

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Champa immigrants in Malaysia: Environmental and social-psychological adaptation

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## ABSTRACT

Culturally and historically, the migration of Champa immigrants to Malaysia shows the complicated interaction between environmental adaptation and social-psychological procedures as a significant event. From 1975, this migration was part of a government-led immigration policy that caused the first generation of Champa immigrants to Malaysia. With cultural ecology and social identity principle, the study examines how these immigrants have overcome to environmental challenges and controlled social and mental variations over the past five decades. Based on fieldwork, interviews, and file analysis, the research digs ecological adaptation measures, cultural identity protection, and the difficulties of marginalization and integration into Malaysian society. From a cultural ecology view, Champa immigrants show tough abilities to adapt to their environment and sustain their livelihoods by agriculture, fishing, and trade in many areas. These conventional activities provide financial steadiness and cultivate association with local Malaysian communities. However, the integration procedure is usually impeded by systemic marginalization, leading to relatively restricted involvement in wider Malaysian social and cultural frameworks. On basis of social identity principle, how Champa immigrants actively preserve their cultural identity by conventional customs, religious measures, and cultural rituals, is highlighted. These act as core points of their collective identity and an origin of resilience against assimilation stress. This dual attention to ecological adaptation and cultural identity, and also emphasizes how immigrants control the difficulties of a novel environment and protect a deep relationship with their cultural roots. The outcomes highlight the interconnection among the environment, social identity, and community resilience, providing precious understandings of the complicated procedures of migration, adaptation, and the protection of culture in diasporic communities.

**Keywords:** Champa immigrants; environmental adaptation; social-psychological; cultural identity

## 1. Introduction

As an influential ethnic group in Southeast Asia, the Chams descended from the once-powerful Champa Kingdom, experienced a profound process of Indianization and eventually Islamization in Central Vietnam. Well-known for its maritime prowess, Champa was a core hub in the Spice Route. The kingdom kept wide political, financial, and cultural bonds with regions including Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, the Malay

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Archipelago, and northern Vietnam[1]. The Champa Kingdom was noteworthy in Southeast Asia due to its unique art, historical framework, and maritime transaction networks during the year 750 to 1400 and once establish the system of “trade diaspora”. [2] Its fortunes took a major turn in 1471, when the capture of Vijaya in the invasion of Vietnamese regime forced the people to go into exile, with some Champa residents migrating to Malaysia, constituting a nearly group of immigrants[3]. The immigrants from Champa, currently dispersed across Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia and Thailand, keep protecting their distinct culture, language, and customs [4]. These Champa descendants started migrating to Malaysia in the mid 20th century, especially after the government-led immigration policy of 1975, which was designed to resettle ethnic minorities in the state. Shortly after the successive falls of Phnom Penh, Vientiane, and Saigon to the Communists, there was a massive exodus of people from Indochina. Many traveled on small vessels, trying to reach the nearest non-Communist country, with the hope of resettling in a third country (such as the US or France) [5]. The associated process for Cham has greatly formed the demographics of some fields in Malaysia, where a lot of Champa immigrants currently live in close-knit communities. These groups mostly live in countries including Kelantan and Terengganu, where they have kept factors of their ancestral culture and integrated into wider Malaysian society.

The adaptation and survival measures of the Champa descendant communities in Malaysia are investigated, highlighting how environmental and social-mental elements have formed their historical growth. To be specific, for this group, climate, geography, and resource availability have required that the associated communities modify their conventional lifestyles for better integration in the new country. Environmental challenges have forced these communities to adapt their traditional lifestyles in order to sustain their livelihoods. Besides, the social-psychological factors, such as ethnic identity, belonging, and cultural assimilation dynamics, that form the experiences of these immigrants, are also explored. How have environmental elements influenced the adaptation procedure of these communities? What impacts have social-psychological parts exerted on their capacity of preserving cultural traditions and controlling their identity under a novel socio-political background? These issues are key to knowing the dual procedures of social-mental and environmental adaptation. The research is crucial as it improves the insight into the adaptation process of marginalized ethnic groups, providing fresh understandings of the interplay between environmental and social-mental elements in forming cultural identity. Besides, combining with views from environmental and social psychology in the structure of cultural research was proposed, making contributions to a deeper insight into the difficulties and resilience immigrant communities meet under their brand-new background.

## 2. Literature review

The past research of the sociocultural aspects of the Cham community in Malaysia mainly emphasize their history, origins, and religious impacts. Associated research has recorded the migration of the Cham from Cambodia and Vietnam to Malaysia following the fall of Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City in 1975[5]. A great turning point for the Cham was marked by this mobility from the original state to the new settlement place. As they adapted to the unfamiliar environment step by step, they started shaping close associations with the Malay people. Early research emphasized the Cham community’s cultural, linguistic, religious, and social integration into Malaysian society, taking priority over the environmental and mental adaptations that boosted their transformation.

Many experts focus on the cultural development of the Cham in the Malay Archipelago, which was discussed in a lot of local literatures including *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Tuhfah al-Nafis*, and

*Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*[6]. The associated publications clarified the historical associations between the Cham and the Malay communities and the same Islamic heritage[7], which drives further combination. Other research has summarized the migration patterns of the Cham during the 1970s, clarifying how they integrated into Malay society and kept their unique Islamic customs[8]. All related researches describe how the Cham community's adaptation entailed cultural changes and mental modifications as they negotiated to preserve their religious identity and navigated a novel sociopolitical landscape.

