

THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF CHINESE WOMEN IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia exhibit a passive political culture. This is evidenced by the number of Chinese women in Parliament and Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN). Despite that Chinese community-based political parties have established a 30 per cent quota to empower the political participation of women, the target quota has yet to be achieved as of today. Therefore, the present study discussed the indicators that influence the political culture of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia. Among the important indicators that affect political culture is the political socialisation agents.

Methodology: In this qualitative research design, data were collected using a semi-structured interview method. The Interviews were conducted with a total of ten participants, namely seven Chinese women political representatives, one Chinese women Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) activist, one academician, and one men politician who served in Peninsular Malaysia. The data obtained through interviews underwent a transcription process which was then coded and themed.

Findings: The themes were divided into two categories, namely the internal political socialisation agents and the external political socialisation agents. Internal political socialisation agents consisted of education, economy, culture, religion, family, and gender, whereas external political socialisation agents consisted of NGOs/associations, political parties, and the community. A model, Political Socialisation Agent Model for Chinese women, based on the Intersectionality Dimension Theory was developed to illustrate the relationship between the internal and the external political socialisation agents that shape the political attitudes and behaviours of Chinese women.

Contributions: The present study contributes to the advancement of knowledge on the political culture of Chinese women residing in Malaysia. The results of this study may be utilised to increase the awareness and participation of Chinese women in the political sphere of Peninsular Malaysia.

Keywords: Chinese women, political culture, political socialisation, intersectionality.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. The ethnic diversity in Malaysia began with the entry of foreign labour by British colonialists. This ethnic diversity has its uniqueness as it has given rise to different cultures, languages, religions, and ways of life. This multidimensional aspect has become a construct that influences the political culture of Malaysians, including Malaysian women, as highlighted by the theory of intersectionality. Bilge and Collins (2016) define intersectionality theory as a way of understanding and analysing the world through individual contexts and complex human experiences. Incidents, social life, and political landscape are not solely determined by a singular factor, but rather by a multitude of interrelated factors. Morales (1990) states that women's experiences are dynamic and can vary over time, proposing that women are viewed in a multidimensional context and experiences that take into account aspects such as ethnicity, skin colour, age, social class, culture, history, geographical location, language, and citizenship status (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

Bastia (2014), Freidenvall (2016), Hankivsky (2012), and Jang (2018) state that the theory of intersectionality was first triggered by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw. Crenshaw (1989) used the concept of intersectionality to understand how the cross-relationship between

gender and ethnicity constrained black women in the labour market in the United States. Insufficient comprehension of intersectionality resulted in discriminatory encounters for black women, who were often marginalised and excluded by dominant or numerically superior groups (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Crenshaw (1989, 1991), gender and ethnicity are the factors surrounding the discourse on women's oppression and racist sentiments. Nevertheless, many scholars agree that women face discrimination not only because of their gender and ethnicity, but also because of their class, religion, and patriarchal culture (Fathi, 2017).

Previous studies on gender and the concept of intersectionality emphasise that the pressure on gender and ethnic factors has become the basic form of discrimination, often without considering other factors. Other factors are seen to have also influenced the behaviour and political involvement of individuals, especially women. The results of the study by Joshi (2011), Brown (2014), Finlay and Hopkins (2019), and Moreau, Nuño-Pérez, and Sanchez (2019) state that factors such as age, education, total income, political affiliation, religion, political party, citizenship, economic status, and experiences of discrimination are interrelated with participation in the political field. However, Joshi (2011), Brown (2014), Finlay and Hopkins (2019), and Moreau et al. (2019) only discussed factor indicators, without considering political socialisation despite its role in the discussion on behaviour, involvement, and political culture.

According to Omar et al. (2008), political socialisation is a process that allows individuals to identify the political system which will then influence their perceptions of politics as well as reactions to political symptoms. Political socialisation involves interrelated macro and micro phenomena. Political socialisation at the macro level pertains to how politics, political society, and political systems impart appropriate norms and practices to citizens, residents, or members. Meanwhile, political socialisation at the micro-level entails a pattern of individual processes in political development and learning, as well as building relationships in a political context (Sapiro, 2004). Therefore, this study used intersectionality theory to discuss the indicators of political socialisation agents and challenges that influence individual political behaviour which shape Chinese women's political culture in Peninsular Malaysia.

According to Sulaiman (2002), political culture is related to the behaviour, involvement, perceptions, beliefs, expectations, and hope of members of society in their political environment. Political culture compasses attitudes, values, orientations, opinions, perceptions, and feelings towards politics. Individuals see the political culture as a control guide for effective political action. Meanwhile, according to groups, political culture plays a role in providing a systematic value structure and rational judgement to determine the

effectiveness of actions taken by political institutions and organisations. Political culture involves the subjective feelings of a person or a group towards the acceptance or rejection of the community identity and obedience to the leader (Besar & Jali, 2015). However, according to Ismail (2018), political culture is a dynamic element that can change based on circumstances, time, technological changes, and environmental influences. Therefore, political culture is an orientation towards politics which can change according to circumstances and time.

Previous scholars, such as Mohd Zain et al. (2011), Ahmad (2014), Ismail (2018), and Abdullah (2020) conducted studies to determine the Malay political culture in Malaysia. In particular, Ismail (2018) conducted a study on the Contemporary Political Culture of the Malay Community in Malaysia: A Critical Assessment. Meanwhile, Ahmad (2014) discussed the Hegemony of Malay Political Culture, Mohd Zain et. al (2011) discussed the Influence of Malay Nationalism on Malay Political Culture, and Abdullah (2020) discussed the Transformation of Malay Political Culture in Terengganu. The studies on political culture are conducted on the natives despite that Malaysia consists of a multi-ethnic population. The discourse surrounding non-native political cultures is relatively limited, with comparatively little attention paid to the political culture of the Chinese community. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of the political culture of Chinese women in Malaysia.

