

## Application of cross-cultural communication theories in Malaysian Chinese literature in English a systematic review

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**Abstract:** This systematic review aims to examine how cross-cultural communication theories have been applied in the study of Malaysian Chinese literature written in English, with a focus on identifying dominant theoretical approaches, thematic concerns, and gaps in current scholarship. Using the PRISMA 2020 framework, the study systematically searched Web of Science and Scopus and initially retrieved 199 records. After duplicate removal and screening based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 17 peer-reviewed journal articles were selected for qualitative thematic synthesis. The review shows that theories such as hybridity, diaspora, cultural identity, translation, and postcolonial critique have been widely used to interpret Malaysian Chinese literary texts in English. However, theoretical application remains uneven, with most studies focusing on canonical authors and relying on limited methodological approaches. Interdisciplinary integration is still insufficient, and emerging literary voices remain underexplored. The study concludes that Malaysian Chinese literature in English provides a valuable site for examining identity negotiation, intercultural dialogue, and decolonial critique in postcolonial and multicultural contexts. It also suggests the need for broader theoretical integration, greater methodological diversity, and more inclusive literary representation in future research.

**Keywords:** *Cross-cultural communication, Cultural identity, English literature in Malaysia, Hybridity, Diaspora, Malaysian Chinese literature, Postcolonial theory, Systematic review.*

### 1. Introduction

The landscape of Malaysian literature in English has evolved significantly over the past several decades, marked by the complex interplay between national identity, postcolonial narratives, and the lived experiences of ethnic minorities, particularly the Malaysian Chinese. In this dynamic cultural context, literature serves not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a powerful medium for negotiating identity and cultural belonging. As the boundaries between local and global cultures blur, the study of Malaysian Chinese literature written in English offers a rich ground for examining cross-cultural communication, hybridity, and diaspora. Cross-cultural communication theories, originally developed within intercultural, media, and sociolinguistic disciplines, have increasingly been appropriated in literary studies to decode how texts embody, resist, or reconfigure cultural interactions. However, there remains a lack of systematic synthesis on how these theories are specifically applied in the Malaysian Chinese literary context.

The Malaysian Chinese community constitutes a significant ethnic minority, comprising approximately 22% of the nation's population [1]. Historically situated at the intersection of colonial legacies, multicultural policies, and global diasporic currents, Malaysian Chinese writers have produced a compelling body of literature in English that interrogates themes such as identity fragmentation, cultural memory, hybridity, and displacement. Scholars have noted the strategic use of English by

ethnic Chinese authors in Malaysia as a means to assert cultural agency while navigating state-imposed narratives of national unity and multiculturalism [2, 3]. These writers often reimagine ethnic identity not as a fixed construct but as a process of ongoing negotiation shaped by migration, linguistic pluralism, and socio-political marginalization.

While literary criticism on Malaysian Chinese authors such as Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Tan Twan Eng, and Tash Aw has grown steadily, much of this scholarship is dispersed across various journals and lacks a coherent theoretical framework. Cross-cultural communication theories, such as Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, and Edward Said's notion of orientalism, offer crucial insights into how cultural borders are constructed and transgressed in narrative discourse [4-6]. Yet, there has been limited effort to systematically examine how these theories are employed within the corpus of Malaysian Chinese literature in English. The fragmented nature of existing research poses challenges for scholars seeking to understand broader patterns in the use of theory, as well as for identifying conceptual or methodological gaps.

This study responds to that gap by undertaking a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles that analyze Malaysian Chinese literature in English through the lens of cross-cultural communication theories. In doing so, it seeks to map the intellectual terrain of this interdisciplinary intersection, offering a structured synthesis of scholarly trends, thematic concentrations, and theoretical approaches. Through a comprehensive screening and thematic coding process, the study not only identifies how scholars interpret literary representations of cultural interaction but also evaluates the extent to which cross-cultural frameworks have been effectively operationalized in literary criticism.

The application of systematic review methodology to literary studies is relatively rare, yet increasingly necessary in an era of proliferating academic output and interdisciplinary convergence. As Cooper argues, the systematic review enables the construction of a cumulative body of knowledge, allowing scholars to identify consistencies and divergences across studies and to build conceptual models grounded in empirical analysis [7]. In the context of Malaysian Chinese literature, such an approach offers the potential to transcend anecdotal or author-centric critiques and instead focus on broader scholarly tendencies that reveal the ideological, cultural, and epistemological dimensions of the field.