In the 21st century, most of the Cham communities in Malaysia had integrated into Malay mainstream society, profiting from the cultural and religious similarities between the two ethnics. Past study takes priority over the effect of mixed marriages between Cham and Malay noble kins in driving cultural bonds and the Cham community's growth in areas including Melaka and Kelantan[9]. Cultural elements have been important in driving the assimilation of the Cham community into Malay culture. Besides, the associated research has shown the growth of the Cham community in states including Melaka and Kelantan, paying attention to fields including language, religion, education, and the effect of females. To sum up, despite their origins as immigrants, the Cham community in Malaysia has mentally adapted by adapting to local Malay culture, particularly by language, religion, and social roles, which has allowed smoother integration into the wiser Malaysian society[10].

For locating the adaptation processes, environmental and mental adaptation of immigrant minorities have been investigated. One theoretical structure, the Acculturation Model, pays attention to how immigrants mentally adapt to novel cultural environments. This model encompasses ideas including integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, which assist in knowing how immigrants navigate between protecting their cultural heritage and combining with their new social backgrounds[11]. Other research on the mental adjustment of ethnic minorities has investigated the pressure and identity difficulties met by migrants meeting novel social standards. According to these outcomes, people keeping great associations with their ethnic identity and accepting factors of the foreign culture, suffer from less pressure and better modification[12]. Further studies emphasize the effect of cultural identification conservation in the mental welfare of immigrant societies, highlighting the significance of protecting cultural measures and faiths for psychological toughness[13].

Precious understandings of the environmental and psychological adaptation procedures of the Cham society in Malaysia are offered. Similar to other groups, the Cham have met the dual difficulty of protecting their unique cultural identification and blending into the social, political, and financial frameworks of their novel context. Employing local agricultural measures, fishing approaches, and social frameworks have been included by their environmental adaptation, while mental adaptation is shown in their contributions to keeping a feeling of belonging to their ancestral culture and integrating into Malaysian community. The procedure of identity discussion has been especially key to their capacity of smoothly integrating while keeping their distinct cultural heritage.

According research, the Cham society has protected parts of their cultural identification and adapted to the unconventional context. The environmental adaptation encompasses blending into local financial events and social frameworks, but mentally, they try to keep their identity among social and religious standards in Malaysia. These modifications emphasize the dual difficulties of cultural adaptation for protecting heritage and meeting a novel cultural background. The Cham community's adaptation has been formed by the main Malay culture, resulting in the employment of similar agricultural measures and social frameworks. In the meantime, they keep upholding their Islamic identity. Knowing these elements is key to baking their blend and protecting their language and culture with regard to modernization.

### **3. Methodology**

The adaptation procedures of the Cham descendant communities in Malaysia are investigated with a qualitative method integrating ethnographic and historical approaches. The ethnographic method is key to obtaining a deep insight into the living experiences, cultural measures, and identity protection measures of the community. In the meantime, historical approaches offer the required background to know their migration history and sociocultural changes as time passes. These approaches work to provide an integrated opinion on the Cham community's strip of adaptation.

Information gathering for this study encompasses three main approaches: fieldwork, file study, and environmental research. Making semi-structured interviews with members of the Cham community is involved in fieldwork, paying attention to their cultural, religious, and social experience. The interviews are for people across various generations to show different opinions. Participant discovery is also made by direct engagement in community events, religious ceremonies, and daily activities to better know their cultural expressions in practice.

Documentation study researches historical records, migration records, and cultural artifacts to complement the fieldwork. Researching drafts, religious texts, and conventional crafts is involved to dig how the Cham have protected their cultural heritage as time passes. Historical information from these origins will be cross-referenced with modern outcomes to recognize modes of cultural continuity and variation. Besides, environmental discussion investigates the ecological parts of Cham settlement fields in Malaysia, such as resource adoption, agricultural measures, and the influence of environmental variations on their lives. This offers understandings of how the Cham community has made interaction with and adapted to their environment.

Sampling for this research pays attention to core settlements of Cham-descendant societies in Malaysia, especially in regions with the most prominent population. Purposive sampling guarantees that various groups in these communities are represented. It allows a more subtle insight into how different elements affect the adaptation of various subgroups in the Cham community. The information gathered is explored applying thematic research and comparative approaches. Thematic research also classified qualitative information into core topics, including cultural adaptation, identity protection, and blend into Malaysian society. Comparative research is also adopted to assess historical information alongside present outcomes, emphasizing continuities and variations in their adaptation measures. This comprehensive method guarantees an integrated insight into the environmental, historical, and sociocultural elements affecting the Cham community's adaptation procedure in Malaysia.

### **4. Historical transformation of Champa descendants**

The arrival of the Cham community in Malaysia is not a novel phenomenon. Historically, the Cham and the Malays in the Malay Peninsula have kept close associations. The waves of migration by the Cham community from Cambodia to the Malay Peninsula have continued to the current day. Their migration was caused by political upheavals resulting from the rivalry between the Western bloc, led by the United States, and the Communist bloc. Most of them arrived from Cambodia around the 1970s and 1980s and were referred to as "Cambodian refugees". There were three waves of migration between 1975 and 1979. The first wave happened in April 1975, next to the Khmer Rouge's seizure of power in Cambodia. During that time, around 33000 Cambodians fled their homeland, such as government officials, intellectuals, and scholars. At the beginning, they were placed in refugee camps in Thailand. The second wave of migration happened in December 1978, after Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, and was soon followed by the third wave in 1979.

