

The Resilience of Chinese Reverted Muslims in Facing Double Minorities Status: A Study in Malaysia Context

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Abstract:

Resilience is one of the important constructs in positive human functioning, especially in facing challenges from various walks of life. Chinese Reverted Muslims (CRM) in Malaysia are a minority group in both the population of Malaysian Chinese as well as in the Muslim community, which falls under the category of double minorities. In the need to face chronic stressors such as discrimination, racism, and prejudice as double minorities, thus to be in the double minorities status (DMS), CRM requires a great deal of resilience to overcome all these negative circumstances. Past studies regarding CRM are of little, especially in the Malaysian context. Globally research also focused more on Chinese Muslims but not CRM. The trace of literature on resilience in CRM also cannot be found in either overseas or local research. Malaysian unique polarized racial structure and history provide a worthy paradigm in studying the population of DMS and also probe the strength and resilience from the religious and cultural perspective. Numerous CRM national exemplary from various societal backgrounds have exercised resilience throughout the years since Malaysia's independence in 1957. Understanding the resilience mechanism behind CRM dealing with DMS

will be helpful in personality building, especially in resilience for oppressed groups.

Keywords: resilience, chinese, reverts, double minorities status, positive, stress

A. Introduction

This paper focuses on the resilience of Chinese Reverted Muslims (CRM) in facing Double Minority Status (DMS) in the Malaysian community. There were numerous studies regarding resilience from overseas, but not many in Malaysia, where the emphasis for this paper is the resilience sourced from religion and spiritual strength, especially for the religion of Islam and the Muslim community. Research on the resilience of Muslims¹ and other religions² has been carried out in great scales in overseas. Nonetheless, past research only focused on teenagers and women. The existing gap here is the resilience of adult reverted Muslims, especially the CRM that fulfilled the criteria of resilience as published through the news media, books, magazines, etc. in Malaysia, which can exhibit positive responses although experiencing negative circumstances, in this study where the DMS is termed as the negative circumstances.

Research regarding CRM has been given more attention in recent years, including culture³, experiences in the religion of Islam⁴, factors of involvement

¹ Nafiseh Ghafournia, 'Muslim Women and Domestic Violence: Developing a Framework for Social Work Practice', *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 36.1–2 (2017), 146–63 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2017.1313150>>; Karim Mitha and Shelina Adatia, 'The Faith Community and Mental Health Resilience amongst Australian Ismaili Muslim Youth', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 19.2 (2016), 192–207 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2016.1144732>>.

² Carrie Doehring, 'Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress', *Pastoral Psychology*, 64.5 (2015), 635–49 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-015-0643-7>>; Arve Gunnestad and S'lungile Thwala, 'Resilience and Religion in Children and Youth in Southern Africa', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 16.2 (2011), 169–85 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2011.580726>>; Marieke Sleijpen and others, 'Between Power and Powerlessness: A Meta-Ethnography of Sources of Resilience in Young Refugees', *Ethnicity & Health*, 21.2 (2016), 158–80 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2015.1044946>>.

³ Syarul Azman Shaharuddin, Abur Hamdi Usman, and Muhammad Yusuf Marlon, 'Malay Culture in Chinese Muslim Newly Convert (Muallaf) Perspective: Selangor Case Study', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2016 <<https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n2s1p325>>.

⁴ ahmad Amir, 'Rashid Rida Dan Fahaman Baru Islam', *Borneo International Journal of Islamic Studies (BIJIS)*, 3.1 SE-Articles (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.21093/bijis.v3i1.2287>>; Muhammad Tahir and Sri Rayhaniah, 'Implementation of The Principles of Islamic Communication In The Digital Era', *Borneo International Journal of Islamic Studies (BIJIS)*, 4.1 SE-Articles (2021) <<https://doi.org/10.21093/bijis.v4i1.4477>>.

in the religion of Islam⁵, identity⁶, societal development⁷, involvement in the economy, politics and social⁸ as well as the contribution of Chinese Muslim organization⁹. Nonetheless, there is no attention given unto the strength and the causes behind such contribution. However, CRM is facing a great of challenges throughout the eras. Therefore this paper will investigate the strength of humans, in this context, CRM.

