

# Urban Chinese Malaysian's Stereotypical Labels toward the Malays and Indians in Peninsular Malaysia

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**To Link this Article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i10/15207> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i10/15207

**Published Date:** 01 October 2022

## Abstract

This paper aims to identify the forms of stereotypical labels used by urban Chinese Malaysians towards the Malays and Indians in a few major cities in Peninsular Malaysia. The significant stereotypical labels are described and discussed to understand urban Chinese's opinion on the labels. This study employed a sequential mixed-method research approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. First, focus group discussion was employed to derive the ethnic stereotypical labels and their meaning. Next, a survey was conducted on 333 respondents in a few major cities in Peninsular Malaysia to identify the significant labels. Results show that stereotypical labels used by the urban Chinese can be divided into different categories, i.e., physical appearance, social status and character, and religion. The construction of the stereotypical labels is related to the concepts of race of Chinese and their interaction with other ethnic groups in everyday life. Result also shows that only a few traditional labels are popularly used and agreed by the urban Chinese. The Chinese inherit their ancestors' worldview and concept of race, which could be considered ethnocentric.

**Keywords:** Stereotype, Stereotypical Label, Racism, Ethnic Relations, Urban Chinese Malaysian.

## Introduction

The issue of ethnic conflict is common around the world, regardless of being developed or developing countries. An analysis of ninety-two armed conflicts during the years 1945-89 concluded that 'the engine that powers most of the wars in today's world is ethnic hostility' (Brogan, 1989: xi, as cited in Banton, 2009). The well-known examples of such conflicts include Serb-Croat, Hutu-Tutsi, American White-Black, and Palestinian-Jew (Fenton, 2004). More ethnic conflicts were seen through media coverage after 1990 which have had deleterious consequences on the peoples directly affected by them, and generally on regional and

international security. Ethnic conflict remains a threat to peace, stability, and prosperity (Anaemene, 2018).

Malaysia is a relatively peaceful country in consideration of ethnic conflict. However, there are a few ethnic conflicts recorded in history and one of the major ones is the May 13 racial riot which happened on 13 May 1969. The conflict involved the Malays and Chinese and caused several hundred casualties (Rahman, 1969; Comber, 1983; Kua, 2007 & 2008). Since then, national unity has become a major agenda in its nation-building project to foster harmonious ethnic relations in the country. It is important to realize that the issue of race is significantly related to politics and the economy in Malaysia. In politics, for instance, the drawing of electoral boundaries is based on the representative of each race within the area. In the economy, only a particular ethnic category is granted a special position and gains benefit from business opportunities, getting a business license, or the usage of land. At the same time, other groups who do not enjoy the special position may feel disappointed and marginalized. In culture and education, the issue of race is also noteworthy. The issue of language, national culture, and the intake of students into higher learning institutes are still closely tied to the issue of ethnicity in the country (Ting, 1986).

As suggested by Banton (2008), an idea of race is important in the understanding of ethnic relations. Herewith, this research focuses on the urban Chinese Malaysian's usage of the stereotypical labels on other races and their understanding or interpretations of the labels. According to Bargh (1997), stereotyping involves attributing to the individual in a group the features that are viewed as inherent in group membership, whether it is an age, gender, or national group. It also could be applied to the self as well as social others. Stereotypes resulted when individuals feel they must defend their group against other groups. A threat to an individual's self-image has been shown to trigger the goal of restoring self-esteem by denigrating other groups (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Spencer et al., 1998, as cited in Boster & Maltseva, 2006: 48). The basis of racism and stereotyping is primordial ties that are mainly based on physical differences and origin. This practice is against the 'ideal' modern society which emphasizes ability and achievement. Member of society is treated differently based on race and not on achievement or ability. This can be considered an inequitable practice because the physical differences and origin are ascribed and are not achieved. Thus, in the view of nation-building and the administration of a country, this issue certainly will jeopardize excellence and at the same time create dissatisfaction among the people who are discriminated against. The idea of stereotyping has long been part of the common sense of racism and even anti-racism. Challenging or undermining stereotypes is a common element in improving people's attitudes and behavior towards other ethnic categories (Murji, 2006).

In the past, there was little literature that discussed the issue of stereotypes in Malaysia. For instance, while Hirschman (1986) discussed the modern racial relations in Peninsular Malaysia were a byproduct of social forces engendered by the expansion of British colonialism of the late nineteenth century, he touched on the matter of stereotypes in his examination of the European attitudes towards the Malays, Chinese and Indians. In his writing, the Europeans described the Malays as happy underlings, lack industriousness, intellectually deficient, lazy, and shiftless but adventurous and noble. Meanwhile, in the Europeans' eyes, the Chinese were a capable race, willing to work in any climate, have great mercantile capacity but greedy.