The main element boosting them to leave Cambodia or Vietnam was the political disorder in the Indochina region, which was finally overtaken by communist forces. The political unrest in Cambodia led to a five-year civil war from 1970 to 1975 between the Lon Nol regime, supported by the United States, and the Khmer Rouge, backed by the communist bloc. After the Khmer Rouge's victory, Pol Pot's regime from 1975 to 1979 ushered in an era of Cambodian autogenocide. During this period, all groups, including minorities such as the Cham community, suffered widespread oppression. Mosques were destroyed, the Quran was burned, and Muslims were forced to eat pork and violate other Islamic teachings. They were also systematically threatened, arrested, and killed<sup>[14]</sup>. These dire circumstances forced them to flee to neighboring countries to save their lives and preserve their faith.

According to interviews conducted with Cham immigrants in Malaysia, many from the first generation of refugees already passed away. Based on data gathered, the second generation stated that their parents felt deep sorrow at leaving their homeland, as they had strong ties to Cambodia and the identity of being Cham descendants. Upon reaching Malaysia, those who could afford it were willing to return to Cambodia to search for relatives. When they arrived in Malaysia, they were immediately given protection by the Malaysian government, which at the time was led by Primer Minister Tunku Abdul Razak. In 1960, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra established the Malayan Muslim Welfare Organization (PERKIM) with the primary aim of spreading Islamic knowledge to the Chinese community in Malaya. The inclusion of the term "welfare" highlighted the importance of mutual assistance in Islamic outreach. With strong governmental support, PERKIM branches were set up across almost every state in Peninsular Malaysia, promoting the vision of racial unity through Islam. Tunku's devotion to Islamic unity finally extended to include wider humanitarian objectives, such as providing refuge to Cambodian Muslims, especially Cham refugees who had fled the brutal Pol Pot regime. Initially, these refugees sought refuge in southern Thailand before crossing into northern Malaysia. They were met with a warm reception and provided temporary shelter in camps located in Kelantan. In response to Tunku's appeal, the United Nations extended financial support to assist in accommodating these refugees.

By 1985, Malaysia had accepted a significant number of Cambodian Muslim refugees, estimated to include around 10,000 Cham people<sup>[15]</sup>. During the early stages of the Cham community's migration to Malaysia, particularly between 1975 and 1980, they were commonly referred to as "Boat People". This label arose from the perception that these war victims fled Vietnam and Cambodia by sea. However, most of the Cham who migrated to Malaysia did not use sea routes but instead traveled by land. Cham refugees first arrived in Thailand, which is geographically closest to Cambodia, before eventually making their way to Malaysia. The Malaysian government welcomed and accepted the Cham people based on the view that they share ethnic and cultural similarities with the Malay community. The adoption of this policy aimed to reinforce the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP)<sup>[16]</sup>, which was designed to improve the economic status of the Malay population.<sup>[17]</sup> Moreover, the NEP was perceived as essential in creating the socio-economic conditions necessary for 'national unity' by 'eradicating poverty' and 'restructuring society' to eliminate the correlation between 'race' and 'economic function'. Given the substantial Muslim population in Malaysia, the policy was seen as crucial for enhancing the economic participation of the Malay community, thus contributing to greater social harmony and stability<sup>[18]</sup>.

After the first group of Cham refugees arrived in Malaysia in May 1975, they were initially placed in a senior citizen care center in Pengkalan Chepa, Kelantan. With back from the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), the authorities constructed the Taman Putra refugee camp in Pengkalan Chepa, which could accommodate 500 refugees. The camp ran until 1980, after which the refugees were moved to

the Cherating Camp in Kuantan, Pahang. To assist them in adapting to new environments, the refugees accepted religious education, occupational training, and Malay language classes. This was required as a lot of the novel immigrants were short of expertise of Islam, and occupational training allowed them to quickly find work, while studying Malay assisted them in integrating into local society. Their health was also taken priority over, with medical examinations upon arrival and constant access to clinics and hospitals as required.

After about a year in the camps, refugees were enabled to leave if they satisfied some circumstances, usually from the Malay community in Kelantan. These guarantors often offered housing, jobs, or economic help. Refugees with no guarantors received one-time economic help of 400 ringgit per family from PERKIM (Muslim Welfare Organization of Malaysia) to begin their livelihoods, often by involving in small enterprises. The Malay community welcomed them warmly, driving a sense of brotherhood because of historical bonds between the Cham and Malays. A lot of Cham refugees settled around Kota Bharu, especially in areas including Kampung Bunga Mas, despite its flood-prone location. As time passes, they expanded to other nearby religions including Jalan Bayam, Melor, and Desa Rahmat. In Kampung Bunga Mas, the Cham community constructed a prayer hall (surau) under the help of their new neighbors, which became a center for communal gatherings and negotiations.

The Malaysian government backed the Cham community's educational demands, so that kids enroll in national schools with textbooks and resources offered. Cham students also obtained access to secondary schools and Islamic organizations. Some, with higher education qualifications, discovered academic jobs, including teaching at colleges such as Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). Plenty of kids in Kelantan attended religious schools, and those who received training in Islamic research often became imams in their communities.