Moreover, after CRM came back to the religion of Islam, there was no single module or specialized body which had been professionally trained and assigned to lead CRM in dealing with challenges and problems faced by them, especially on DMS. Although a government sector is assigned to support and deal with the reverted Muslims, it is more of general support, such as financial support. The specific support oriented to the necessities of reverts¹⁰, such as emotional needs, psychological needs, attitude modification, and spiritual needs, are not emphasized compared to financial needs. Therefore, the form of support or guidance that is based on the current situation or the circumstances that the CRM faced, sharing of experiences and testimonies, etc., in groups are needed by the CRM. This refers to the ways to face and deal with the challenges that CRM will

⁵ Azarudin Awang and Khadijah Mohd Khambali, 'A Study on Factors That Encourages Chinese Muslim Community within Dialogue of Life', *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 5.1 (2015), 45–53.

⁶ Wai Weng Hew, 'Penamaan Dan Identiti Cina Muslim: Pensempadanan, Perundingan Dan Kacukan Identiti Di Malaysia', in *Conferene on the Malaysian Economy: Development and Challenges*, 2004; Yuen Yu Joy Lam, 'Religious Conversion and Reconstruction of Identities: The Case of Chinese Muslim Converts in Malaysia', 2004; Rosey Wang Ma, 'Shifting Identities: Chinese Muslims in Malaysia', *Asian Ethnicity*, 6.2 (2005), 89–107 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14631360500135146>>; Pei-Chien Wu, 'Looking beyond Ethnicity: The Negotiation of Chinese Muslim Identity in Penang, Malaysia', *Asian Ethnicity*, 16.1 (2015), 78–91 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2013.870838>>.

⁷ Wan Kamal Mujani and Abdul Qayyum Abdul Razak, 'Historical Development of the Chinese Muslim Society in Malaysia', *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences*, 2012.

⁸ Wan Kamal Mujani and others, 'The Chinese Muslim Community: Their Economic, Political and Social Involvement in Malaysia', *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences*, 2012.

⁹ .. Mohd Faridh Haféz Mhd Omar and . Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail al-Qudsy, 'Sumbangan Organisasi Cina-Muslim Dalam Keharmonian Beragama Di Malaysia : Tinjauan Terhadap Peranan Dan Cabaran PERKIM Dan MACMA', in *Isu-Isu Semasa Dakwah Dan Golongan Minoriti*, 2016.

¹⁰ Azman Ab Rahman and others, 'Prosedur Pengislaman Mualaf Di Negeri Sembilan: Kajian Di Persatuan Cina Muslim Malaysia (Macma)', *Journal of Fatwa Management and Research*, 6 (2018), 149–66 <<https://doi.org/10.33102/jfatwa.vol6no1.79>>; Zurqoni Zurqoni, Muhammad Arbain, and Umar Fauzan, 'The Dynamics of the Development of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia', *Borneo International Journal of Islamic Studies (BIJIS)*, 2.1 SE-Articles (2019) <<https://doi.org/10.21093/bijis.v2i1.1849>>.

usually face in the Malaysian context. It is a fact that the authorities in charge of the affairs of the religion of Islam, such as *Jabatan Agama Islam* in respective states, did prepare classes specialized for the reverts. In contrast, those classes merely focus on worshipping and rituals such as reciting Quran in Arabic or performing the prescribed prayers, yet giving very little attention to the life challenges or the attitude the reverts should adopt in facing the trials as a newly reverted Muslim.

The objective of this paper is to investigate the factors that contribute to the resilience of CRM in dealing with DMS. Furthermore, this paper will also describe the mechanism of the resilience of CRM while dealing with DMS in Malaysia. What are the factors that contribute to the resilience of CRM in dealing with DMS? Furthermore, how does the resilience of CRM while dealing with DMS in Malaysia work?

B. Literature Review

1. Resilience

Understanding the term "resilience" would start with its definition, which originates from the Latin "resilience" with the meaning "to recoil." Merriam-Webster offers the meaning of resilience as (a) The ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something terrible happens; or (b) The ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc. The full definition is as follows: (1) The capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress; or (2) An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. Hence, the dictionary definitions show that resilience can be applied to objects and beings.