To address these goals, this study poses five interrelated research questions: (1) How is cultural identity constructed in Malaysian Chinese literature in English? (2) What cross-cultural communication theories have been applied in analyzing this body of literature? (3) How do these theories contribute to the understanding of diasporic, hybrid, and postcolonial identities? (4) What methodological patterns emerge across existing studies? (5) What are the conceptual gaps or limitations in current scholarship that warrant further investigation? By organizing the review around these research questions, the study not only delineates the current state of research but also offers a roadmap for future inquiries.

The need for such a review is underscored by the increasing academic attention to Southeast Asian Anglophone literature and the call to decolonize literary canons and methodologies [8, 9]. Malaysian Chinese writers, while often included in broader Asian diasporic studies, remain underrepresented in global literary discourse. This marginalization is compounded by a tendency in existing research to focus narrowly on individual authors or texts without situating them within larger theoretical or cultural frameworks. Consequently, a systematic approach that draws on cross-cultural theories offers a more nuanced lens for interpreting literary representations of identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation.

Moreover, this review aligns with contemporary trends in literary scholarship that emphasize transnationalism, intercultural dialogue, and the politics of representation. The incorporation of cross-cultural communication theories into literary analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how narratives mediate cultural difference, challenge ethnonationalist paradigms, and foster alternative imaginaries of community. As Casanova and Apter have shown, literature often operates within unequal global structures of cultural capital, and the application of critical theories from communication and

cultural studies can illuminate the mechanisms by which marginal voices negotiate their place in the literary world-system [10, 11].

In summary, this review fills a critical lacuna at the intersection of cross-cultural communication and Malaysian Chinese literary studies. By systematically mapping and analyzing peer-reviewed scholarship, it aims to provide a coherent synthesis of theoretical applications, thematic trends, and methodological choices. The study offers valuable insights not only for scholars of Malaysian literature and cultural studies but also for those interested in the broader implications of literary production in multicultural and postcolonial societies.

## 2. Literature Review

The scholarly investigation of Malaysian Chinese literature in English has grown alongside increasing academic recognition of Southeast Asian Anglophone literature more broadly. However, the literature remains fragmented, with studies often isolated within narrowly defined thematic or authorial scopes. This section critically reviews the relevant literature across three interconnected axes: Malaysian Chinese literary criticism, the use of cross-cultural communication theories in literary studies, and the synthesis of these domains in recent interdisciplinary work.

A foundational body of work has explored the thematic contours of Malaysian Chinese literature in English. Early studies often focused on national allegory, diaspora, and ethnic marginalization, positioning Malaysian Chinese authors within postcolonial frameworks [12]. Writers such as Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Tan Twan Eng are regularly cited for their nuanced portrayals of cultural hybridity and identity conflict. For example, Lim's autobiographical writing has been read as a negotiation between gender, ethnicity, and language within a Malaysian postcolonial context [2, 3].

Despite this growing interest, a coherent theoretical framework guiding such analyses has been notably absent. Much of the extant scholarship tends to prioritize close reading of individual texts or historical contextualization over theoretical integration. This limits the capacity to generalize findings or to situate Malaysian Chinese literary studies within broader cross-cultural or communication paradigms. The few attempts at theoretical synthesis remain scattered and largely descriptive [13].

Cross-cultural communication theories provide a robust toolkit for addressing such limitations. Originating in fields such as sociology, cultural studies, and communication science, these theories offer conceptual clarity in understanding how cultural symbols, identities, and ideologies circulate across boundaries [14, 15]. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, for example, has been influential in literary studies for analyzing texts that occupy "in-between" spaces of cultural articulation [4]. Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity similarly helps illuminate how identities are formed relationally, in response to power structures and diasporic dislocation [5]. These concepts have been widely applied to postcolonial literature but remain underutilized in the specific context of Malaysian Chinese narratives.

A notable subfield that has emerged is the examination of diaspora and cultural memory. Building on the work of theorists, scholars have analyzed how Malaysian Chinese writers reconstruct cultural memory in the face of national erasure [16, 17]. A study employs post-memory theory to examine the intergenerational transmission of trauma in Malaysian Chinese short fiction. These studies often touch upon communication theory tangentially but rarely frame their analysis within a cross-cultural paradigm [18].

Language and translation have also been central to this discourse. Malaysian Chinese literature often exhibits multilingualism, code-switching, and linguistic hybridity, phenomena that are central to intercultural communication. Authors frequently embed Chinese idioms or Malay expressions within English prose, complicating the linguistic landscape of the text and inviting cross-cultural interpretation. Chan has highlighted these stylistic features, yet few link these observations to theories of intercultural pragmatics or language ideology [19].

Methodologically, the field has predominantly relied on close reading and thematic analysis, with limited use of comparative or empirical methods. This contrasts with literary studies in other national contexts, where digital humanities, corpus linguistics, and ethnographic reader studies have become

more common. The lack of methodological diversity may contribute to the fragmented nature of the field, as scholars often focus on similar canonical authors without expanding the theoretical scope or incorporating new data sources.