Besides Hirschman et al (2014) compared the results of two surveys on racial stereotypes in Malaysia. One was conducted by Rabushka in 1967 in a few major cities in Peninsular, and another by Universiti Utara Malaysia research team in 2006 among university students. Both surveys used the same instrument developed by Rabushka for comparison. The research found that racial stereotypes in Malaysia were found not to influence behavioral choices among the ethnic groups.

Other than the literature on stereotypes and ethnic relations connection, Radzlan et al (2018) introduced a new method to measure racial stereotypes in Malaysia from a social psychological perspective. The study is important to understand ‘how “unspoken stereotypes”, or stereotypes cannot be expressed free in the socio-cultural context in Malaysia, especially towards the Malays and Chinese through implicit social cognition approaches’ (Radzlan et al., 2018:2133).

From the history of ethnic relations and previous literature, the importance of stereotypes’ role in determining ethnic relations in society is highlighted. Thus, this paper investigates a fundamental issue, which was yet to be discussed deeply. This paper aims to discuss the forms of stereotypical labels used by the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia towards other ethnic groups, mainly the Malays and Indians. And more importantly, aims to discuss the background of the formation of those stereotypical labels.

### **Methodology**

A sequential mixed-method research approach was used to collect data for this research. The sample population in the research comprises Chinese adults living in urban areas between the ages of 21-60 years old. The research first employed qualitative methods, i.e., focus-group discussion to derive the ethnic stereotypical labels and the meaning behind them. Next, a quantitative method i.e., a survey was conducted in three major cities of peninsular Malaysia, i.e., Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baharu, and Georgetown. Non-probability sampling was utilized to select the samples and a total of 333 questionnaires were completed by the respondents. The purpose of the survey is to gather information regarding respondents’ opinions on the stereotypical labels which include to what degree they agree with the labels and to what extent they utilize the labels and hear about the labels in their daily life. The degree of the usage and popularity of the labels in the questionnaire was measured by frequency. The respondents were asked to indicate their opinion by choosing the options of never, hardly, frequent, and very frequent on each item.

### **Result and Discussion**

There were many labels collected through the focus-group-discussion method in the research. However, in this writing, we only focus on the stereotypical labels that are popularly used by the respondents in their daily conversations. This means that only the labels shared by most of the respondents are considered popular and commonly used by the respondents. Besides, some of these labels were also written in the pronunciation of different Chinese dialects namely, *Hakka*, *Hokkien*, and *Cantonese*. Unless the labels carry a different meaning in dialect, all labels which carry similar meaning though in different dialects are categorized in one label and is written using the Chinese *pinyin* system.

In general, these popular stereotypical labels can be divided into a few categories according to their nature. However, there are a few labels that by nature are overlapping and therefore they are categorized according to their main or more significant nature. Most of the labels can be considered derogatory ethnic labels. As presented in Table 1 below, the stereotypical labels involved describing other ethnic groups as uncivilized, demons, and animals. There are also labels related to physical appearance, social status, and character, and in the context of religion.

Compared to the number of labels applied to the Indians, the Chinese apply more labels to the Malays. This is mostly due to the structure of the population in Malaysia with the Malays being the largest component (69.4 percent) and the Chinese the second largest (23.2 percent). Thus, compared to the Indians who are only 6.7 percent of the population, the Chinese interact more frequently with the Malays and further reflect more distinct perceptions and labels of them (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022).

Table 1  
*Stereotypical Labels Applied to the Malays and Indians*

Category	Stereotypical Labels	
	Malays	Indians
Uncivilized, Demonized, and Animalized	<i>Sakai, Huanna</i> (番仔, Hokkien), <i>Fanren</i> (番人), <i>Fangui</i> (番鬼), <i>Malaigui</i> (马来鬼), <i>Malaizhu</i> (马来猪), <i>Zhutou</i> (猪头).	<i>Siwugui</i> (死乌鬼)/ <i>heigui</i> (黑鬼)/ <i>Siheigui</i> (死黑鬼)
Physical Appearance	<i>Wantan/Yuntun</i> (云吞), <i>Penguin</i> , <i>Baotouren</i> (包头人)/ <i>Baotoude</i> (包头的), <i>Shuimu</i> (水母).	<i>Heiren</i> (黑人), <i>Heipi</i> (黑皮), <i>Dousi</i> (豆鼓), <i>Heitantou</i> (黑炭头), <i>Wujiling</i> (乌吉灵), <i>Shendanshu</i> (圣诞树).
Social status / Character	<i>Lalang</i> , <i>XingMade</i> (姓马的), <i>Diqiuwangzi</i> (地球王子), <i>Lanren</i> (懒人), <i>Agongzi</i> (阿公仔).	<i>Indudian</i> (印度癫), <i>jiugui</i> (酒鬼)/ <i>zuigui</i> (醉鬼).
Religion	<i>Meiyou chizhuroude</i> (没有吃猪肉的).	Nil

#### *Uncivilized, Demonized, and Animalized*

According to Dikotter (1992), the Five Classics of Confucianism play pivotal roles in influencing the Chinese's world views. The Five Classics are the ancient books that comprised the syllabus for the disciples of Confucius, namely the *Shujing* (Book of History), the *Shijing* (Book of Odes), the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), the *Liji* (Book of Rite), and the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals). These philosophies of Confucianism have molded the Chinese worldview to become narrow and idealistic. The classics are generally believed to have been oriented towards the world, or *tianxia* (all under heaven). The world was perceived as one homogeneous unity named *datong* (great community). Therefore, any kind of cultural pluralism was absent at that time and the Chinese worldview was dominated by the assumption of its cultural superiority.

