

## A Thematic Review on Baba Nyonya Relating to Cultural Features Publications From 2014–2024

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### Abstract

The Baba Nyonya is a unique ethnic group that developed under a complex historical and geographical context. The complexity of its culture is a manifestation and result of this uniqueness. With the development of modern society, this unique culture faces both opportunities and challenges. Although many scholars have discussed the various cultural carriers and characteristics of the Baba Nyonya, there is still a lack of comprehensive literature reviews on the overall cultural characteristics of the Baba Nyonya globally. To bridge this gap, this paper utilizes ATLAS.ti 23 software to conduct a thematic review of 26 articles related to Baba Nyonya culture published between 2014 and 2024. Through thematic analysis, four core themes emerged: Cultural Change and Modern Impact, Physical or Material Culture, Social or Behavioral Culture, and Spiritual or Ideal Culture. While diversity is commonly recognized as one of the main cultural characteristics of the Baba Nyonya, this study further elucidates the dynamic cross-cultural integration features of Baba Nyonya culture through the "Three Cultural Layers" theory from the Physical, Social, and Spiritual dimensions. The review points out that although current research on Baba Nyonya culture is already very in-depth, it mainly focuses on identity, cuisine, architecture, and feminism. Additionally, this study emphasizes the possible cultural changes due to the development over time. This research not only provides insights for scholars interested in Baba Nyonya culture but also offers directions for design research based on the cultural characteristics of this ethnic group.

**Keywords:** Thematic Review, Baba Nyonya, Cultural Features, ATLAS.ti 23.

## Introduction

### *Baba Nyonya Community*

The Baba Nyonya community is composed of descendants of Chinese male immigrants (mainly merchants) from Fujian, China, who migrated between the 15th and 19th centuries and married local women. In this community, males are referred to as "Baba" and females as "Nyonya." As the most influential branch of the Peranakan Chinese, the terms "Baba Nyonya," "Peranakan Chinese," and "Straits Chinese" are often used interchangeably, although they technically refer to slightly different groups (Johannes, 1994; Hardwick, 2008).

Unlike the broader geographical distribution of the Peranakan Chinese across Southeast Asia, the Baba Nyonya are mainly concentrated in three areas along the southern coast of the Malay Peninsula. They originated in Malacca, a place of cultural collision between East and West due to maritime trade, and later expanded to Singapore due to commercial activities. Following the expansion of former British colonies, they also spread to George Town.

Historically, the Baba Nyonya initially leaned culturally and politically towards China (then under the Qing Dynasty). However, following the Opium Wars and the continued influence of British colonialism, this inclination shifted decisively towards Britain. As a primarily mercantile community, the Baba Nyonya not only amassed substantial economic resources but also gained significant political privileges, leading to a golden era from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. This prosperity lasted until World War II disrupted their favorable social environment, causing much of the population to disperse overseas, leading to a rapid decline of the community.

Culturally and intellectually, the practice of sending young Babas to China for education changed during the colonial period to sending them to Britain. These young people culturally identified with Britain and saw themselves as "Queen's Chinese." The inevitable clash between the Eastern and Western ideologies represented by the older and younger Babas respectively contributed to the complexity of their identity. On the other hand, this complexity also created the unique cultural form of the Baba Nyonya, leaving behind a rich heritage of tangible and intangible cultural assets that continue to be celebrated.

### **The Identities of Baba Nyonya**

During the colonial period, the Babas were typically regarded as local elites with high social status and influence because they controlled resources and opportunities in trade, administration, law, education, and philanthropy (Poh-seng, 1969). However, in the post-colonial era, they faced challenges such as new political systems, nationalist movements, and changes in socio-economic structures, which altered their social status and class differentiation. On the other hand, the Nyonyas played crucial roles in family and society, including cooking, sewing, child-rearing, weddings, festivals, and community organizations (Chia, 2015; Teoh, 2016). They also expressed their identity through clothing, transitioning from local styles to a fusion of Chinese and Western elements (Lee, 2016). Over the past few decades, research on the Baba Nyonya has sporadically explored their identity from various aspects, including social status and class differentiation, gender roles and relationships, the origins and development of identity and ethnicity, and cultural ambiguity and diversity. However, this topic remains academically contentious. Some scholars argue that the Baba

Nyonya are a dynamic group shaped by structural conditions such as colonial history, socio-economic structures, political systems, and cultural traditions, and their culture is a result of local assimilation (Montsion & Parasram, 2018; Rudolph, 1998). Conversely, other scholars believe that the Baba Nyonya culture is the result of "acculturation" rather than "assimilation," and that the Baba Nyonya negotiate their identity and heritage concerning other ethnic groups and national narratives (Johannes, 1994; Hardwick, 2008; Tan, 1988). The Baba Nyonya exhibit varying degrees of hybridity and creativity in cultural expressions such as language, religion, literature, and art, reflecting how they manage tensions and contradictions between different cultural influences, as well as the impacts and conflicts between cultures (Tan, 1988).

Some scholars have examined the cultural forms of the Baba Nyonya from the perspective of cultural carriers and their material culture. The Baba Nyonya are influenced by both Chinese and Malay cultures, forming their unique language, cuisine, and artistic characteristics. Baba Malay is a significant marker of Baba Nyonya identity but faces the threat of extinction, necessitating protective and revitalizing measures (Coluzzi et al., 2018; MUN, 2010). Furthermore, various aspects of Baba Nyonya material culture, such as furniture, ceramics, textiles, jewelry, and food, reflect their cultural hybridity and creativity to varying degrees (Lam et al., 2017; Sankar et al., 2016). From the above review, it is evident that while numerous scholars have focused on Baba Nyonya culture over the past few decades, their research priorities have significantly shifted with the times, highlighting the need for studies that clarify this trend.

### **Baba Nyonya Culture**

The Baba Nyonya culture is not only a result of the multifaceted exchange between Eastern and Western traditions but also a significant part of the Malacca World Heritage. Despite the growing influence of the TV series "Little Nyonya" and increased attention from both government and civil organizations, there is concern that modern society and lifestyle changes are negatively impacting the traditional Baba Nyonya culture. This has led to a noticeable decline in the transmission of traditional culture to the next generation (MUN, 2010). Many scholars have directly expressed their concerns about the challenges faced by Baba Nyonya culture (Kim, 2008; Pue, 2016)

Developing products that adapt to modern lifestyles and meet the needs of younger generations is one important way to achieve the sustainable development of traditional culture (Hassan et al., 2021; Teoh, 2016). This approach is also a viable option for the development of Baba Nyonya culture. In recent years, there has been research focused on modern product design based on Baba Nyonya culture Rakhim et al (2020), and more designers have begun exploring Baba Nyonya cultural product design in their respective fields. To achieve cultural development, these designs must first reflect the authenticity of Baba Nyonya culture. To do this, it is essential to use existing theories to identify the overall cultural characteristics of the Baba Nyonya, providing a basis for design that ensures cultural authenticity. However, there are currently no reviews discussing research on Baba Nyonya's cultural characteristics for product design. Therefore, another aim of this paper is to provide a foundation for the sustainable development of Baba Nyonya culture by reviewing current literature and integrating previous research.

### Three Cultural Layers Theory

Culture is defined as the way of life of an entire society, encompassing not only patterns of human activities but also the symbolic structures that give these activities meaning. Different definitions of culture reflect varying theoretical foundations for understanding or evaluating human activities. Drawing from theories in linguistics, anthropology, and sociology, culture is described as the result of the evolutionary process of human civilization, involving language, customs, religion, art, ideas, and behaviors (Leong & Clark, 2003).

In the field of product design, incorporating cultural characteristics or elements into modern product design has gained increasing attention. Over the past few decades, numerous scholars have proposed corresponding theories and practical approaches. Initially, Leong and Clark (2003) developed a framework related to product cultural levels and design attributes, in which culture is divided into three specific levels: the external "tangible" level, the intermediate "behavioral" level, and the internal "intangible" level. Following this, Lee (2004) proposed a multi-layered cultural structure model from a design perspective, including levels representing artifacts, values, and fundamental assumptions. Building on these earlier studies Leong & Clark (2003); Lin (2007) provided a framework for studying cultural objects and classifying culture into three levels: (1) material culture, including food, clothing, and transportation; (2) social or behavioral culture, including interpersonal relationships and social organization; and (3) spiritual or ideal culture, including art and religion. This layered interpretation of culture aligns with insights from other cultural research fields (Frank, 2013; Sun & Gao, 2020) (Figure 1).

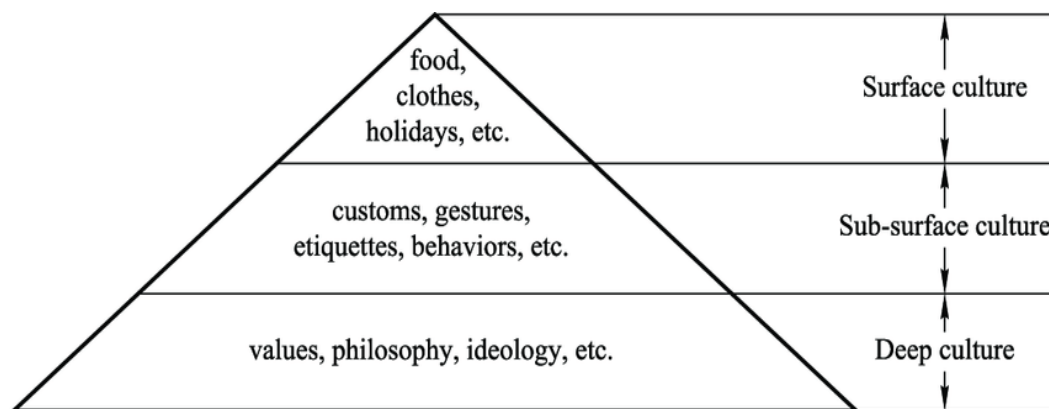


Figure 1. Components of the three-layer cultural model.

Subsequently, Lin (2007) further refined the "Three Cultural Layers" theory by integrating it with Norman's three levels of design theory Norman (2004), establishing a new framework to study the relationship between culture and design. As shown in Figure 2, this framework divides culture into three layers: 1) the external "tangible" layer—material or physical, 2) the intermediate "behavioral" layer—social or behavioral, and 3) the internal "intangible" layer—spiritual or ideal. These cultural aspects are then translated into three design characteristics: 1) visceral design, which includes appearance, form, color, lines, texture, patterns, and details; 2) behavioral design, which encompasses functionality, usability, operability, safety, and user satisfaction; and 3) reflective design, which deals with self-image, emotions, and

cultural attributes (Figure 2). Currently, Lin's theory is widely cited by scholars for analyzing various cultural characteristics and product development.