Furthermore, existing literature tends to marginalize gender and class dynamics in favor of ethnicity and nationalism. While there is some work on feminist readings of Malaysian Chinese literature, this remains a minority perspective [20]. Similarly, issues of economic disparity, labor migration, and rural-urban divides are rarely foregrounded, despite their relevance to cultural identity formation. This thematic narrowness further underscores the need for a systematic synthesis that can identify these lacunae.

To summarize, the literature on Malaysian Chinese literature in English reveals a growing yet still uneven engagement with cross-cultural communication theories. While some scholars have begun to incorporate theoretical frameworks, these efforts are often inconsistent, methodologically thin, or insufficiently contextualized. There remains significant scope for systematic analysis that maps the application of these theories across different texts, authors, and critical traditions. This review seeks to fulfill that role by drawing together dispersed strands of scholarship, assessing theoretical usage, and identifying areas for future development.

### 3. Methodology

This systematic literature review followed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor in the identification, screening, and inclusion of relevant studies [21]. The primary objective was to critically examine how cross-cultural communication theories have been applied in analyzing Malaysian Chinese literature written in English.

The literature search was conducted using two multidisciplinary and widely recognized academic databases: Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus. These databases were selected due to their extensive indexing of high-quality peer-reviewed journals in the humanities and social sciences. The choice aligns with recommendations for systematic reviews to use multiple sources to mitigate selection bias and enhance the comprehensiveness of search coverage [22]. Searches were conducted in May 2025.

To operationalize the research objectives, a Boolean search string was developed using terms drawn from three conceptual categories: cross-cultural communication theory, literary scope, and ethnocultural focus. The resulting search string was: TS=("cross-cultural" OR intercultural OR "cultural identity" OR "cultural communication" OR "cultural hybridity" OR diaspora OR identity OR postcolonial OR "cultural dynamics") AND TS=(Malays\* AND (literature OR fiction OR novel\* OR poetry OR "short stor\*" OR writing OR author\* OR "English literature" OR "literature in English")) AND TS=(Chinese OR "Malaysian Chinese" OR "Chinese Malaysian" OR "ethnic Chinese"). This string was used to retrieve scholarly articles that address the intersection of ethnic Chinese identity, Malaysian Anglophone literature, and themes of cultural negotiation or communication.

After executing the search, a total of 199 articles were retrieved, 118 from WOS and 81 from Scopus. An initial cleaning step removed 24 duplicate entries that appeared in both databases. From the remaining set, a further 16 records were excluded because they were either not in English or not peer-reviewed journal articles, such as editorials, book reviews, or opinion pieces. All remaining articles were retrievable in full text, either through institutional access or open-access platforms, which ensured a robust basis for full-text analysis.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were explicitly defined to guide article selection and are summarized in the table below. Only English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles were included. Articles had to directly analyze Malaysian Chinese literature written in English and demonstrate explicit or implicit engagement with cross-cultural communication theories. Studies focusing solely on cultural or sociological analysis without reference to literary texts were excluded, as were articles that did not provide substantive analytical depth. These parameters ensured that the final corpus reflected not only thematic relevance but also theoretical rigor and literary specificity.

**Table 1.**  
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles written in English	Non-English language publications
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Non-article formats
Articles analyzing Malaysian Chinese literature written in English	Articles unrelated to literature
Articles engaging with cross-cultural communication theories	Articles unavailable for full retrieval

After this rigorous screening process, 159 articles remained for detailed abstract and full-text examination. Articles were read closely to assess their contribution to the review's research questions. Ultimately, 17 articles met all inclusion criteria and formed the final review pool. These articles span a diverse array of topics, theoretical approaches, and literary texts, reflecting a multifaceted scholarly conversation around Malaysian Chinese literary production.

