

Career as Self-Identity in Chinese Malaysian Students' Career Choice in STEM

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Chinese Malaysians who inherit the traditional Chinese culture have evolved with assimilation of globalisation with colonialism elements to form a myriad of cultural *mélange*, with an impact on career choice in STEM. Applying Stuart Hall's theory of circuit of culture, a study deploying obituaries has been used to understand media and cultural influence on STEM career choice. Career as self-identity and social status has influenced Chinese Malaysian students' career choice, with a hierarchy of prestige among them and medicine occupying the top position. Career choice for them in STEM is found to be limited to a few which are socially visible. In addition, the hegemony of "university", "degree" over "college", "diploma", "vocational" and "training" has resulted in Chinese Malaysians to consider technical and vocational education and training as well as practical-oriented courses in STEM as second choice. This does not augur well for national human resource development in emerging fields in STEM. Alternative discourses and narratives for STEM careers with reimagining of nature of jobs for STEM careers to reconstruct perception towards STEM via the media and science communications could enhance the attractiveness of STEM careers. Additionally, multi-disciplinary approach to higher education and promotion of specific STEM careers based on market needs could bring STEM closer to students.

Keywords: career choice; higher education; STEM; media; culture; hegemony

I. INTRODUCTION

Student career choices are influenced by many factors. They encompass career prospects, nature of jobs, cost of education, accreditation and quality of education, influence of significant persons like parents, teachers, and friends as well as factors attributed to education institutions like location and environment, facilities, and management (Wee, 2002). Many of these factors are mediated by attitude, perception and pre-conceived ideas based on one's cultural background, as well as mass media in an increasing connected world.

An interesting perspective is cultural influence which often has enduring impact on one's attitude and decisions made in life. This study is focused on Chinese Malaysians, a minority group subject to influence of Chinese and Malaysian heritage as well as globalisation imbued with colonialism.

The main study material is obituaries in the local Chinese language dailies.

In Malaysia, there are various language schools and media in Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil. Language determines a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment (Ngugi, 1987). It is the instrumental carrier of culture and heritage, providing an emotive connection to one's heritage and contributes to the people's continued patronage of traditional culture. The availability of Chinese language schools and media in Malaysia serves as the main lineage to Chinese culture. Chinese Malaysians also practice an array of religions, with Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and Islam being the common ones. Meanwhile, they also engage in a range of non-Chinese and international activities. This diversity provides a culturally rich nurturing ground for the evolution

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of cultural mix in worldview, value system, and ideology, with bearings on their career choice.

II. CAREER AS SELF-IDENTITY

The meaning of career goes beyond “job”, “profession”, “occupation”. It also represents one’s social status, ambition, and identity (Rahmat, 2022). In this aspect, culture plays a role in defining both the content of one’s identity and the process of identity formation (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). There is a “stable ego identity” where “a set of values, belief systems, goals, and attitudes” provides individuals with “a sense of coherence and continuity in their adult lives” (ibid., p.433).

Meanwhile, there is variation in the view of self in Western and non-Western society. In the West, it is seen as “unitary and stable”, but in non-Western societies, it is perceived to be “flexible and varied” (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). In Malaysia’s culturally, racially, and religiously pluralistic post-colonial society, the situation is further compounded by the interplay of various ethnic groups’ cultural influences as well as colonial and globalisation forces. The prominent social force on the self is the family, due to its longevity and the intensity of its relationships (Tucciarone, 2007). In addition, the view of self in the East is more collective, compared to the individual-self of the West. This implies an individual’s obligation and responsibility for the family’s survival and well-being. In Chinese tradition, it is often an act of filial piety to improve the well-being of the family by choosing a career to raise its financial and social status.

III. INFLUENCES OF CHINESE CULTURE, COLONIALISM AND GLOBALISATION

The early Chinese Malaysians who migrated from China were peasants who had little education due to abject poverty and hardship in a war-torn country. This made them determine to strive for a better future for their children in the new home of Malaysia. One of the avenues to achieve this is through education. This attitude can also be attributed to traditional Chinese culture, where scholars and intellectuals were highly regarded. This is reflected in the phrase categorising the main professions in the following order: “Intellects, farmers, artisans, and traders” (士农工商). Intellects were the most highly regarded. It was customary

for the top scholar (状元) of the Imperial Examination to be given the honour of Prime Ministership or be a high-ranking councillor who would advise the emperor in state matters. The farmers and artisans were regarded as productive workers of essentials like food and infrastructure, while traders were deemed as non-productive middlemen and thus were at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Due to lack of education and proficiency in English and Malay languages, many Chinese early settlers became self-employed and small traders, who generally had low stature in society. With the arrival of the colonial power, especially the British, there was a new way of looking at jobs as white-collar jobs and blue-collar jobs. The former provided comfort and prestige, and the latter was hard work with little stature in society. The ensuing globalisation brought about modernisation, which created a cultural hybridity - a process of cultural mix arising from increased global migration, connectivity, and social relations, occurring across various locations and identities worldwide. It is a politics of integration without the need to give up cultural identity, giving rise to new cross-cultural patterns of difference (Pieterse, 2015). This notion of cultural hybridity combining the traditional and the modern, which is a post-modern view, best reflects the scenario in Malaysia, as opposed to cultural differentialism with formation of cultural conflicts and rivalry; and cultural convergence with cultural homogenisation and diffusion from a centre (ibid., p.57). This hybridity or mix can be seen in the obituaries in the local Chinese language newspapers.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main theory deployed is Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, which explains the dominance of some cultural elements over another. This refers to the dominance through establishing norms and ideologies to earn leadership and power. Such dominance is perpetuated with coercion and creating consensus on the moral and intellectual leadership of the dominant group, resulting in alternative ideas and discussion becoming instinctively inhibited (Fermia, 1987). This theory helps to investigate the power of dominant representation in media messaging on students’ motivation in making career choice. These representations can be in the material form of signs such as words, images, or sounds