Kelantan's Islamic Religious Council assisted in offering housing and other back, guaranteeing the refugees could integrate into society. Refugees who arrived before 1980 obtained Malaysian citizenship, represented by receiving blue identity cards. They showed gratitude and a desire to make contributions to their new homeland with loyalty and devotion. Despite integration into Malay society, the Cham community preserved their cultural identity. The first generation tried to teach their kids the Cham language, but over time, intermarriage with Malays and the dominance of the Malay language in schools resulted in a reduction in the application of the Cham language. Polygamy, an ordinary measure among Malays, was initially criticized by the Cham because of Buddhist impacts in their culture while in Cambodia. Nevertheless, later generations started adopting local measures, and by the second and third generations, a lot of Cham had married Malays, so that it was harder to keep their unique identity. The younger generation are often short of fluency in the Cham language, keeping only fundamental insight because of their restricted exposure.

The Cham community in Malaysia has shown toughness and elasticity in protecting their cultural identity and blending into the wider Malay society. As a key factor of their identity, language has met great reduction, with the younger mainly losing fluency because of the superiority of Malay in education. Nevertheless, religious measures have been a fastness of their identity, as Islam associates them with the Malay-Muslim majority and offers a platform for keeping distinct Cham rituals and customs. Architectural and communal measures have similarly adapted, with Cham prayer halls and homes initially showing their heritage but step by step integrating into local styles. They describe the society's constant contributions to keeping their unique cultural heritage and solving the difficulties of blend, emphasizing the subtle balance between cultural protection.

## 5. Environmental adaptation

By interviewing Cham immigrants, different parts of their environmental adaptation have been researched. These encompass how they solved physical and ecological difficulties, modified to novel geographies, and maintained livelihoods among environmental and societal variations. Below are the core outcomes, classified into given fields:

### 5.1. Physical and ecological challenges

Numerous interviewees emphasized the geographical difficulties met upon arrival in Kelantan. They initially settled in flood-sensitive regions nearby the Kelantan River. While these sites offered access to fertile land for farming and access to water resources, seasonal flooding brought great threats to their homes. As time passes, they modified by immigrating to higher ground or enhancing housing frameworks. Amir reflected his view about handling these issues like his family adopting local materials and methods to construct flood-resilient houses.

According to interviews, various methods for meeting Malaysia's financial and environmental circumstances were shown. First-generation refugees highlighted the importance of agricultural work in their early days of resettlement. One interviewee, a former farmer in Kelantan, began: "We learned rubber tapping from the local Malays, which provided us with a steady livelihood upon first arrival." Middle-aged second-generation members emphasized a change toward small-scale enterprises, with one respondent recounting: "My parents began a small batik enterprise, and we jointly supported the family." In the meantime, younger third-generation members discovered an increasing dependence on urban jobs because of decreased change in agriculture. A college graduate shared: "Farming is no longer viable due to frequent floods and less fertile land, so I moved to the city for better lives."

This procedure conforms to Cultural Ecology Principle, arguing that human societies cultivate adaptive measures in reaction to environmental circumstances through changing their financial events and social frameworks. For the Cham immigrants, the reliance on agriculture shows their ecological adaptation to Kelantan's rural environment. Nevertheless, the change to small enterprises and urban employment emphasizes how environmental difficulties, including flooding and resource depletion, have boosted financial diversification. The community's capacity of adjusting their livelihood measures shows the interplay between cultural measures and the ecological restrictions of their novel geography, highlighting the relevance of Steward's structure in knowing their resettlement procedure.

### 5.2. Environmental adjustments

The Cham society showed great elasticity in changing from the Cambodian place to the Malaysian mode. The associated modification mostly encompasses agricultural blend, geographic familiarity, and society settlement. While many initially depended on their familiarity with farming and fishing, which conformed to Kelantan's rural finance, others tapped into their entrepreneurial abilities to involve in trade and commerce. Adopting knowledge in textiles and craftsmanship, a lot of Cham refugees made contributions to the local garment industry, paying attention to production, wholesale, and retail. As time passes, these efforts enabled some individuals to move from door-to-door sales to owning their own stores, finally becoming smooth entrepreneurs.

Some interviewees shared their experiences, focusing on this change. A middle-aged second-generation entrepreneur interpreted, "*My parents started by selling fabrics door-to-door when they first arrived. It was hard, but they knew how to identify what people wanted. Overtime, they saved enough to open a small shop in Pasar Khadijah Kota Bharu.*" Another respondent, a first-generation immigrant who worked in a batik

factory, pointed out, “*The Malays welcomed us and showed us how to make batik. We combined that with what we already knew about tailoring and started selling our own designs.*”

These entrepreneurial ventures offered financial steadiness and boosted greater community ties. A lot of Cham entrepreneurs backed each other through sourcing materials together or sharing market chance. A third-generation Cham entrepreneur pondered on this sense of consolidation: “*My grandfather always expressed, ‘We succeed because we have team spirit.’ He began his garment store with support from other community members who loaned him materials and taught him the trade.*” This entrepreneurship emphasizes the Cham society’s toughness and capacity of adapting to their novel environment. By exceeding subsistence work, they set up a foothold in Malaysia’s commercial industry, blending financially and keeping their cultural identity.