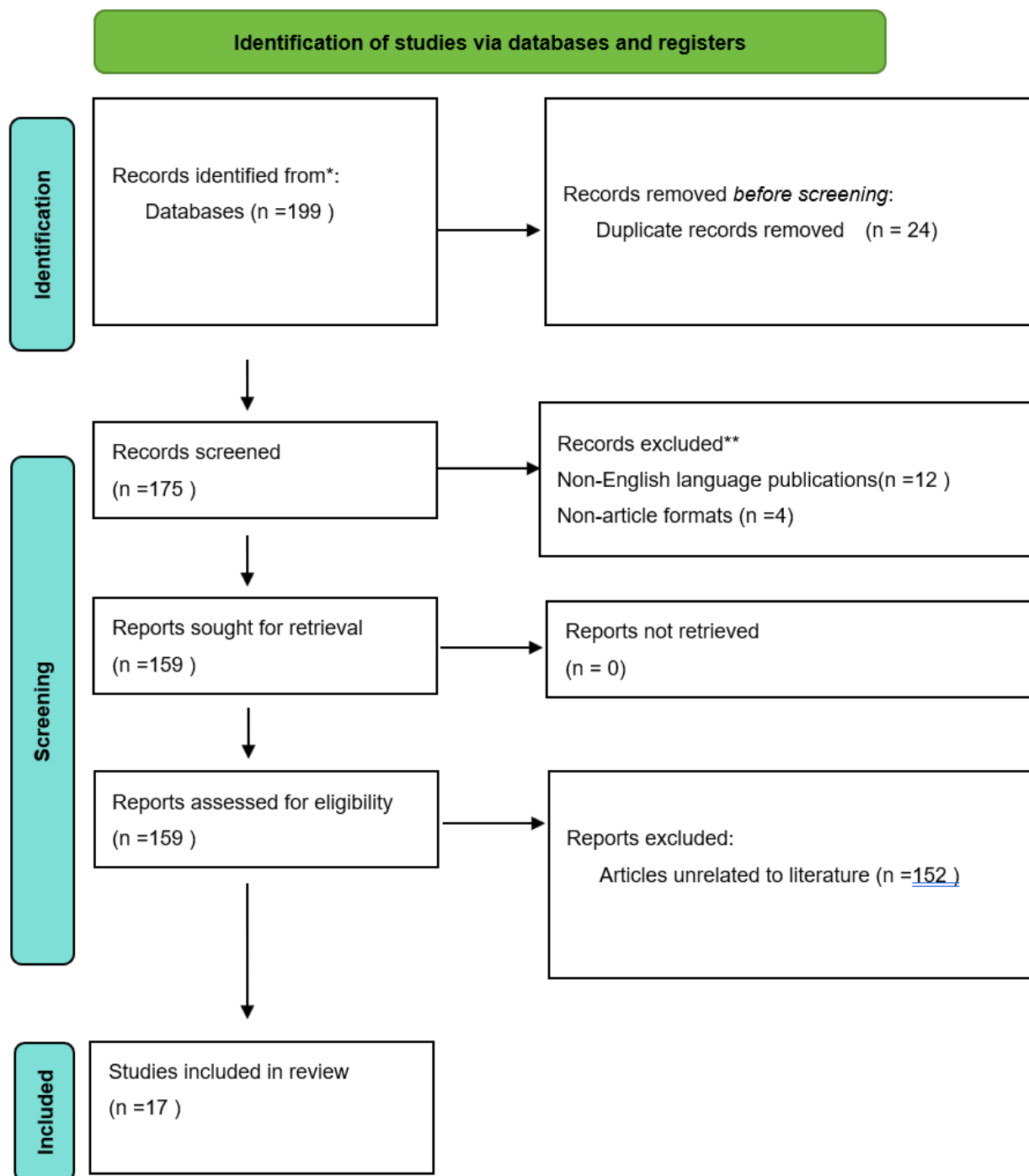
To organize the analysis, a structured data extraction table was created. For each article, the following information was recorded: bibliographic metadata (author, title, journal, year), theoretical frameworks employed (e.g., Bhabha's hybridity, Hall's identity theory, Gilroy's concept of diaspora), literary works analyzed, methodological approach (e.g., close reading, discourse analysis), and thematic focus (e.g., memory, belonging, multilingualism). This structured approach facilitated thematic synthesis and comparative evaluation across the studies.

The synthesis of findings was conducted through qualitative thematic analysis, following the model proposed by Thomas and Harden [23]. Articles were grouped based on recurring conceptual and thematic trends, which were then organized into four major domains corresponding to the review's five research questions: cultural identity construction, diaspora and belonging, memory and trauma, and language and hybridity. This organization enabled a nuanced understanding of how scholars apply cross-cultural communication theories in literary analysis, as well as the identification of research gaps.

Close reading served as the primary mode of textual interpretation, a method aligned with standard literary research practices [24]. However, where applicable, the review also took note of articles that integrated interdisciplinary methods, such as historical contextualization or sociolinguistic analysis. These hybrid approaches contributed to a richer understanding of how identity and cultural exchange are narrated, contested, and performed in literature.

Although this review was designed to be comprehensive and rigorous, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The decision to exclude grey literature and book chapters may have omitted valuable yet non-peer-reviewed contributions, particularly from emerging scholars. Similarly, the English-language restriction, though methodologically justified for consistency, may have resulted in the underrepresentation of scholarship written in Chinese or Malay, which could provide different perspectives on Malaysian Chinese literary production. These constraints suggest that future research may benefit from multilingual and multigenre inclusion strategies.