such as the mortarboard or title of course qualifications, whose meaning varies according to cultural and social context as exemplified by Saussure; or in the form of discourse or narratives where knowledge produces discourse of power relations, as illustrated by Foucault. Discourse manifests its power on the thinking, regulates and controls practice (Hall, 1997) and imposes authority (ibid., p.42) on one's decision-making including making career choice.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study material used is obituaries in the Chinese language press. An obituary is essentially a notice on the passing away of a loved one. Through the years, in some local Chinese language newspapers, the descendants' higher education credentials and professions have been incorporated in obituaries as a mark of achievements.

Obituaries which display professions and academic credentials were sourced from recent largest circulating Chinese newspapers and online platforms. To enable identification of patterns, a total of eight obituaries with sizable family trees have been selected. Five of them are from the print, while the remaining three are obtained by googling the Chinese word for obituary - 讣告 online. Those obtained online most likely had appeared in the print earlier and were subsequently placed online. It is not customary for all obituaries to display professions and academic credentials of the offspring – they are those without these credentials and those who do not wish to publicise. It is also not present in other language newspapers in Malaysia.

In this study, interpretive and critical paradigm approaches to gain insight into their deeper meaning are deployed. Methods used include textual analysis and critical discourse analysis.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

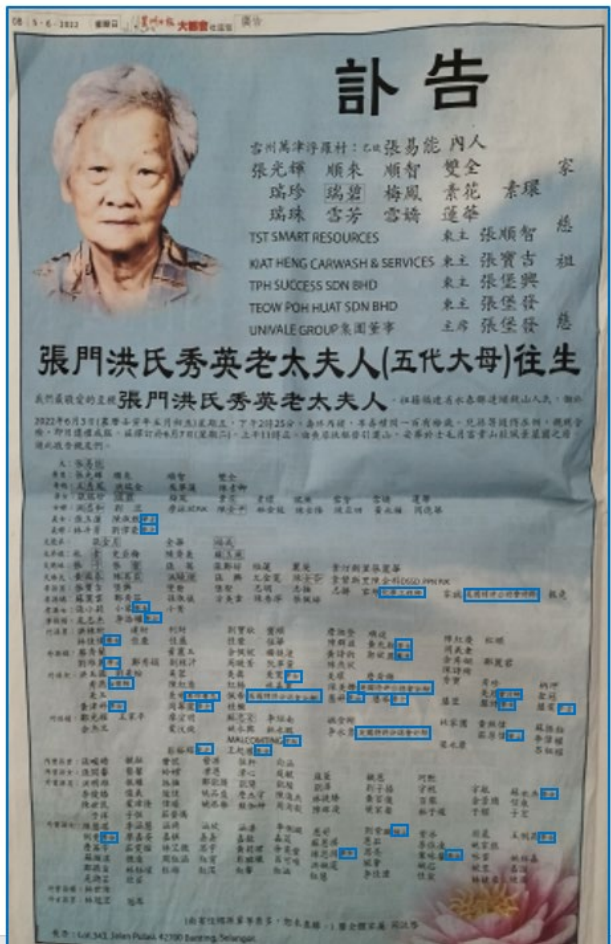
A. Analysis of Obituaries

Locally, obtaining higher education is often viewed as an achievement for upward social mobility, if not extraordinary achievement and distinguished social status. In the context of one's career achievement, certain symbols, labels, and narratives have evolved since Malaysia's independence to become significant representations of achievements where a

unique sub-culture and value system can be seen. The evolution of this sub-culture could be attributed to Chinese traditional culture of high regard for scholars. It is also an alternative outlet for recognition of ethnic Chinese, who as a minority group in Malaysia, often lack recognition at mainstream official level.

Of the eight obituaries selected, six are female, and two are male. This is a mere coincidence rather than any gender bias towards the female. They are all from urban settings in big cities or medium towns: two from Kuala Lumpur, two from Banting, one each from Penang, Muar, Sepang, and Parit Buntar. They are likely from middle- and upper-income families as there is an advertisement charge equivalent to that of a display advertisement. Moreover, as higher education for Chinese Malaysians can be costly at private universities and colleges and overseas, these obituaries displaying many university graduates most likely represent those from financially sound families. They are all from the West Coast of Malaysia, where the Chinese Malaysian population is concentrated. All the deceased lived above 60 years, and two of them were up to 100 years old, which in Chinese traditional culture is considered auspicious, worthy of wide publicity. The longevity of the deceased could also be the result of selecting large family trees with many descendants.

The obituaries are analysed in two parts: first on Figure 1, which has several interesting features, and then a general analysis. The professions/education credentials are marked in small blue boxes at the rear of their names in the obituaries shown.



longevity” (福祿壽), which are signified by various features in the obituary. Good fortune is reflected in having many offspring spanning several generations with outstanding achievements, as shown in the list of 281 descendants, with many of them having professions/education qualifications highlighted, portraying the enduring Chinese heritage of high regard for intellectuals. In traditional Chinese culture, one’s achievements in life are accrued to the ancestors, just like one’s victory in an Olympic Game is accrued to the nation. It is customary to use the phrase “Glory to the ancestors” (光宗耀祖) when congratulating someone’s success. The self is viewed in a broader sense of the collective self of the extended family. Also, at the top of the obituary, four private-limited companies of the Matriarch’s children are listed, signifying the family’s prosperity. It is also stated she lived up to 100 years. Thus, she had achieved the three cherished values of “good fortune, prosperity and longevity” and deserved a full-page colour advertisement.