### **5.3. Economic transition and resource utilization in adaptation**

The Cham society suffered from a great change in their professional and financial measure over the decades. Their trip shows a change from survival-centered subsistence activities to growing blend into urban economies. Upon their arrival as refugees, the first-generation Cham paid attention to survival. Without both economic resources and expertise of the Malaysian economy, they initially relied on local families by a system known as “*Rumah Angkat*” (Adoption House), which offered them shelter and back. In return, a lot of Cham refugees entered the rural agricultural industry.

Rubber tapping and rice farming were ordinary jobs among the Cham, as these roles demanded minimal capital investment and offered a stable income. These activities conformed to the agrarian finance of Kelantan, so that the Cham adopt their prior agricultural expertise. One elderly interviewee of 70 years old recalled, “*We only knew Kelantan as the ‘Serambi Mekkah,’ and were not familiar with Malaysia’s finance when we arrived. But the locals told us how to tap rubber trees, and I had also served as a rubber tapper in Pahang before. That’s how we survived in the beginning.*” Despite the physical needs of these jobs, they offered the basis for the community’s early financial steadiness. An interesting aspect of the Cham refugees’ migration was that they came as families instead of individuals. If a family had ten members, all ten would be employed by a single local family. The original refugees rejected the concept of being employed individually, preferring instead to stay together as a family unit. Those who selected not to be adopted were sent to Pahang to work on coconut plantations in Kraton or with UBIYU in Kuantan. By these early agricultural occupations and their collective method for migration and blend, the Cham community setup the prejudice for financial steadiness and step by step started integrating into Malaysia’s wider financial landscape. This process laid the foundation for future diversification and urban financial involvement.

Over time, the second generation of Cham refugees started diversifying their financial activities, changing from agriculture to small-scale trade and entrepreneurship. This change was boosted by occupational training projects and informal ability-sharing in the community. A lot of Cham people cultivated knowledge in garment manufacturing, a skillset they integrated with their entrepreneurial spirit. At the beginning, they served as itinerant traders. As time passes, these modest beginnings generated more well-designed enterprises, with several families administrating to open small stores in town centers. A second-generation respondent shared her family’s story: “*My parents began by making door-to-door, selling fabrics they made at home. After years of saving, they could rent a small store in Kota Bharu. That store became the heart of our family business.*” This change from subsistence labor to small-scale entrepreneurship enhanced their financial situation and marked the community’s gradual blend into the Malaysian finance.

Third-generation Cham Malaysians stands for another phase in this financial change. After receiving formal education and chance in urban regions, a lot of younger Cham people changed to professions beyond



agriculture and small enterprises. They have more involved in careers in retail, production, and even high-skilled sectors. A third-generation respondent illustrated this advancement in his family: *“My grandparents worked on farms; my parents operated a textile store. Currently, I work in a tech enterprise in Kuala Lumpur. Our family’s route has varied in just three generations.”* This generational change represents the wider urbanization tendencies in Malaysia, showing how education and financial development have allowed upward mobility for migrant societies.

In these changes, the Cham society showed a great attention to cooperation and resource-sharing, which was important in their financial success. A lot of families used their resources to buy raw materials at bulk discounts, or to assist each other with start-up expenses for novel ventures. They decreased personal economic stress and improved the social solidarity of the society. One respondent discovered, *“We all cooperated in the early days, like some families would integrate their savings to purchase materials. It was hard, but we assisted each other.”* This sense of consolidation guaranteed that even families with restricted resources could involve in financial activities and construct steady lives.

Although they have realized financial advancement, the Cham society met difficulties that validated their toughness. Agricultural work and small enterprises are often stopped by flooding in Kelantan. For example, one respondent illustrated how their store was damaged in a main flood: *“The water destroyed everything including our stock, our devices. We had to start over from scratch, but with back from the community, we could reconstruct.”* Besides, competition asked Cham business owners to make innovation and enrich their products. Several started venturing into regional transaction or extending their enterprises to urban centers, showing their elasticity in controlling a competitive financial context.

The financial change of the Cham society describes their capacity of adapting to novel environments and keeps a sense of consolidation. From the survival-oriented agricultural work of the first generation to the start-ups of the second and the careers of the third, the Cham have shown toughness, and a devotion to advancement. These changes show their personal contributions and the effect of society collaboration, educational chance, and Malaysia’s changing financial pattern. This trip of adaptation highlights the Cham society’s capacity of thriving although difficulties are met in setting up a novel home. The Cham society’s financial trajectory emphasizes a multilevel adaptation procedure boosted by their toughness. The integration of adopting ecological resources, making investment in human capital, and controlling the chance and difficulties of migration has enabled them to realize upward financial mobility and kept a sense of community and cultural identification. The combination of theoretical views highlights the wider importance of their trip as an instance of smooth blend and advancement in a new social structure.

