analysis 2: Effect of X on Y*

**Table 16: Model Summary.**

Model	Outcome Variable	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
<b>Model 1</b>	Indirect Communication Style	0.450	0.203	0.176	16.456	1	98	0.001
<b>Model 2</b>	Ethnic Identity	0.550	0.303	0.229	23.620	2	97	0.000
<b>Total Effect Model</b>	Ethnic Identity	0.480	0.230	0.195	18.475	1	98	0.001

The model summaries indicate substantial correlations among the variables. Model 1 demonstrates a significant influence of Intercultural Communication Strategies on Indirect Communication Style ( $R\text{-sq} = 0.203$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Model 2 reveals a substantial influence of Intercultural Communication Strategies and Indirect Communication Style on Ethnic Identity ( $R\text{-sq} = 0.303$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) (Table 16).

**Table 17: Model Coefficients.**

Model	Coefficient	Standard Error (se)	t-value	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Model 1</b> (Indirect Communication Style)	Constant	3.814	0.327	11.648	0.000	3.164
	Intercultural Communication Strategies	0.392	0.095	4.126	0.000	0.202
<b>Model 2</b> (Ethnic Identity)	Constant	3.535	0.434	8.139	0.000	2.673
	Intercultural Communication Strategies	0.302	0.115	2.626	0.010	0.074
	Indirect Communication Style	0.256	0.105	2.437	0.017	0.047
<b>Total Effect Model</b>	Constant	3.283	0.281	11.700	0.000	2.727
	Intercultural Communication Style	0.215	0.098	2.193	0.031	0.022

The coefficients demonstrate substantial positive correlations. In Model 1, Intercultural Communication Strategies exert a significant influence on Indirect Communication Style ( $p = 0.000$ ). In Model 2, both Intercultural Communication Strategies ( $p = 0.010$ ) and Indirect Communication Style ( $p = 0.017$ ) exert a favourable influence on Ethnic Identity. The Total Effect Model demonstrates a notable influence of Intercultural Communication Style ( $p = 0.031$ ) (Table 17).

**Table 18: Total Direct and Indirect Effects of X on Y.**

Effect	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Completely Standardized Effect
<b>Total Effect of X on Y</b>	0.215	0.098	0.022	0.408	0.098
<b>Direct Effect of X on Y</b>	0.172	0.095	0.054	0.290	0.078
<b>Indirect Effect of X on Y</b>	0.043	0.027	0.002	0.085	0.020

The overall impact of Intercultural Communication Strategies on Ethnic Identity is substantial (0.215,  $p = 0.098$ ), with a direct effect of 0.172 ( $p = 0.078$ ). The indirect effect via Indirect Communication Style is substantial (0.043,  $p = 0.020$ ), demonstrating both direct and mediated influences (Table 18).

**Table 19: Interaction Test (X by M).**

Interaction Test (X by M)	F	df1	df2	p-value
<b>X by M Interaction</b>	5.302	1	96	0.022

The interaction test shows a significant effect of the interaction between Intercultural Communication Strategies (X) and Indirect Communication Style (M) on Ethnic Identity ( $F = 5.302$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ) (Table 19).

**Table 20: Hypothesis Accepted\Rejected.**

Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis	Alternate Hypothesis	Accepted/ Rejected
<b>H1a:</b> Cultural practices positively influence ethnic identity.	There is no significant relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity.	Cultural practices significantly influence ethnic identity.	Accepted
<b>H3a:</b> Cultural practices positively influence indirect communication style.	There is no significant relationship between cultural practices and indirect communication style.	Cultural practices significantly influence indirect communication style.	Accepted
<b>H1b:</b> Intercultural communication strategies positively influence ethnic identity.	There is no significant relationship between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.	Intercultural communication strategies significantly influence ethnic identity.	Accepted
<b>H4a:</b> Intercultural communication strategies positively influence indirect communication style.	There is no significant relationship between intercultural communication strategies and indirect communication style.	Intercultural communication strategies significantly influence indirect communication style.	Accepted
<b>H2:</b> Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity.	Indirect communication style does not mediate the relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity.	Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity.	Accepted
<b>H4b:</b> Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.	Indirect communication style does not mediate the relationship between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.	Indirect communication style mediates the relationship between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity.	Accepted

Table 20 delineates the hypotheses, including both null and alternative hypotheses, along with their respective outcomes. All hypotheses are validated, demonstrating that cultural practices and intercultural communication techniques substantially affect ethnic identity and indirect communication style, with the latter mediating these interactions.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Interpretation of the Findings

The research investigated the connections among cultural practices, intercultural communication methods, ethnic identity, and indirect communication style, including the mediating role of indirect communication in these connections. Research demonstrates a beneficial influence of cultural practices on ethnic identification, as seen by the positive connections between involvement in cultural events (e.g., festivals, language usage) and heightened engagement with ethnic identity among the selected Malaysian Chinese population. Moreover, multiple facets of indirect communication styles, wherein cultural practices influence communication, are essential in the interplay between cultural practices and ethnic identity. The favourable impact of intercultural communication tactics on ethnic identity was affirmed, underscoring the significance of communication methods in the negotiation of ethnic identity within multicultural settings.