This paper conceptualizes the resilience of CRM, a category of beings under the group of humans. Therefore, resilience for CRM refers to the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens while adjusting to the changes in lives, which will be discussed further in the later section of this paper regarding this community of people. There are several existing theories on

resilience for the abused group¹¹, minorities¹², refugees¹³, youth¹⁴, children¹⁵ and the traumatized¹⁶, where some of the highly related theories on resilience for this paper are from the group of adult on general¹⁷, Chinese context¹⁸, minorities¹⁹, and spiritual²⁰.

The perspective for resilience will be process-oriented rather than trait-oriented, usually referred to as "resiliency" since the background of the study is contextually based in Malaysia. Process-oriented resilience regards resilience as an interaction of one and one's situation for overcoming the adverse effects of risk exposure, coping positively with traumatic experiences, or avoiding the destructive courses associated with risks²¹. This paper's resilience will adopt the strength-based model to find promotive factors in helping CRM face the DMS. As mentioned earlier, most of the studies are carried out overseas, while the theories of resilience to be applied in Malaysia as part of Eastern countries shall be noted on cultural consideration in the case of the Chinese. Cultural differences might arise from the aspect of risks, resources, assets, and different risk exposure²² for the circumstance faced by CRM in DMS.

¹¹ Ghafournia.

¹² Fahad Riaz Choudhry and others, "We Are the Soul, Pearl and Beauty of Hindu Kush Mountains": Exploring Resilience and Psychological Wellbeing of Kalasha, an Ethnic and Religious Minority Group in Pakistan', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 12.1 (2017), 1267344 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2016.1267344>>.

¹³ Sleijpen and others.

¹⁴ Mitha and Adatia; Yanxue Zhai and others, 'The Relationship between Post-Traumatic Symptoms, Parenting Style, and Resilience among Adolescents in Liaoning, China: A Cross-Sectional Study', *PLoS ONE*, 2015 <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0141102>>.

¹⁵ Gunnestad and Thwala.

¹⁶ Jawad Seidm Mahmoodi, Changiz Rahimi, and Norolah Mohamadi, 'Resiliency and Religious Orientation: Factors Contributing to Posttraumatic Growth in Iranian Subjects', *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry*, 2011.

¹⁷ Robert J. Taormina, 'Adult Personal Resilience: A New Theory, New Measure, and Practical Implications', *Psychological Thought*, 8.1 (2015), 35–46 <<https://doi.org/10.5964/psyc.v8i1.126>>.

¹⁸ Stevenson Fergus and Marc A. Zimmerman, 'ADOLESCENT RESILIENCE: A Framework for Understanding Healthy Development in the Face of Risk', *Annual Review of Public Health*, 26.1 (2005), 399–419 <<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.26.021304.144357>>.

¹⁹ Choudhry and others.

²⁰ Doehring.

²¹ Fergus and Zimmerman.

²² Jin-Liang Wang, Da-Jun Zhang, and Marc A. Zimmerman, 'Resilience Theory and Its Implications for Chinese Adolescents', *Psychological Reports*, 117.2 (2015), 354–75 <<https://doi.org/10.2466/16.17.PR0.117c21z8>>.

According to the concept of resilience from²³, "Adult personal resilience is a multifaceted construct that includes a person's determination and ability to endure, adapt, and recover from adversity." which consists of 4 dimensions of adult resilience, are named: Determination, Endurance, Adaptability, and Recuperability. Determination is the decision to persevere and/or to succeed sourced from the willpower and firmness of purpose to do so; Endurance is the psychological and physical strength within the individual that enables one to go through unpleasant difficulties without giving up; Adaptability is the coping and the adjusting of oneself with the negative and changing circumstances; Recuperability is the recovering one's usual condition physically and mentally from the adverse condition. From the side of minorities,²⁴ found that respect for others, tolerance, unity, and pride in one's traditional culture are the contributing factor to the resilience of one in a minority community. Moreover, caregiving relationships help people spiritually integrate moral stress fostering resilience, as summed up by²⁵. From the religious perspective, spirituality and religion were viewed by the women in the study of²⁶ as a significant dimension in their lives that provided strength and resilience. The same goes for²⁷.