A breakdown of professions/credentials of the descendants shows the values placed on some of the professions and education qualifications. 33 out of 281 descendants’ profession/academic credentials are highlighted. Out of 33, 22 of them held a Bachelor’s degree, one with Master’s degree, and the remaining ten had their respective professions specified, namely, accountancy, medicine, engineering, law and valuation surveying. It illustrates that obtaining a Bachelor’s/Master’s degree or becoming a professional is an honour worthy of recognition.

However, 22 or 67% of those with a Bachelor’s degree are without their specified profession stated. They could possibly be from STEM professions beyond those specified or from non-STEM ones. This discrepancy of not highlighting their specific professions suggests they are not highly looked upon. This could also be explained by the concept that behaviour is learned and acquired through observation in social settings (Bandura, 1977). Accountants, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and valuation surveyors are in regular presence in daily life and social interaction. The images of an engineer with his engineering cap and a drawing plan at a construction site, an accountant at a desk handling bookkeeping and crunching numbers, and a doctor with his stethoscope and a white cloak are distinct images

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
Bachelor’s Degree	22
Master’s Degree	1
Accountant	5
Doctor	2
Engineer	1
Lawyer	1
Valuation Surveyor	1
Total	33

Figure 1. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (洪秀英)

Date Published: Oct. 2022, Press: Sin Chew Daily

Fig.1 shows an obituary of a Matriarch, written in Chinese traditional format, highlighting her ancestral origin, the date of death in both Western and Lunar Calendar and stating that she was a matriarch with 13 children and descendants spanning five generations. This full-page colour advertisement depicts an accomplished life based on Chinese traditional values of “good fortune, prosperity, and

learned through observation in daily interaction and reinforced by mass media images. Most human behaviour is learned through modelling by observing others (ibid., p.22). Attention determines what is selectively observed and extracted from the exposure and behaviours, which are repeatedly observed are learned most thoroughly. Some forms of modelling are so rewarding that they can hold attention for ages (ibid., p.24). The media are effective in holding attention and viewers are capable of learning much without special incentives (ibid., p.25).

Being inconspicuous in daily life, coupled with little image curation by mass media, many STEM careers beyond the popular ones, like botanist, zoologist, physicist, biologist, etc., may not invoke an impression and appeal to students and their parents. Those who have pursued these courses are likely aiming to gain the coveted crown of “university” and “degree”, not so much for the stated profession.

For the remaining 248 offspring, their professions/education are not highlighted. Assuming half of them were children or adolescents who had yet to acquire any qualification, there was still a considerable large number of them. They might have obtained diplomas, higher diplomas, trade, or skill qualifications. Their non-mention indicates they have little stature in society. This signifies the demarcation and hegemony of degree qualifications over non-degree ones, which can be attributed to our colonial heritage of looking upon selected professionals as white-collar jobs of “prestige”, often characterised by images of university graduates with mortarboards and convocation gowns or managers sitting in posh boardrooms, which are accentuated and entrenched by repetitive display of mass media.

Another feature in the obituary is four offspring in accountancy career are specially designated as “British Chartered Accountant”. These probably refer to the Association of Chartered Certified Accountant (ACCA) and Chartered Institute of Accountants (CIMA) qualifications, which are popular in Malaysia. The “British” and “Chartered” are considered as another layer of prestige superimposed on “university” and “degree”, as exemplified by Barthes (1988), who viewed connotation as a super-imposed layer of meaning (Aiello, 2004). In Malaysia, ACCA and CIMA are recognised as equivalent to local accountancy professional

qualifications and not higher. The perception of their higher prestige reflects the lasting influence of British colonialism.

From another perspective, if we regard medicine, accountancy, engineering, and other professional fields as disciplines where additional training is required for job competency, such as doctors undergoing horsemanship and accountants undergoing pupillage under registered practitioners, the hegemony of “university” and “degree” over “non-university” and “non-degree” places STEM careers which require more training at a disadvantaged position in attracting students. A case in point is the German Dual Vocational Training (GDVT), a 3-year higher diploma course for school leavers, with 70% practical training and 30% theoretical study in Mechatronics, logistics, electronics, and other high-skill STEM fields, run by German-Malaysian Chamber of Commerce and Industry locally. Although it is free of tuition, albeit with training allowance, with employment guaranteed at local German companies and salary comparable to university graduates, it has attracted only those who fail to qualify for local universities. Here, the hegemony of “degree” and “university” over “vocational” and “training” in its name does not make it desirable, even though the German brand is appealing. This shows the power of signification of symbols, that is, the course title in relation to self-image has over the course content, as illustrated by Saussure. This perception does not bode well for STEM talent development in emerging STEM fields which involve considerable skill-training.