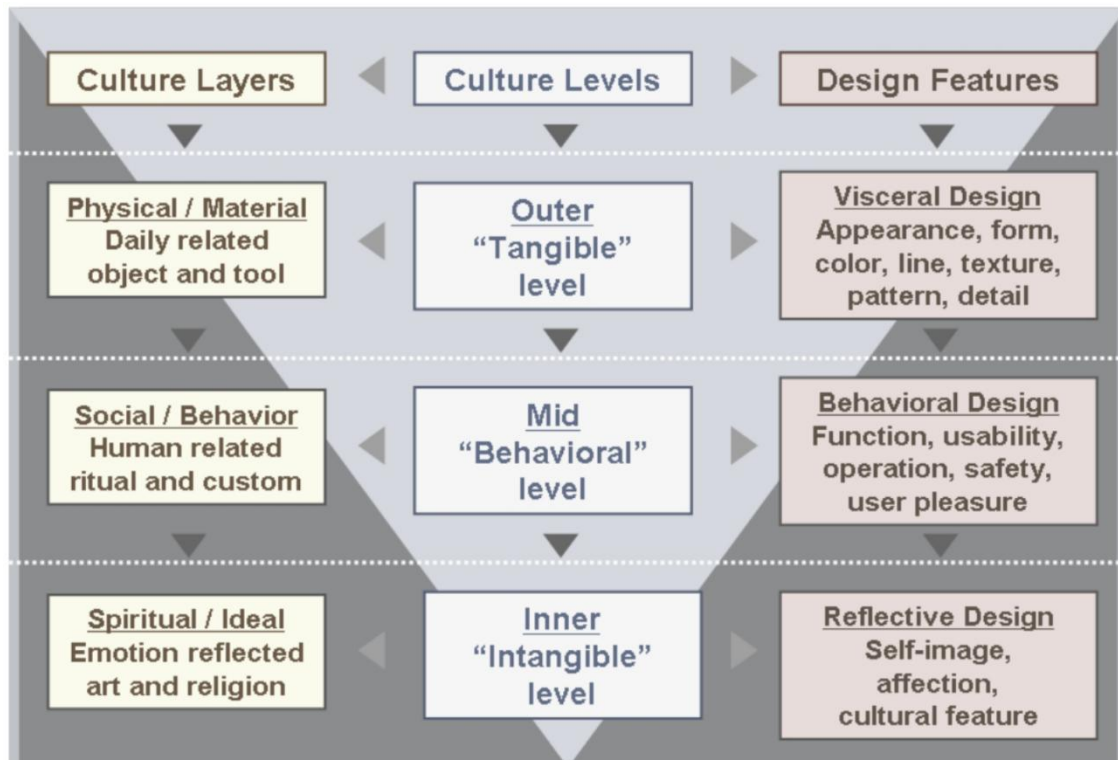


Figure 2. Three layers and levels of cultural objects and design features.

Despite many studies that have discussed the cultural characteristics presented by different specific cultural carriers of Baba Nyonya, no published papers have yet applied Lin's theory to analyze these cultural characteristics. This paper posits that Baba Nyonya represents a diverse and complex cultural phenomenon that warrants further research and exploration. Therefore, one of the purposes of this paper is to synthesize previous research findings and summarize these characteristics through Lin's theory.

In summary, despite the significant attention Baba Nyonya culture has received from numerous scholars who have provided valuable insights into this unique and complex cultural phenomenon in Southeast Asia, previous studies on Baba Nyonya have been relatively fragmented and lacking clear trends. On the other hand, while some research has focused on specific cultural carriers of Baba Nyonya culture, such as clothing Lee (2016), cuisine Lam et al (2017), and language Mun (2010); Coluzzi et al (2018), they have not addressed the interconnections and corroborative cultural characteristics among these carriers. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a more comprehensive and integrated perspective to understand how the cultural characteristics presented by different carriers of Baba Nyonya culture interconnect, corroborate, and influence each other to form a holistic three-layer cultural characteristic system.

Additionally, no review papers have yet discussed the above two aspects. Thus, this paper aims to systematically review the literature on Baba Nyonya culture from 2014 to June 2024, with a focus on the cultural characteristics and research development trends of Baba Nyonya. The research findings are expected to provide insights for future product design based on

Baba Nyonya culture, thereby promoting cultural sustainability. The following are the research questions this paper aims to address:

1. What are the current Baba Nyonya culture trends covered in the publication from 2014 to 2024?
2. What are the cultural features of Baba Nyonya based on the cultural layers theory discussed in the publication from 2014 to 2024?

### **Materials and Methods**

This paper employs a thematic review method, which differs from a systematic review in that it aims to explore the existing literature on a specific topic rather than evaluate the quality of previous research findings. The purpose of this paper is to provide a literature review of Baba Nyonya's cultural features. To achieve this goal, a thematic review approach was adopted. This review model incorporates thematic analysis, a method used to identify patterns and develop themes through an in-depth examination of the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Despite the numerous publications on Baba Nyonya culture, the focus of researchers in this field has shifted over time due to social development and changes in the cultural environment of Baba Nyonya. Additionally, there has been no thematic review dedicated to Baba Nyonya's cultural features over the past decade.

The next step involves retrieving relevant literature. Considering the impact factor and quality of publications, the databases searched were "Scopus" and "WoS," as they are comprehensive and contain many articles that overlap with other databases such as Mendeley and Google Scholar. Based on this, the review was designed with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to select studies for evaluation, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the subject assessment.

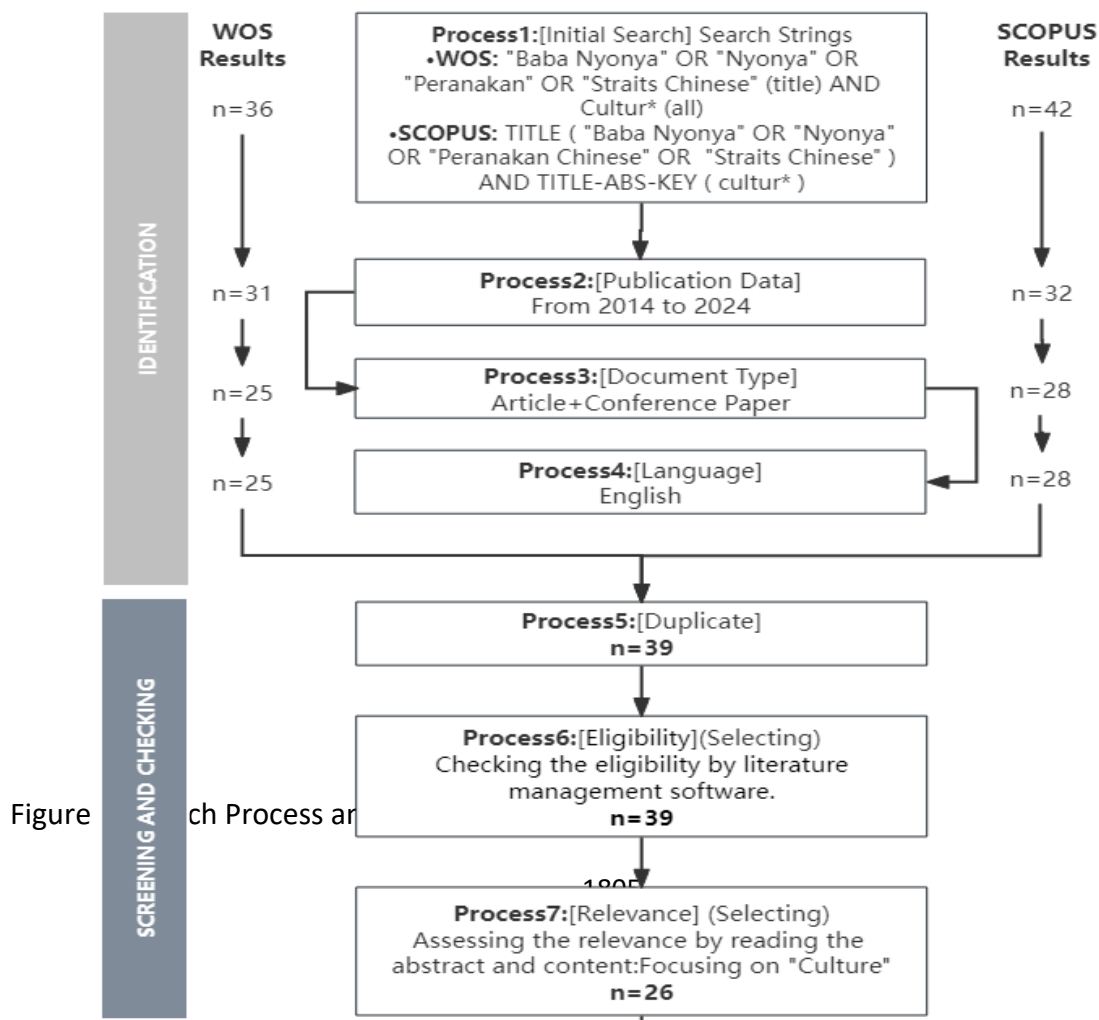
First, after multiple attempts, the search criteria were set to include the keywords "Peranakan," "Baba Nyonya," "Nyonya," or "Straits Chinese" in the abstract. Second, the publication period was limited to 2014 to 2024. Third, to ensure the quality of the research, only peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers were considered, excluding document types such as book chapters. Fourth, to ensure accurate understanding during thematic analysis, the language of the publications was set to English.

It should be noted that after applying the above search criteria, Scopus retrieved 28 articles. WoS yielded similar results, with 25 articles (Table 1). After removing duplicates, the number of publications was reduced to 39. Finally, by reading and excluding the abstracts and contents of publications that did not meet the objectives of this review, the final number of publications relevant to the theme was 26 (Figure 3).



Database	Search Strings	Results
SCOPUS	( TITLE ( "Peranakan Chinese" OR "Baba Nyonya" OR "Nyonya" OR "Straits Chinese" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( cultur* ) ) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ar" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "cp" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "English" ) )	28
Web of Science	"Peranakan" OR "Baba Nyonya" OR "Nyonya" OR "Straits Chinese" (title) AND Cultur* (all) and 2024 or 2023 or 2022 or 2021 or 2020 or 2019 or 2018 or 2017 or 2016 or 2015 or 2014 (Publication Year) and Papers or Conference Proceedings (Document Type) and English (language)	25

Table 1  
Search Strings of Database and Results



For data processing and basic quantitative analysis, ATLAS.ti 23 software was used. The metadata for each paper, including author, journal, publisher, publication year, and country/region, was coded using ATLAS.ti 23. This coding helps to examine trends based on the retrieved literature. In the qualitative analysis section, ATLAS.ti 23 was also used to code and summarize the identified literature. The software utilizes the thematic analysis model proposed by Zairul (2020, 2021); Zairul & Zaremohzzabieh (2023) to aid in qualitative analysis. The goal is to identify patterns and construct themes to help understand the characteristics of Baba Nyonya culture.

## Results

### Quantitative Results

The quantitative results are based on the selection of 26 publications. Various analyses were conducted, including word cloud analysis, examination of publication years, research countries, regions, and covered themes. These analyses provide insights into Baba Nyonya culture. The word cloud analysis highlighted the most frequently mentioned words in the articles. Among them, "nyonya" and "baba" appeared 1071 times and 626 times, respectively. Correspondingly, "Chinese" appeared 1672 times, "straits" 450 times, "Peranakan" and "Peranakans" together 1253 times, "cultural" and "culture" together 1160 times, and "heritage" 422 times.

In addition to these search terms, other frequently occurring meaningful words include "food," "cuisine," and "cooking," which appeared 864, 299, and 196 times, respectively; "identity" appeared 366 times; "Singapore" appeared 628 times; "Malaysia" and "Malay" appeared 348 and 345 times, respectively; "Penang" appeared 227 times; and "Malacca" appeared 197 times. This indicates that in the literature from the past 10 years, the focus of discussion has shifted from "identity" to specific cultural carriers like food. The subjects of discussion are primarily the Peranakan Chinese communities, specifically Baba Nyonya, in Singapore, Malacca, and Penang (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Word cloud generated from 26



The initial codes for this review were derived from an analysis of the content of 26 academic articles on Baba Nyonya culture (Diagram 1). These initial codes were then refined through multiple iterations, including renaming, splitting, and merging, resulting in the identification of four main themes and 12 sub-themes. The four central themes, based on the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, are "Physical or Material Culture," "Social or Behavioral Culture," "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," and "Cultural Change and Modern Impact." It is important to note that not only does each theme encompass multiple publications, but each publication may also involve multiple themes.

The quantitative results section presents a cross-analysis of these themes by year, country and region, theme, and author. The cross-analysis of themes by year, as shown in Diagram 2, indicates that apart from a significant increase in the number of studies in 2019, the number of studies on each theme in other years ranges from 0 to 2. This trend is particularly evident in the themes of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact" and "Spiritual or Ideal Culture." "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" consistently had more studies than other themes in most years, indicating that this theme is a primary focus in Baba Nyonya's cultural research.