2. Malaysian Chinese

Malaysia's population structure is unique due to the multiracial as well as the multi-religious formation, and the vibrancies become even more complex when there is a categorization of Malays and non-Malays in the proportion of the population²⁸, where Chinese in Malaysia are under the category of non-Malay as well as non-*Bumiputra*. Giving an overview of the Chinese in Malaysia as related to this paper is of the scope includes Chinese communal values, culture, religion, social structure, and lastly, taboo, where all these are largely intersecting and intermingling with one another to form a whole image and identity of being a Chinese in Malaysia.

Since the early age of Chinese immigrants pioneering the formation of Chinese society under the great influence of Yap Ah Loy during the 19 century, contextual factors such as education level helped adapt ideological formation sourced from China. The crucial platform for the production of ideologies that give Chinese

²³ Taormina.

²⁴ Choudhry and others.

²⁵ Doehring.

²⁶ Ghafournia.

²⁷ Jeremy P. Cummings and Kenneth I. Pargament, 'Medicine for the Spirit: Religious Coping in Individuals with Medical Conditions', *Religions*, 2010 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel1010028>>.

²⁸ Lee Hock Guan and Leo Suryadinata, *Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects, Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects*, 2011.

society in Malaysia a set of values, including educational and literacy institutions, rituals in religion, and also entertainment, thus comes the formation of Confucian learning, attaining harmonic stability with natural and supernatural forces, loyalty to kin and pseudo-kin, filial piety and the importance of literacy²⁹.

In relation to the multi-religious identity of Malaysia, the religion of the Chinese population is diverse, where Chinese Religion and Chinese Buddhism are the most outstanding. Mainly due to the large part of them being from these two categories, and the Chinese culture and civilization take both as representatives³⁰. Furthermore, Chinese religion is still being observed by most Malaysian Chinese today, and some of them will apply non-Chinese animistic rites, which are perceived as useful to certain Chinese individuals. It is easy for a Chinese to adopt another religion that is not ethnically labeled, also termed as non-exclusive in their worldview of religion. Interestingly in the context of Malaysia, because of the fear of later generations being assimilated into the Malays, as the majority make up of Muslims in Malaysia, Chinese parents object to their children becoming Muslim³¹.

Chinese religion and local social organizations and leadership are closely connected, where this will serve political purposes and importance to the local Chinese politician by attending Maja or religious functions or acting as "advisor" of the temple. The temple, which is commonly situated in each Chinese settlement or town, is under the management of a committee that reveals the collective ownership and identities, serving social, religious, and political functions. Both homes and temples can be a place of worship for the Chinese. When the need arises, such as marriage or health-related consultation, or during special occasions such as deities' birthdays and major Chinese festivals, they will go to the temple³².

Customs and taboos are a fundamental part of the Chinese identity, heritage, and tradition. They are not just part of the Chinese norm but of the expression of Chinese moral and ethnic values, which preserve order, civility, and harmony between members of the society, from the birth of a child to marriage, up to the

²⁹ S A Carstens, *Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese Worlds* (Singapore University Press, 2005).

³⁰ Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, *The Chinese in Malaysia / Edited by Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng* (Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹ Hing and Chee-Beng; Fakhri Sungit, Zulkifli Abd. Hamid, and Hanis Najwa Shaharuddin, 'Isu Dan Permasalahan Muallaf Cina Di Malaysia', in *International Conference on Aqidah, Dakwah & Syariah 2016 (IRSYAD 2016)*, 2016, pp. 1181–11181.

³² Hing and Chee-Beng.

funeral and other superstitions³³. In terms of cultural interaction between the Chinese as non-Malays and the Malays, the former holds a strong belief that their culture is superior to the culture of the latter. This can be seen in a clear picture when it comes to intermarriage between Chinese and Malay, where comes the disapproval from family and community at a serious level. It is worth noting that such negative evaluations on ethnicity upon Malay culture is not parallel with the views towards the Western culture as regarded as high admiration³⁴.