2.0 CHINESE WOMEN AND POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

The representation of Chinese women in the Parliament and Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN) remained comparatively inadequate (refer to Table 1). The representation of Chinese women in the Parliament during the 13th General Election was 2.3 per cent, which experienced a slight increase to 4.5 per cent during the 14th General Election. However, the 15th General Election witnessed a decline of 3.6 per cent. The trend in the representation of Chinese women in parliament, observed from the 12th General Election to the 15th General Election, demonstrated a fluctuation pattern. In DUN, during the 13th General Election, the proportion of Chinese women in DUN was recorded at 3.8 per cent, which subsequently declined to 3.4 per cent during the 14th General Election. The percentage increased to 4.5 per cent during the 14th General Election but declined again to 3.5 per cent during the 15th General Election. The data presented indicate that the representation of Chinese women in the Malaysian Parliament and DUN was relatively low in proportion to the overall population of Chinese women in the country. Hence, it is imperative that their voices are not disregarded as they play a crucial role in advocating for the well-being of Chinese women in Malaysia.

Table 1.0: The percentage of ethnic Chinese women in the parliament and Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN) during the 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th general elections

	12th General Election Malaysia (Percent)	13th General Election Malaysia (Percent)	14th General Election Malaysia (Percent)	15th General Election Malaysia (Percent)
Parliament	4.0	2.3	4.5	3.6
Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN)	2.6	3.8	3.4	-

Source: Minister of Women, Family and Community Development/ Parliament of Malaysia

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies discussed in this section are divided into two themes: (i) women and politics in Malaysia, and (ii) the political landscape of the Chinese community in Malaysia.

3.1 Women and Politics in Malaysia

Numerous academics (e.g., Khalid, 2014, 2019; Karim & Talib, 2016; Hanafi, 2019; Padzil, 2017; Azmi, 2019; Sukhani, 2020; Ahmad Zakuan, 2023) have conducted research on the relationship between gender and politics. The discussion on women and politics encompasses a multitude of themes, including the challenges encountered by women in politics, the participation of women in politics via political parties, endeavours aimed at empowering women in politics in Malaysia, and the influence of democracy on women and politics. In addition, previous studies on women’s political involvement have been generalised, without considering the nuances of ethnic, religious, cultural, historical, and other relevant factors. Besides, studies pertaining to women have extensively examined Malaysian Malay women in comparison to Malaysian Chinese women. For instance, Azmi (2019) conducted a study on the presence of women within the ranks of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) during the 14th General Election, while Hanafi (2019) examined the political challenges encountered by women politicians, but with a particular emphasis on Malay women.

The study conducted by Ahmad Zakuan (2023) highlights the various challenges encountered by women in political parties in Malaysia. These challenges include gender roles, male dominance, gender stereotyping, women’s agency, the intersectionality of age and gender, and political efficacy within the parties. These challenges pose significant obstacles to women, particularly those who aspire to hold leadership positions in political parties. Sukhani (2020)

posits that the lack of quotas and opportunities presents a challenge in attaining the objective of achieving a minimum of 30 per cent of women participation at the leadership level of a political party. The reason is that men perceive gender quotas as being undemocratic. Women are expected to engage in competition predicated upon their individual aptitudes or proficiencies. Nevertheless, the study encompassed the entire female population, without accounting for varying factors such as ethnicity, religion, and culture, which may yield varying outcomes.

The studies on Chinese women and politics were conducted by Padzil (2017) and Karim and Talib (2016). Padzil (2017) examined the role of women in social activism and nationalism in Malaya during the period spanning from 1929 to 1957. The study discovers that the involvement of Chinese women in activism within Malaya can be divided into three distinct phases. The initial phase commenced during the early 1800s, marked by the awareness of privileged women and intellectuals from the Straits Chinese Community. The second phase spanned the period from 1925 to 1940, known as the awakening phase, characterised by the participation of women from diverse backgrounds, including those from the general populace, in politics and activism (Padzil, 2017). The third phase, spanning from 1941 to 1957, witnessed the active involvement of Chinese women in the national politics of Malaya. During this stage, they played a crucial role in the national political movement that sought independence from the British colonialists.

According to Karim and Talib (2016), the absence of women representation within the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) sub-committee in 1961 was documented in the MCA Annual Report of 1961. Women's reluctance to participate in political activities was worsened by the incident of the racial clashes on 13 May 1969. However, upon Ling Leong Sik's appointment as the President of MCA, he was attentive towards matters pertaining to women. As a result, a growing number of women were granted positions either within or beyond the party. In comparison to the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), MCA's action towards women was perceived as significantly more extreme. Phang Ooi Choo, a former high-ranking official at the Ministry of Public Works, was subsequently reassigned to the Ministry of Transport, had her abilities refined and evaluated under the leadership of Ling Leong Sik. She was appointed later the position of General Manager at the Port of Klang Authority in 1997.

Besides that, Dr Ng Lay Swee, the first President of Abdul Razak University (UTAR), was the first Chinese and Malaysian woman to hold the highest position within the local ivory tower. When Dr Ng Yen Yen was appointed as MCA Vice President, she reveals that the

appointment of women to high-ranking positions is influenced by political power. The presence of a 'glass ceiling' impedes the advancement of qualified women to important positions, thus requiring the interplay of political influence. Despite possessing the necessary qualifications, women may encounter difficulty in breaking through this barrier and achieving further professional success. According to Padzil (2017) and Karim and Talib (2016), the involvement of Chinese women in politics predates Malaysia's attainment of independence. However, their involvement remains limited due to the presence of a 'glass ceiling'.

Padzil (2017) and Karim and Talib (2016) have provided an overview of the factors that shape the experiences of Chinese women in politics. However, their works fail to extensively describe the agents of socialisation that impact these women. The scope of their work has been limited to the discussion of women's political movements during the pre-independence era and the early stages of the country's independence. Thus, there has been a dearth of research examining the involvement of Chinese women in politics and the factors that influence their involvement as previous studies predominantly concentrated on the political involvement of Malay women. In addition, many studies on women's involvement in politics are generalised to all ethnicities, without accounting for factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and historical context.

3.2 The Political Landscape of the Chinese Community in Malaysia

Studies on the political landscape of the Chinese community in Malaysia have been discussed through the works of Chin (2001), Abdullah (2008), Lee (2010), Xia, Lee, and Ab. Halim (2019), and Besar (2021, 2023). The focus of the discussion revolves around the history of the early involvement of the Chinese in politics, the role of MCA parties, the alliance parties in the early stages of independence, and the Chinese voting patterns in Malaysia.