Notably, "Social or Behavioral Culture" had a low number of publications, with only one publication in 2016 and three in 2019, and no publications in other years, indicating that this theme receives less attention and is a relatively niche research area. Due to the small sample size of studies in these fields, the development trends of each theme are not very pronounced. However, the overall number of studies in this field has shown a slow upward trend since 2020.

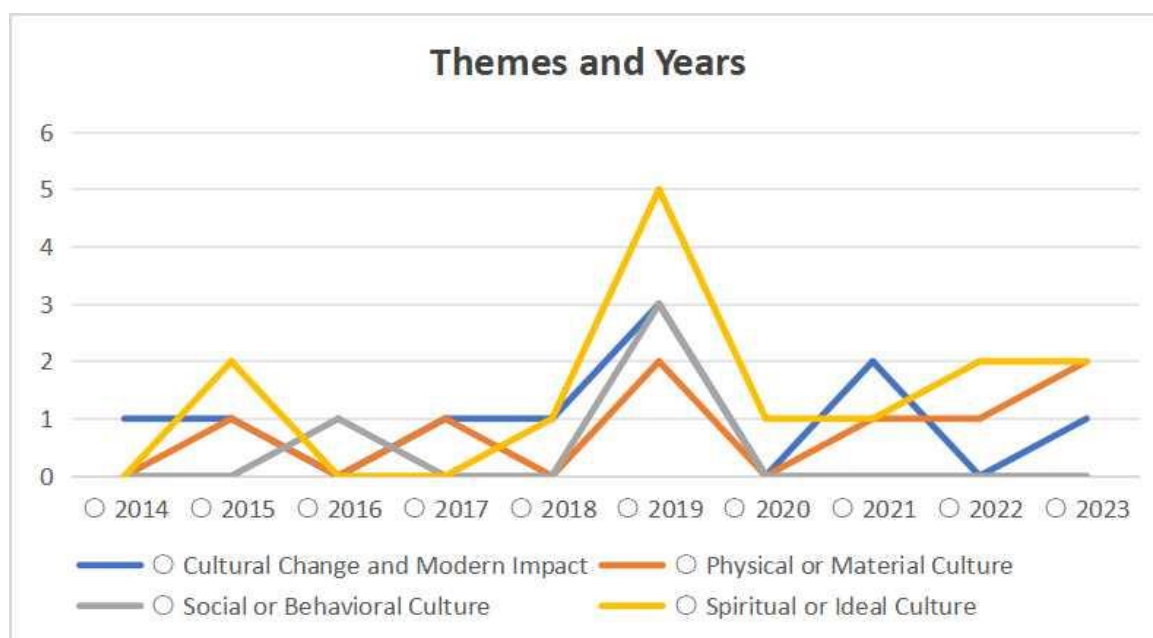


Diagram 1. Themes according to year of publication

From a temporal perspective (Diagram 2), there has been no significant change in the number of studies over the past decade, except for the year 2019. It is evident that 2019 had the

highest number of studies, totaling 9 publications, while in other years, the number of studies for each theme ranged between 1 and 3. Following 2019, there was a sharp decline in the number of publications, with only one study published in 2020, likely due to the global pandemic. However, the number of publications has gradually increased each year thereafter. It should be noted that only one study was published in 2024 up to June 1st, which is not representative of the entire year and is therefore not included in the analysis.

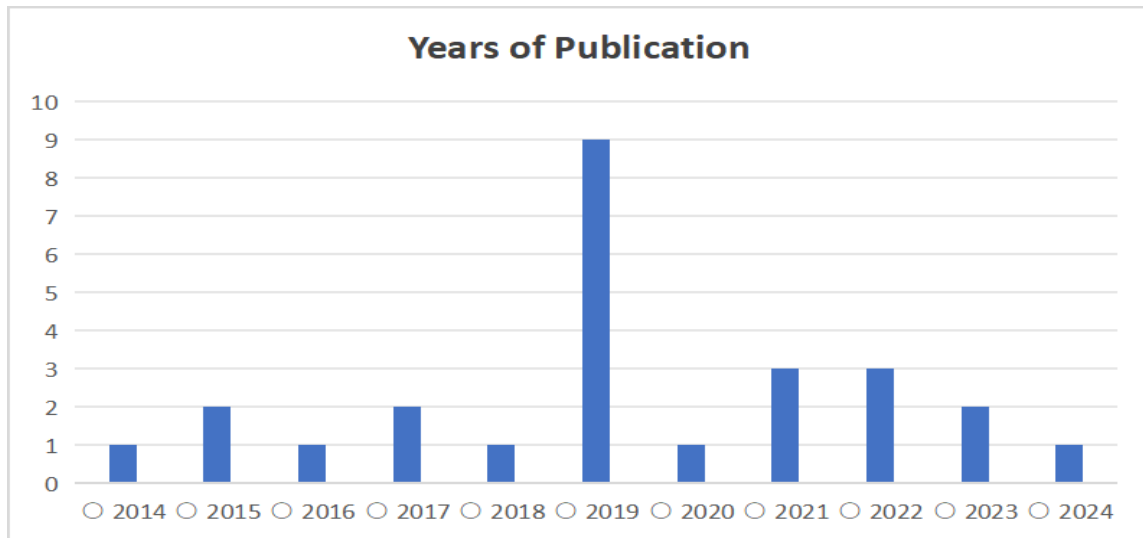


Diagram 2. Year of Publication.

From Diagram 3, the distribution of publications by country shows that 13 publications originate from Malaysia, accounting for half of the total number. Aside from Malaysia, other publications primarily come from Southeast Asian countries where the Baba Nyonya community is distributed, with the number of publications being relatively evenly spread across these countries. Non-regional countries such as China, the United States, Australia, and Canada have also contributed to this field of research, though their number of publications is comparatively lower.

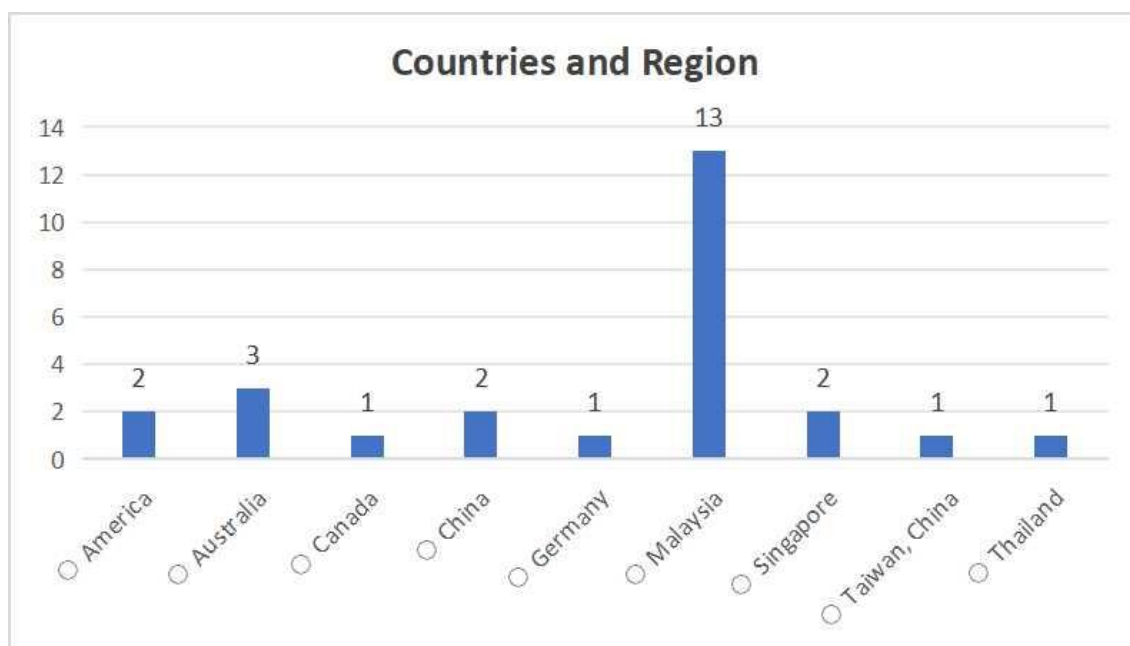


Diagram 3. Countries and Region of Publication.

在国家地区和发表年份的分析中可以看出 (Diagram 3, Table 2), 2019 年是分界线, 在 Previously, research in this field was primarily conducted in Malaysia, while the United States, Thailand, and Canada each had only one publication. Starting in 2019, scholars from countries and regions such as Australia, China, Taiwan, Germany, and Singapore also began contributing to this research area. The publications from Western immigrant countries like Australia, the United States, and Canada may be attributed to the significant presence of Baba Nyonya community members in these countries, particularly Australia due to its proximity. However, Malaysia remains the most consistently active in this field, with nearly annual publications.

In contrast, other countries, apart from Singapore which had two publications in 2022, have shown no data since 2021. This may be because the Baba Nyonya is a niche community primarily concentrated in Malacca, Singapore, and Penang, where many valuable artifacts are preserved in local museums. Consequently, scholars from Malaysia and Singapore have the advantage of accessibility for research. It is foreseeable that Malaysia will continue to leverage its advantages to maintain a focus on this field, and as the importance of cultural preservation grows, more Singaporean scholars will likely join in this research area.

Table 2  
*Countries and Region of Publication Years*

	○ 2014	○ 2015	○ 2016	○ 2017	○ 2018	○ 2019	○ 2020	○ 2021	○ 2022	○ 2023	○ 2024	Total	(n/%*)
○ America	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	7.7
○ Australia	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	3	11.5
○ Canada	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.8
○ China	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	7.7
○ Germany	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.8
○ Malaysia	1	1	1	1	-	4	-	1	1	2	1	13	50
○ Singapore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	7.7
○ Taiwan, China	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.8
○ Thailand	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.8
Total	1	2	1	2	1	9	1	3	3	2	1	26	100

An analysis of the publication sources (Table 3) indicates that these 26 articles were published in 22 different journals and 2 conference proceedings. Specifically, five journals are from the arts and humanities fields, such as "Cogent Arts & Humanities" and "International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change." Additionally, three journals specialize in ethnological studies, such as "Identities" and "Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences." Notably, "Asian Ethnicity" has two publications, suggesting that researchers studying Baba Nyonya culture extensively reference humanities and art literature to guide their work.

Apart from design and arts journals, researchers have also published their work in journals from various other academic disciplines. For example, journals like "Advances in Environmental Biology" and "Molecular Biology and Evolution," which are related to biology, show that scholars are attempting to provide evidence for identity recognition and cultural characteristics proposed in previous studies through an interdisciplinary perspective. Other scholars have published in highly specialized journals in fields such as history, tourism, and museum studies, indicating an active integration of different academic perspectives to explore new research avenues on Baba Nyonya culture.

Furthermore, specialized journals on cultural carriers such as linguistics, media, and cuisine have also featured publications. The "Journal of Ethnic Foods," with two publications, highlights that the unique culinary culture of Baba Nyonya has garnered attention from specialized journals as early as 2016. Linguistics ("The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies") and media studies ("Studies in Media and Communication") journals have also shown interest in Baba Nyonya culture in 2022 and 2023, respectively. This indicates that while culinary aspects have been the focus of early attention, more scholars in recent years are exploring other cultural carriers.