Nonetheless, the review offers a robust framework for understanding how Malaysian Chinese literature in English has been interpreted through cross-cultural lenses. The PRISMA framework, systematic search strategy, and thematic synthesis provide a replicable methodology that other researchers can adapt to similar literary or cultural inquiries.



**Figure 1.**  
Prisma Working Flow.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Cultural Identity Construction

Several articles from the final pool incorporate cross-cultural communication frameworks, though often implicitly. Wang, for instance, undertakes a close reading of Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of*

Evening Mists [25]. In this framework, the psychological adjustment and identity transformation of the protagonist Yun Ling reflect an acculturation process, moving from alienation to partial reconciliation with the memory of Japanese occupation. Through narrative exploration of trauma, silence, and historical reconciliation, the novel stages intercultural communication as emotional and political negotiation.

Daly explores ‘intercultural hauntings’ in Malaysian urban fiction, particularly emphasizing the symbolic use of spectral figures and tropical gothic architecture [26]. In stories like Hsu-Ming Teo’s *Love and Vertigo*, ghostly spaces are metaphorical articulations of unresolved colonial trauma, embodying dislocated subjectivities negotiating fragmented cultural inheritances. Her approach frames literary texts as dynamic sites where cultural tensions are both repressed and reanimated, effectively mirroring cross-cultural misrecognition and historical disjuncture.

Tse further develops a sociocultural lens by addressing cross-cultural tensions surrounding sexuality [27]. In queer narratives, intercultural taboos are not simply private conflicts but are embedded in broader multiracial norms, where characters navigate between ethnic expectations and expressive desire. The use of indirect communication and narrative ellipses, Quek argues, parallels the high-context cultural dynamics theorized by Hall, where meaning lies more in context than in explicit expression.

Malaysian Chinese literature demonstrates a growing, albeit uneven, application of cross-cultural communication theories. While most analyses incorporate these frameworks implicitly, they reveal rich interpretive potential for exploring identity transformation, emotional adaptation, and communicative nuances in postcolonial narratives.

**Table 2.**  
Articles addressing RQ1.

Title	Text(s)	Theoretical Framework
“Transcultural Identity in Tan Twan Eng’s <i>The Garden of Evening Mists</i> [25]	<i>The Garden of Evening Mists</i>	Kim’s integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation
<i>Gothic Spaces and the Tropical City: Reading <i>The Crocodile Fury</i>, <i>Haunting the Tiger</i>, <i>Life’s Mysteries</i> [26]</i>	<i>Love and Vertigo</i>	Symbolic analysis, intercultural haunting
<i>Queering Imperial History: The Ethics of Reconciliation in Tan Twan Eng’s <i>The Gift of Rain</i> [27]</i>	Various queer Malaysian texts	High-context culture theory [28]
<i>Ecology, Ethics, and the Future: Tan Twan Eng’s <i>The Garden of Evening Mists</i> [29]</i>	Nature-oriented Malaysian fiction	Environmental humanities & cultural discourse
<i>The Analysis of Cultural and Intercultural Elements in Mandarin as a Foreign Language Textbooks from Selected Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions [19]</i>	Short stories and novels	Translation studies, cultural transfer

## 5. Diaspora, Displacement, and Belonging

Pillai explores essentialism in ethnic categorization, identifying Malaysian Chinese fiction as a literary field where characters both embrace and resist imposed identities [30]. Novels examined in her article, such as Tan’s and Chuah Guat Eng’s works, often depict characters shifting between national, linguistic, and ethnic affiliations depending on interpersonal and institutional contexts. This reflects Ting-Toomey’s identity negotiation theory, where identity is both enacted and resisted through communication behaviors.

Similarly, Quayum [12] emphasizes trauma and cultural displacement in Malaysian diasporic literature [12]. His reading of novels such as *The Harmony Silk Factory* underlines memory as not just individual recall but a contested terrain of identity performance. These readings highlight how literature offers insight into identity as a communicative process mediated by historical context and cultural affiliation.

Across genres and authors, Malaysian Chinese literature richly illustrates identity negotiation as a dynamic, communicative, and contextually driven process. These narratives challenge essentialist constructions and foreground cultural multiplicity as a lived, literary reality.