According to Chin (2001), the involvement of the Chinese community in politics in Malaysia has been low since Malaysia achieved its independence, and he further states that the community has experienced marginalisation. The weak power factor among the leaders of the Chinese community in the coalition of the Alliance Party has had an impact on the formation of Chinese community policies. Lee (2010) argues stating that the Chinese community constitutes the second-largest group in Malaysia and has been actively involved in politics since the middle of the 19th century. He further posits that there had been notable political transformations within the Chinese community from 1970 to 1990, wherein Chinese voters had demonstrated a growing inclination towards opposition candidates, despite the Malay community's continued support of the Barisan Nasional (BN).

Besar (2021) explains that in the 2018 general elections, support for BN/UMNO relied on votes contributed by the Malay community, while the voting strength of PH depended on the Chinese community. According to Besar (2021), the outcome of the 2018 General Election was influenced by the voting patterns of the Malay and Chinese communities. Specifically, support for the BN/UMNO coalition was contingent upon the votes cast by Malays, whereas the PH coalition's success was dependent on the votes of the Chinese. During the election, the West Coast region of Peninsular Malaysia was predominantly dominated by PH in both urban and semi-urban areas, which were characterised by a diverse ethnic composition and a significant Chinese population. The success of PH in this region can be attributed to ten factors, including PH as a multi-racial party that suits the ethnic composition of the electorate, the leadership of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the realistic PH election manifesto, sympathy because PH was overthrown during the Sheraton Step in March 2020, the convincing slogan 'Kita Boleh', the politics of values such as integrity, fairness, and trust in PH, campaigns through effective social media, impactful speeches and transparent, experienced and young/energetic leadership.

Xia et al. (2019) studied the background of ethnic politics in Malaysia. Through his study, Malaysia is a country that consists of people from various ethnicities who practise different cultural and religious traditions. As a result of the plural society in Malaysia, the political structure in Malaysia is a result of the interrelation between ethnicity and religious factors which had emerged since the British colonisation. However, the political landscape in Malaysia undergoes a transformation during the general election held on 9 May 2018, which was successfully won by the opposition. As a consequence, the Barisan Nasional coalition, which was led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), experienced a loss of power, resulting in the dismantling of their longstanding 61-year governance of Malaysia.

Based on the findings of the previous studies, it was observed most studies have been discussing the political landscape of the Chinese community in Malaysia but did not delve into the various factors that influence the political involvement of the Chinese community. Studies on Chinese society and politics often neglect to consider and prioritise gender indicators. The present study examined the political culture of Chinese society through a gender lens. The present research investigated the political culture of Chinese women in Malaysia by employing the Intersectionality Dimension Theory and taking into account the political socialisation process.

4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Qualitative Methods

This study employed qualitative research methods through intensive interview techniques and secondary data collection. The interaction between the interviewer and the informants through an interview process allows the researcher to understand the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the informant towards the question asked (Babbie, 2010). An intensive interview consisting of semi-structured questions was conducted to ensure the uniformity of information obtained to answer the research questions. However, the names of informants who participated in this study were kept confidential. This was to uphold the principle of anonymity, which aimed to ensure the security of information. This also gave participants the freedom to share their experiences and unlimited opinions, as sometimes their views and emotions could lead to controversy.

A total of ten informants were interviewed (see Table 2). The informants consisted of seven Chinese women political representatives, one Chinese women NGO activist, one academician, and one male politician who held office in Peninsular Malaysia. We interviewed Chinese women political representatives who were actively involved in politics, either they held important positions in political parties or were members of the Dewan Rakyat or DUN in Peninsular Malaysia. The current study sought to have a better understanding of the real situation based on their experience in the political world. The academician possessed the expertise and was actively conducting research on the political culture of the Chinese community. A Chinese women NGO activist was chosen to be a part of this interview because she was involved in protecting the rights of women, especially Chinese women. Furthermore, the NGO activist collaborated and interacted with women politicians and representatives from political parties and the government to empower women in many aspects, including economic, political, and social aspects. Therefore, NGO activists could provide opinions and views based on their experience in assessing the political culture of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia. The male perspective was also included in this study due to the voluntarily offered interviews on the political culture of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia as male politicians are seen as important among the individuals who are also directly involved with Chinese women politicians. The selection of informants from diverse backgrounds, namely such as NGO activists, academicians, and male politicians was intended to get a balanced opinion and to strengthen the triangulation process. Triangulation is a method used to strengthen the data through selected research methods. One way to make qualitative data have high reliability is to do triangulation between the data.

Table 2.0: List of informants

Informant		Political Parties /Institution
Informant 1	Women Political Representatives	MCA
Informant 2	Women Political Representatives	MCA
Informant 3	Women Political Representatives	PKR
Informant 4	Women Political Representatives	PKR
Informant 5	Women Political Representatives	DAP
Informant 6	Women Political Representatives	DAP
Informant 7	Women Political Representatives	DAP
Informant 8	Male Politicians	PKR
Informant 9	Academician	University of Malaya
Informant 10	NGO activist	(NGO)

The selected female political representatives were from MCA, Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) parties. The MCA and DAP parties were chosen because the parties were dominated by the Chinese community. PKR was chosen because the party received support from other ethnicities, including the Malays. The current study focused on the political culture of Chinese women in 2019, before the transition of government power from Pakatan Harapan (PH) to Perikatan Nasional (PN). Although the ratio of informants varied, it was sufficient because it had reached the point of saturation, whereby no new findings were displayed. According to Mason (2010), the concept of saturation is the most important factor in determining the sample size in qualitative research. This is because when the findings have reached the concept of saturation, the data collection process can be stopped. In addition, Charmaz (1990) argues that the sample size in qualitative research methods is typically smaller compared to quantitative research methods. This is because qualitative research methods allow for a deep understanding of a phenomenon or focus on an issue, process, situation, or set of social interactions.

4.2 Research Procedures

The statements from interviews with informants were recorded and transcribed via verbatim copy. Themes were developed from the transcripts of interviews conducted with informants to display the findings. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), an important aspect of the process of finding research data is to identify themes, as well as to develop concepts and general statements. Coding was also conducted to develop and facilitate the analysis and interpretation of the findings from the intensive interviews. The present study employed a transcription-based

analytical approach to examine the frequency and similarity of perspectives articulated by key informants, which were subsequently organised into thematic categories. The study also included a narrative statement or plotline, such as a verbatim quote, that illustrates the informants' emotional experiences and expressions regarding the topic under investigation.