訃告

英傑州麻坡巴東
鄭萬青 鄭瑞光
麻坡: NAGA KIRANA PACKAGING SDN. BHD. 董事 鄭光達
龍威紙箱工業有限公司 董事
HARTABEE CORPORATION SDN. BHD. 董事
美國: AT BUSSINESS ENGINEERING CONSULTANT 東主 鄭光洲博士
DINA GAIN SDN. BHD. 董事經理 鄭光益
麻坡: NAGA KIRANA PACKAGING SDN. BHD. 董事經理
龍威紙箱工業有限公司 董事
HARTABEE CORPORATION SDN. BHD. 董事經理
吉隆坡: TROPICAL PROFILE (M) SDN. BHD. 董事
TROPICAL ENGINEERING SDN. BHD. 董事經理
拿督鄭光程(DATO' TAY KUAN TEA)
麻坡: NAGA KIRANA PACKAGING SDN. BHD. 董事 鄭光春
龍威紙箱工業有限公司

鄭門楊秀賢老夫人仙逝

我們最敬愛的至親鄭門楊秀賢老夫人，隸屬廣東省潮州市潮安區鮑江鄉人民，嚮於2022年10月4日(農曆壬寅年九月初九)星期二，清晨5時46分喜終內親，享壽積閱一百一十歲，我們隨侍在側，親視含殮，即日遵禮成服。現擇定於10月8日(星期六)下午2時扶柩發引運山，安葬於麻坡吧口醫藥德武山之原，謹以最慈憫的心情，將此噩耗敬告關心我們的親友們。

夫: 鄭萬青 同文姐: 陳麗翠
大胞弟: 鄭桐發 大弟媳: 陳巧珍
胞弟: 楊深永(中國汕頭) 許鏡階
弟媳: 楊杏君(中國汕頭) 陳玉華
孝男: 鄭萬青 萬光 光達 光洲 光正 光正
孝女: 洪慧庭 梁玉華 馬興翠 郭慧 MARY STEWART 彭秀敏
拿汀謝玉蘭 拿汀TRAN THI MAITHOM 黃麗嬌
外孫女: 鄭玉卿 美霞 藍玉 吳芳 秋玉 秋霞 光玉
女孫: 邱麗權 譚仲榮 陳耀林 吳南燕 蔡添德
孫男: 鄭連元 連錦上 連錦中 力文 良安 國仁 廣樓 智傑 祝順
子孫: 祝良 子豪 子豪 子豪 子豪 子豪 子豪 子豪 子豪 子豪
孫媳: 姚佩珊 蔡惠雲 洪宇達 洪乙風 莫宋碧茹 潘林嘉華 劉金愛
孫女: 鄭惠芳 如英 惠文 淑英 淑英 淑英 淑英 詩燕
依歸
孫孫: 孫維欽 陳帝福 TORD LISSBORG 李東豪 彭行輝
外孫男: 譚仲凱 王文全 文華 玟璇 陳建豪 建華 吳嘉偉 嘉廷
外孫女: 郭雲英 王沁怡 許微妮 黃秋蓮 鄭依軒
外孫女: 亞明慧 胡凱倫 譚寶齡 雅琳 貴巧 林慧珊 慧安 王桂清
蔡俊君 陳家奇 陳桂峰
外孫孫: 陳家奇 張英和 陳漢雄 陳偉明 關榮輝 宋順偉
曾孫男: 鄭凱升 觀中 觀仁 張凱 浩宇
曾孫女: 鄭惠丹 美丹 惠介 惠之 謝雪 欣悅 欣怡 汶儀
外曾孫男: 孫偉強 陳俊榮 俊榮 俊璋 陳煥發 陳家樂 陳家宇 陳宏文 陳宏武 陳奕輝 陳奕輝
外曾孫女: 關子璇 王潔宇 王潔宇 王楷傑 宋俊輝 吳的堅 吳有心 陳奕哲 陳奕輝
外曾孫孫: 孫伊婷
外曾孫女: SARAH LEWIS JIA MIN 孫平芝 平珍 李悅彤 蔡思聰 譚吉惠 譚啟忠 張陶
張穎 陳家琦 陳如娟 關亦思 王乙祀 王若涵 宋的芯 吳雨潼
外曾孫孫: 孫意翔
外曾孫女: 孫平恩

(尚有餘多親屬，恕未能一一盡錄。) 暨全體家屬同泣啓

治喪處: 恩賜林氏路德會堂禮儀館A, B樓
哀務由麻坡文德生命堂禮儀服務承辦: 017-555 5540 (孫賢儀), 017-666 6939 (WEE CHUA)
謝聯合社誌

Profession/ Education Credential	No. of Descendants
Bachelor's Degree	20
Master's Degree	5
PhD	2
Total	27

Figure 2. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (楊秀賢)
Date Published: Oct. 2022. Press: Sin Chew Daily

訃告

露露角頭 張草榮 蔡慈
張栢勛 兄弟家祖慈
張文強 張文國
張文忠 張文斯
露露巴里文打/威南高湖 拿督 張文忠
祥興有限公司董事經理 張文斯
露露巴里文打/威南高湖 拿督 張文斯
祥興有限公司執行董事

張門陳氏豪英(嬌揚)老太孀人仙逝

我們最敬愛的至親張門陳氏豪英(嬌揚)老太孀人，隸屬廣東省普寧縣小揚美，嚮於2019年5月6日(星期一)農曆己亥年四月初二日，晚上7時30分，壽終內寢，享壽積閱一百一十歲高齡，吾等隨侍在側，親視含殮，即日遵禮成服。安葬於5月12日(星期日)上午10時舉殯，移柩至威南高湖美湖園葬禮，由新華人公塚安葬。謹此敬告各親友們。