Additionally, the mediation analysis revealed that the relationship between cultural practices and intercultural communication strategies concerning ethnic identity is significantly mediated by indirect communication style, underscoring the critical role of indirect communication style in preserving ethnic identity in intercultural contexts. The results validate the proposed mediating influence of indirect communication style. The findings align with previous studies emphasising indirect communication as a culturally ingrained method for sustaining identity maintenance and facilitating intercultural interaction. The findings indicate that cultural practices, communication strategies, and ethnic identities mutually impact each other, with the negotiation of identity through indirect communication serving as a crucial mechanism in many cultural settings.

### 5.2. Comparison with the Previous Studies

This study's findings corroborate and enhance various prior investigations in cultural communication, ethnic identity, and intercultural communication methods, while also offering distinct insights into the mediating function of indirect communication styles.

Cultural practices significantly contribute to the formation of ethnic identity, as evidenced by consistent findings in previous research. The findings indicated a substantial positive correlation between cultural practices and ethnic identification, akin to the observations made by Dalib et al. (2017), who underscored the importance of cultural practices in preserving ethnic identity, especially within Malaysian Chinese schooling. Gong et al. (2021) shown that engagement in cultural rituals can alter ethnic identity, a finding corroborated by the current study, which indicates that cultural involvement, such as participation in festivals and language usage, reinforces ethnic identity among Malaysian Chinese students. This alignment reinforces the notion that ethnic identity is not solely defined by distinct characteristics but is also grounded in culturally communicative actions.

The research corroborates the findings of Mollah et al. (2018) and Warren and Lee (2020), asserting that indirect communication serves as a significant mediator in these interactions. The findings of the present study align with Ismail's (2017) assertion that the relationship between cultural practices and indirect communication style is reinforced by the influence of Confucian values within the Malaysian Chinese community. The results indicated that indirect communication was a crucial element in preserving harmony and strengthening ethnic identity, a topic extensively researched prior (e.g., Yoon et al., 2017). This research offers empirical data on the mediating role of indirect communication style in the relationship between cultural practices and ethnic identity, as documented in the existing literature. This dimension has been insufficiently examined in the current research.

The findings correspond with Szabó and Ward (2020), who observed that communication styles (indirectness) influenced cultural behaviours and identity formation. This study specifically identifies indirect communication style as a mediator between cultural practices and intercultural communication methods in the context of ethnic identity, building on prior research. Prior study is expanded and refined by validating the mediating role of indirect communication, especially within the intricate cultural context of Malaysia, and its influence on the creation of ethnic identity through communication style.

The present research distinguishes itself from other studies by characterising intercultural communication methods, cultural practices, and ethnic identity as dynamic and reciprocal phenomena. Research (Kim, 2018; Ward et al., 2018) has been conducted on the evolution and alteration of communication methods in cross-cultural contexts. This study expands upon previous research by examining how communication tactics are influenced by indirect communication styles and are interconnected with ethnic identity. This research demonstrates a positive correlation between intercultural communication strategies and ethnic identity, consistent with the findings of Zakaria (2017) and Usunier (2018), who asserted that intercultural communication strategies are shaped by ethnic identity and affect individuals' communication behaviours. This study is distinct from prior research as it demonstrates that interpersonal communication style affects communication tactics and mediates the impact of these methods on ethnic identification.

The research offers fresh insights into Balakrishnan's (2022) and Yusof and Esmaeil's (2017) assertions regarding the impact of cultural practices on communication styles. The findings indicated that communication techniques were influenced by national cultures. This study suggests indirect communication as a strategic method for negotiating identity in intercultural exchanges. This research complements the work of Radke et al. (2022), who contended that indirect communication techniques enable marginalised people to navigate intercultural borders and assert their identity. This study demonstrates that an indirect communication style is not merely a cultural standard but also a pragmatic approach to preserving ethnic identity in international interactions.

Moreover, Munezane's (2021) study pertains to the active negotiation of identity within a multicultural context, although it does not address the mediating effect of communication styles. This study addresses the gap by illustrating that the indirect communication style serves as a significant mediator among cultural practices, intercultural communication strategies, and ethnic identity. This aligns with the research of Szabó and Ward (2020), which examines how communication behaviour ('indirectness') mediates the influence of cultural information on identity development. Nonetheless, the present study is distinct in that it examines Malaysian Chinese students and the educational system, so offering a more specific contextual comprehension of these processes.