During the interview process, information from the informants was subjected to coding. The quotations featured in this study were systematically coded to include each key informant's statement, along with the corresponding page and line number, for the purpose of facilitating easy reference (refer to Table 3.0).

Table 3.0: The coding process

Informant 3:	'...I used to be an activist in the university, in the Hua Chinese Language Association.' (P:51, L:1468-1471).
<i>P:</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>L:</i>	<i>Line</i>

In addition, the current study focused on the collection of secondary data to obtain information about the historical, contextual, and situational aspects of the phenomenon studied. Secondary data can be used to support and augment evidence, as well as verify the information obtained from the interview process. There are several main sources of secondary data which can be obtained from libraries, government agencies, and political parties. The method used in this study is summarised in Figure 1.0.

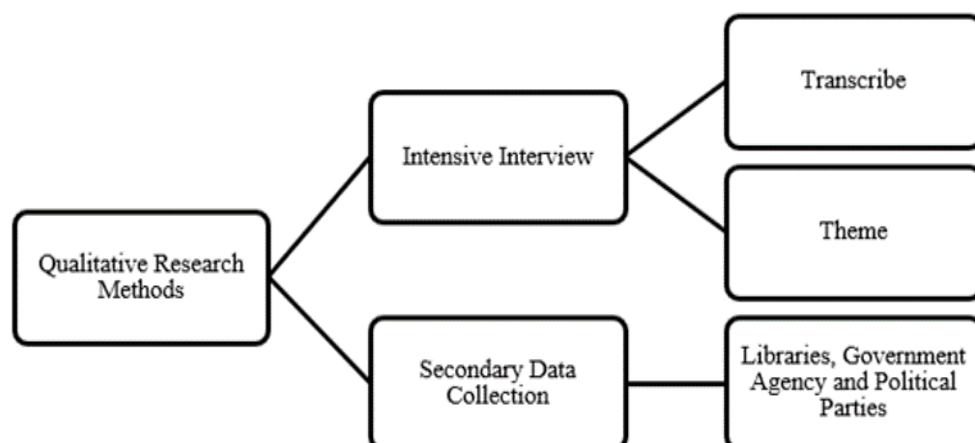
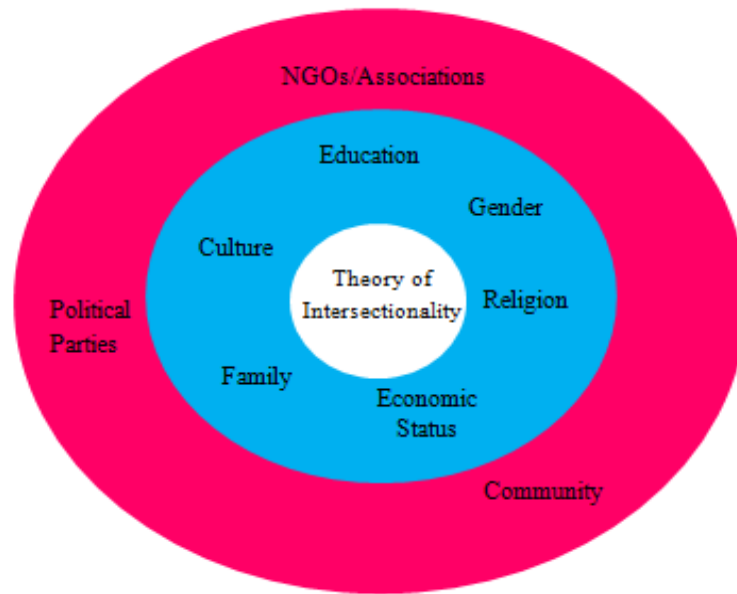


Figure 1.0: Method of studies

5.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION



Source: Modification from the Research Finding

Figure 2.0: Model of Chinese women's political socialisation agents through the dimensions of intersectionality theory in peninsular Malaysia

The current study proposed a model, Chinese Women's Political Socialisation Agents in Peninsular Malaysia' based on the Intersectionality Dimension Theory (see Figure 2.0) to describe the intersection and link between Chinese women's socialisation agents in Peninsular Malaysia. The results of the interview discover that political socialisation agents influence the political behaviour and culture of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia. These political socialisation agents are divided into two categories, which are internal political socialisation agents and external political socialisation agents. The internal political socialisation agents consist of education, economy, family, religion, and gender. While the external political socialisation agents consist of NGOs/associations, political parties, and the community. These political socialisation agents do not stand alone but intersect and overlap with each other. This is due to the majority of informants having shared their opinions, which found that there are multiple political socialisation agents that had influenced their political behaviour.

The findings of this study suggest that it is necessary to take into account multidimensional aspects such as behaviour, political involvement, political culture, and the political socialisation process, rather than solely relying on indicators. This intersection and link have been discussed by scholars such as Joshi (2011), Brown (2014), Finlay and Hopkins

(2019), and Moreau et al. (2019). The political socialisation process entails the recognition of the political system, which will form one's perceptions and ultimately influences their actions towards specific political phenomena. The process of political socialisation is a continuous phenomenon that begins during childhood and persists throughout an individual's lifetime. Hence, it is imperative to acknowledge this process while discussing political involvement and culture.

5.1 The Internal Political Socialisation Agents

a) Education

Education is one of the important agents of political socialisation. Chinese community prioritises education for their children. For instance, Yingying (2016) asserts that Confucian ideology places emphasis on education and highlights the culture of respecting teachers. This culture has existed for a long period and become a good practice among the Chinese community. This includes the practice of prioritising education and the Chinese languages, which is inherited from one generation to the next. Chinese women's education was traditionally emphasised in the aspect of home education, but it underwent reform during the women's rights movement in the Mainland of China. This impacted the education pattern for Chinese women around the world including in Malaya. The informant's statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme Education
Informant 2	'The teaching school, it was really a time to be actively involved in the program.' (P:27, L: 799-800)
Informant 3	'...is when i entered to study at USM was in 1986 to 1990 that was when Mahathir became Prime Minister...' (P:48, L: 1384-1385)
Informant 9	'...that time is over, after graduating from university...' (P:164, L: 4886-4887)