夫: 張永正 孝弟: 張卓華 卓榮 孝女: 張素芳 諸男: 鄭加勳 李秀奇 胞兄: 陳豪英 蔡崇
孝媳: 周楚全 謝翠琴 女孫: 林文君 謝維 賴素蓮 鄭俊權 兒媳: 羅翠英
胞弟: 陳豪英 文國 蔡文忠 蔡文斯
內孫男: 張栢勛 文強 文國 蔡文忠 蔡文斯
內孫女: 張潔瑜 譚漢雲 羅翠華 蔡秀麗 黃翠屏
內孫女: 張淑嫻 麗詩 麗芳 麗雲
內孫女: 梁子文 李銘鈞 鍾錦松 陳智勇 蕭英敏
外孫男: 林章益 Calvin 章傑 Michael 章祥 Raymond
章威 Shanno
外孫女: 鄭慧珊 葉麗輝 郭佩詩
外孫女: 林慧儀
外孫孫: 楊升俊
侄孫: 陳耀水 羅安 羅順 侄孫: 謝清美
侄女: 陳寶珍 蔡琴 蔡佩晶 愛音晶 愛惜 內曾孫男: 張子晉 振浩 振綱 譚軒 譚雋 譚焜 譚森 曾孫女: 鍾瑋 鍾乾 鍾玲 鍾逸 鍾乾
內曾孫女: 張珂瑜 琪恩 子涵 子樂 外曾孫男: 梁立維 鍾培均 蕭鈺鈺 林華澤 Gareth 華晉 Lucas
外曾孫女: 鍾紫琳 張冰 紫雲 符芯 蕭語慧 語彤 林佳琪 Hannah 佳琪 Rachel 佳辛 Sibhan
(尚有胞兄弟姊妹在泰國/在梓, 夫兄弟姊妹在梓, 孫婿, 夫侄甥孫輩等親屬眾多, 未能一一盡錄) 同泣啟

喪居: 露露角頭大街門牌 TB 351 號 (角頭南華小學對面小路進)

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
PhD	1
Doctor	9
Pharmacist	1
Total	11

Figure 3. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (陳豪英)
Date Published: May 2019, Press: Kwong Wah Jit Poh

訃告
譚門郭氏秀梅老夫人逝世

我們最敬愛的至親譚門郭氏秀梅老夫人，祖籍廣東縣人氏，於2022年10月3日(農曆壬寅年九月初八)星期一壽終內寢，享壽積閱八十有餘。我等隨侍在側，親視入殮，即日遵禮成服，現擇定於2022年10月5日(農曆壬寅年九月初十)星期三，上午十一時舉行家奠後，在實地亞南仙鏡古城火化場進行火化儀式。謹以最悲痛的心情，將此噩耗告知關心我們的親友們。

夫：譚吉祥
孝男：譚錫盛 醫生 譚景盛 醫生 譚榮盛
孝媳：方淑君 醫生
孝女：譚翠明 醫生 譚燕明
女婿：DR MANUKHARAN NITHIANANTHA 鄭鵬佑
姪子：羅明利
孫男：譚偉豪 譚永豪
孫女：譚慧思
外孫男：鄭俊傑 鄭俊凱

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
Doctor	4
PhD	1
Total	5

Figure 4. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (郭秀梅)

Date Published: Oct. 2022, Press: Sin Chew Daily

訃告
雲州雙溪比力 彭宜雲 愛妻 彭胤儒 胤蕙 胤涵 家慈 包秀玲老夫人逝世

我們最敬愛的至親彭門包氏秀玲老夫人，祖籍福建省福州古田鐵寮村人氏，於2022年10月3日(農曆壬寅年九月初八)星期一晚上9時07分壽終內寢，享壽積閱六十有三歲。我等隨侍在側，親視含殮，即日遵禮成服。茲擇定於2022年10月6日(星期四)，下午2時正，由喪居扶柩舉殯至雪邦市議會火化場羽化。善後骨灰安奉在雪邦華人義山骨灰塔。

謹此敬告關心我們的親友們！

家翁：彭慶憲 家姑：黃愛珠
父：包錫傳 母：陸寶珠
夫：彭宜雲
孝男：彭胤儒 彭胤蕙 彭胤涵
孝媳：Tiffany Jane
孝孫男：彭祥俊
孝孫女：彭若緣
夫兄：彭宜榮
夫弟：彭宜漢 彭宜錦 夫嫂：陳淑梅 夫弟媳：陳美金
彭宜忠
夫姐：彭柳妹 彭榮妹 夫姐夫：鄭祥興 張雅各
夫妹：彭花妹 彭星妹 彭雪妹 彭雪蘭 彭雪娥
彭香麗
夫妹夫：陳成忠 楊升通 鍾亞生 賴金彪 黃興萬
冷文興
胞弟：包世龍 包世海
胞弟媳：黃麗芳
胞妹：包秀芳 包秀瑛 包秀菊
胞妹夫：廖世明 高仲敏 劉成旺
夫侄兒：彭胤康 彭胤宏 彭胤盛
夫侄媳：董雅貞 唐麗蓮 鄭筱薇
夫外甥男：鄭久偉 鄭久良 張艾倫 張艾文 陳翰帆
陳翰熾 楊家豪 楊家盛
夫外甥媳：謝翠韵 王莉喜
余麗珊
夫外甥女：鄭美玲 鄭雪玲 鄭美蓮 鄭麗玲 張艾琳
陳詡雲 楊家燕
夫外甥婿：林國來 林文財 林清正 馬耀聲 陳道強
鄭家福

(尚有任甥輩親屬眾多，無法盡錄) 同泣啓
喪居：No 38, Lorong Lapis 5, Kampung Baru Sungai Pelek, 43950 Sepang Selangor.