**Table 3**  
*Themes and Authors*

<i>Publishers and years</i>	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
○ 1st International Conference on Humanities Design and Creativity	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Advanced Science Letters	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Advances in Environmental Biology	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ ASIAN ETHNICITY	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
○ Cogent Arts & Humanities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
○ East Asian History and Culture Review	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Ethnicities	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Identities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
○ International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE INCLUSIVE MUSEUM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
○ Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
○ Journal of Ethnic Foods	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
○ JOURNAL OF MEDIA & CULTURAL STUDIES	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
○ Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Molecular Biology and Evolution	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1

○ POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Studies in Media and Communication	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
○ SYNERGIZING CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN RESEARCH	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ Textile Bioengineering and Informatics Symposium Proceedings 2019	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ THE JOURNAL OF IMPERIAL AND COMMONWEALTH HISTORY	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
○ Tourism Management Perspectives	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
○ YOUNG CONSUMERS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1

In summary, this section partially answers RQ1 from a quantitative perspective. The research trends in recent literature related to Baba Nyonya culture reflect the current state of research on Baba Nyonya cultural characteristics to some extent. The review article discusses the historical development of Baba Nyonya culture and various research approaches. Firstly, 2019 marked a peak in Baba Nyonya cultural research over the past decade. Before this, aside from Malaysia, few countries paid attention to this group. In 2019, many countries began to invest in research in this field. However, this peak abruptly ended with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, Malaysia has continued to focus on this cultural group due to its geographical and cultural advantages. From a developmental trend perspective, scholars from various countries have continued to discuss the history and identity of Baba Nyonya. They have also consistently researched the three traditional cultural carriers of this group: language, cuisine, and clothing. In recent years, researchers have begun exploring other interdisciplinary fields such as architecture, media, and museum studies. There is even research extending into the field of biology, indicating a possible shift in focus from identity to a broader exploration of diverse cultural carriers. This exploration is increasingly characterized by a multidisciplinary approach.

**Qualitative Results**

Although the previous content explored the research trends of Baba Nyonya culture quantitatively, it is not comprehensive. A qualitative analysis of each theme is necessary to address the research questions thoroughly. Based on the five overarching themes identified in the previous analysis, the following research questions are addressed:

What is the current trend in Baba Nyonya cultural research covered in publications from 2014 to 2024?

What are the cultural features of Baba Nyonya based on the cultural layers theory discussed in publications from 2014 to 2024?

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, this review summarizes four themes, providing a deeper understanding of the field. According to the research covered in existing publications, each theme is further divided into 2-4 sub-themes (Figure 5). It is important to note that while these 26 articles are categorized into four themes, the categorization is based on the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, resulting in strong logical relationships between the themes. Specifically, the themes of "Physical or Material Culture," "Social or Behavioral Culture," and "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" are not independent but often coexist within the same article. Consequently, many articles cover multiple themes simultaneously.

The interrelated nature of the themes highlights the complexity and richness of Baba Nyonya culture. The overlap of themes within articles indicates that the material, behavioral, and spiritual characteristics of Baba Nyonya culture are deeply intertwined within a single cultural carrier. Additionally, the corroboration of these three aspects across multiple cultural carriers underscores the authenticity and systematic nature of the culture. This holistic approach to understanding Baba Nyonya culture is crucial for comprehending its intricate cultural features from a global perspective.

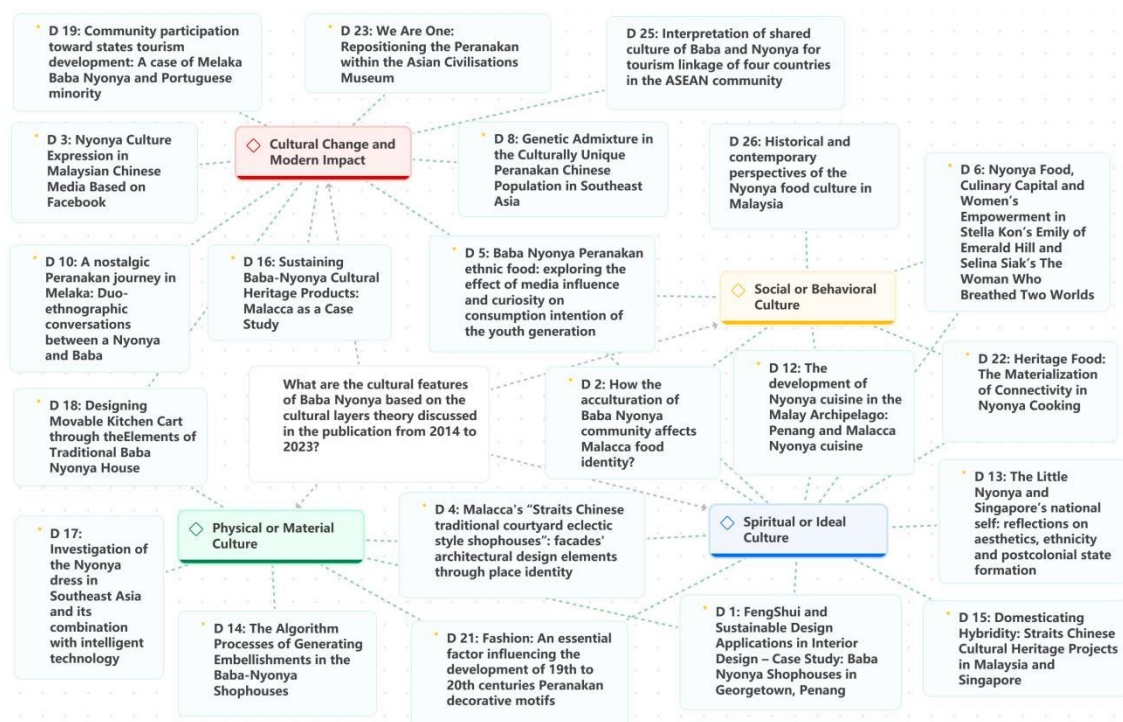


Figure 5. Themes for Research Question 2.

### Theme 1 Physical or Material Culture

According to the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, material culture includes tangible cultural carriers such as food, clothing, and transportation, which represent the external manifestation of culture. This form specifically encompasses appearance, form, color, lines, texture, patterns, and details. In the context of Baba Nyonya culture, an analysis of the twelve



published papers related to the "Physical or Material Culture" theme reveals three codes: "Apparel and Decoration," "Architecture and Living," and "Cuisine" (Figure 6).

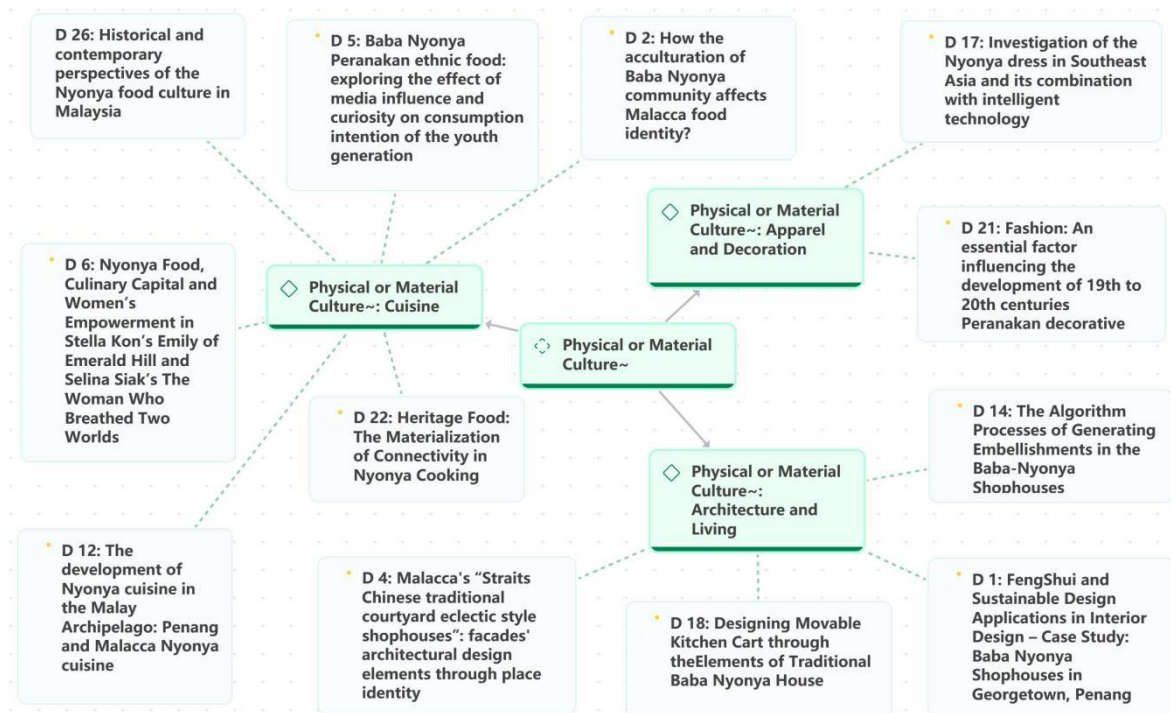


Figure 6. Physical or Material Culture.

### Apparel and Decoration

Apparel is an important material carrier of culture, and Nyonya attire is a distinctive feature of Baba Nyonya culture, with decorative patterns being a concrete manifestation of material culture. Under the "Apparel and Decoration" code, two articles explore the evolution of Baba Nyonya clothing and decoration in historical and modern contexts, as well as their cross-cultural influences.

Shariffuddin & Zahari (2014) provide a historical overview of the development of Nyonya attire, highlighting how the clothing gradually integrated elements from Malay and other Southeast Asian cultures, evolving from traditional Chinese dress into a unique Nyonya style. Additionally, the article discusses the potential for incorporating smart technology into these traditional garments, emphasizing the possibility of combining cultural traditions with modern technology.

On the other hand, Wang (2023) focuses on how global trade and European fashion influenced the development of Nyonya decorative patterns between the 19th and 20th centuries, resulting in distinctive cross-cultural features. Using the methodology of comparative historical research, this paper analyzes the cross-cultural aspects of decorative patterns, showcasing how Nyonya culture maintained and developed its unique visual and material cultural identity amidst globalization. More importantly, Wang reveals that the decorative patterns exemplify an eclectic style influenced by both Chinese and Western cultures, contrasting sharply with their origins.

Together, these two papers reveal the rich cultural layers of Nyonya clothing and decoration and their dynamic adaptability in global cultural exchanges. Shariffuddin & Zahari (2014) emphasize the fusion of tradition and modern technology, offering new developmental pathways for Nyonya culture. In contrast, Wang (2023) explores how fashion, as a significant cultural force, influences and shapes the material cultural expressions of Nyonya. These studies illustrate how Nyonya culture while preserving its traditions, adapts to modern society by incorporating new global influences and technological innovations.

### **Architecture and Living**

Architecture is solidified music; it directly reflects people's lifestyles and is one of the important carriers of culture. Under the "Architecture and Living" code, four papers collectively explore the integration of Baba Nyonya architectural features with modern design and technology, revealing how traditional cultural elements maintain their influence and relevance in modern contexts.

Firstly, Zwain & Bahauddin (2015) focus on the application of feng shui and sustainable design in Baba Nyonya shophouses, particularly in optimizing interior space layout and enhancing environmental quality, emphasizing the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This study not only enhances the understanding of feng shui practices but also provides practical guidance for integrating traditional cultural knowledge into modern architectural design. Abdulqader et al (2017) describe the generation mechanisms of wooden decorations in Baba Nyonya shophouses, which often feature intricate patterns reflecting the fusion of Chinese and Malay cultures. The study notes that the layout and color configuration of interior spaces directly respond to cultural influences, demonstrating how design principles can optimize the visual and functional effects of space. The algorithmic process for generating decorations considers design symmetry, repetition, and transformation, which are key factors in forming the unique appearance and form of shophouses. These design principles not only ensure visual appeal but also maintain cultural continuity and recognizability. By researching the generation algorithms of wooden decorations, the study delves into the combination of traditional craft skills and modern manufacturing techniques, emphasizing the importance of preserving craft traditions while adopting modern technologies, echoing the findings of Zwain and Bahauddin on the necessity of combining tradition and modernity. Furthermore, Zwain & Bahauddin's (2023) subsequent research deeply analyzes the traditional courtyard shophouses in Malacca, highlighting the main external architectural components of these shophouses, including Chi Tou hats, protective walls, lintels, Ionic columns, and gable ends. These elements not only represent the form and appearance of the architecture but also showcase the visual and aesthetic features of Baba Nyonya culture through their unique design details, such as decorative patterns on Chi Tou and intricate structural treatments. The study explores how these structures maintain the local identity of the Straits Chinese, further expanding the applications of feng shui and sustainable design, thereby enhancing the cultural identity significance of the architecture.

