Turning a Social Character Trait Phenomenon into a Diagnostic Web-Based Measuring Instrument Using a Grounded Theory Research Method

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ABSTRACT

The formation of proverbs and phrases into poetic forms with synchronised sentence structures and rhyming expressions through authentic dictions that are engaging and meaningful are the treasures of one's trait and nation. For some race or ethnic groups it is through these classical works of wisdom that a race or an ethnic group could prevail and remain recognised transcends time and age . A list of 26 basic components of social character traits of the Malays was traced through maxims and literary work s of wisdom. The list of social character traits will just remain a list of compilation to be read and forgotten, just like many others written and compiled by other Malay literary scholars. There is a need to make this list scientifically proven. This paper discusses on how these components were transformed into a measuring instrument through a grounded theory research method. The end product was not only a web-based diagnostic instrument to measure the conformity and deviation of an ethnic group but also a formation of a new theory that could be applied to all other ethnics and related groups in the world today that are interested in knowing and preserving their social character traits.

Keywords: Ethnic, social character trait, literary work, maxims, measuring instrument, grounded theory, research method, theory, heritage, preservation, culture

INTRODUCTION

A lot of ethnic groups in the world today are experiencing the changing phase and loses of cultural identity at a very rapid rate either explicitly or implicitly. This has threatened the harmonization and unity amongst races or within races, especially

in a multi-racial country like Malaysia. Nonetheless, many do not want to admit that the rates of change and loses of cultural identity are happening very fast, whilst many too are sceptical that it is happening. It is about time in this globalise age where boundaries amongst nations are seemingly smaller and diminishing, ethnic groups or races think of a mechanism to overcome the issue. With the ease of disseminating knowledge at our finger tips anywhere and anytime, the rate of cultural change can not be avoided or slowed down by any race or ethnic group. The only way out is to think of ways to incorporate and integrate the national heritage and identity amongst races so that it can be upheld and move together with the wave of change. This paper reveals how a social character trait phenomenon could be transformed into an instrument that could measure conformity and deviation of an individual in its social ethnic character trait. At least having the awareness of where he or she is at now could determine ways of how to get back or perhaps redefine this social character trait to suit the needs of our borderless future net-generation citizens.

THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION FROM LITERARY TO SCIENTIFIC

The formation of proverbs and phrases into poetic forms with synchronised sentence structures and rhyming expressions through authentic dictions that are engaging and meaningful are the treasures of one's character trait and nation. In these poetic forms are meaningful symbolic phrases which could be directly or indirectly analysed and enlisted as the social psyche of an ethnic group under study, that is, the Malays, an ethnic majority of Malaysia. Through observations, securitization and analysis of secondary sources of literary and cultural works and maxims, Hashim (2008) has established 26 basic social character traits of the Malays. These findings are very precious to the ethnic community as references but transforming them into something measurable could make the findings scientifically proven. How could this be done? How could a social phenomenon be scientifically proven? The way to do it is to develop it into a measurable instrument, where a degree of conformity and deviation could be calculated. Hence, such an instrument could make a social phenomenon a scientific value that could be both validated and calibrated.

Such an effort will enable social and humanity research findings be made known to the world of science, which is especially important in this intelligence era (Said, 2010). Literary and cultural findings that are not expanded and transformed into scientific methods will only be circulated and distributed amongst its members, interested parties and thinkers. Even though it has been a trend and approach for many decades, in this knowledge and intellectual age, individualisation and group conformity is no more relevant. The technological waves have resulted in the formation of new waves in knowledge discovery and acquisition through research, that is, the formation of a group of multidisciplinary thinkers. An

example is the expansion of wave from "engineering to meta-engineering". This expansion has involved the widening of scope, number of audiences, and thinkers with ideas and visions multi-disciplinary in nature. Therefore, there is a need for us from the social sciences to think of ways to widen our knowledge and research to fill in the gap of the integrated multi-disciplinary field that is still new. One way is by transforming literary and cultural findings into something scientific. How could this be done? There are many ways, but for this research context, the research method used is the 'grounded theory' research strategy approach. This type of research strategy is usually very specific and therefore relevant for interpretative research.

WHAT IS "GROUNDED THEORY"?