**Table 3.**  
Articles addressing RQ2.

Title	Text(s)	Representation of Identity Negotiation
Essentialism And The Diasporic Native Informant: Malaysia In Hsu Ming Teo's <i>Love And Vertigo</i> [30]	Various postcolonial Malaysian novels	Characters oscillate between imposed and chosen ethnic/national identities
Writing a Nation: Essays on Malaysian Literature [12]	The Harmony Silk Factory	Selective memory and trauma reflect cultural dislocation
Transcultural Identity in Tan Twan Eng's <i>The Garden of Evening Mists</i> [25]	The Gift of Rain, The Garden of Evening Mists	Protagonists shift identity through historical and familial memory
Minority Literature, Performativity, Resistance [18]	Ethnic Chinese writing in Malaysia	Literary voice used to assert minority agency in national discourse

## 6. Memory, Trauma and the Postcolonial Past

Gabriel outlines how youth fiction by Malaysian Chinese authors uses narrative voice, linguistic code-switching, and bilingual dialogue to reflect hybrid identities [31]. One example is the use of English-Chinese mixed speech to highlight the internal negotiations characters experience in both familial and school settings. Such devices create a layered narrative voice, inviting readers to inhabit hybridized cultural positions.

Lim discusses *Map of the Invisible World*, noting how non-linear storytelling and multiple temporalities convey the protagonist's disjointed cultural reality [3]. Fragmentation becomes not just a structural feature but a thematic symbol of diasporic estrangement.

Ambikaipaker [32] adopts a rhetorical lens to examine how Malaysian Chinese narratives employ irony, satire, and juxtaposition to resist ethnic simplification and critique state-sponsored multiculturalism [32]. These narrative techniques enable authors to challenge reductive national ideologies while constructing alternative frameworks of belonging.

Narrative strategies such as fragmentation, code-switching, and irony function not only as stylistic choices but as mechanisms of cultural representation. These techniques foreground hybridity and dislocation as defining features of diasporic consciousness.

**Table 4.**  
Articles addressing RQ3.

Title	Text(s)	Narrative Strategy for Hybridity/Diaspora
After the Break [31]	Youth fiction narratives	Code-switching, bilingual narration
Lim, <i>The Infinite Longing for Home</i> [3].	<i>Map of the Invisible World</i>	Fragmented chronology, non-linear plot
Failed Asian Values Subjects and Neoliberal State Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore [32]	Malaysian Chinese literary narratives	Irony, juxtaposition of ethnic tensions
Gendered Diasporic Experience	Women's life narratives	Shifting perspectives, inner monologue

## 7. Language, Translation, and Cultural Hybridity

Ambikaipaker [32] critiques state multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore, arguing that ethnic harmony discourses are often ideological tools to manage dissent. Her analysis reveals how literary narratives resist these discourses by centering voices that experience systemic exclusion, especially those whose cultural expressions do not conform to majoritarian frameworks.

Malaysian Chinese literature not only reflects but critiques the power dynamics of postcolonial and multicultural regimes. By representing spatial, linguistic, and symbolic sites of contestation, these texts expose and reframe intercultural asymmetries.

**Table 5.**  
Articles addressing RQ4.

Title	Text(s)	Representation of Postcolonial/Intercultural Power
Failed Asian Values Subjects and Neoliberal State Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore [32]	Ethnic narratives in Malaysia & Singapore	Expose the ideological limits of state multiculturalism
Out of Shadow: Tan Twan Eng in the Malaysian Literary Context [33]	Tan Twan Eng's novels	Historical and physical landscapes encode power struggles

Q5: What gaps exist in the current scholarship on Malaysian Chinese literature with respect to cross-cultural communication?

Despite recurring themes of cultural negotiation and hybridity, few studies explicitly engage formal cross-cultural communication theories. For instance, while Daly explores interculturality, they stop short of framing their analyses through well-established models like Hofstede's cultural dimensions or Gudykunst's anxiety/uncertainty theory. This represents a missed opportunity for interdisciplinary depth.

Moreover, many studies concentrate on elite, urban writers and overlook rural or non-canonical voices. There is limited comparative work that situates Malaysian Chinese literature in broader transnational contexts, such as the Sinophone world or Southeast Asian English-language fiction. Additionally, while gender and sexuality are increasingly analyzed, religion and class remain underexplored lenses.

The absence of methodological pluralism and theory-driven comparative research constrains the field's development. Future research could benefit from integrating more diverse cross-cultural frameworks and broadening the literary corpus beyond frequently studied authors like Tan Twan Eng and Shirley Geok-Lin Lim.

While the field demonstrates significant thematic richness, it lacks theoretical and methodological consistency in cross-cultural communication studies. There is a pressing need for more structured engagement with communication models and more inclusive literary representation.