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
Bachelor's Degree	4
Bachelor in Economics	1
MBA	1
Medical Specialist	1
Pharmacist cum MBA	1
Pharmacist	3
Engineer	2
Lawyer	2
Physiotherapist	1
Total	16

Figure 5. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (包秀玲)

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我們至愛的親人 **李美香女士**

惜於主曆 2019年6月30日(星期日)上午8時蒙主恩召，安息主懷，在世寄居 91載，茲擇定於7月4日(星期四)上午10時移柩至檳城中路痛苦之母堂舉行追思彌撒，隨後舉殯，安葬于檳城浮羅山背天主新墳場。謹此敬告主內外教友親友們。

夫：林沂祝
子：林傳傑 傅龍 傅德 傅文 傅武 傅新
媳：潘惠球 吳玉玲 鍾雪月 劉麗紅 覃靜儀 陳碧華
女：林慧禧 慧玉 慧琳
女婿：Brian D. Peterson 劉華才
內孫男：林旨渝(香港) 旨勤 旨麟 香明 香年 香德 香誠 香樂 香霖
內孫女：林安琪 安琪 安琪 安琪 安琪
安欣 菲敏 嘉敏
內孫男：梁柯康
外孫女：黃婉嫻 劉俐伽 俐妍
外孫男：梁溫傑 梁溫銘 黃樂軒 黃宇澤 黃宇杰
(尚有任甥孫輩等暨親屬眾多，未能盡錄) 同泣

(雪隆的帛金將獻捐雪隆潮州會館，檳城的帛金將獻捐檳城中路痛苦之母七苦堂及檳城潮州會館)
喪居：6, Westland Road, 10400 Penang. (TNB 旁路直進)
H/P: 019-4296973, 016-4503009

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
Bachelor's Degree	3
PhD	1
Eye Specialist	1
Accountant	1
Doctor	4
Lawyer	3
Pharmacist	1
Total	14

Figure 6. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (李美香)

Date Published: June 2019, Press: Kwong Wah Jit Poh

訃告

雪州萬津浮羅村：
 鄭金華 金祥 金泉
 金福 金星 金和
 鄭金華水喉工程 東主 鄭金華
 Famous Astra S/B 東主 鄭金泉
 KCT Global Resources 東主 鄭金泉
 Win Xing Car Service Centre 東主 鄭金福

鄭添成老先生往生
 (五代大父)

我們最敬愛的至親**鄭添成府君(五代大父)**，祖籍福建省泉州永春縣達埔鎮烏石村1179號人氏，備於2019年6月27日(農曆己亥年五月廿五)星期四，凌晨12時30分，壽終正寢，享壽積閱八十有四歲，兒孫等隨侍在側，親視含殮，即日遵禮成服。茲擇訂於6月30日(星期日)，上午11時正，由喪居扶柩發引還山，安葬於茶山詩愈港新華人義山之原。謹此敬告親友們。

妻：林賽珠
 孝男：鄭金華 金祥 金泉 金福 金星 金和
 孝媳：鄭金華 朱慧芬 藍錫華 洪秀微
 孝女：鄭秀鳳 秀嬌
 女婿：洪金興 陳國龍
 出嗣女：張燕華 林健郎
 孝孫男：鄭順來 順達 榮生 詠安 詠喜 詠頤 詠才 展發
 孝孫媳：胡碧君
 孝孫女：鄭慧玲 家宜 芷虹 凱瑩
 外孫男：洪國慶 國語 國忠 醫生 陳勝英 工程師
 陳景奕 工程師
 外孫媳：陳美雲 林板雲 鄭小潔 醫生
 外孫女：洪寶燕 寶琴 寶雲 陳苓雀 醫生
 外孫婿：鄭禮榮 洪偉壽
 內曾孫男：鄭家寶
 外曾孫男：洪浚恒 銘駿 銘優 鄭凱澤
 外曾孫女：洪瀟恩 麗錦 語欣 語晨 麗詩 莉文 佳鈺 鄭培勻

(尚有侄甥孫輩等眾多，恕未盡錄。)暨全體家屬 同泣啟

喪房：Lot 325, Jalan Pulau, 42700 Banting, Selangor.
 電話：012-283 6755, 019-263 2192, 019-256 5678

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
Doctor	3
Engineer	2
Total	5

Figure 7. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (鄭添成)

Date Published: June 2019, Press: Sin Chew Daily

訃告

Kim Kee Hardware 創辦人
 Kua Sin Kui And Sons Realty Sdn Bhd
柯榮桂 P.P.N(四代大父)逝世
 謹以最悲痛的心情宣布，我們最敬愛的至親**柯榮桂府君**，祖籍福建安溪蓬萊人氏，備於2022年10月13日(農曆壬寅年九月十八)星期四，壽終正寢，享壽積閱八十有五歲，吾等隨侍在側，親視入殮，即日遵禮成服。擇定於2022年10月17日(星期一)，上午10時正，由治喪處扶柩發引還山，安葬於吉隆坡新街場福建義山。

忝屬 姻鄉戚世友 謹哀此訃聞

妻：葉玉英
 孝男：柯德生 柯德源 柯德山 柯德榮 柯德利 柯德發
 孝媳：DEBBIE MARTINEZ 柯知子 廖慧薇 李玉妮 劉美燕
 孝女：柯彩賢 博士
 女婿：CHUCK CANON 博士
 孫男：柯祥安 柯祥軒 柯祥健 柯祥勳 柯尚銘 柯尚勳 柯尚佐
 孫媳：ROSE LEWIS
 孫女：柯葦蘭 柯素妃
 外孫女：SURYA CANON QUANA CANON
 誼男：柯德岩

(尚有侄甥輩親戚眾多，恕無法一一盡錄) 同泣啟

平唁時間：10月14日 星期五 ~ 10月16日 星期日 (11am ~ 10pm)
 治喪處：吉隆坡孝恩館G樓10號廳 Xiao En Centre, G Floor, Hall 10, No.1, Jalan Kuari, 56100 Kuala Lumpur.
 電話：1800 888 333

Profession/Education Credential	No. of Descendants
PhD	2
PhD Medicine	1
Total	3

Figure 8. Obituary with Profession/Education Credentials (柯榮桂)

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The above obituaries portray the juxtaposition of Chinese traditional culture with globalisation imbued with colonialism. While globalisation is often viewed in the context of trade and economics, Appadurai (1996) views it from five cultural flow dimensions, which he terms as ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples. The suffix “-scaples” refers to the fluid and irregular nature of these landscapes and depicts the shifting and multiple imagined worlds we are living in, formed by these landscapes, based on differences in language, culture and political ideologies (ibid.).