Lastly, Rakhim et al (2020) apply traditional Baba Nyonya elements to modern kitchen equipment design, demonstrating how traditional architectural and decorative elements can be reinterpreted and applied to modern household items. For example, the vibrant and

intricate geometric patterns commonly found on Nyonya tiles and fabrics are used. This provides practical examples of the modernization of traditional culture.

Synthesizing these four papers, we can conclude that the visual features of Baba Nyonya culture in architecture mainly include the adoption of Chinese feng shui philosophy to improve the internal physical environment; architectural construction primarily adopts a combination of Chinese and Western styles, reflecting a unique eclecticism; and the use of bright and symbolic colors such as vivid red, bright blue, and green, which not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the buildings but also reflect cultural significance and aesthetic preferences. Other decorative details further embody cultural characteristics, with detailed carvings and exquisite decorative lines showcasing high craftsmanship, such as wood carvings and intricate tile patterns, which are part of Baba Nyonya culture's emphasis on detail and artistic expression. From complex floor tile patterns to meticulously designed window frames, local Malay elements are fused with traditional Chinese motifs, presenting a cross-cultural aesthetic perspective.

### **Cuisine**

In discussing the "Cuisine" code under the theme of "Physical or Material Culture," six papers collectively emphasize Nyonya cuisine as a crucial carrier of material culture. Each paper explores how food plays a key role in cultural identity, social interaction, and the food consumption behavior of the younger generation from different perspectives. Firstly, Zahari et al (2019) reveal through quantitative research the significant impact of cultural assimilation on the food identity of the Baba Nyonya community in Malacca. This resonates with the study by Oh et al (2019), which analyzes how Nyonya cuisine, through the fusion of Chinese and Malay cooking techniques, spread within the Malay Archipelago and further developed with globalization and cultural exchange. Both studies highlight the role of cultural fusion in forming regional food identities. The studies by Zanzaizman et al (2023); Ng & Ab. Karim (2016) focuses on how media and globalization influence the consumption intentions and attitudes of the younger generation towards Nyonya cuisine. These papers demonstrate how media shapes food consumption behavior and emphasize the role of food as an important carrier of cultural identity in the context of globalization.

Additionally, Fauzi & Ahmad (2022) explore how Nyonya cuisine serves as a tool for female empowerment by analyzing food descriptions in literary works, while Pampus (2019) discusses from an anthropological perspective how the performative aspects of Nyonya cooking are used to construct and express Baba Nyonya cultural identity. These two papers investigate the complex role of food in cultural expression from the perspectives of gender and performance. In summary, these six papers collectively depict a multi-layered picture where Nyonya cuisine is not only a source of nutrition but also a powerful cultural symbol. Through the preparation and consumption of food, Nyonya cuisine showcases the preservation of tradition, the shaping of cultural identity, and the response to modern globalization influences within Malaysian society. These studies highlight the central role of food in constructing social structures and cultural heritage and its continued importance in modern society.

### **Theme 2 Social or Behavioral Culture**

Social or Behavioral Culture is the intermediate layer of culture, primarily referring to interpersonal relationships and social organization. This theme includes two codes: "Family Beliefs and Feminism" and "Religious Beliefs and Practices," and encompasses six related published papers (Figure 7).

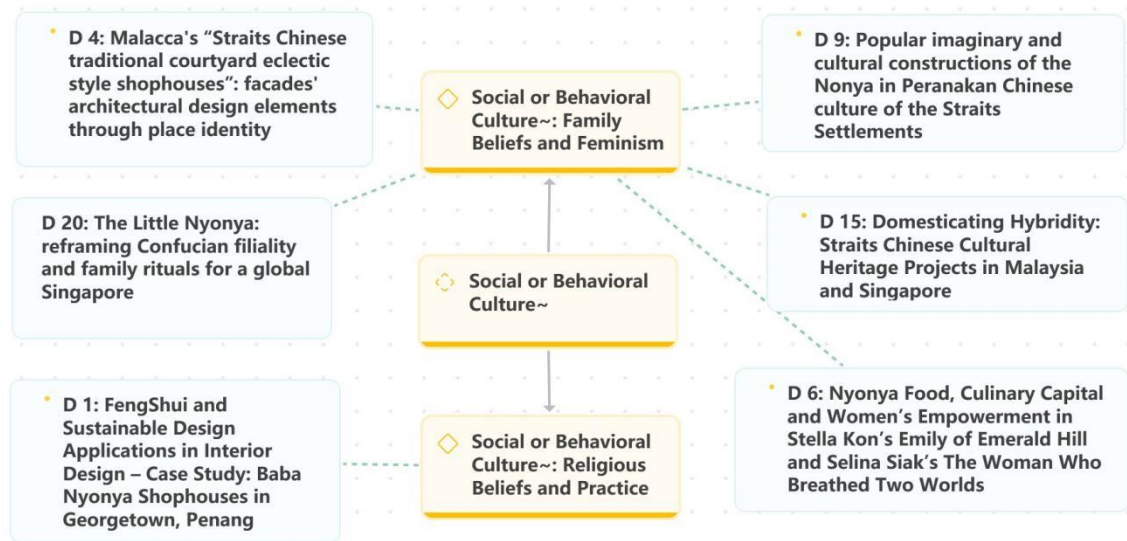


Figure 7. Social or Behavioral Culture.

### Family Beliefs and Feminism

Under the "Family Beliefs and Feminism" code within the theme of "Social or Behavioral Culture," five papers collectively explore how family beliefs and feminism in Baba Nyonya culture express and shape social behavior and cultural identity. These studies, through various perspectives and methods, reveal the complex roles and power dynamics of Nyonya women within traditional family structures and modern society.

Firstly, Teoh (2016) focuses on how Straits Chinese culture is "domesticated" through heritage projects, particularly emphasizing the feminized aspects of Nyonya culture in exhibitions while overlooking more masculine elements. This approach demonstrates how cultural and historical displays can reshape family beliefs and female roles, commodifying the feminine aspects of Nyonya culture and reinforcing gender and cultural identity stereotypes. In contrast, Neo et al (2020) discuss the gender roles and power dynamics of Nyonya women in the context of the Straits colonial era, highlighting the unique and complex power structures Nyonya women held within the family and society. They analyze how popular culture, such as the TV series "The Little Nyonya," portrays family beliefs and feminism in Nyonya culture and disseminates these concepts through television and other media.

Additionally, Fauzi and Ahmad (2022) examine the connection between Nyonya cuisine and female empowerment through literary texts, demonstrating how food serves as a tool for women to exercise power and influence within the family and community. This contrasts with Teoh's focus on the commodification of cultural displays, emphasizing the proactive role and power of women in cultural practices (Teoh, 2016). Lastly, Eng (2020) analyzes the TV series "The Little Nyonya" to explore the breaking of gender roles within Confucian family structures, showing how Nyonya women challenge traditional gender barriers and reshape family and social roles. These studies collectively present modern interpretations and

practices of family beliefs and feminism in Nyonya culture, highlighting the central role of Nyonya women in cultural and social transformation.

In summary, these papers collectively reveal how women in Baba Nyonya culture utilize and transform family beliefs and feminism to enhance their status and influence, demonstrating their central role in cultural preservation, social participation, and family management. Through these multi-dimensional studies, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics and cultural complexity within the Nyonya community.

### **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Under the "Religious Beliefs and Practices" code within the theme of "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," research primarily focuses on the diversity of religious beliefs and practices within the Baba Nyonya community and their impact on individuals and society. These religious practices are not only expressions of faith but also integral components of cultural identity and social structure. For example, the application of feng shui in the Baba Nyonya community reflects adherence to traditional religious and philosophical principles while also incorporating modern sustainable design principles, demonstrating a fusion of cultural adaptability and environmental awareness.

The study by Zwain & Bahauddin (2015) analyzes the application of feng shui and sustainable design in Nyonya shophouses in George Town, Penang, revealing how ancient religious philosophies are combined with modern environmental conservation principles to create harmonious living environments. This not only illustrates the role of religious practices in shaping architecture and interior design but also shows how religious beliefs adapt to modern environmental challenges to promote sustainable community development.

Such research emphasizes the dual role of religious beliefs in preserving cultural heritage and fostering community cohesion. In this way, the religious practices of the Baba Nyonya community serve as a source of spiritual support and a bridge for cultural heritage and social innovation. This in-depth exploration of how religious beliefs influence daily life and social structure provides valuable insights into the internal dynamics of this complex community.

In discussing the theme of "Baba Nyonya Social or Behavioral Culture," cultural studies focus on revealing the unique characteristics and behavior patterns of the Baba Nyonya community in terms of social customs and family beliefs. These studies highlight how social and behavioral traits within Baba Nyonya culture are preserved and transmitted through daily practices and social interactions in a multicultural environment.

Firstly, family beliefs and structures hold a central position in Baba Nyonya culture, manifested in strict family rules and respect for elders. This family structure and belief system support the interactions and social responsibilities among community members while reinforcing intergenerational cultural transmission. Additionally, the rituals and festive celebrations of the Baba Nyonya significantly reflect their social and behavioral culture. These activities not only strengthen internal community bonds but also showcase the uniqueness and diversity of their culture to the outside world. Through these social and behavioral customs, the Baba Nyonya community maintains its distinctive cultural identity and continuity in modern society. In summary, the social or behavioral culture of the Baba Nyonya community, through family structures and social activities, demonstrates their deep cultural traditions and diversity of social behavior patterns. These cultural traits not only enhance



internal community cohesion but also enable the Baba Nyonya to maintain their cultural distinctiveness and social influence in the context of globalization.

### Theme 3 Spiritual or Ideal Culture

In the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, Spiritual or Ideal Culture refers to the realm of spirituality or ideals, including art and religion. In this review, the theme of Spiritual or Ideal Culture for Baba Nyonya includes Identities, Cross-culture and Acculturation, and Art and Performance. These aspects are summarized from 13 publications (Figure 8).