The Chinese measured alien groups according to a yardstick by which those who did not follow 'Chinese ways' were considered barbarians or uncivilized. With these, the concepts such as *Huaxia* (华夏) and *ZhongGuo* (中国) were created. *Huaxia* carries the meaning of being highly civilized and *ZhongGuo* means that China was placed at the center of the world.

The degree of remoteness from the imperial center i.e., *ZhongGou* corresponded to levels of cultural savagery and physical coarseness. In the *Shanhaijing* (山海经), a work of geographical mythology, spirits, and monstrous beasts roamed the edges of the world beyond the *DaHuang* (Great Wilderness) which was written in the fourth century, recorded there was a tribe of *YiMuGuo* (one-eyed people), as well as a *Sanshouguo* (country of three-headed barbarians). There are also records regarding the Malays in the Chinese eye, for instance, in 750, Jianzhen (688-765) noticed the presence of many 'Brahmans, Persians and *Kunluns* [Malays]' in Canton. The *Kunluns* are presented as black, wavy-haired barbarians of the mountains and the jungles. Barbarians living beyond the realm of Chinese civilization were dehumanized. They were seen as devils or ghosts. Only the Chinese were described as *ren*, 'man', or 'human being', thus implicitly degrading alien groups to bestiality (Dikotter, 1992).

Hitherto, the traits of the conservative Chinese worldview could still be identified through the labels which the Malaysian Chinese apply to other alien ethnic groups. Among most the Chinese for instance, the labels *Sakai*, *fanzi* (番仔), *fanren* (番人), and *fangui* (番鬼) are commonly used to refer to the Malays. The label *Sakai* was not created by the Chinese and is not referred to by the Malays. In its original form, *Sakai* is one of the many tribal or indigenous groups in Peninsula Malaysia. The early Chinese borrowed this terminology and applied it to the Malays because for them, *Sakai* means uncivilized and primitive. Thus, together with the use of *fanzi*, *fanren* and *fangui*, the Chinese deems the Malays as barbarians, uncivilized people, or an uncivilized devil. The terminology '*fan*' refers to the uncivilized places that are far from the center of civilization, i.e., *Huaxia* or *Zhongguo* as mentioned earlier. It is not only applied to alien groups, but sometimes it is also used to refer to the foreign food or product, for example, *fanshu* (番薯, potato), *fanqie* (番茄, tomato), and *fangan* (肥皂, in Hakka and Cantonese, dialects meaning soap).

There are other labels that the Chinese apply to the Malays, i.e., *Malaigui* (马来鬼), *Malaizhu* (马来猪), *zhutou* (猪头). The word *Malai* refers to Malay, *gui* means ghost, demon, or devil in the Chinese language. In this context, it refers to the Malays as ghosts. Thus, *Malaigui* refers to the Malay Ghost or devil. The word *zhu* (猪) refers to pig and *Malaizhu* means the Malay Pig. *Tou* (头) refers to the head, thus *zhutou* (猪头) means pig head.

Table 2

*Urban Chinese's Perceptions toward Stereotypical Labels of the Malays (Category Uncivilized, Demonized, and Animalized)*

Stereotypical Labels (Category Uncivilized, Demonized, and Animalized)	Chinese's Perceptions					
	Used/Heard %				Agree? %	
	(n)				(n)	
	Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
<i>Sakai</i> (uncivilized)	34.5 (115)	31.2 (104)	18.6 (62)	15.6 (52)	36.9 (123)	63.1 (210)
<i>Fanzi</i> or <i>fanren</i> (番仔 or uncivilized)	24.3 (81)	24.0 (80)	19.2 (64)	32.4 (108)	45.9 (153)	54.1 (180)
<i>Fangui</i> (番鬼 or uncivilized ghost)	54.4 (181)	21.6 (72)	13.2 (44)	10.8 (36)	23.4 (78)	76.6 (255)
<i>Malaigui</i> (马来鬼 or Malay ghost)	18.0 (60)	29.1 (97)	27.0 (90)	25.8 (86)	46.2 (154)	53.8 (179)
<i>Malaizhu</i> (马来猪 or Malay pig)	20.7 (69)	22.5 (75)	19.2 (64)	37.5 (125)	47.1 (157)	52.9 (176)
<i>Zhutou</i> (猪头 or pig head)	29.1 (97)	23.7 (79)	21.3 (71)	25.8 (86)	40.5 (135)	59.5 (198)

Note. Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No

Referring to Table 2, the urban Chinese seemed not agreeing to all the stereotypical labels suggested by the respondents in the focus group. Among the labels, *fanzi* or *fanren*, *Malaigui* and *Malaizhu* are more popularly used in the Chinese community. More than 50 percent of the respondents used or heard others using the labels frequently or very frequently in their daily life. Besides, most of the respondents disagree with the usage of the labels towards the Malays, especially on the labels *Sakai* and *fangui*, we can see that more than 60 percent of the respondents disagreed with the labels.