Chinese Malaysians exposure to diverse cultures via various language education, media and religion affiliation in Malaysia’s open economy and liberal democracy have facilitated the shaping of mixed or hybrid cultural landscapes. Examples of hybrid culture in the obituaries include inter-racial marriages (Figures 1, 2, 4, 6 & 8); non-Chinese names (Figures 2 & 3); obituary of a Chinese Christian (Figure 6) whose obituary does not follow traditional Chinese format; and honourable titles bestowed by Malaysian *Sultans* like “*Datuk*”, and “*Datin*” (Figures 1, 2, 3, 6 & 8). Malaysia’s National Culture Policy stipulates the national culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region, while suitable elements from the other cultures may be accepted, with Islam as an important component (National Cultural Policy, 2019). The fluid cultural policy has enabled these obituaries to evolve from hybrids to myriads of cultural mix or melange (Pieterse, 2015).

It is noted the medical profession is prominent in all the obituaries, except for Figure 2, where no specific profession is stated. This illustrates that medicine occupies the top position in prestige in career hierarchy among Chinese Malaysians. Also, the medical and allied health professions run in some families. There are 9 and 4 medical doctors respectively in Figure 3 and Figure 4. Besides prestige, this large number may be due to awareness on the importance of healthcare and its potential career prospects. It also demonstrates the influence of the family as an institution on career choice where siblings influence one another. The family as an institution can be construed as a mini-state apparatus with power and influence over its members (Althusser, 2014). Overall, these obituaries signify a narrow scope of STEM career choice, prominence of medicine and allied health (32 out of 52 of those whose professions are specified as shown in Table 1); as well as Chinese Malaysians’ penchant for “degree” or academic study over “non-degree” and skill and practical training.

Table 1. Summary of Obituaries

Professions	No. of Offspring with Credentials	STEM/ NON-STEM
General	62	
Medicine & Allied Health	32	STEM
Engineering	5	STEM
Valuation	1	STEM
Surveying		
Business/Management/Accountancy	8	Non-STEM
Law	6	Non-STEM
Total	114	

The significance of career as a symbol of prestige and social status in the Malaysian context, is also seen in local Chinese media regularly reporting on top students struggling to secure places in medicine at local public universities. This can be witnessed in Malaysia having the highest ratio of medical schools per million population: 1.0 (34 medical schools for a population of 32 million), compared to the UK (0.47), Canada (0.44) and India (0.24) (Song, 2022). Such a manifestation illustrates knowledge power in practice, influencing the behaviour of choosing a career. This narrative of the medical profession as a glamorous one can be described as a “myth” as spelt out by Barthes (1988). It makes such a career choice innocent, giving it natural and eternal justification, and a clarity, which is not an explanation, but a statement of fact (Hall, 1997). This is where a “regime of truth” is created by knowledge-power relations (ibid., p. 268). It is noted that such a scenario is not present in China where the medical profession is not popular due to its hard work and long hours.

Another observation is vocational careers like hospitality, culinary art, art and design, and drama and music, etc., which often appear in higher education advertisements are not highlighted in the obituaries. While advertisements respond to market demands, obituaries symbolise “Walls of Fame”. This confirms the previous assertion that vocational and non-degree courses, although pursued by Chinese Malaysians, do not have the stature to be showcased on the “Wall of Fame”. They play second fiddle and are pursued

when students fail to gain entry into a degree course. This perception of career as a mark of prestige in self-identity, assimilated through cultural heritage, colonialism, and globalisation in an enabling environment of policies and accentuated by media propaganda, perpetuates in a Circuit of Culture (Hall, 1997), as shown below:

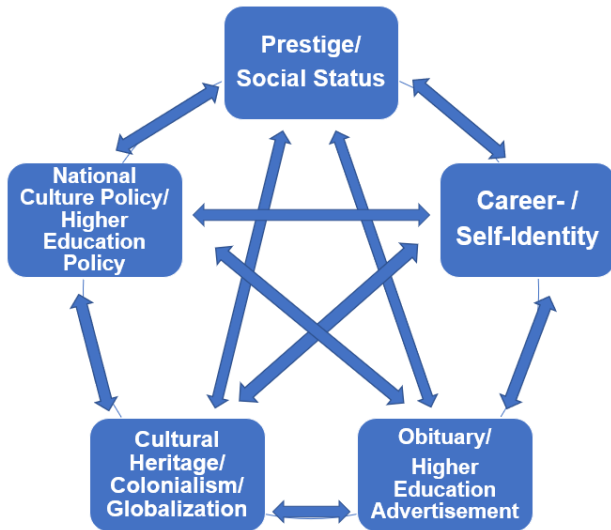


Figure 9. Circuit of Culture: STEM Career Choice of Chinese Malaysians

B. Impact of Career as a Symbol of Status on Stem

Career decisions are mediated by attitudes and perceptions, depending on one's cultural background, the mass media one consumes and other exposures, giving rise to certain narratives and discourses. One of the common narratives is "it is important to get a university degree to secure one's future". This narrative is often reinforced by representation of the mortarboard as a sign of extraordinary achievement by local advertisements. From a dress code at the graduation ceremony, the mortarboard has emerged to signify beyond academic achievement as a symbol of prestige and societal stature, which can be showcased throughout one's life, as shown by portraits of graduates with mortarboards and graduation robes placed prominently in living rooms of Malaysian households. Such a combination of power of a discourse, with symbols signifying extraordinary stature, could produce positive outcomes like encouraging education pursuit for personal career, and enhancing national socio-economic progress. However, it also hampers the development of non-degree education like technical and

vocational education and training (TVET), as well as on apprenticeship and high-skill training in STEM which are instrumental in industrial development. It also results in preference towards academic and theoretical study over skill and practical training. The latter is in demand in current era of emerging technology fields like robotics and artificial intelligence.