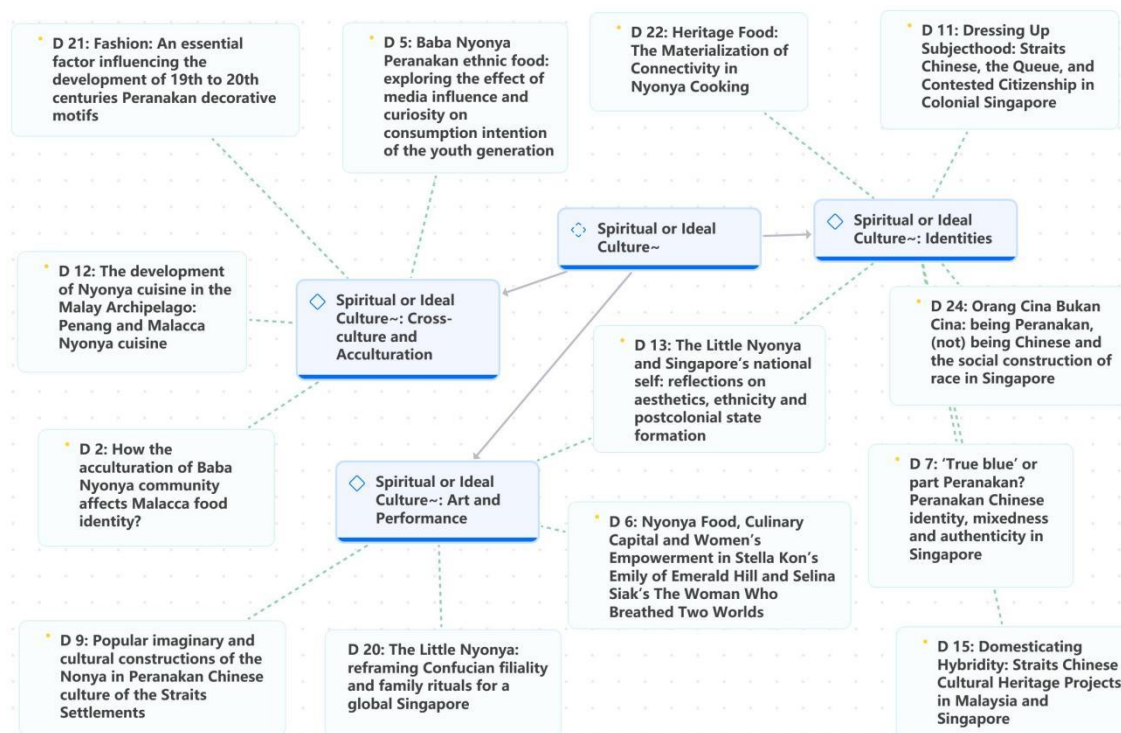


Figure 8. Spiritual or Ideal Culture.

### Identities

Under the "Identities" code within the theme of "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," these six articles collectively explore the construction, expression, and evolution of identity within Baba Nyonya culture, particularly in the context of globalization and multiculturalism. Although each study focuses on different aspects, they collectively present a complex network of cultural identities shaped by history, social practices, and policies.

Firstly, Rocha and Yeoh (2022, 2023) discuss how Baba Nyonya's identity is both included and marginalized in the racially diverse society of Singapore through the lens of racial construction. This complexity of identity is reflected in its integration into the broader framework of a multi-ethnic society while striving to maintain its unique cultural characteristics. Additionally, Sai (2019) reveals the relationship between cultural identity and political law through a specific historical event, illustrating how individuals navigate their identities between official racial policies and personal cultural practices.

Furthermore, Teoh (2016); Montsion and Parasram (2018) discuss how the state and media participate in the construction of this identity, not only influencing public perception through



policies and legal frameworks but also shaping and disseminating the cultural image of Baba Nyonya through cultural industries such as television series and museum exhibitions. These cultural expressions not only reshape public understanding of Baba Nyonya's identity but also become modern channels for identity recognition. Lastly, Pampus (2019) highlights the cultural dimension of food, revealing how cultural heritage is maintained and transmitted in daily life, emphasizing the core role of cultural practices in preserving and developing cultural identity.

Overall, these papers collectively outline a multi-dimensional picture of how Baba Nyonya's identity is understood, expressed, and transmitted in modern society from different perspectives and methods. They reveal how cultural identity is formed through complex interactions among historical heritage, social practices, policy interventions, and cultural expressions, thus constituting the unique cultural characteristics and identity of Baba Nyonya. Under the "Identities" code, by analyzing the historical background, social dynamics, and personal recognition of the Baba Nyonya community, these studies reveal how community members shape and maintain their unique cultural identity within a multi-ethnic social structure. The research emphasizes how individuals define their identity through historical memory, social interaction, and cultural practices, and how these identities adapt and change under the influence of globalization and social transformation. This demonstrates the persistence and complexity of Baba Nyonya culture, as well as its continuity and adaptability in modern society.

### **Cross-culture and Acculturation**

Under the "Cross-culture and Acculturation" code within the theme of "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," four studies explore the adaptation and integration of Baba Nyonya culture in the context of globalization and multiculturalism from different perspectives. These papers collectively emphasize the dynamic nature of cultural assimilation and its profound impact on identity construction.

Firstly, Zahari et al (2019); Oh et al (2019) focus on food as a medium for cultural exchange and identity expression, revealing how the types of food, cooking methods, and choice of ingredients form a unique food identity within regional cultures. These studies indicate that food is not only a carrier of cultural heritage but also a scene for cultural adaptation and innovation. Zanzaizman et al (2023) further explore how media, as a modern communication tool, influences the cultural consumption habits of the younger generation, highlighting the critical role of new media in cross-cultural communication.

On the other hand, Wang (2023) examines the impact of cross-cultural influences on visual arts, such as fashion and decorative arts, and how these influences permeate daily life, shaping the visual culture and identity symbols of the Baba Nyonya community. This perspective complements the earlier studies on food and media, collectively illustrating how Baba Nyonya culture, driven by globalization, renews itself and reshapes its identity through various cultural elements and media. These studies not only reveal the diversity of cultural adaptation but also demonstrate the strategies employed by the Baba Nyonya community to maintain cultural continuity in modern society.

Under the "Cross-culture and Acculturation" code, by examining the interaction of food, fashion, and media within the Baba Nyonya community, these studies uncover how cultural adaptation and integration occur through everyday cultural practices and the influence of globalization. They show how the Baba Nyonya community maintains traditions while incorporating new global cultural elements. Using food and visual arts as examples, these studies explore how this unique cultural identity evolves and adapts through ongoing cross-cultural exchanges, reflecting how small cultural groups sustain and reshape their cultural characteristics and social identities by adapting to new environments and absorbing external influences in the context of globalization.

### **Art and Performance**

Under the "Art and Performance" code within the theme of "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," four papers explore the representation and impact of Nyonya culture in the realms of art and performance, demonstrating how this culture influences and shapes social identity and gender roles through various media. Fauzi & Ahmad (2022) analyze the relationship between Nyonya cuisine and female empowerment through literary works, highlighting how women gain power and respect within the family and community by mastering culinary skills. This not only reflects food as a vehicle for cultural transmission but also emphasizes the central role of women in cultural preservation and transmission. Neo et al (2020) examine the cultural construction of Nyonya identity through the television series "The Little Nyonya," analyzing how media shapes and disseminates diverse perspectives on Nyonya women. The study shows how these women challenge traditional patriarchal society while highlighting their complexity and strength. This research underscores the role of art and performance in shaping and discussing ethnic identity.

Montsion & Parasram (2018); Eng (2020) delve deeper into how the television series "The Little Nyonya" reflects and influences national identity and cultural awareness in Singapore. Montsion & Parasram (2018) argue that the series dynamically reconstructs Confucian and local identity concepts, while Eng (2020) focuses on how the series reframes Confucian family values and filial piety to support Singapore's image as a diverse and modern society.

In summary, these studies collectively reveal the rich expression of Nyonya culture in the fields of art and performance and how these cultural manifestations maintain and redefine the community's cultural identity in a globalized context. Through television, literature, and public discourse, Nyonya culture demonstrates its ability to adapt and influence modern society, emphasizing the critical role of cultural arts in shaping and disseminating ethnic-specific identities.

Under the "Art and Performance" code within the theme of "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," Baba Nyonya culture showcases its profound cultural layers and spiritual values. Through various artistic and performance forms, it reflects its unique cultural characteristics and social influence. This code examines the expressions of Nyonya cuisine, family rituals, and daily life through literary works, television series, and cultural analysis, highlighting the core role of Nyonya culture in shaping and transmitting identity and values. Nyonya culture is depicted as an active participant in and influencer of social structures.

Women in the Nyonya community are portrayed not only as maintainers of the household but also as key figures in cultural transmission. They exhibit unique power and status through

culinary arts and social participation. Additionally, through media representations like the television series "The Little Nyonya," Nyonya culture engages in and shapes discussions on cultural identity and ethnic relations in Singapore and beyond, emphasizing cultural diversity and inclusivity.

In summary, the "Art and Performance" code emphasizes the active expression and influence of Nyonya culture in the realm of spiritual or ideal culture. Through art and performance, Nyonya culture not only preserves and transmits its rich cultural heritage but also demonstrates its ability to adapt to changes and shape identities in modern society, thus maintaining its uniqueness and appeal in the context of global cultural exchange.

When discussing the "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" of Baba Nyonya culture, several key aspects of its cultural characteristics can be summarized. These aspects include cross-culture and acculturation, art and performance, religious beliefs, and identity issues in a multicultural society.

Firstly, the "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" of Baba Nyonya emphasizes its ability for cross-culture and acculturation. The ancestors of the Baba Nyonya community were early Chinese immigrants to Malaysia and Indonesia, and through their integration with local Malay culture and other Southeast Asian cultures, they formed a unique Peranakan culture. This cultural amalgamation is reflected not only in the material culture, such as clothing and cuisine but also deeply influences their spiritual culture and social behavior, particularly in religious practices and social rituals.

Secondly, in terms of art and performance, the Baba Nyonya community maintains a rich cultural expression, including traditional dance, drama, and music. These art forms are not only displays of their cultural identity but also important tools for intergenerational transmission. For example, the intricate costumes and fine craftsmanship displayed in traditional Baba Nyonya theater and wedding ceremonies demonstrate their commitment to preserving cultural traditions.

Lastly, regarding identity issues in a multicultural society, the Baba Nyonya community, through its unique cultural practices and social behavior, demonstrates how it maintains its distinctive cultural traditions while integrating with the broader social environment. This dual identity enables Baba Nyonya culture to sustain its uniqueness and continuity under the influence of globalization, while also facing the challenge of balancing cultural distinctiveness with the needs of modern society.

Overall, the "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" of Baba Nyonya showcases a composite picture of cross-cultural integration, rich artistic expression, unique religious practices, and complex social identity construction. These characteristics not only highlight the complexity of this unique cultural group but also reflect their adaptability and vitality in the context of modernization and globalization.

#### **Theme 4 Cultural Change and Modern Impact**

Beyond the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, new characteristics and trends in Baba Nyonya culture have been identified, and summarized under the theme of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact." This theme includes four codes: "Cultural Nostalgia and Authenticity,"

"Globalization and Cultural Adaptation," "Heritage Preservation and Tourism," and "Media and Information Dissemination" (Figure 9).

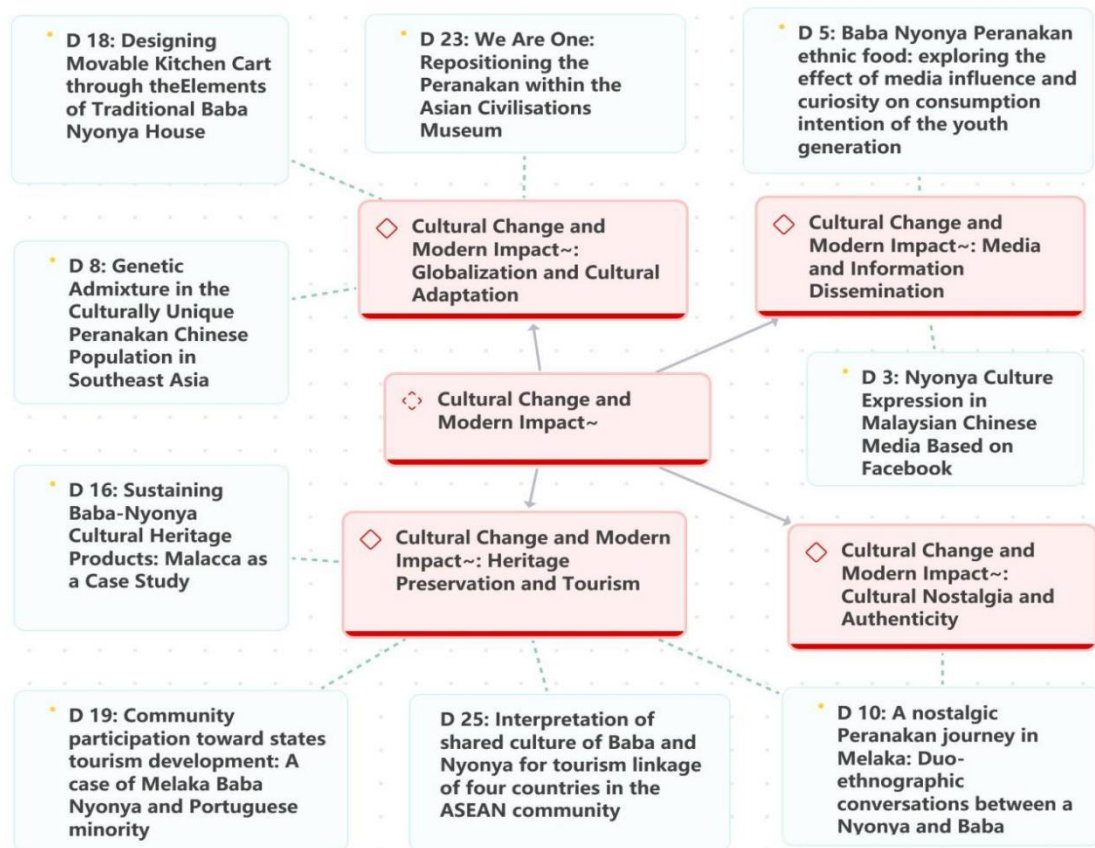


Figure 9. Cultural Change and Modern Impact.