Most of the interviewed informants graduated with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. The high level of education among informants was one of the important political socialisation agents that influenced them to be involved in politics. This is because individuals with a high level of education are very sensitive to the rights of people and have the awareness to fight for their rights in politics. On the other hand, individuals with a lower level of education are less

likely to be active in politics. This is because they are mostly more interested in engaging in income-generating activities than being involved in political activities. In addition, their lack of knowledge of the importance of being involved in politics impacts their political perceptions and behaviour. Persson (2013) stated that highly educated individuals take a greater part in political activities than individuals with lower education.

b) Economic Status

Economic status is also one of the important political socialisation agents that influences individual political behaviour. The economic factor refers to the total income of an individual. The informant's statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme Economic
Informant 1	'... before this i was a lecturer at the Ungku Omar Polytechnic and with the free time i had, i ventured into an NGO that is a single mother...' (P:1, L: 1-13)
Informant 5	'I actually work as a journalist in my Parliament lobby covering a lot of political news.' (P: 107, L: 3137-3138).
Informant 8	'Due to economic independence, he can also have financial planning. Not just for his family, but for himself. So, it is very important. Women also have their own plans, economic independence and also participation among public life. What i mean is that you become a member of the public. You are no longer a member of your home. You are not only a home pick, a home maker, that is all. You can now be a teacher, a minister. You can go to elections, you can join political parties, you can go to campaigns, you can vote.' (P:157, L: 4685-4682)

According to table, the interviewed informants possessed economic independence because they had a high level of education, which had facilitated their career and economic status before entering politics. They possessed good economic status based on their previous careers before being actively involved in politics. Among their careers were lecturers, teachers, journalists, entrepreneurs, accountants, and lawyers. Good economic status encouraged informants to be actively involved in politics. This is because their economic independence allows them to be less reliant on any individual when making decisions, including being actively involved in politics.

The level of education influences the type of occupation that the informants engaged in. A high level of education allows informants to get good jobs. A good job brings a decent

salary return to the informant which has created economic independence among informants. The informants of the current study, consisting of lecturers, journalists, teachers and accountants, agreed that economic independence allows women to be involved in public life and broadens their role beyond housewifery, enabling them to actively participate in politics. However, detained cases, such as the arrestment of Chinese politicians, such as Lim Kit Siang, Teresa Kok, Tony Pua, and Lim Guan Eng, have had an impact on political sentiments among the Chinese community in Malaysia. As a result, the Chinese community does not encourage their family members to get involved in politics, including women.

Women participate in politics as a result of their experience and interactions with family members who participated in politics. For instance, Lim Hui Yung, a member of Parliament Tanjong, Pulau Pinang and the Deputy Minister of Education, is the daughter of Lim Kit Siang and the little sister to Lim Guan Eng, has participated in politics because of her family influence (Aziz, 2022). Also, the father of Nicole Wong Siaw Ting, a member of the National Assembly, the National Youth Leader, and the Federal Territories State Relations Committee, MCA (Bernama, 2022), is an active participant in politics as a lifetime member of MCA (Sinar Harian, 2022). Hence, the family unit serves as a significant political socialisation agent due to many women participating in politics because of the support and interactions with family members who are already involved in politics.

c) Gender

The results from the interviews with the informants indicate that gender issues also affected the participation of Chinese women in politics. This is because of the frame of mind that the political field is more suitable for men. Furthermore, there is a prevalent perception that women are not suitable for politics because politics is labelled as hard, masculine and dirty, which is exclusive to men. In short, the biological nature and physical abilities influence individuals' perceptions of women's involvement in politics. The informants' statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme Gender
Informant 3	"I think women are not interested in politics, politics here is tough, not everyone likes it, what do women of your age like? Like shopping, buy what's beautiful, even like to watch star movies now you like K pop. Film stars are beautiful things, right, so you like soft style, if you read the newspaper, you can see that film stars have pages, singers... we like gossip about movie stars, singers, who is interested in gossip about Teresa Kok? It's like a very thick iron lady, you know they're afraid to see it." (P: 59, L: 1694-1701)
Informant 5	"...for the Chinese, there are still many people who think that politics is too masculine, no matter where it is, it is indeed masculine, that is, many people think that it may not be suitable for women... there are irrational complainers, usually men handle it because they have strength, that's what people fear to them as a leader ..." (P: 107, L: 3170-3175)

According to Walby (1990), patriarchal culture is a system of social structures and practices where men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. Therefore, in the current context, the relationship between men and women is influenced by patriarchal culture, but the effect of patriarchal cultural practices may vary depending on cultural practices, countries, and so on. Therefore, this frame of mind influences the political culture of Chinese women in Malaysia because the political field is considered unsuitable for women.

d) Family

Family is one of the important elements that affect the lives of individuals and is one of the important agents of political socialisation. Married informants had the support of their husbands, whereas the unmarried informants had the support of their parents and other family members to be involved in their political careers. Thus, family is recognised as an important factor that impacts the political career of Chinese women in Malaysia. The informants' statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme Family
Informant 1:	"I am grateful because i have a very supportive and understanding husband, actually he was the one actually last time (laughter) who encouraged me to join Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO)...and also you know from there, from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) then after that i ventured...i extended When he asked me when he encouraged me to join, he was busy with his career and I was a lecturer a lot of the time." (P 3, L: 70-75)
Informant 3:	"My parents are really disappointed why i went to Democratic Action Party (DAP), right? So in their view, after i worked with Democratic Action Party (DAP), everyone was afraid to hire me if I left Democratic Action Party (DAP), nobody will hire you, you know that's one of the conversations my parents had I'm like there's no future, there's no tomorrow for you (laughter) yes, when i joined Democratic Action Party (DAP), 5 years until 1995, i was sent as a candidate to run in the election, then my parents came to help me." (P: 52-53, L: 1509-1515)
Informant 6:	"No, but my father really supports the struggle of certain politicians and when i was young he told me about his struggle for a fair and just society and that as an orphan, he felt that the society was not fair and equitable towards him. " (P: 123, L: 3622-3625)

Based on the results of interviews with all informants, most of them admitted to having received family support. Nevertheless, there were cases where at the beginning of the informant's involvement in politics, they had met with resistance from their family members. The objection was mainly because the political field was labelled as dirty. Also, many political leaders were arrested during the tenure of the fourth Prime Minister administration, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. During that period, Malaysia was even labelled by political analysts as a quasi-democratic country. This is prior to the government's restriction of several important processes of democracy such as the rule of law, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press, with the justification of maintaining the political stability and the prosperity of the country (Omar & Pandian, 2006). In line with that, many politicians, including Chinese politicians, were arrested under the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA). Some of the arrested Chinese politicians were Lim Kit Siang, Teresa Kok, Tony Pua, and Lim Guan Eng. The arrest has had an impact on the political sentiments of the Chinese community in Malaysia, resulting in the Chinese community not encouraging their family members, especially women, to get involved in politics.