This trend of regarding a profession as representation of prestige could be attributed to the colonial legacy, as illustrated in Orientalism where European culture was able to shape the Orient in so many ways in ideology, politics, sociology, science, and imagination; or Eurocentrism which claims that modernity has emanated from Europe since its Renaissance in the 18th Century. In Malaysia, a post-British colony, colonialism has served as a vehicle for Orientalism and Eurocentrism, which have found its footing via the mass media, and the globalised internet as well as Malaysians' lineage to the West through education and business connection. It is common for Malaysians to choose universities in the West in preference to those in the East like Singapore, Japan, and Hong Kong, even though the latter shows equivalent or sometimes better quality and ranking in university ranking. For some, to be educated and earn the label of the West is their ultimate dream, often with the cost of spending lifetime savings.

C. Hegemony and Paradigm Shift on Career and Work

A hegemony in career choice is formed when a dominant ideology arises (Hall, 1997) from among contesting ideologies and cultural norms "become embedded in media messages in ways that allow them to be reinforced, internalised, and ultimately become hegemonic" (Aiello, 2004). They are then experienced as universal laws, resulting in these representations or myths to be accepted as facts. This is "how consent is manufactured" (ibid., p.98).

However, while cultural norms can become hegemonic via media propagation, interpretation by the audience can vary as meanings are culturally, socially, and historically constructed, as explained by Hall, who regards language as polysemic. He identifies three ways audience interpret a message: to accept the meaning in a hegemonic reading; to negotiate with it; or completely reject it (Holleufer, 2020;

Aiello, 2004). Thus, meanings can be deconstructed by the same process as it has been constructed, that is, through media campaigns and rebranding. However, this is often a hard-fought “war of position” over time (Santucci, 2010). A successful example of overcoming the hegemony is the rebranding of “Vocational and Industrial Training Board (VITB)” of Singapore, where the word “vocational” was left out and “training” was substituted with “education”, changing it to Institute of Technical Education (ITE), as “vocational” was seen to carry derogatory connotation and “training” did not sound attractive. This, coupled with an intensive campaign plus refurbishing of campuses, has successfully made TVET more attractive to Singaporeans. In another case, unpleasant news which are widely and repeatedly reported in the media, like recent report on lack of job security of contract doctors, and bullying of young doctors leading to suicide, could generate feeling of insecurity among aspiring students, giving them a negative perception towards the medical profession and their perception towards it may shift when realism sets in.

Additionally, historic events like the recent pandemic brought about massive disruption to life and work, may create a paradigm shift in world views and change in values towards life. A paradigm shift is characterised by upheaval and breakthroughs where outmoded views and practices not in step with prevailing scenarios are overthrown. It allows familiar things to be seen in revolutionary ways (Hall, 1997) and new discourses be formed. Some of the current discourses on career and work are “need for balance between career and personal life pursuit”, “higher quality of life and less stressful jobs”, “more time for family”, “flexi-work lifestyle to maintain mental health”, “money is not everything in life”. Though these discourses are not entirely new, it appears that the value placed on jobs and careers is waning in a turbulent and uncertain world. This might have influenced students in making career choice in STEM. New approaches in communication on STEM careers may be necessary as “strategies that worked at one time or another may not work in the present day” (Grant, n.d.).

D. Hegemony and Education Development

There is an emerging trend in universities awarding micro-credentials earned and accumulated for a final qualification. In another case, a UK university is offering a hybrid model of degree-apprenticeship programs. With increasing complexities of contemporary global issues, there is also an advocate for more interdisciplinary study like STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics). These new developments may break the dichotomy and hegemony of degree qualifications over non-degree ones.

VII. CONCLUSION

Chinese Malaysians inherit Chinese cultures as well as Malaysian and globalisation influences shaded with colonialism, living in a shifting multiple world that is constantly being shaped by evolving language, culture and political ideologies into a cultural mix.

The manifestation of the evolution of these influences is seen in the career choice of Chinese Malaysians. Based on the study of obituaries, it is found that career, among others, is closely associated with one’s self-identity as a symbol of prestige and social status. This notion of prestige has an impact on STEM career choice -there is a hierarchy of prestige based on one’s career, with the medical profession occupying the top position. Career choice in STEM is found to be limited to selected few like medicine, allied health, and engineering. Beyond these, most science careers, especially the socially obscured and less visible in media ones, do not appear to be within the purview of the Chinese Malaysians.

The study found that Chinese Malaysians value higher education, as demonstrated in highlighting education achievements in obituaries. However, there is a discrepancy in value placed on the types of qualifications and higher education institutions. “University” and “degree” have taken precedence over “college”, “diploma”, “vocational training” and “polytechnic”. This has been accentuated by the media displaying certain images like the mortarboard and graduation gown, resulting in the hegemonic power of the former over the latter. This does not augur well for the development of TVET as well as high-skill jobs in emerging STEM fields.

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