Grounded theory is not a theory. According to Punch (as cited in Strauss, 1987), grounded theory is a method, an approach and a research strategy which he terms as research strategy . Hence, grounded theory is a research strategy that involves a process of developing a theory from research data. The research method involves the development of a theory from the inductive analysis of data. Strauss's *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987) uses the research as an approach in an analysis mode and to test a theory.

According to history, grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was built when they were researching a social perspective of an organisation. The research concerned with complex social behaviour and the data were gathered using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Even though this method was built in the field of Sociology, the characteristics do not depend on a particular discipline. Instead, grounded theory could be used in multiple disciplines. Its difference from most methods is that it does not begin with a theory with hypotheses to be tested upon. The method begins with something very open-ended that in the end will lead to the development of a theory. This method is relevant in this study because the data obtained will help us understand a social phenomenon.

A WEB-BASED SELF DIAGNOSTIC TEST

A web-based self diagnostic test HB™ Melayu (Malay Character Traits and Identity - *Hati Budi Melayu)* is a measuring instrument that has been built using findings gathered across literary and philosophical works of the Malay world. The wisdom treasures found in poetic verses of the Malay *pantun, syair* (poems) and *gurindam* were analysed and classified into 26 basic character traits of the Malays as the basic pillars of the Malay civilization. From this, the information was transformed into something measurable and testable. The product was built to measure "How True Malay Are You?"

The Scientific instrument was built as a method that could tell us the effect and degree of deviation and conformity of a Malay individual in the Malay living norms.

Findings from the process of development have given us an overview and a universal conclusion that this approach could be used to measure deviation and conformity of other ethnic groups as well. By applying the same methodological process, the findings will help us not only to trace, restructure, redefine and rearrange a cultural norm, but also to preserve and appreciate those that have been lost, are losing and will be lost as cultural heritage treasures that transcend age and time. The software is the first of its kind and has received two silver medal awards; one for software and another for education innovativeness in INPEX, Invention and New Product Exposition, Pittsburgh, P.A. USA in 2010.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This paper presents the chronology of the process of transformation, i.e., starting from creating the list of 26 basic components of the Malay Psyche or Social Character Traits (Hashim, 2008), identified through observation, to detailed analyses of secondary sources. Thus, the main issue presented in this paper is the chronological process of developing the 26 basic social character traits into a self-diagnostic test measuring instrument.

Step One

The first process was to develop questions from the 26 basic social character traits. The step started by composing 160 questions from the list. In order to avoid cognitive overloading, the questions were later

reconstructed and further divided into sub-sections.

Step Two

The questions were reanalysed to determine sub-divisions. Later, the 160 questions were divided into four defined clusters to enable us to understand and internalise the 26 basic social character traits. The identified clusters were educational upbringing, epistemology, values, and religion or beliefs. These four clusters were later found to become a new theory about ethnic identity.

Educational upbringing refers to how individuals get themselves educated as they grow up; this could be influenced by either or both or all the three basic contributors in one's life; namely, parental, social and environmental surrounding and upbringings.

Epistemology is about acquisition of knowledge by individuals, either that of knowledge of the world or eschatology that is knowledge of the year after, whereby it is this knowledge that will influence the personal development of any individual.

The value cluster is about living and lifestyle that form the most important branch of development, whereby from it we could define the value norms of an individual as a respected citizen and member of the community, society, race, ethnic origin and nation.

The last cluster of beliefs or religion determines the stand and knowledge of the individuals' belief in the group they are identified with. The principle they hold and the knowledge they acquire about their societies' belief or religious virtues are

important, and form a basis of their personal development not of status and wealth. The strength in this area will give us a clear picture of the relationship between religions or beliefs and the principles the individuals hold on to and practice. It will help us understand why the younger generation with high level of knowledge on religion and beliefs but still get involved in composite social problems.

Step Three

The third process is the development of a questionnaire for a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the questions developed. For this purpose, the questionnaire was distributed to 46 respondents. These 46 respondents, who aged between 17 and 55 years, were selected randomly from rural and urban areas, including university and non-university students living in and around Wilayah Persekutuan (Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur) and Selangor. The questionnaire was developed to find out whether a social character trait could be measured.