3. Chinese Reverted Muslims

Chinese Reverted Muslim or known as converts, make up the majority of nearly 60,000 from the the whole of the Chinese Muslim population, which is less than one percent, included Hui Muslims. Chinese Muslims are a unique and unconventional group in Malaysian society due to the general belief that being Malay is equivalent to being Muslim³⁵ sourced from the Constitution as accepted by the public makes it even harder to explain the identity of Chinese who is being a Muslim. In the Malaysian social circumstance, this group is reduced to a double minority: minority Muslim among the majority non-Muslim Chinese, and minority Chinese among the overpowering Malay Muslims³⁶.

There are convictions and convenience factors of one Chinese choose Islam as a religion, namely marriage³⁷, environment, reading, or better acquaintance about Islam while getting some economic and political benefit is considered a rare case³⁸. These reverts are being addressed as *muallaf*³⁹ or *saudara baru*, which means new brother and sister. By such addressing, CRM disliked it due to the view of being considered as a different type of Muslim⁴⁰, which indicates the first part of the minority status faced by CRM in Malaysia among the Muslim society. There is a unique circumstance in Malaysia regarding one's reversion to Islam, which will be considered as changing one's ethnicity, known as "*masuk Melayu*", which literally means "enter the Malay". Here comes a challenge to the CRM which that how much "Chineseness" can they preserve within themselves along the way to get mingled with the society of Malay that makes up the majority Muslim, and the situation of ambiguousness goes more serious when they

³³ Wan Seng Ann, *Chinese Customs and Taboos* (Fajar Bakti, 1995).

³⁴ Carstens.

³⁵ Hing and Chee-Beng.

³⁶ Rosey Ma, 'Being Muslim and Chinese in Malaysia', in *Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects*, 2011 <<https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814345095-006>>.

³⁷ Mujani and Razak.

³⁸ Hing and Chee-Beng.

³⁹ Hew.

⁴⁰ Hing and Chee-Beng.

encounter the Malays that makes no much of the boundaries between racial and religion⁴¹, from the majority Chinese who are non-Muslim, CRM as being singled out from the mainstream, and this causes the second degree of the minority status for CRM, thus CRM facing DMS in Malaysia.

It happens around the world, where minority communities strive hard to get acknowledgement from the majority community due to the sense of not belonging. CRM needs to prove to Malays that they are Muslim enough by not just practicing Islam in their life while assimilating some level of Malay cultural style⁴² as well. On the other hand, by expressing the Chinese characteristic being the origin of one as Chinese through the aspect of culture and values⁴³, CRM will always be in the dilemma of reconstructing of identity due to the fact that they will finally be neither Malay nor Chinese in the view of the mainstream society⁴⁴.

The reverting process is not just as simple as a changeover from one spiritual faith to another. There is a major change in the principal identity of an individual that involves a redefinition of self-identity, usually taking cultural and religious dimensions into account for identity reconstruction⁴⁵. Throughout the adaptation, numerous factors affect the change of the reverts, which is family background, former faith or religion, objectives for the reversion, career background, earlier concept of Islam and the process of learning the religion, and one's socio-economic prowess⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Rosey Ma.

⁴² Awang and Khambali; Shaharuddin, Usman, and Marlon.

⁴³ Wu.

⁴⁴ Rosey Ma.

⁴⁵ Lam.

⁴⁶ Rosey Ma.

C. Discussion

Figure: 1 Chinese Reverted Muslims' Coping for Identity Reconstruction.