To the Indians, the Chinese commonly use *heigui* (黑鬼) or *siheigui* (死黑鬼) and *siwugui* (死乌鬼). The words *hei* (黑) and *wu* (乌) mean black or dark, and *si* (死) refers to dead. It may not make much sense if the combination of *si* and *heigui* is literally translated to 'dead black ghost' or 'dead black demon' in the English language. In my opinion, the word *si* used in this context is more suitable to be understood as 'unwanted, hated or disliked'. In Chinese society, the term *si* is very commonly used to curse an opponent or a person Chinese dismay with. Thus, *siheigui* is better to be understood as an 'unwanted black demon or dark ghost'. And as shown in table 3, the majority of the respondents (59.8 percent) disagreed with the usage of the label, and only 22.2 percent of the respondents used and heard other Chinese using the label frequently and 17.4 percent very frequently.

Table 3

*Chinese's Perceptions towards Stereotypical Labels of the Indians (Category Uncivilized, Demonized, and Animalized)*

Stereotypical Labels (Category Uncivilized, Demonized, and Animalized)	Chinese's Perceptions					
	Used/Heard				Agree?	
	%				%	
	(n)				(n)	
	Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
<i>Siheigui</i> (死黑鬼) / <i>heigui</i> (黑鬼)	31.5 (105)	28.8 (96)	22.2 (74)	17.4 (58)	39.9 (133)	59.8 (199)

Note. Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No

### *Physical Appearance*

The second category is formed based on how the Chinese perceive the Malays and Indians' appearance. The stereotypical labels for the Malays, especially the female include *wantan* or *yuntun* (云吞), *penguin*, *baotouren* (包头人) or *baotoude* (包头的), and *shuimu* (水母). All these labels carry similar meanings although using different words. *Baotouren* or *baotoude* refers to the Malay females who cover their hair with a cloth. *Bao* (包) refers to cover or tie. The term *wantan* or *yuntun* refers to a kind of Chinese traditional food, i.e. dumplings. And *shuimu* (水母) refers to a kind of sea creature, i.e. jellyfish. These two terms together with the label *penguin* were used to label the Malay females because of their appearance with heads covered and wearing gowns (*hijab*) similar to the shape of dumplings, jellyfish, or penguins. When looking into the urban Chinese community's opinion on the labels, according to the figures shown in Table 4, most of the labels are considered not popularly used in society. The majority, i.e. more than 50 percent of the total respondents never or hardly used or heard about others using the labels, especially on the labels such as *wantan* (60.6 percent), *penguin* (71.5 percent), *baotoude* (67.5 percent), and *shuimu* (75.4 percent). Relatively, the label, *baotouren* is more commonly used.

Table 4

*Chinese's Perceptions of Stereotypical Labels of the Malays (Category Physical Appearance)*

No	Stereotypical Labels (Category Physical Appearance)	Chinese's Perceptions					
		Used/Heard				Agree?	
		%				%	
		(n)				(n)	
		Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
1	<i>Wantan</i> ((云吞or Dumpling)	41.1 (137)	19.5 (65)	20.4 (68)	18.9 (63)	44.1 (147)	55.9 (186)
2	Penguin	53.8 (179)	17.7 (59)	17.4 (58)	11.1 (37)	33.0 (110)	67.0 (223)
3	<i>Baotouren</i> (包头人)	31.8 (106)	22.5 (75)	26.4 (88)	19.2 (64)	49.5 (165)	50.5 (168)
4	<i>Baotoude</i> (包头的)	38.4 (128)	29.1 (97)	14.4 (48)	18.0 (60)	32.4 (108)	67.6 (225)
5	<i>Shuimu</i> (水母or Jellyfish)	61.3 (204)	14.1 (47)	16.2 (54)	8.4 (28)	26.7 (89)	73.3 (244)

Note. Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No

For the Indians, common labels are *heiren* (黑人), *heipi* (黑皮), *heitantou* (黑炭头), *dousi* (豆鼓), *wujiling* (乌吉灵), and *shendanshu* (圣诞树). The Indians have the darkest skin color among the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia. This skin color has become a significant difference among the ethnic groups in the view of physical differences. *Heiren* means black people, *heipi* means black skin and *heitantou* means black charcoal head. *Dousi* is a kind of bean which is black and has shiny skin. It is also used to illustrate the skin color of the Indians.