#### **5.4. Social and cultural adaptation**

The Cham society has mainly blended into the local Malay-Muslim society over the generations. For the first-generation Cham refugees, social blend was slower, with relatively uncommon intermarriage. A lot of families loved marrying in their own society to protect their identity. As one first-generation respondent interpreted: *“We didn’t marry outside our community because we desired for keeping our traditions alive. At that time, we spoke Cham, and it was simpler to discover someone who knew our culture.”* Nevertheless, this tendency started shifting with the second and third generations. A second-generation interviewee expressed: *“When I was younger, my parents still wanted me to marry someone from the Cham community, but now it’s varied. A lot of my cousins are married to Malays, and we all live together as one big family.”*

Intermarriage became more ordinary in the second and third generations, showing their deeper blend into the social fabric of Malaysia. This change emphasizes the integration of cultural identities, as younger generations used local customs and continued to hold onto factors of their Cham heritage. Education has

been important in driving this social and cultural adaptation. Schools offered younger Cham generations expertise and proficiency in Malay, which became their main language of exchange. A third-generation respondent discovered: *“My grandparents didn’t speak Malay at all, but for us, it’s different. We learned Malay in school and use it everyday now. It’s the main reason we can easily interact with others.”*

Education also drove social associations outside the Cham community. A second-generation respondent recalled: *“When I went to school, I made friends with Malay students, and they invited me to their homes for Raya. That’s when I really started feeling part of the community.”* These experiences assisted younger Cham people in forming ties that extended beyond their instant community, further blending them into Malaysian society. Through education and improved social interaction, the Cham have been a required part of the Malay-Muslim community. While the younger generations recognize more closely with Malaysia’s national identity, contributions to preserving factors of their cultural heritage, including conventional rituals, language, and oral history, continue within families. A third-generation interviewee expressed: *“I don’t speak Cham fluently anymore, but my parents still try to teach us a few words. We also celebrate some of the old traditions during family gatherings.”* This dual process of integration and cultural protection shows the Cham community’s capacity of controlling the intricacies of adapting to a novel environment and keeping an association with their roots.

## 6. Social psychological dimensions

The social mental adaptation of the Cham community in Malaysia shows the characteristics such as a complicated interaction of identity discussion, belonging, marginalization, and resilience, formed by both historical and modern forces. The Cham met the difficulties of controlling their identities under a novel socio-political background, represented by great diversities from their homeland. Balancing their cultural heritage with the stress of blend into the wider Malaysian society was involved in this procedure of identity discussion. As experts in social psychology believe, this “bicultural” adaptation frequently asks people to blend factors of their ethnic heritage and the dominant culture to keep mental welfare and guarantee a sense of continuity<sup>[19]</sup>.

The idea of belonging is key to knowing the Cham’s social adaptation. While the Cham were often marginalized in the early years because of their refugee status and the racial and religious diversities met, their blend into local communities as time passes has been formed by external acceptance and self-identification. According to research on refugee communities, belonging is about the capacity of individuals and groups to keep a sense of identity and community in their own ethnic group<sup>[20]</sup>. For the Cham, keeping cultural traditions including language, religious measures, and social frameworks has been key to driving a sense of belonging in their community, even as they blend into the bigger Malaysian social fabric.

Marginalization remains a core social mental difficulty for the Cham. Despite their final blend into the agricultural finance and, more recently, urban industries, the Cham keep facing socio-economic and cultural marginalization, often compounded by their minority status. The experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and the struggle for recognition are obvious topics in the literature on refugee and minority communities. For the Cham, this marginalization has often been bonded with perceptions of them as outsiders or “foreigners,” despite their long-term residence in Malaysia.

Yet, resilience has been a defining characteristic of the Cham community’s adaptation. According to social mental principle of resilience, communities subjected to marginalization and adversity often cultivate coping systems and cultural measures that allow them to persist and boom<sup>[21]</sup>. The Cham have shown great resilience by keeping their social networks, protecting their cultural measures, and driving intergenerational

bonds that drive mental welfare. The toughness enables the Cham to control the intricacies of belonging and identity in a mixed community. [22]

### **6.1. Identity formation and negotiation**

The procedure of identity shaping among the Cham has changed over time, formed by internal cultural continuation and external social impacts. For the first generation, identity was firmly based on their Cham legacy. A lot of elders highlighted the significance of protecting their customs, language, and cultural measures to keep unique in a novel place. One elderly respondent expressed, *“Even though we were in a novel state, we never forgot who we were. We are Cham first, and we held onto our traditions.”*

Nevertheless, identity discussion became more subtle for the second and third generations. These younger Cham people more acknowledged Malaysian culture, while still identifying their Cham roots. A third-generation respondent interpreted, *“I treat myself as Malaysian first, but I know my family is Cham. It’s part of me, but it’s not the same as how my grandparents saw it.”* This dual identity shows an integration of cultural legacy and blend into major society, building a distinct identity that enables them to control worlds.

Eventually, how the wider local community treats the Cham has also been useful in forming identity. While their incorporation into the Malay-Muslim majority has driven acceptance, several Cham people aired worries about cultural invisibility. One second-generation respondent discovered, *“Sometimes it feels like our Cham identity doesn’t matter anymore. People just treat us as Malay, and our culture gets forgotten.”* These dynamics emphasize the tension between integration and cultural protection in the identity shaping procedure.

### **6.2. Ethnic belonging and community cohesion**

Shared customs, language, and religious rituals are deeply bonded with belonging in the Cham community. Islamic measures have been a basis for driving group solidarity. One respondent interpreted, *“During Ramadan, the society comes together topuasa (Fasting). It’s about feeling associated with our roots.”* They enhance a sense of belonging and act as a bridge between their Cham heritage and their blend into the wider Malay-Muslim culture.