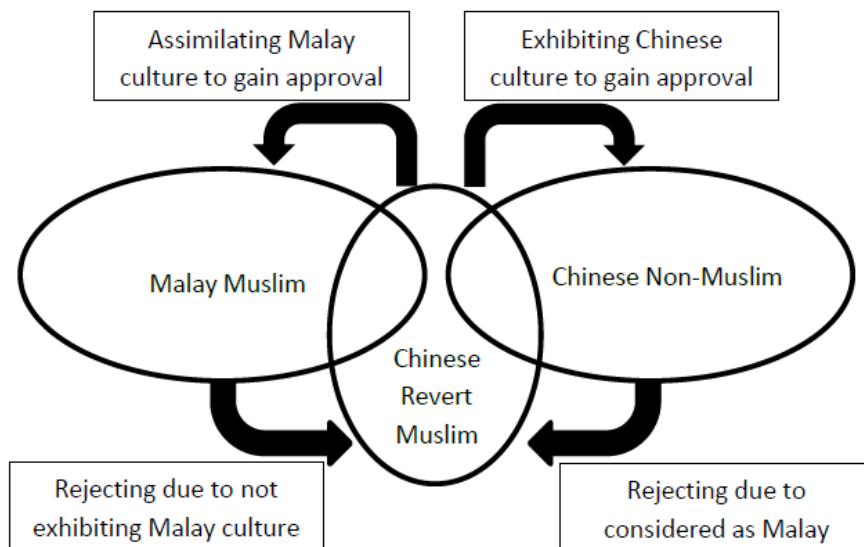
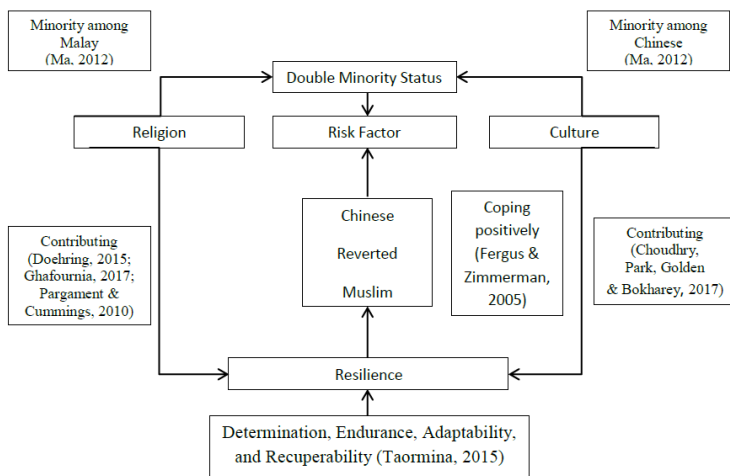


Figure: 2 Conceptual Framework for the Resilience of Chinese Reverted Muslims in Facing Double Minority Status.



The conceptual framework for this paper will take CRM as the central role that exhibits the positive coping with the DMS with resilience as model 1. DMS, rooted in the religious community of Malay Muslims and the cultural community of non-Muslim Chinese, contributes to the risk factor towards CRM in the model process-oriented resilience. At the same time, CRM will withdraw strength from

religion as well as a culture that acts as an internal source of resilience. It is also undeniable that the religious and cultural communities⁴⁷ also did contribute to the resilience of CRM, while the internal promotive factor being focused on in this model of building the resilience of CRM in facing DMS. DMS is a traumatic experience, and CRM might have two outcomes going through this process, either post-traumatic stress or post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is an interesting part to be explored further by the researcher, seeing that numerous successful examples of CRM in society, such as Haji Sharin, Xifu Naser, Dr. Osman Chuah, Profesor Dr. Ridhuan Tee, Dr. Athiroh, Prof. Dr. Taufiq Yap, Chan Abdullah, Albeit Liew⁴⁸ instead of apostasy cases, the source of strength or the resources in building the resilience of the traumatic group would be significant to the study of resilience as well as the society. One of the points worth of being noted is the learning process, which along the coping with DMS, is how a CRM learn to cope it positively by exercise ng the resilience within them sourced from the internal and external support and ultimately transformed into a resilience being along the process of dealing with DMS, the transformative learning process.

D. Conclusion

Malaysia's highly polarized population structure indirectly created a context of religious as well as cultural boundaries, which is unclear and causes the existence of DMS for CRM. With such context in Malaysia, it is suitable to study the process of resilience which did not being given much attention, especially comes to the Chinese community as a minority or even a DMS in both racial and religious communities. Conducting a study as such will able give a clearer picture not only of the social interaction that is shifting at times between culture and religion in Malaysia but as of giving awareness to the authorities regarding the importance and the ways to support the minorities in society for the betterment of all. Learning how to be resilient will provide a closer look at the process of how resilience is being built instead of what builds resilience.

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⁴⁷ Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar and Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail al-Qudsy; Shaharuddin, Usman, and Marlon.

⁴⁸ Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar and Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail al-Qudsy.

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