The label *wujiling* refers to the black *keling*. In today's context, it is an insult to the Indians if they are called *keling*. In 2003, an Indian Muslim group, *Angkatan Pelopor India Muslim Selangor dan Wilayah Persekutuan* (APIM), filed a lawsuit against the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (DBP) or The Institute of Language and Literature, over the inclusion of the word *keling* in the official *Kamus Dewan Malay* dictionary. They claimed that the word is a racial slur and derogatory and found offense with the dictionary's inclusion of examples such as *keling mabuk todi*, which is an illustration of one who is fond of talking nonsense; *keling haram*, is an illustration of someone who makes unnecessary noise; and *keling pelikat*, is a definition of an Indian Muslim, in the dictionary (The Star, 2003). A similar argument erupted in 2021, DEP received heavy criticism over the definition of the word '*tambi*' (means "little brother") was defined as "a call for *Keling* people younger than us" in its website (Cheah, 2021). Eventually, DBP agreed to replace the word "Keling" with the word "Indian" (Hassandarvish, 2021).

It is believed that the word *keling* has been derived from the name of the kingdom of Kalinga. However, it has been used to describe south Indians since early times and not specifically to inhabitants of Kalinga. There is also another version of the origin of this term which is recorded in *The Malay Annals* or *Sejarah Melayu*. In this record, the term *keling* appears in the second chapter dealing with the exploits of Raja Chulan, whom the emperor of China is said to have referred to as Rajah Keling and according to Zain (n.d.), if this chapter is indeed a distant memory of the invasion of Rajendra Chola during the Sri Vijaya period (circa 1025 A.D.), one can surmise that the *keling* referred to in the chapter may indeed be the Cholas of South India rather than Kalinga in the east of India. Zain also wrote that according to 'A Descriptive Dictionary of British Malaya', the term 'Kling' is defined as "a general term for all the people of Hindustan and for the country itself". And in Isabella Bird's famous travelogue of the Malay Peninsula, "The Golden Chersonese" written in 1879, described the *klings* as natives of southern India. No matter how, Zain concludes that none of these examples of the use of the word or references to *kelings* – from the *Malay Annals* in the sixteenth century down to the British travelogues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – were in any way used in any derogatory sense or intended as racial slurs. It was simply a word to describe the people of South India or their descendants in the Peninsula.

Another label in the category of appearance is *shentanshu* (圣诞树) which literally means Christmas tree. This label is applied to Indian women. Traditionally, when the Indian women in Malaysia wear their traditional costumes, they decorate themselves with jewels and accessories. In the Chinese eye, this decoration is similar to the decoration on the Christmas tree which is full of sparkling items and colored ornaments. In my companion, the label *shentanshu* is not only applied to the Indian women by the Chinese. It is also common for the



Chinese to label any woman, regardless of their ethnic group, who “over decorates” herself in accessories and make-up as *shentanshu* in their daily conversation.

Table 5

*Chinese’s Perceptions of Stereotypical Labels of the Indians (Category Physical Appearance)*

No	Stereotypical Labels (Category Physical Appearance)	Chinese’s Perceptions					
		Used/Heard				Agree?	
		%				%	
		(n)				(n)	
		Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
1	<i>Heiren</i> (黑人 or black man)	15.0 (50)	20.7 (69)	32.4 (108)	31.8 (106)	64.0 (213)	36.0 (120)
2	<i>Heipi</i> (黑皮 or black skin)	14.4 (48)	21.3 (71)	31.8 (106)	32.4 (108)	61.0 (203)	39.0 (130)
3	<i>Heitantou</i> (黑炭头 or black coal)	47.4 (158)	28.2 (94)	15.0 (50)	9.3 (31)	33.0 (110)	67.0 (223)
4	<i>Dousi</i> (豆鼓 or black bean)	45.3 (151)	24.6 (82)	16.8 (56)	13.2 (44)	33.6 (112)	66.4 (221)
5	<i>Wujiling</i> (乌吉灵 or black keling)	29.4 (98)	26.1 (87)	25.2 (84)	19.2 (64)	45.6 (152)	54.4 (181)
6	<i>Shendanshu</i> (圣诞树 or Christmas tree)	66.7 (222)	16.2 (54)	8.7 (29)	8.4 (28)	18.6 (62)	81.4 (271)

Note. Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No.

When comparing the Chinese’s perceptions of the Malays and the Indians’ physical appearance, it seems that the Indian’s physical appearance is more significant. Labels like *heiren* and *heipi* were deemed by the respondents as popularly used labels towards the Indians in the society. 32.4 percent of the respondents frequently used or heard of others using the label *heiren* and 31.8 percent very frequent. Similarly, 31.8 percent of the respondents frequently used or heard of others using the label *heipi*, and 32.4 percent very frequently. And respectively there are 64.0 percent and 61.0 percent of the respondents agreed on the usage of the labels.