While once a central pillar of community cohesion, language has discovered its role decline over time. The first generation mainly spoke Cham, but the second and third generations have more employed Malay as their main language. Contributions to protecting the Cham language persist by family customs. A parent expressed, *“I don’t anticipate my kids to speak Cham fluently, but I teach them a few words.”* This intergenerational contribution shows a wider want for maintaining cultural continuation and meeting linguistic changes in a novel environment. Community rituals keep exerting a key effect on keeping solidarity. They act as chance for the Cham to reassociate with their legacy and enhance social ties. Even as the younger become more blended into Malaysian community, these customs are still a key link to their identity.

### **6.3. Challenges of marginalization**

Although they blend into Malaysian community, marginalization, especially during the early years of settlement, has been met. First-generation refugees often suffered from social bias, leaving mental scars. One elder recounted, *“Upon first arrival, they treated us as outsiders. They didn’t know who we were, and we had to obtain their trust.”*

A varied form has been taken by marginalization among the younger generations. With less visibility their Cham identity in the wider Malay-Muslim society, several people have aired feelings of cultural loss. A respondent of the second generation commented, *“Sometimes it feels like being Cham doesn’t matter*

*anymore. People just guess we're Malay, and our distinct culture disappears.*" This cultural invisibility can result in a sense of alienation, particularly for those who feel deeply associated with their legacy. The mental influence of marginalization changes but often encompasses feelings of setback. Nevertheless, the society has discovered methods for addressing these difficulties, applying back and cultural pride as devices to combat removal and keep a sense of oneself.

#### **6.4. Resilience and adaptation**

Toughness has been a defining feature of the mental adaptation of the Cham community. Measures for keeping welfare include adopting society networks, driving pride in their legacy, and depending on shared religious values. Belief, has been an origin of merit, offering comfort and purpose during hard times. As a respondent expressed, *"Our belief makes us grounded. No matter what difficulties we meet, we always discover merit in it."*

Society gatherings have also been important in constructing toughness. These activities enable the Cham to back one another, and pass on customs to the younger. For instance, cultural workshops which teach conventional crafts or cooking have been a method for engaging younger Cham people. As a community leader interpreted, *"We host these workshops to guarantee our kids don't forget where they come from. It's about instilling pride in who we are."*

Education has been driving toughness and elasticity. With access to formal education, younger generations were allowed to realize financial success and provided them with the trust to control their dual identities. A lot of younger Cham people have studied to include their Malaysian and Cham identities, treating this duality as a merit

The capacity of controlling the intricacies of identity shaping, belonging, marginalization, and toughness is described by the social mental adaptation of the Cham society. The demands for blending into Malaysian community with the want for preserving their cultural legacy have been balanced over generations. While the younger meet difficulties associated with cultural invisibility, the society's contributions to keeping customs, driving social ties, and adopting education have allowed them to boom. This trip emphasizes the Cham society's lasting toughness and elasticity with regard to external and internal stress

### **7. Discussion**

The environmental difficulties met by the Cham community in Malaysia are correlated with the social identity and adaptation procedure. Upon arriving in Malaysia, the Cham met various environmental difficulties, such as the demand for securing fundamental survival demands, adapting to a novel physical mode, and adjusting to a foreign socio-political mechanism. They formed their instant survival measures and affected their long-term adaptation.

The environmental background drove the Cham's initial blend through offering chance in rubber tapping and rice farming, jobs that demanded restricted capital but adopted their agricultural abilities. These chances were key to forming their early identity as staffs in a rural finance. Nevertheless, the circumstances also brought constant difficulties. The physical needs of agricultural labor, integrated with the initial marginalization they met as refugees, built mental difficulties that required toughness and elasticity.

Social identity principle provides precious understandings how the Cham's social adaptation interacts with these environmental elements. Based on Tajfel and Turner's theory, the external environment and internal group changes form group identity. For the Cham, keeping a unique cultural identity acted as an element against marginalization. The procedure of social classification assisted the Cham in navigating the

novel social environment, as they recognized themselves as part of a cohesive society that surpassed their refugee situation. This procedure of in-group unity offered emotional back and a sense of belonging, which was key to relieving the social difficulties met.

In the meantime, their adaptation to a novel environment demanded balancing cultural protection with blend into the wider Malaysian society. The Cham's social identity became a fluid discussion between keeping cultural customs and adapting to novel social standards. This interaction conforms to acculturation principle, indicating that people and groups must discuss the degree to which they keep their cultural heritage versus adapt to the main culture.

The Cham community also shows distinct characteristics by comparing with other diasporic groups. Their great association with religious and cultural measures, including Islam and the Cham language, has acted as a marker of uniqueness and an origin of resilience. Besides, their blend into rural and agrarian industries of Malaysia, instead of more urbanized environments, has made contributions to their unique process of adaptation. This sets them apart from other diasporic groups that may have been more instantly engaged in urban or industrial sectors, which often resulted in various patterns of social and financial blend. By comparing with indigenous communities in Malaysia, the Cham community's adaptation process emphasizes various systems of survival and blend. While the *Orang Asli* met serious displacement and marginalization by colonial and post-colonial policies, a degree of agency in their decision-making procedure marked the Cham refugees' adaptation, as they kept a clear sense of community identity despite displacement.