Here is an example of a question asked on the Educational Upbringing Cluster. When an individual was asked of his or her reaction to a number of questions on parenting, the total number of scores gathered will give some clues of the status of the individual's character traits in the educational upbringing cluster, whether it is excellent, good, and fair or eroded.

"If someone complains some negative doings of your child, are you going to get angry with the people who convey the complaint?" Place your answer using a Likert Scale of 1-5 "totally agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and totally disagree."

If the respondent answers 1 to the above question, it means some form of deviation has happened in this cluster because according to the 26 Malay character traits, an individual should not be angry if he or she hears a complain. However, he or she should thank the person first and later investigate on its validity before taking the necessary steps to rectify his or her child's behaviour.

Analysis of the data from the initial 160 questions in the pilot study gave an indication that these questions could be made into an instrument to measure the degree of conformity and deviation of an individual to its ethnic character traits. It is from these questions that the instrument was later redefined and redesigned to its present form.

Step Four

About 204 respondents have contributed to the research study. There were representatives in all the 14 states in Malaysia. Analysis of the findings revealed the differences between different states. This paper does not intend to discuss the findings of the degree of conformity and deviation but instead, it portrays how the grounded strategy research method has helped the formation of an instrument to measure the

degree of conformity and deviation amongst individuals of the Malay ethnic group. Administering the questionnaire to all the 14 states in Malaysia has helped to determine the validity and reliability of the questions in gauging individuals' degree of conformity and deviation to answer the question how true they are to the ethnic group they belong to. It is from these findings that a system was developed into a self- diagnostic web-based instrument with defined the rubrics of deviation and conformity.

Step Five

Based on the research findings, a few amendments were made to transform the instrument into a web-based and CD self-diagnostic test tool. The quality of the questions was upgraded, while some questions were added or removed to achieve an equal representation from each section. The rubrics of deviation and conformity were later developed from it . The users will be able to see their scores in each cluster by going through the questions. In addition, doing so will enable the individuals and the research team to measure and to get a true picture of the deviation and conformity of an individual for each cluster and to gauge how true the individuals are to the social character traits of the ethnic group that they represent.

RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

The 26 social character traits are very valuable because it was developed from the poetic verses of *pantun* and the Malay proverbs contained in the ethnic works of treasure and heritage. The findings remained as just data for the sciences if they were not tested scientifically.

Scientific data enable the information to be distributed and disseminated to not only interested parties, groups, thinkers or disciplines, but to a much larger audience. The process of developing it into a scientific component has proven that a sociological phenomenon could be measured, validated and calibrated. Along with the ability to measure an individual's deviation and conformity to its ethnic social character traits, the data gathered from the process have also managed to contribute to the formation of a new theory. Through the development process, it was found that all the four clusters mentioned above (namely, educational upbringing, epistemology, value and beliefs or religion) could be applied to the formation of social character traits and identity of any ethnic, group or race in the world today. Therefore, the software could be modified and customised to measure the degree of deviation and conformity of other individuals to their ethnic groups. The only anticipated credential to make this workable is that the researcher or the research team must be very well versed of the culture, literature and heritage of the ethnic group.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the process of how the transformation was made. The findings from the grounded strategy research method done manually were later used to design

the questionnaire into a web-based format after it had been created and proved that a social character trait could be measured. The instrument was designed in two forms; one as a self-accessed web-based diagnostic test and another as CD software. The software HB™ Melayu, a measuring instrument of a Malay Social Character Trait to test "How True Malay Are You", is available and can be accessed by all Malays and Malay diaspora, groups and communities of the world.

The system has a formula that enables interested parties to determine the percentage of how much an individual is still Malay as he or she interacts with the system. Even though this instrument could not directly help the Malay ethnic group to hold on to its culture and racial endeavours or solve its moral and social problems, it can still be used as a tool to detect where it is lacking and to propose a remedy to ensure that the future generation will not lose its cultural identity. The data, if gathered collectively, will help agencies, government bodies, and NGOs design programmes to improve and rectify what has been done in the past on policies, planning, and implementations of efforts in restoring ethnic and cultural identity, ideology and practice. The universal attributes could be modified, improvised, adapted and applied to measure cultural identity of other ethnic groups with a prerequisite that the team must be true believers and practitioners of the group in question.

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