*Social Status and Characters*

There are also labels created and applied to other ethnic groups by the Chinese which signify the ethnic groups’ social status and characters. This kind of label is especially evident when applied to the Malays. In this context, we found the labels such as *Diqiuwangzi* (地球王子) and *Agongzi* (阿公仔) are related to the Malays’ status in this country as indigenous people or more commonly categorized as the *Bumiputera* which is also popularly translated in the English language as “the son of the soil” by many. A label like *diquiwangzi* is a direct literal translation of *Bumiputera* which is the combination of *Diqiu* means the earth or *bumi* and *wangzi* mean prince or *putera*. Meanwhile, the label *Agongzi* or *Agongkia* (in Hokkien dialect) refers to the Malays as the sons of Yang di-Pertuan Agong (the king of Malaysia) and thus their status is different from other citizens in the country. These two stereotypical labels highlight how the Chinese perceive the status of the Malays in the country. It is very common that

among the Chinese community, the Malays are perceived to be granted “Malay special rights”, “Malay special privileges” or simply Malay “rights”.

As it is written in Quek’s article, after many years of independence, racial issues continue to dominate Malaysian politics, and championing Malay rights remains the single dominant ideology of UMNO (United Malays National Organization) – the only ruling power that this nation has known since Independence. Quek (2008) emphasizes that thousands of speeches have been made championing this Malay cause, using various terminologies such as Malay “special rights”, Malay “special privileges” or Malay rights, often invoking the nation’s Constitution as the legal back-up. Yet, the familiar terminologies such as Malay “special rights”, Malay “special privileges” or Malay “rights” are nowhere to be found in the Malaysian Federal Constitution. Instead, the term “the special position of the Malays” appears twice, in Clause (1) and Clause (2) of Article 153, which is titled “Reservation of quotas in respect of services, permits, etc, for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak.” (Malaysia, 2007)

Clause (1) of Article 153 states: “It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong [the King] to safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article”. So, according to Quek (2008), the first understanding that we must have of Article 153 is that it is meant to protect the interests of not only the Malays but also those of the non-Malays. Besides, Quek also highlighted the deliberate use of the words “safeguard” and “special position” (instead of “special rights” or “special privileges”). The choice of these words must be understood in the historical context of the drafting of this Constitution half a century ago when Malays were economically and educationally backward in comparison with other races. It was thought fit and proper then that there must be “safeguards” to protect the Malays from being swarmed over by other races. Hence, the creation of the “special position” of the Malays, was intended for a defensive purpose: to protect for survival. The meticulous avoidance of using words like “rights” and “privileges” and the choice of the word “safeguard” was calculated to reflect its defensive nature (Malaysia, 2007).

Due to the stereotyping of the status of the Malays who are perceived as having special rights and special privileges, the Chinese further label the Malays as *xingmade* (姓马的) and *lanren* (懒人). The label *xingmade* means “those whose surname is Ma”. In the Chinese language, the Malay people are *Malairen* (马来人). Thus, as in the Chinese name, the first character refers to the surname of the person, the Chinese use “Ma” as the surname for the Malays when referring to them in their conversation. Yet, the usage of the label *xingmade* does not stop at this simple or surface level, when the Chinese apply the label, it also carries the intention to differentiate the status of the Malays as members of the out-group who are granted special rights and privileges.

Further, the Chinese label the Malays as *lanren* (懒人), which carries the meaning of “lazy people”. This label has been applied to the Malays since colonial times. For instance, the British officer, Frank Swettenham once wrote that the British viewed the Malays as being lazy, unproductive, and unwilling to work for wages; hence it was difficult for them to be

considered a potential pool of labor in the colonial economy (Andaya, 2001). Swettenham even suggested “The leading characteristic of the Malay of every class is a disinclination to work’ (as quoted in Alatas, 1977: 44).

From the Chinese’s perspective, besides stereotyping the character of the Malays as lazy, the label *lanren* is also related to their status as “bumiputera” who enjoy the special rights. With this stereotype, the Chinese assume that the Malays need not worry about how to make a living or work hard to survive because the government will subsidize them, or quoting the Chinese common comment, “the Malays are reared by the government”. Related to this, the Chinese assume that the reason why the Malays are able and prefer to have many children in comparison to the Chinese, although many of these Malays are from the lower-income category and unable to provide good quality socialization for their children, is because the government will help to “take care” of their children. And unfortunately, the stereotypical label of the Malays character further enhances the Chinese’s stereotypical thinking that the government sector will finally absorb the lazy Malays. This also causes the Chinese to assume that working in the public or government sector is an easy and lazy job. To them, this also justifies why most of the government servants in Malaysia are Malays.