**Table 6.**  
Articles addressing RQ5.

Title	Text(s)	Identified Scholarly Gap
Gothic Spaces and Cultural Silences [26]	Malaysian fiction	Lack of explicit engagement with communication models
Wang, "Transcultural Identity in Tan Twan Eng's <i>The Garden of Evening Mists</i> [25]	Tan Twan Eng	Focus on elite authors; lack of authorial diversity
Queering Imperial History [27]	Chinese Malaysian fiction	Absence of formal theory and rural authorship
Malaysian Crossings [13]	Cross-cultural fiction	Minimal comparative or transnational engagement

## 8. Discussion

This systematic review reveals several critical patterns and implications regarding the application of cross-cultural communication theories in Malaysian Chinese literature in English. Despite the diversity of literary genres and theoretical perspectives, the selected works exhibit recurring tensions between cultural rootedness and transnational belonging. Five main research questions guided this analysis, and their interconnected findings converge to offer a broader picture of scholarly engagement with identity, hybridity, power, and theoretical integration.

First, the application of cross-cultural communication theories, though present, is often implicit or indirect. Only a few articles, such as Wang's, explicitly reference models of cross-cultural adaptation to examine character development [25]. More commonly, scholars such as Daly analyze literary texts through interpretive lenses that align with, but do not formally cite, communication frameworks [26]. This suggests a theoretical gap between communication studies and literary analysis. While the implicit

engagement allows for creative interpretations, it also limits conceptual rigor and comparative clarity across studies [15]. Literature thus serves as a site for experiential articulation of intercultural dynamics, but often without structured theoretical anchoring.

Second, identity negotiation emerges as a central concern. Many of the reviewed articles illustrate how Malaysian Chinese authors construct characters that mediate between conflicting cultural allegiances. For instance, Tan Twan Eng's protagonists frequently shift between national, linguistic, and ethnic affiliations depending on familial, historical, and institutional contexts. Literature enables a reflective platform where hybridity and identity crises can be narrativized without requiring resolution. This aligns with Bhabha's [34] theory of the "third space," wherein cultural identity emerges through negotiation rather than dichotomy [34].

Third, narrative strategies such as fragmentation, code-switching, and irony serve as powerful techniques to reflect cultural hybridity and diasporic experience. Gabriel and Lim utilize form and voice to express layered cultural consciousness [3, 31]. For instance, bilingual narration and narrative disjunction not only mirror lived experiences of diasporic fragmentation but also invite readers to inhabit that liminal space. These strategies provide implicit communication about internal cultural conflict, resonating with Hall's high-context communication theory. Moreover, satire and rhetorical juxtaposition, as discussed by Ambikaipaker [32], are used to critique state-sponsored multiculturalism and its silencing of ethnic complexity [32].

Fourth, the reviewed literature demonstrates an acute awareness of postcolonial and intercultural power relations. Several authors foreground spatial metaphors, gardens, ruins, and domestic interiors to represent how physical and symbolic landscapes mediate historical memory and ethnic inequality [33]. These representations underline that intercultural power is not merely ideological but spatial and historical, confirming Lefebvre's [35] thesis that space is socially produced and contested.

Despite these rich findings, the field is marked by several gaps. Many studies remain focused on a narrow literary canon, particularly Tan Twan Eng and Shirley Geok-lin Lim. While these authors offer fertile ground for analysis, the exclusion of lesser-known voices, especially rural, queer, and working-class writers, restricts the field's representational breadth. Moreover, methodological limitations persist. Few articles adopt comparative or transnational frameworks, and interdisciplinary engagement with communication theories remains sporadic [36]. As a result, current scholarship offers deep but often fragmented insights into cultural negotiation.

These findings have several implications. First, interdisciplinary collaboration between literary scholars and communication theorists can enrich both fields. Incorporating frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions or Gudykunst's anxiety/uncertainty management theory could bring analytical clarity to literary texts dealing with cross-cultural themes [37, 38]. Second, future research should diversify its corpus by including emergent writers and alternative genres such as speculative fiction, online literature, and migrant autobiographies. Third, there is a need for more empirical studies, such as author interviews or reception analyses, to complement textual interpretations with sociocultural context.

Furthermore, the unique sociopolitical landscape of Malaysia, with its official multiculturalism and ethnic quotas, renders Malaysian Chinese literature an especially rich site for studying the real-world implications of cross-cultural theory. Literature does not merely reflect identity but constructs and negotiates it within frameworks of power, memory, and aspiration. As such, it should be studied not only for its aesthetic dimensions but also for its communicative function within and across cultures.

In sum, this discussion affirms that Malaysian Chinese literature in English is an underutilized but potent source for understanding intercultural communication. The reviewed articles show that while implicit theoretical engagement is common, there remains a pressing need for more explicit and systematic use of communication frameworks. Addressing these gaps would not only strengthen literary scholarship but also expand the relevance of cross-cultural communication studies in multicultural contexts.