Nevertheless, many Chinese women participated in politics through their experience and interactions with other family members who were involved in politics. The participation

of Lim Hui Yung in politics as a member of Parliament Tanjong, Pulau Pinang and the Deputy Minister of Education was initially a result of her experience as the daughter of Lim Kit Siang and a little sister to Lim Guan Eng (Aziz, 2022). Other than that, Nicole Wong Siaw Ting, a member of the National Assembly, the National Youth Leader, and the Federal Territories State Relations Committee, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) (Bernama, 2022), is a daughter to an active lifetime member of Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) (Sinar Harian, 2022). The involvement of numerous Chinese women in Malaysian politics can be attributed to the influence and engagement of family members who are already active in politics, thus highlighting the significant role of family as a political socialisation agent.

e) Culture

Culture refers to a customary way of life that is shared by a group of individuals in society that is transmitted from one generation to the next generation. Culture comprises diverse elements that include religion, politics, customs, language, clothing, buildings, and works of art (Santoso, 2017). Itulua (2014) argues that culture refers to the lifestyle practices of community members or groups in society that include dress code, marriage customs, language, family life, work patterns, religious ceremonies, and leisure activities. The current study concludes that culture is a way of life that is inherited from one generation to the next, encompassing social, economic, political, and religious activities. Political culture is one of the elements of culture that pertains to the political context. The informant's statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme
The Structure of Modern Culture	
Informant 4	‘...There is none, for this Chinese community, he does not say that Chinese cannot be involved in the party, there is no...’(P: 88, L: 2555-2561)
Informant 8	‘Today, i think the Chinese ethnic community can accept ‘female leadership’ because it is becoming more and more common. If you look now, MP or assembly ..man, i think they have a ‘main job’. Most of them and what is more important is that they are young. If it’s a traditional society, they respect more experienced ‘senior’ people. But now if you are young, professional, energetic, people will feel ‘this is the thing that people want to support’ and more importantly i think the perception of women has changed a little. In the past, maybe 20 or 30 years ago (90/80s), maybe they were a bit skeptical. Pregnant women have to take care of the family and may not have time to take care of the community or the interests of the voters. But now the perception is different. They see women as clean, less corrupt, more loyal, more ‘genuine’ in the tasks assigned to them. For me, their ‘performance’ is good. They don’t get too involved in most dirty politics. I think this is a good and positive development. I can see most of them are young. For me, it is very interesting. So, what i see. I think the members of the Johor Parliament are very young, many are very young. They are all ‘energetic’ about their marriage status, as if now it is not an issue.’ (P: 157, L: 4712-4727)
Informant 10	‘Chinese people, we have no issues, who can come forward for us to give us a chance. I think voters also give young women 20 years, 26 years a chance to win at the DUN and Parliament level. So I think for the Chinese community he is more open. If we set an example for the young, so in the PKR, we have Chua Wei Kiat, who has been a Rawang assemblyman for 26 years. So now you see that DAP has women like Jamalia, like YB Yeo Bee Yin and also Michelle Ng near Subang Jaya.’ (P: 175, L: 5231-5238)

According to the informant, the Chinese community placed greater emphasis on ‘performance’ in comparison to the factor of seniority. Most of the informants stated that cultural practices did not prevent their involvement in politics despite that the Chinese patriarchal culture is still present in today’s society. This is because its prominence appears to be diminishing over time. The acceptance exhibited by the Chinese community towards women’s involvement in politics was evidenced by the considerable number of Chinese women who represented DUN and the Parliament. For example, during the 15th General Election held on 19 November 2022, some Chinese women won the Parliamentary seats, including Wong Shu Qi, Vivian Wong Shir Yee, Alice Lau Kiong Yieng, Teo Nie Ching, Hannah Yeoh, Yeo Bee Yin, and Lim Hui Ying. In the same election, several Chinese women won DUN seats namely, Ng Shy Ching, Wong May Ing, and Violet Yong. Women candidates were perceived to have better performance due to

their reputation for being more ethical, less prone to corruption, more committed to their duties, and more ‘genuine’ in the execution of their assigned tasks. These factors are the pull factor in selecting women as politicians.

Upon scrutiny, Nicole Wong Siaw Ting was the first young woman to have successfully toppled male dominance as MCA Youth Chief. She, who previously held the position of MCA Youth Vice Chief, managed to get 136 votes, defeating his challenger Ng Kian Nam in the Youth Central Committee Election for the period of 2018 to 2021 (Rosli, 2018). This phenomenon shows that women are increasingly being accepted as viable leaders within the Chinese political landscape.

f) Religion

Most of the interviewed informants were Chinese women and professed either Buddhism or Christianity. According to the informants, religions did not prevent women from getting involved in politics. The informant’s statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme Religion
Informant 1	‘Yes, in Buddhism, as a Buddhist we don’t have such err what to us is every human is equal... that’s in terms of religious teachings, even i think Christians also like that right. Christian also like that err either you are christian or you because most of us we are Christian or either Buddhist. So neither of those two religions have such teachings.’ (P:7, L: 192-195)
Informant 9	‘...actually the main thinking of Buddha is that every life is the same not only men and women. Every life is the same. What he means is, what’s that one thing, he’s all the same weight as one person. You kill an ant, same as you kill a person. Actually it is the same in Buddhism because he thinks that all spirits are the same. Then, of course no one can do until that level. If a mosquito bites me, hit me, kill me. So but em i think somehow is a same, is a right thing. If we look down on insects, if it’s a mosquito, you can get dengue. You can die. Even mosquitoes can kill people. So it’s the same thing, so in Buddhism he is more of an equal. Equality. Yes. That’s why I think and they more to balance for Chinese for living not Buddhist to live. We are more to balance. Everything you cannot exaggerate. So if the woman is strong then it should be a man that soft. Its okay to be like that as long as your family is balanced. So you can’t have strong women, strong men too. So this family will have two heads and the family will be chaotic. It’s like that...’ (P: 173, L: 5140-5152).