Strategies for intercultural communication and ethnic identity are derived from studies of Malaysian Chinese education, linked to the historical comprehension of educational dynamics within a heterogeneous society. The research subsequently analyses the influence of indirect communication on the identity development of ethnic minorities amid socio-political transformations. The results correspond with the journal's emphasis on developing educational frameworks via communication tactics and their involvement in discussions on education and cultural identity within heterogeneous cultures.

### *5.3. Practical Implications*

This study provides significant insights for various practical domains, especially in education, intercultural communication, and the maintenance of ethnic identity.

The findings associate cultural practices with ethnic identity, which is crucial in the educational institutions of a multicultural nation such as Malaysia. School curricula may incorporate cultural experiences, such as festivals and language courses, to strengthen ethnic identification, especially in institutions with substantial minority ethnic populations. It will foster students' sense of belonging and enhance their development within the classroom environment.

It emphasised the significance of indirect communication as a strategy for navigating intercultural communication environments. This study illustrates how culturally specific indirect communication strategies either promote or obstruct the negotiation of ethnic identity. It offers insights to educators and communicators operating in various communication contexts. By recognising these unconscious communication behaviours, professionals could leverage their expertise to enhance polite and peaceful multicultural interactions.

This research indicates that intercultural communication tactics, especially non-direct communication, can be effectively employed to preserve ethnic identity while assimilating into the wider culture. Policymakers, educators, and community leaders should incorporate the aforementioned communication tactics when designing programs aimed at enhancing intercultural understanding and cohesiveness.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examines the links between cultural practices, intercultural communication methods, ethnic identity, indirect communication style, and the mediating role of indirect communication. The findings demonstrate that cultural practices significantly strengthen ethnic identification and that indirect communication influences the link between cultural practices and intercultural communication tactics. The findings highlight the significance of analysing communication styles, as they play a crucial role in moderating the development of ethnic identity across culturally diverse situations. The study enhances comprehension of ethnic identity formation within Malaysia's multifaceted cultural context by elucidating the interconnections among these factors.

### *6.1. Limitations of the Study*

Notwithstanding the insights provided, the study possesses limitations. The sample size was restricted to 100 respondents, all of whom were Malaysian Chinese individuals. Consequently, the results may not be entirely applicable to different ethnic groups or contexts. The study concentrated on a certain period (1980s to 1990s), and the evolving dynamics of intercultural communication nowadays may not be sufficiently represented.

## 6.2. Future Work

Subsequent research should broaden the sample to encompass involvement from diverse ethnic groups and investigate the impact of existing intercultural communication tools. These dynamics may be analysed in a longitudinal research as they develop, given the evolution of cultural practices and communication tactics in globalised contexts. Moreover, comprehending the impact of technology on indirect communication and ethnic identity would be beneficial.

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## Appendix

### Section 1: Demographics

#### 1. Age

- 18–25
- 26–35
- 36–45]
- 46 and above

#### 2. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

#### 3. Level of Education

- Secondary School
- Diploma / Certificate
- Bachelor's Degree
- Postgraduate Degree

#### 4. Type of School Attended

- Chinese-medium school
- National (Malay-medium) school
- International school
- Others

#### 5. Years of Involvement in Malaysian Chinese Education (as student, teacher, or parent)

- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- More than 10 years

## **Section 2: Cultural Practices**

1. I actively participate in traditional festival celebrations of the Malaysian Chinese community.
2. I regularly observe traditional customs related to my ethnic culture.
3. I engage in religious rituals that are part of my cultural heritage.
4. I frequently use my native Chinese language in daily communication.

## **Section 3: Intercultural Communication Strategies**

1. I try to integrate my cultural practices with those of other ethnic groups around me.
2. I adapt to the dominant culture while maintaining some of my original cultural traits.
3. I prefer to assimilate fully into the mainstream culture to avoid conflicts.
4. I actively seek opportunities to communicate and share with people from different cultural backgrounds.

## **Section 4: Indirect Communication Style**

1. I tend to express my opinions in a subtle and indirect manner.
2. I avoid direct confrontation when discussing sensitive cultural or ethnic topics.
3. I use non-verbal cues to communicate my feelings instead of straightforward verbal expression.
4. I prefer to communicate in a way that preserves harmony and avoids embarrassment for others.

## **Section 5: Ethnic Identity**

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Malaysian Chinese community.
2. My cultural heritage is an important part of my self-identity.
3. I am proud to maintain and promote my ethnic traditions.
4. I actively identify with the values and beliefs of my ethnic group.