The case of the Cham community makes contributions to environmental psychology and cultural social psychology by providing precious understandings of intersecting place, identity, and adaptation. From an environmental psychology view, the Cham's experiences describe how environmental elements, varying from the physical landscape to the socio-political context while forming the community's mental welfare. The rural agrarian setting offered chance and difficulties that affected the Cham's social roles, coping systems, and overall resilience.

Cultural social psychology offers a useful perspective through which to know the Cham community's constant discussion on their social identity. With adaption to a novel environment, they kept balancing cultural protection with the requirement for involving in the dominant Malay-Muslim community. The procedure of bicultural adaptation shows the mental and cultural elasticity necessary for people to smoothly control various cultural backgrounds. The Cham's capacity of preserving their unique cultural measures, while involving in the wider Malaysian community, shows the wider ideas of cultural continuation, which highlights the toughness of minority groups in keeping their cultural identification among bigger social forces. <sup>[23]</sup>

Besides, the intersection of environmental difficulties and social identity also makes contributions to a wider insight into acculturative pressures. <sup>[24]</sup> The Cham community's trip shows how external difficulties which can influence mental welfare. Through investigating how the Cham administrated these difficulties, a deeper insight into the mental systems that make contributions to toughness and adaptation in the marginalized is gained.

To sum up, the experience of Cham society offers subtle case research for knowing the interplay between environmental difficulties and social mental processes. Their capacity of maintaining a united cultural identity and meeting the external needs of survival and blend provides great efforts to the realms of environmental psychology and cultural social psychology. Theoretical ideas can further diversify our insights

into how minority societies control complicated social and environmental modes, and similar studies on the Champa people's way of life have also been conducted in Cambodia. [25]

## **8. Conclusion**

According to this research, the Cham society has experienced great variations in its social and cultural identity over time. At the beginning, the Cham met survival difficulties upon arrival, with environmental elements in Kelantan and Pahang offering key back for their early financial steadiness. The great cultural identity of the community was significant in keeping cohesion and toughness with regard to adversity.

Nevertheless, the Cham society has suffered from great blend into the wider Malaysian society in the past five decades. While older Cham people still greatly acknowledge their Cham legacy and highlights their unique cultural characteristics, the younger are more using a Malay identity. This change in identity can be caused by some elements, such as cultural and social blend, intermarriage, and the impact of Malaysia's dominant Malay-Muslim culture. The younger Cham generations are less possibly to keep conventional Cham customs and are more employing Malay cultural measures, such as language, eating habits, dress, and social standards.

This generational change shows a wider tendency of cultural assimilation that a lot of migrant or diasporic communities suffer from as they blend into a dominant national identity. While the older Cham community members keep upholding their Cham identity, the following generations, especially those born and raised in Malaysia, more conform to Malay identity, emphasizing the fluid and dynamic property of social identity in diasporic communities. Given that Cham culture is currently marginalized, there are several concrete strategies that could be implemented to preserve their unique culture. The first response the local government can do is to create educational and linguistic relative programs, which will benefit the Cham younger generation to better integrate into a broader society without losing their cultural identity. Moreover, there should be positive media representation and awareness-raising campaigns to counter stereotypes, and these must be key actions to raise awareness among the public about the history and achievements of the Cham people. In addition, local organizations must promote interfaith and interethnic dialogue among various communities to enhance mutual understanding and eliminate bias.

This study highlights the significance of an interdisciplinary method that combines historical, environmental, and mental views. Through investigating the Cham community's adaptation from various perspectives, the research pushes forward interdisciplinary scholarship that solves the distance between environmental elements, historical migration modes and social psychology. Knowing the Cham's experiences in this wider structure diversifies our expertise of their specific case and makes contributions to wider negotiations on migration, community growth, and cultural protection. The demand for future research that investigates the interaction of environmental backgrounds and mental adaptation in various communities is highlighted.

The research outcomes have significant practical influences on policy and community growth. One core suggestion is to build policies that back cultural protection while driving integration. For the Cham community, keeping cultural, measures including religious rituals, language, and conventional social frameworks which have been a key element in their resilience. Therefore, policy-makers should pay attention to the creation of inclusive spaces where minority communities can keep their cultural identity and involve in wider social functions. Programs that drive cultural exchange and intergroup insight can assist in mitigating feelings of marginalization and driving a more inclusive society.

Another significant practical influence is the enhancement of community resilience. As this research shows that resilience is a community feature that is enhanced by social support networks and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Policies that pay attention to the improvement of community cohesion, offering financial chance, and improving access to education can be useful in enhancing resilience. Besides, offering mental and social support services to marginalized groups can assist them in better navigating difficulties associated with acculturation and socio-economic blend.

This research opens some avenues for future studies. One core direction is expanding studies to other descendant groups or areas that have experienced similar processes of migration and adaptation. Comparative research between the Cham community and other ethnic or refugee groups, both within Malaysia including those from Bangladesh and in other parts of the world, would offer a wider insight into the commonalities and diversities in the social and mental adaptation of displaced communities. Studies could also dig how urbanization and modernization influence the maintenance of cultural identity in diaspora communities. Future research should also investigate how external elements affect the identity and adaptation measures of refugee and migrant populations. In the end, longitudinal research could offer deeper understandings of how community resilience and cultural identity change cross generations.

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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