Berger (1967) defines religion as a set of beliefs that connects individuals with a community and transcends individual rights and boundaries. The informants of the current study, who

practised Buddhism or Christianity, believed that their respective religions emphasise equality among all living beings, encompassing both animals and humans, irrespective of gender. The involvement of women in politics has been made possible, albeit with a greater prevalence of men's dominance in religious establishments. This is due to a gendered power dynamic whereby men hold authority over temples in the Chinese community, while women are restricted from accessing these spaces or participating in certain forms of prayer during menstruation, which is perceived as a state of impurity.

Religion serves as an important socialisation agent for individuals from an early age. It plays a significant role in shaping the way of life, including the way of doing politics. Religious restrictions on political involvement may limit the participation of its followers in political activities. For example, the PAS party, a religion-based party, previously took the approach of allowing women's participation in politics but did not allow women to hold positions in the party as decided in the PAS Muzakarah on 4 January 1953. Nevertheless, PAS's stance has been guided by the policy of *al-siyasah al-Syariah*, which depends on the *maslahah* (Islamic divine law) and the current local situation. Now, PAS has started to give opportunities to women candidates after Dewan Muslimat PAS Pusat (DMPP) submitted a motion that considers women candidates. The motion was later passed at the 44th PAS Annual General Meeting in June 2000 (Azmi, 2019). In short, it is evident that religion and belief systems are important agents of political socialisation because they can construct the minds of individuals and in turn affect their lives, including their opinion on gender involvement in politics.

Religion is an important indicator of society in Malaysia (Ahmad, 2020), but the dichotomy between religious and political elements in Malaysia is non-existent. Though the official religion of Malaysia is Islam, Malaysians are free to practise any religion. Nevertheless, religious matters are a sensitive issue in Malaysia, thereby anything perceived threat to religion will be defended. For instance, the introduction of Jawi writing in vernacular schools was perceived as a threat by the Chinese community in Malaysia. The Federation of Malaysian Chinese School Board Associations (Dong Zong) submitted a memorandum rejecting the learning of Jawi writing in vernacular schools to the Ministry of Education because of the fear that the learning was motivated by the Islamisation movement of Muslims against non-Muslim students. The memorandum was handed over by Dong Zong Chairman Tan Tai Kim, along with two Tamil organisations namely CHILD Information, Learning, and Development Center and Tamil Foundation.

In conclusion, the religious element influences the life of Malaysian society, including in the political field. While religion does not prevent Chinese women from engaging in politics,

it is a sensitive topic for the Chinese community, particularly with regard to the Islamisation agenda. This indicates that the Chinese community has yet to celebrate the culture of the natives and still rejects the efforts of the National Cultural Policy. Dong Zong's actions represent the Chinese community's adherence to traditional values that do not recognise in Malay leadership despite that the leadership has conferred numerous benefits upon the Chinese community (Chua, 2004).

5.2 The External Political Socialisation Agents

a) NGO/Associations

According to the results of the interviews conducted with the majority of the informants who were involved in the political world, individuals' active involvement in associations or NGOs had greatly influenced Chinese women's political representations before their involvement in politics. The informant's statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme
Informant 1	NGO/Associations
Informant 1	'... so why i choose single mother because at that time Tan Sri Ng Yen Yen formed a club called Club Rainbow ye that's why i choose woman... i choose MCA because that of Club Rainbow to me is meaningless if i join an NGO that you i only know how to organise a dance..what about organising a dinner that one I don't know it's not my...it's not to my liking, i'm not interested... so i ended up with MCA because of that Rainbow...what Rainbow Club was established... under women of MCA to help single mothers yes...so for but when i joined in, i help them to form an NGO Association of Perak State Single Mothers...' (P: 3, L: 79-87)
Informant 4	'Actually like this, i got involved in politics by accident because I was originally involved with welfare, because i was the chairman of I-Tsing welfare.'(P:83, L: 2374-2375) '...i am being approached by more and more poor people, especially Indians, and indeed our funds are limited...among our committee members said, this is how it is, since you have experience, because i am in business with my husband, right? i can appear in front, then what do you say try to take a position as a member of the council, i don't think i want that, i really don't want to, i don't want to be bound, right? But, in such a situation, lack of funds, my friend also said, go and try. Then, i made a deal with the party, how long, he said, the period is only two years. We said it would be ok for two years, but when i accepted this position, I was still part of the NGO, i did not join the party. i joined an NGO so that i don't want to make the community feel bad because to be honest, there are some who receive donations, they don't want any party for fear of being sensitive. So, for me the condition to hold a position as a council or still keeps me as an NGO....' (P: 84, L: 2407-2417)
Informan 5	'...when i studied abroad. i am the president of the Malaysian students' association...' (P: 108, L: 3174-3175)

The majority of the informants stated that they participated in politics upon their active participation in an association or NGO. Their active participation inspired more Chinese women to participate in politics. Most of the informants reported having been involved in welfare activities to help the community and target groups. For instance, they had the experience as the leader of a sports house, holding the position of president in the Malaysian students' association abroad, as well as engaging in activism within the Tiong Hua Chinese Language Association, the Fang Descendants Association, the Rainbow Club, and the I-Tsing Welfare Association. Their participation in an association and NGO honed their leadership qualities besides making them more responsible for protecting and safeguarding the welfare of their members. In their experiences with associations and NGOs, they faced various obstacles and challenges financial constraints and dealing with bureaucracy. With their experience

dealing with challenges to provide assistance to their target group, they had wider resources to serve the people and society more effectively once they are involved in politics.