Table 6

*Chinese’s Perceptions of Stereotypical Labels of the Malays (Category Social status / Character)*

No	Stereotypical Labels (Category Social status / Character)	Chinese’s Perceptions					
		Used/Heard				Agree?	
		%				%	
		(n)				(n)	
		Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
1	<i>Diqiuwangzi</i> (地球王子 or prince of the earth)	61.6 (205)	18.0 (60)	9.3 (31)	11.1 (37)	27.6 (92)	72.4 (241)
2	<i>Agongzi</i> (阿公仔 or sons of Yang di-Petuan Agong)	52.9 (176)	21.3 (71)	13.2 (44)	12.6 (42)	23.4 (78)	76.6 (255)
3	<i>Xingmade</i> (姓马的 or those whose surname is Ma)	38.7 (129)	21.9 (73)	21.0 (70)	18.3 (61)	36.0 (120)	64.0 (213)
4	<i>Lanren</i> (懒人 or lazy people)	22.5 (75)	17.1 (57)	33.0 (110)	27.3 (91)	60.7 (202)	39.3 (131)

*Note.* Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No

Table 6 shows the respondents’ opinions on the Malays in the context of social status and character. The result shows that except for the label *lanren* or lazy people, the rest of the labels were considered as not popular. There are an only total of 20.4 percent respondents ever heard or used frequently or very frequently the label *diquiwangzi* or prince of the earth and 25.8 percent for *agongzi* or sons of *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (king). And there are a total of 39.3 percent of the respondents frequently or very frequently heard or used the label *xingmade*. The majority of the respondents gave positive answers toward the label *lanren* or lazy people. There is 33.0 percent of respondents frequently used or heard the label and 27.3 percent very frequently. At the same time, 60.7 percent of them agree with this label.

In the same category, the labels applied to the Indians are *Indudian* (印度癡), *jiugui* (酒鬼), or *zuigui* (醉鬼). In Mandarin, the Chinese address the Indians as *Induren* (印度人). In the first label above, the word *dian* (癡) refers to crazy and easily getting mad. To a certain extent, it also carries the meaning of dangerous and violent. This stereotypical perception of the Indians is also probably greatly influenced by one of the social illnesses in the Indian community in Malaysia, i.e. alcoholism (Jernigan & Indran, 1999). In Malaysia, the alcohol problem has often been sidelined as merely the "*samsu* problem of the poor Indians". *Samsu*, beer, and toddy are the most commonly consumed alcoholic drinks. The problem is of greater concern in the Indian community who might have been introduced to toddy by the colonial plantation owners who wanted to keep their laborers under control and dependent. Today, in Malaysian society, the Indian community has the highest incidence of alcoholism, which cuts across all classes (Ramachandran, 2002). Due to this, there are labels such as *jiugui* (酒鬼) or *zuigui* (醉鬼), which refer the Indians to "alcoholic ghost" or "drunken ghost" applied by the Chinese to the Indians. Again, similar to the label *shentanshu* in the previous part, the two labels refer to Indians as *jiugui* or *zuigui* is also applied by the Chinese to anyone who is a drunkard regardless of race.

Table 7

*Chinese's Perceptions of Stereotypical Labels of the Indians (Category Social status / Character)*

No	Stereotypical Labels (Category Social status / Character)	Chinese's Perceptions					
		Used/Heard				Agree?	
		% (n)				% (n)	
		Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
1	<i>Indudian</i> (印度癡 or mad Indians)	46.5 (155)	28.8 (96)	15.3 (51)	9.3 (31)	26.7 (89)	73.3 (244)
2	<i>Jiugui</i> (酒鬼)/ <i>zuigui</i> (醉鬼) or drunken ghost)	15.3 (51)	21.6 (72)	32.4 (108)	30.6 (102)	64.0 (213)	36.0 (120)

Note. Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No.

The result from the survey shows that the majority of the urban Chinese disagreed with the label *Indudian*. Only 15.3 percent of the respondents said that they frequently heard or used the label and 9.3 percent admitted that they very frequently used or heard the label. On the contrary, the label *jiugui* or *zuigui* is very popularly used among the urban Chinese. The data shows that there are respectively 32.4 percent and 30.6 percent of the respondents answered that they frequently or very frequently used or heard the label and 64.0 percent of them agree with the label.

### Religion

The only label that can be categorized under the context of religion is when the Chinese refer to the Malays as *meiyou chi zhrou de* (没有吃猪肉的), those who do not eat pork. To understand why eating pork or not eating pork can be a label, one must understand the background of Malaysia as a multiethnic society and its policies in nation-building.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religion society composed of three major ethnic groups i.e. Malay, Chinese and Indian. As suggested by Shamsul (2001), Malays and non-Malays have different interpretations of the meaning of their aspired nation or 'nation of intent'. While the Malays would like to maintain their dominancy over the country, the non-Malays would like to be recognized and treated equally as citizens. These ethnic categories, which were first constructed by the British colonial government, became a social norm, although each of these categories shares a common flaw in the fact that they never represent a homogenous group of people but comprise many other sub-ethnic groups. Nevertheless, in the aspect of religion, although there is a substantial minority of Indians who are Muslim and some converted Chinese (especially those who have married Malays), Islam is still considered the religion of the Malays. At the same time, Indians are expected to be Hindus and Chinese to be Buddhist/Taoist. Religious injunctions, in fact, also create an ethnic boundary. In the context of the Chinese and Malay relationship, religion plays a major role as the boundary between Chinese and Malays. The Malaysian Constitution lays down the ethnic boundary between the Malays and Chinese. As defined by the Constitution, Malay is 'a person, who professed the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs and is a citizen of Malaysia' (Malaysia, 2007). While the Malay language serves as the national language of Malaysia and all citizens of Malaysia are expected to learn it in school and Malay culture is a vibrant concept that is difficult to define, Islam becomes the most significant ethnic characteristic of the Malay and the distinguishing boundary between the Malays and Chinese.