### Cultural Nostalgia and Authenticity

In exploring the "Cultural Nostalgia and Authenticity" code under the theme of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact," Tan & Teoh (2019) provide profound insights. Through a dual-ethnographic dialogue, the study delves into the roles of nostalgia, authenticity, and diaspora in cultural heritage tourism. The research shows that nostalgia serves not only as a bridge to personal and collective memory but also as a crucial means for the modern Baba Nyonya community to engage with their cultural heritage, reflecting an ongoing quest for cultural roots and identity in the context of globalization.

Additionally, the paper highlights the concepts of existential authenticity and objective authenticity, which are revealed and shaped through nostalgic tourism experiences. This pursuit of cultural authenticity demonstrates how the Baba Nyonya community maintains and reinforces its unique cultural identity by preserving traditional customs and celebrations and through cultural and historical education. In this way, the Baba Nyonya community not only preserves its cultural heritage but also adapts it to modern contexts to cope with ongoing global cultural changes.

### **Globalization and Cultural Adaptation**

Under the "Globalization and Cultural Adaptation" code within the theme of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact," three research articles explore how the Baba Nyonya community adapts and constructs its cultural identity under the influence of globalization. These studies demonstrate various perspectives on maintaining and adapting cultural characteristics in a modern environment.

Firstly, Wu et al (2021) reveal the phenomenon of cultural and genetic mixing through genetic analysis. The study finds that genetic mixing between the Baba Nyonya community and Malays is significantly higher than with other Chinese groups. This not only reflects cultural integration but also highlights the impact of globalization and regional historical migrations on the Baba Nyonya cultural identity. This genetic data provides biological evidence of cultural adaptation in the globalization process. Furthermore, Rakhim et al (2021) demonstrate how traditional architectural elements can be integrated into modern furniture design, showcasing how cultural heritage can be transformed into products that meet modern needs. This design innovation preserves traditional elements while making them more suitable for contemporary household use, reflecting the revitalization and functional reinterpretation of traditional culture in the context of globalization. Finally, Bezzina (2021) explores how museums showcase Baba Nyonya culture, reflecting Singapore's social changes as a multicultural nation. The article emphasizes that repositioning the cultural display of the Baba Nyonya can enhance public awareness of this unique cultural group, promoting its cultural identity in the era of globalization.

These three papers collectively depict how the Baba Nyonya community maintains and adapts its unique culture in the context of globalization. Whether through the lens of genetics, innovative product design, or cultural displays in museums, they illustrate the community's efforts to seek cultural continuity and adaptability in the modern world. These studies emphasize the importance of maintaining and developing unique cultural identities and traditions through various means in the globalization process.

### **Heritage Preservation and Tourism**

Under the "Heritage Preservation and Tourism" code, four papers collectively explore various dimensions of preserving and promoting Baba Nyonya cultural heritage through tourism and community engagement, demonstrating how different approaches contribute to the revitalization and sustainable development of cultural heritage. Tan and Teoh (2019) use a dual-ethnographic approach to examine how nostalgic tourism helps individuals connect with their cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of experiential tourism activities in enhancing cultural awareness. This provides a practical context for Ahmad et al (2019), who study how the commercialization and community engagement of Baba Nyonya cultural products and events in Malacca support the sustainable use and transmission of culture.

Shariffuddin and Zahari (2014); Muneenam et al (2017) further expand the discussion on community involvement and transnational cultural connections. Shariffuddin and Zahari (2014) highlight the central role of community participation in preserving and promoting tourism development, demonstrating how community mobilization ensures the achievement of social and economic goals in cultural heritage preservation. Muneenam et al (2017) explore the practice of using interpretative tools such as postcards to spread Baba Nyonya culture

across four ASEAN countries, showing how modern tools facilitate education and promotion, fostering cross-cultural understanding and acceptance.

Collectively, these studies construct a comprehensive framework demonstrating how tourism and community participation jointly drive the preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage. Each study underscores the importance of education, community involvement, and market strategies in maintaining and transmitting cultural heritage while highlighting the support and challenges posed by modern influences on these cultural practices. Overall, these four papers present a multi-dimensional perspective on how tourism and community engagement promote the preservation and utilization of cultural heritage. They illustrate how Baba Nyonya culture is preserved, disseminated, and revitalized through various methods, providing practical pathways and strategies for its continued development in the context of globalization.

### **Media and Information Dissemination**

Under the "Media and Information Dissemination" code, two papers explore how media influences and promotes the dissemination and modernization of Baba Nyonya culture. Firstly, the study by Wang et al (2024) analyzes the expression of Nyonya culture on Facebook, revealing the role of digital media in disseminating and integrating traditional culture. They coded and analyzed 19 Facebook posts, examining the representation of Nyonya culture across five dimensions: food, crafts, traditional customs, social affairs, and media entertainment. This study emphasizes the importance of social media in promoting cultural inheritance and innovation, demonstrating that social media is not only a platform for cultural display but also a crucial tool for cultural exchange and identity.

Secondly, Zanzaizman et al (2023) focus on how media influences the consumption intentions of the younger generation regarding Baba Nyonya ethnic food. Through a quantitative study, they found that media influence and personal curiosity significantly affect young people's intentions to consume Baba Nyonya food, highlighting strategies to enhance the appeal of ethnic food through media dissemination. This research shows how digital platforms like social media can effectively promote unique cultural cuisine and stimulate the consumption desires of young people.

Together, these two papers illustrate the power of media as a tool for information dissemination and cultural education in modern society, especially in the context of globalization and multiculturalism. Media influence enables the global spread of Baba Nyonya culture and facilitates its modernization and adaptation, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and cultural sustainability. The logical relationship between the two papers lies in their use of modern media tools to explore and achieve cultural dissemination strategies, highlighting how traditional culture can be innovated and redefined through modern technological means in the digital age.

Under the theme of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact," various changes and modern influences on Baba Nyonya culture are explored through different research codes. These studies reveal how cultural heritage is not only preserved and transmitted in the era of globalization and digitalization but also continuously adapts to new social and technological environments.



Firstly, the exploration of cultural nostalgia and authenticity reflects how the Baba Nyonya community reconnects and reshapes its cultural traditions through tourism and educational activities. This nostalgia is not just a reflection on the past but also an important aspect of modern identity. Cultural heritage tourism strengthens the community's cultural awareness and global recognition. For example, visiting historical sites and participating in traditional activities preserve cultural authenticity while making this unique culture more widely understood and appreciated.

Secondly, research on globalization and cultural adaptation showcases the strategies employed by the Baba Nyonya culture in response to global cultural dynamics. From studies on genetic mixing to the application of modern design, the Baba Nyonya community demonstrates its cultural resilience and openness, maintaining traditions while incorporating external elements and innovating cultural practices. This cross-cultural exchange and integration not only enrich the cultural content of Baba Nyonya but also provide momentum for its sustainable development in the global cultural landscape.

Lastly, the role of media and information dissemination highlights how the digital age affects the spread and acceptance of culture. Through social media and other digital platforms, Baba Nyonya culture transcends geographical and cultural boundaries to reach a global audience. This modern mode of communication enhances the visibility of Baba Nyonya culture and promotes cross-cultural understanding and exchange, showcasing the vitality and adaptability of traditional culture in contemporary society.

In summary, this theme delves into the multifaceted changes in Baba Nyonya culture under modern influences. From preserving nostalgia and authenticity to adapting culturally in the face of globalization and leveraging modern media for widespread dissemination, these studies collectively portray a dynamic, adaptable, and continually evolving cultural view.

### **Conclusions**

This review employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to conduct a comprehensive review of 26 articles on Baba Nyonya culture published between 2014 and June 2024. The quantitative analysis presents data obtained from ATLAS.ti 23, discussing current research trends in Baba Nyonya cultural studies. Simultaneously, the study utilizes thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti 23 for the qualitative part, partially based on the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, to reveal Baba Nyonya's cultural features.

Despite the growing interest of scholars in researching the Baba Nyonya community, especially in the detailed and in-depth studies of cultural carriers such as clothing, architecture, language, and cuisine, there is a lack of dedicated review articles focusing comprehensively on the theme of cultural characteristics. Therefore, it is necessary to bridge this gap by synthesizing relevant articles on Baba Nyonya culture and summarizing related concepts based on the "Three Cultural Layers" theory. The qualitative analysis in this study categorizes the identified themes into four key sections: (1) Physical or Material Culture, (2) Social or Behavioral Culture, (3) Spiritual or Ideal Culture, and (4) Cultural Change and Modern Impact.

One of the identified research trends is the deeper exploration of traditional Baba Nyonya cultural carriers, particularly in material culture layers like architecture and cuisine. However, there is limited exploration and discussion of cultural resources in the social or behavioral culture layers, such as social customs and lifestyles. Additionally, there is a growing body of research focusing on the changes and adaptations of Baba Nyonya culture in modern society. Overall, this paper clarifies the cultural characteristics of Baba Nyonya across the three layers, reveals current research patterns, and emphasizes new trends in cultural change and adaptation. It provides valuable insights for scholars, designers, and researchers in the field.

### The Cultural Features of Baba Nyonya

The thematic review of publications from the past ten years systematically summarizes the cultural characteristics of Baba Nyonya from three perspectives—“Physical or Material Culture,” “Social or Behavioral Culture,” and “Spiritual or Ideal Culture”—based on the “Three Cultural Layers” theory (Figure 10), revealing the overall picture of Baba Nyonya culture.