b) Community

The results of the interviews found that most of the informants were involved in politics starting with a desire to help the community. The informants' statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme Society
Informant 1	'... what pushed me to venture into politics is actually the vision and mission to help more people especially women, that's why i joined politics for and until today lah for this position because to me women are only women who understand the needs of women better there are so many you know in terms of policy in terms of legislation that is not fair how to say it was outdated and unfair to women and groups in need such as the elderly and also our children...' (P:2, L: 58-62).
Informant 5	'When a party leader invited me to join, it was actually a challenge for me, i accepted and i joined because i don't want people to curse behind me... i want to stand up and fight for the people's rights, it's as simple as that because I think everyone wants to sit comfortably, right? want to donate their time or energy for this country so it's difficult and everyone just sits and comments, that's the reason.' (P: 108, L: 3168-3172).
Informant 9	'But, i think there is a responsibility because not many will enter politics, especially women.' (P: 164, L: 4902-4903). 'That's why i always think, think that in politics you must have various people, various representatives and i think, but if we say we want to have, there is a representative from OKU, what is that, poor people. Something like that, i think our country has not reached that level yet. It hasn't arrived yet. At least we can start with women and youth. So, younger generation ewith women, we, if we can, we try to involve them in politics, that's why i decide to join politics.' (P: 164, L: 4908-4913)

The inclination to help the community showed that the informants were willing to take responsibility on the part of the politicians for the benefit of the community. According to most of the informants, their active participation in politics was because of their awareness and sense of responsibility to help people. Most informants were also sensitive to the lack of involvement of Chinese women in politics. This phenomenon prompted them to take up the challenge of being in politics. In addition, most of the informants expressed a desire to help women because they believed that women possess a better understanding of the needs of women and that the existing legal system had been less sensitive to women, the disabled, the elderly, and children.

This indicates that Chinese women are highly independent and willing to provide assistance to the Chinese community without government subsidies. This allows the Chinese community to advance as politics serves as a channel to achieve this goal.

c) Political parties

According to the results of interviews, political parties do not discriminate against women. Instead, political parties have been providing opportunities for women to hold important positions and are encouraged to secure candidature at the state assembly and parliamentary levels. The informant's statements are shown in the table below:

Informant	Theme
Political Parties	
Informant 1	'So there are always give chance to the Head of Division. I think United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) also the same, yes so but now no more now is if you the Head of the Division are not liked you are not popular, then you won't be chosen as a candidate. They will they will look at other candidates other people. Yes, what is important now is the acceptance of the people.' (P: 317, L: 317-321)
Informant 5	'One of the advantages of this DAP party is that we must give credit to this party because this party is always willing to give opportunities to young people, regardless of whether they are boys or girls, and as a result, it gives opportunities to women and girls. DAP is not the same as other parties. which only gives unwinnable seats to women...this party will put female candidates in winnable seats because there are many female representatives in DAP because we are not like PAS, PAS always puts women near unwinnable seats even if they nominate but don't can win but our DAP puts a woman candidate in a seat that can win like Teresa Kok, Teresa Kok ran for the first time in 1999 in Seputih, Seputih is the seat that DAP holds the strongest and she ran for the first time and all the seniors agreed that Teresa ran there because we need a female leader which is the strongest seat for women and not for others... men who are strong...those who are strong are okay go compete near the seat that is dangerous go there if you can win, win if you can't win it means this is not strong anymore but don't fight with this woman seats are for women near the party even we know we must promote women leaders that is our leaders even the majority are men again but they are all willing to give women a chance in the party.' (P: 110, L: 3233-3249).
Informant 10	'...party, we are the first party in Malaysia to hold a 30 percent quota. So at the level, not only in terms of membership but also in terms of women's leadership, we aim to have at least 30 percent for the Parliament for the State Assembly, we become Councilors as well, we want to raise women to the front. So after Pakatan Harapan won, not only the Selangor and Central governments, you can see many women come forward...' (P:175, L: 5219-5223)

According to informants, DAP and PKR formed a quota of 30 per cent of women's involvement in the party to increase women's involvement. In addition, MCA set a 30 per cent quota for women at the party's highest council level, but the current number of elected MCA women has not reached the targeted quota. Although there was an increase in the number of women in the MCA party's highest council level from 2016 to 2018, the newly formed PKR party exhibited a greater degree of women involvement with its number almost reaching its target 30 per cent target. For instance, in the 2018 General Election, as many as 27.8 per cent of women were successfully elected to the PKR's highest council.

DAP party introduced a quota system in 2014 but the number of women at the party's highest council level has not reached the quota target. In 2016, the percentage of women who were elected at the party's highest council level was 10 per cent and this figure increased to 15.6 per cent in 2017 and 16.1 per cent in 2018. Therefore, despite the opportunities and space provided by the DAP, PKR, and MCA parties through the quota system, the number of women at the party's highest council level has yet to reach the targeted quota, with MCA and DAP failing to reach 20 per cent of the number of women at the party's highest council level when compared to the PKR party.

Informants shared that compared to men, women had to work hard and prove that they were eligible to be elected as party leaders or to contest in elections. This suggests the presence of the glass ceiling factor which continues to influence male-dominated political parties. Furthermore, the political climate is one of the agents that influence women's participation in politics. Women's acceptance and recognition within a political party serve as an encouragement for women to continue to develop in political careers and fields. In the absence of opportunities provided by a political party, it is highly unlikely for a woman to succeed in a political career or hold important positions within the party. Their prospect of running as a candidate in elections is also impeded.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis through the interview process determine the elements of Chinese women's political socialisation agents in Peninsular Malaysia, particularly political behaviour and culture. The Political Socialisation Agent Model has been developed to focus on Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia. The Intersectionality Dimension Theory proves that political socialisation agents are interrelated and intersecting, and have influenced the political culture of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia. However, the political culture of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia is predominantly passive. This phenomenon is evidenced by the number

of Chinese women in the Parliament and DUN. Even with the implementation of a 30 per cent quota for women, the number of women at the decision-making level in Chinese-oriented parties such as the DAP and MCA remains limited.

This study can contribute to the increase in the body of knowledge in the field of Chinese women's political culture in Malaysia. This is because research on Chinese women and politics in Malaysia is still limited. The results of this study can be used to determine the differences and level of development of Chinese women's political culture in Malaysia over time, as well as the differences in the political culture of various ethnic communities in Malaysia.

This study suggests future studies combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches with more emphasis given to qualitative methods due to their ability to yield more comprehensive and information-rich findings. In addition, future studies can be conducted by expanding the sample size to Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera women as an effort to complement the study of women and politics.

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