This distinguishing boundary has been made clearer with the implementation of the cultural and religious policies in Malaysia. In the 1970s the state cultural policies were most influenced by the Malay cultural nationalists, and in the 1980s the state became more pressured by the "Malay Islamic nationalists". The pressure on the state to be more Islamic was largely due to the opposition Malay party, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), turning to use Islam as its main means to critique the state and to win the Malay votes. Partly to contain and counter the increasing influence of Islam among the Malays, the state expanded its Islamization policy. The co-option of Anwar Ibrahim 1981, then the leading Islamic youth leader, into the UMNO and Government as part of the state's strategy to win over the more Islamic segment of the Malay community (Tan, 2005).

The impact of the state Islamization policy generated unease and anxieties among the non-Muslim population in general and the Chinese in particular. This was because as part of the expanded Islamization, certain Chinese practices and symbols deemed offensive to the Muslims were either eliminated from or confined to the periphery of the public space. For example, in certain wet markets, the selling of pork was either banned outright or, if allowed to be sold, they were confined to spaces hidden from the public, frequently a little hidden corner in the car park level. Indeed, there was a generalized attempt by the state to erase the "pig" symbol from the public space, including textbooks, television, and government cafeterias (Tan, 2005).

Today, not offering pork or food containing pork or lard to the Malays is an important general norm in the context of Chinese-Malay interaction. Whereas in Kelantan the Chinese must adjust socially more to the Malays as shown in their manner of selling and buying pork in the private Chinese domain, in Kuala Lumpur where the Chinese are numerous, they do not have

to 'concede' so much socio-cultural adjustment to the Malays. In Kuala Lumpur, the Chinese can sell and buy pork freely in the markets and the peddlers can even sell pork from house to house using motorbikes or vans. In this situation, the Malays have adjusted to the cultural needs of the Chinese. This form of ethnic relations functions well, if the Chinese observe the general norm of not insulting the Malays with pork (such as throwing pieces of pork or pig's bones around the compound of Malay houses or teasing the Malays to buy pork), and Muslim politicians do not turn this aspect of cultural diversity into a political issue (Tan, 2005).

Table 8

*Chinese's Perceptions towards Stereotypical Labels of the Malays (Category Religion)*

No	Stereotypical Labels (Category Religion)	Chinese's Perceptions					
		Used/Heard				Agree?	
		% (n)				% (n)	
		Ne	H	F	VF	Y	N
1	<i>Meiyou chi zhurou de</i> (没有吃猪肉的, those who do not eat pork)	34.5 (115)	25.5 (85)	21.3 (71)	18.6 (62)	53.8 (179)	46.2 (154)

Note. Ne – Never; H – Hardly; F – Frequent; VF – Very Frequent; Y – Yes; N – No.

As shown in the table above, the label *meiyou chi zhurou de* is considered moderately used in the urban Chinese community. There are only 21.3 percent and 18.6 percent of the respondents frequently or very frequently used or heard the label. Simultaneously, there are slightly more than half (53.8 percent) of the respondents agreed with the label.

### Conclusion

Stereotypical labels toward other races exist and are used in Chinese everyday life and most of them are derogatory ethnic labels. These labels are constructed when the Chinese interact with the alien group in the social world when the Chinese observed their physical differences, character, social status, daily practices, and behaviors in daily life. The Chinese inherit their ancestors' worldview and concept of race, which could be considered ethnocentric. Yet, in this study, many respondents are unable to provide the meaning of the labels.

Though many labels were derived through the method of focus group discussion, not all the labels suggested were agreed upon by most of the respondents in the survey. Only a few of the labels are considered popularly used by the urban Chinese. *Malaigui*, *Malaizhu*, and *lanren* for the Malays, and *heiren*, *heipi*, and *jiugui* or *zuigui* for the Indians were among the labels. Though the rest of the labels were considered rare still there are some Chinese who are using them in their daily life.

Stereotypical labels, especially the derogatory ones are not only used by the Chinese towards other ethnic groups in Malaysia. The Malays and Indians have different labels to apply to the Chinese and one another too. To enhance the unity and positive relationship among the different ethnic groups, the derogatory ethnic labels must be erased. Insufficient knowledge about others, superficial interactions among different groups, ethnic polarization, and politicizing ethnic issues are among the challenges to improving the situation in Malaysia.

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