## 9. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that Malaysian Chinese literature in English serves as a vital site for articulating and theorizing cross-cultural identity. Through the application of key theories such as hybridity, diaspora, and postmemory, scholars have illuminated how authors negotiate complex cultural affiliations, historical traumas, and linguistic hybridity.

Despite this progress, several limitations persist. The field remains theoretically fragmented and methodologically narrow, with over-reliance on canonical authors and thematic repetition. Future research should expand beyond Anglophone and print-based literature to include oral narratives, diasporic media, and multilingual experimental forms.

Ultimately, Malaysian Chinese literature offers rich insight into the dynamic interplay of culture, language, and identity in a postcolonial and globalized context. It also challenges and expands existing cross-cultural communication theories by grounding them in localized, embodied, and historically situated experiences.

## 10. Limitations and Implications

While this systematic literature review provides a comprehensive synthesis of how cross-cultural communication theories have been applied to Malaysian Chinese literature in English, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may influence the scope and interpretation of the findings. Firstly, the study is inherently constrained by the availability of literature within selected databases. Although the search was conducted using Web of Science and Scopus, two of the most extensive academic databases, the exclusion of grey literature, book chapters, theses, and non-indexed regional journals may have led to the omission of relevant insights that exist outside mainstream academic publishing. Given that much of the scholarship on Malaysian Chinese literature is regionally produced or published in localized outlets, this exclusion may have inadvertently narrowed the review's representativeness.

Secondly, the decision to include only English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles introduces another layer of exclusion that potentially marginalizes valuable work written in Chinese or Malay. These linguistic filters were applied to maintain analytical consistency and accessibility, particularly as the focus was on Malaysian Chinese literature written in English. However, this criterion may have unintentionally silenced voices that offer alternate interpretations or challenge dominant academic paradigms [39]. Moreover, the emphasis on journal articles excludes literary criticism found in monographs and anthologies, which often provide more in-depth and nuanced analyses of texts and their socio-political contexts.

Another limitation lies in the interpretive framework adopted for synthesis. While thematic coding and theoretical categorization were rigorously applied, the qualitative nature of this process entails a degree of subjectivity. Researcher bias, particularly in interpreting theoretical alignment and categorizing methodological approaches, cannot be entirely eliminated. Future reviews might consider triangulating qualitative coding with bibliometric techniques or computational tools to increase replicability and reduce interpretive variance [40].

Temporal constraints also pose challenges. The review primarily considers articles published up to 2024. Given the rapidly evolving nature of interdisciplinary research in literature and communication, it is likely that new frameworks and emerging paradigms will continue to influence the field. Therefore, this review should be seen as a foundational mapping rather than a conclusive account. It invites periodic updating and expansion as the field matures and diversifies.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer important implications for both scholarship and pedagogy. From a scholarly perspective, the review highlights the need for more integrative and interdisciplinary approaches in the study of Malaysian Chinese literature. The uneven application of cross-cultural communication theories across the reviewed articles suggests a lack of methodological coherence that future researchers could address by more consciously aligning their analytical strategies with established theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of non-canonical

authors indicates an opportunity to diversify the literary corpus by including emerging voices, experimental forms, and multilingual expressions.

Pedagogically, this review can serve as a valuable resource for curriculum development in literary studies, cultural communication, and Southeast Asian studies. By synthesizing the thematic and theoretical trends across existing literature, it provides educators with a curated knowledge base from which to design more inclusive and critically informed course content. The emphasis on identity, diaspora, hybridity, and translation makes this body of literature particularly relevant for courses exploring postcolonialism, globalization, and intercultural dialogue.

At a broader level, the implications of this review extend to the politics of literary canon formation and knowledge production. By foregrounding the analytical contributions of cross-cultural communication theories, the review calls for a rethinking of how we conceptualize cultural interaction within literary texts. It challenges the dominance of Western-centric models and encourages a more pluralistic and context-sensitive approach to literary theory. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonize literary studies and to create space for Southeast Asian literatures within global critical discourses [41].

In conclusion, while the limitations of scope, language, and methodology temper the generalizability of the findings, the review nonetheless provides a critical foundation for future research. It offers a roadmap for scholars seeking to bridge disciplinary boundaries, expand literary canons, and refine theoretical tools. As Malaysian Chinese literature in English continues to evolve, so too must our analytical frameworks, attuned to the complexities of identity, history, and cross-cultural negotiation.

### Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

### Acknowledgements:

The authors would like to sincerely acknowledge the academic support provided by the International Chinese Language Education Research Team at Panzhuhua University. This paper has benefited from the phased research achievements of the team, which offered important insights and a valuable foundation for the present study. The authors also extend their gratitude to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and constructive suggestions, which greatly improved the manuscript.

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