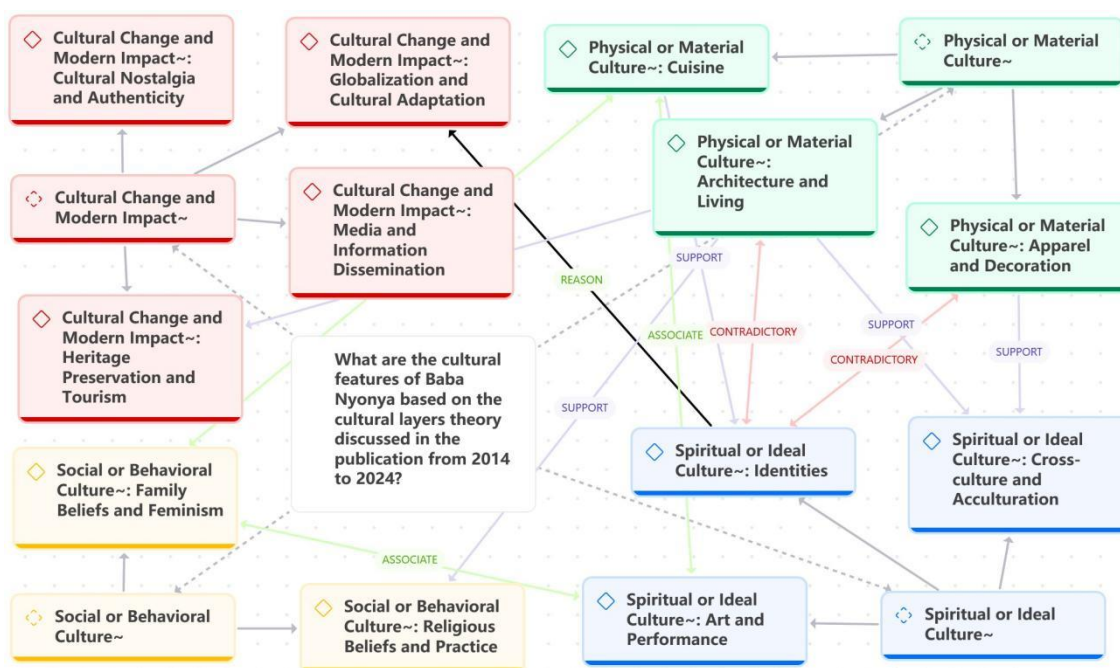


Figure 10. The Cultural Features of Baba Nyonya discussed in the publication from 2014 to 2024.

Firstly, in the "Physical or Material Culture" layer, influenced by the living environment, such as climate and geographical conditions, Baba Nyonya culture in areas directly related to personal life, such as cuisine and clothing, exhibits a typical fusion of Chinese and Malay cultures. In contrast, in visual decorative patterns such as those found in architecture and ceramics, Baba Nyonya's cultural features display a typical eclectic style combining Chinese and Western influences. This blend of Eastern and Western cultures is highly inclusive, even to the extent of accommodating elements that diverge from traditional aesthetics.

Secondly, in the "Social or Behavioral Culture" layer, Baba Nyonya's cultural characteristics are evident in their lifestyle and the social status of women. The religious beliefs of the Baba

Nyonya, heavily influenced by Chinese culture, led to adherence to "Fengshui" in their way of life and architectural forms. Contrastingly, their family and social organizational structures differ significantly from those in China. In ancient Chinese agricultural society, women were considered subservient to men, whereas, in the commercial society of the Baba Nyonya, women (Nyonyas) took on more significant roles, leading to higher empowerment within the family and society compared to their Chinese counterparts. Additionally, due to the focus of women on household affairs, traditional cultural preservation is more complete, resulting in more attention—intentionally or unintentionally—being given to women-related cultural aspects such as Nyonya cuisine, clothing, and ceramics, and the TV series "The Little Nyonya." However, it is essential to note that this trend can shape the stereotype of a feminized Baba Nyonya culture.

Lastly, in the "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" layer, the complexity of Baba Nyonya culture arises from historical, social, and cultural aspects. Briefly, due to its origins and heritage, Baba Nyonya culture in the three main cultural identity carriers—cuisine, clothing, and language—is significantly influenced by both Chinese and Malay elements. In terms of cultural orientation, it has been successively influenced by Chinese Confucian culture and Western civilization, resulting in a distinct cross-cultural characteristic. This feature is prominently projected onto the "Physical or Material Culture" and "Social or Behavioral Culture" layers. After summarizing the cultural characteristics of Baba Nyonya, the theme of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact" introduces new perspectives, indicating that traditional Baba Nyonya culture is changing the influence of modern society. This is mainly reflected in the gradual abandonment of concepts and lifestyles that are incompatible with contemporary society. Furthermore, researchers believe that embracing this change is necessary, as modern technology, social concepts, and lifestyles can combine with this culture to achieve sustainable development.

Researchers generally agree that the most typical characteristic of Peranakan Chinese culture is cross-cultural integration, with the most intuitive evidence being the eclectic multiculturalism displayed by its cultural carriers (e.g., architecture, food, language). Further supporting this, genetic research has verified these findings. Accordingly, different research directions have yielded varying results regarding cultural identity for different branches of the Baba Nyonya (such as those in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand). This is likely due to geographical factors causing different combinations and degrees of cultural influence. For instance, Singapore's Peranakan Chinese culture includes Chinese, European, and Malay elements, whereas Thailand's Peranakan Chinese culture is deeply influenced by Chinese and Thai cultures. This difference, though difficult to quantify, subtly impacts cultural identity. All branches are certainly influenced by Chinese culture, albeit to varying degrees, primarily due to geographical factors, followed by historical and social factors. Whether Chinese culture plays a dominant role depends on the specific analysis of these three factors. In summary, the review highlights that Baba Nyonya's cultural characteristics are a multifaceted integration of Chinese, Southeast Asian, and European cultures, interwoven with splendor and harmony, complexity and contradiction, rupture and inclusiveness.

### **Future Research Directions**

The thematic review has generated new research suggestions to further advance knowledge in the field of Baba Nyonya culture. Previous researchers have focused on the complex

identity issues of the Baba Nyonya community from historical, genealogical, sociological, and cultural perspectives. Following this, researchers have increasingly explored Baba Nyonya culture through its rich cultural resources, initially focusing on traditional cultural carriers, particularly within the "Physical or Material Culture" layer, such as cuisine, architecture, and clothing, and then extending into considerations of feminism and lifestyle within the "Social or Behavioral Culture" layer (Figure 11).

Many researchers have found it necessary to sustainably conserve Baba Nyonya's traditional culture amid modern societal developments. They have attempted to explore sustainable development avenues from the perspectives of "Physical or Material Culture" and "Spiritual or Ideal Culture." As illustrated in Figure 11, although existing research on Baba Nyonya culture is relatively comprehensive, there remains a significant imbalance. Research on "Physical or Material Culture" is more in-depth and closely linked with "Spiritual or Ideal Culture," yet studies on the "Social or Behavioral Culture" layer and its connection with "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" are lacking in breadth. Additionally, there is a lack of systematic linkage in depth between these two layers.

The "Social or Behavioral Culture" and "Spiritual or Ideal Culture" layers of Baba Nyonya are crucial research directions. Although some scholars have begun research in the field of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact," they rarely systematically connect this research with the original cultural layers to discuss the sustainable development of a culture based on its indigenous roots. Therefore, this review suggests that this is also a future research direction.

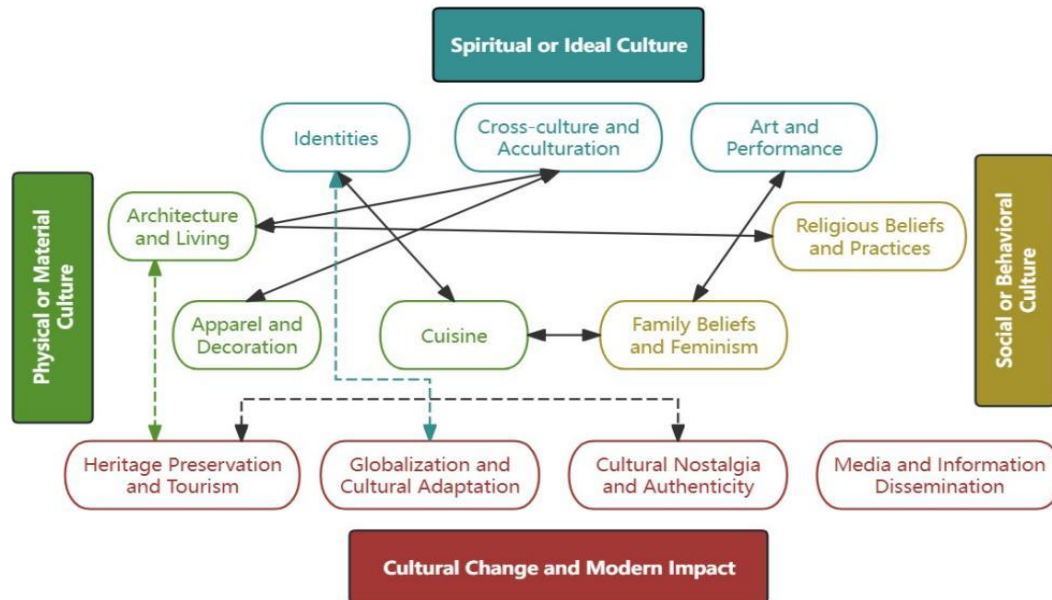


Figure 11. A Conceptual Framework on Cultural Features of Baba Nyonya.

This paper makes several significant contributions to the field of Baba Nyonya studies from a cultural perspective. Firstly, based on the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, it summarizes recent publications on Baba Nyonya's cultural characteristics, revealing that the cultural features at the levels of Physical or Material Culture, Social or Behavioral Culture, and Spiritual or Ideal Culture are interwoven yet consistently point in the same direction. The most prominent

characteristic of Baba Nyonya culture is the dynamic and eclectic cross-cultural integration of traditional Chinese, Malay, and European cultures to varying degrees, periods, and carriers. This fusion process exhibits strong cultural inclusivity, such as breaking aesthetic and taboo boundaries in visual decorations to achieve cross-cultural integration.

Researchers have found that in carriers directly related to personal social and living environments, such as cuisine, clothing, and language, Baba Nyonya culture shows more integration of Chinese and Malay elements. Conversely, in architectural forms, decorative arts, and family and social organizations, which are more related to social group consciousness, the culture exhibits more integration of Chinese and Western elements. Researchers tend to believe this is related to the colonial socio-economic structure. These cultural characteristics and patterns can lay the foundation for modern product development based on Baba Nyonya culture.

Secondly, this paper discusses the changes and new trends of Baba Nyonya culture in modern society under the theme of "Cultural Change and Modern Impact." Researchers point out the "feminization" tendency of Baba Nyonya culture, which may lead to stereotypes. It also reveals that many researchers are collaboratively exploring more effective cultural development strategies in various directions. This will provide valuable insights and guidance for researchers dedicated to the sustainable development of Baba Nyonya culture.

In conclusion, this paper clarifies the characteristics of Baba Nyonya culture, emphasizes its future research directions, and provides valuable insights for achieving sustainable cultural development.

### **Contribution**

This study provides a unique perspective by comprehensively reviewing and systematically organizing the literature on Baba Nyonya cultural features published between 2014 and 2024, aiming to understand and explain the evolution and ongoing impact of Baba Nyonya culture in modern society. Theoretically, grounded in the "Three Cultural Layers" theory, this research extends our understanding of the multidimensional characteristics of Baba Nyonya culture by conducting a detailed analysis across three dimensions: 'Physical or Material Culture', 'Social or Behavioral Culture', and 'Spiritual or Ideal Culture'. This not only challenges the boundaries of traditional cultural studies but also offers new theoretical perspectives on how cultures adapt and survive through material and immaterial forms in a globalized context. Additionally, the in-depth analysis of this study can assist product designers and researchers in creating products that meet the modern lifestyle and emotional needs based on the cultural features of Baba Nyonya, thus ensuring the authenticity of Baba Nyonya culture and promoting the sustainable development of traditional cultures. This research highlights the complexity and diversity of cultural inheritance, providing strategies for effectively preserving and disseminating traditional cultures in modern society, which holds significant implications and practical value for cultural conservationists, policymakers, and the academic community. Therefore, this study not only enriches our understanding of Baba Nyonya culture but also offers valuable references for other cultural groups facing similar challenges globally.

### **Disclosure Statement**

*The Authors Declare no Conflict of Interest*



This paper is a review of the published literature on Baba Nyonya from a cultural features-based perspective over the last ten years, which helps us to understand current patterns in this topic and provides insights for future research. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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