# Towards identifying indigenous personality dimensions of the Malaysian people

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## ABSTRACT

*The indigenous personality dimensions of the Malaysian people were investigated by examining: (a) the trait adjective nouns provided by the cultural informants; (b) factor analyses of the items and factors capturing the personality trait adjectives. University undergraduate students of different racial background (N= 250) completed an open ended questionnaire about common personality trait adjectives and their associated behavioral exemplars. More than 20 desirable and non-desirable personality trait adjectives were identified through the open-ended questionnaire After selecting and refining the most frequently cited personality trait adjectives, items were developed based on the given behavioral and situational examples. In the following study, 1087 other university students completed the personality questionnaire. We combined the items of desirable and undesirable traits and factor analyze the 419 items in a series of incremental factor rotations. Congruence indices suggest the existence 4 factors of personality dimension. Good reliability and interpretable factors provide sufficient support for the indigenous dimensions of personality traits among Malaysians. Further comprehensive study involving relating the dimensions to the universal model of personality is recommended.*

## INTRODUCTION

Studies exploring indigenous personality dimensions of the Malaysian people were considerably behind compared to the similar studies done in her neighboring Asian cultures like the Chinese (Cheung et al., 1996), Filipino (Katigbak et al., 1996), and Korean (Choi, Kim & Choi, 1993). Availability of imported personality measurement tools may be among reason for no concerted effort to develop the indigenous instruments. Little effort was also seen among local psychologists who willing to explore the dimension of personality probably due to the nature of the work – comprehensive and thus, laborious. In addition, Malaysian people are not homogenous society. They comprises of three major races – Malay, Chinese and Indians – each of those possessing different racial, cultural and religious traditions. Studying their trait composition, from the cross-cultural perspective, require comprehensive coverage of their cultural meaning and understanding about self, belief and behavioral exemplars (Church, 2001). However, it is interesting to note that at the early seventies, the work on comparing psychological attributes of Malaysian people had already begun. One study was conducted by a Fulbright scholar, after observing diversity in racial personal representation, on the racial stereotypes of the Malays, Chinese and Indians (Rabushka, 1971). Using some kind of simple questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate their beliefs about characteristics of other ethnic background. Among the findings were that Chinese were seen as intelligent and ambitious but greedy, Malays were very clean but lazy and Indians lacked of cleanliness. However, this study was mainly based on perception and no replicated studies were conducted.

Literatures on the characteristic of the Malaysian people mostly reported in the sociological work as compared to the psychological. Swift (1965) for example, narrated that Malays were very self-

consciousness people. At page 110 he says that Malay is 'hypersensitiveness to what other people are thinking about oneself'. They often avoid disagreement and hard to say 'no'. Crouch (1996) noted that a Malay is 'usually portrayed as polite and self-effacing, avoiding open conflict whenever possible and preferring to sit around chatting rather than work hard' (p. 165). Mahathir (1970) also discussed some negative character of the Malays and he disagreed with some of the damaging characteristics such as being too polite and too agreeable. Some awareness of the personality-related attributes were therefore observed. The ever consistent, stable and continuing perception on some good and bad characteristics of the Malaysian people since before and after the Independence warrants the need to study the attributes of the people in more systematic approach – which is by using personality tests among people (McCrae & Costa, 1998).

*1.1 Past studies on personality traits of the Malaysians*

Earlier work on personality traits of the Malaysians was conducted through the Big Five model. With close guidance from the original author of the instrument, Mastor et. al., (2000) translated the NEO PI-R into Malay and studied the personality dimension of the Malay college students. That translation and back-translation process followed the steps conventionally used (Brislin, 1980). At the initial screening, 60 items were not accepted and replaced with a new one. Some cultural differences in few items were identified and then modified. Using procrustes rotation on the varimax factor matrices, factor congruency indices were high (mostly more than 0.90). Four major domains of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness were replicated fairly well. Openness to experience was not clearly replicated indicated by its lower reliability coefficient and smaller factor loadings of its facets. Presumably, the less clear replication of the openness implies it as a culture-specific phenomenon as the same case observed in the other similar studies like the Korean (Piedmont and Chae, 1997), Filipino; (Church et al, 1997), Mexican (Ortiz et al, 2006) and Indonesian (Halim et al., 2004).

Another effort to study the personality characteristics of the Malaysian was also based on the Big Five by Haslina (2005). She translated the Big Five Inventory (John, 1995) and conducted the study among Malaysian students. Four factors were replicated well except the Openness. One possible explanation is that openness dimension probably is a culture specific phenomenon – the meaning and cultural context of openness might differ between Malaysian people and the American. For example, openness to ideas is acceptable since it relates to readiness to learn new things. But openness to values, is hard for the Malaysians, especially the Malays, who held some core religious and cultural values rigidly. Even the Chinese and Indians were preoccupied with their own cultural and religious beliefs. Thus, items on measuring openness in western context may be peculiar to the majority of the samples. Cheung (1998) added the Openness items in her CPAI and found that openness did not emerge in expected loading factors.

*1.2 Present study*

The study on the personality traits, nevertheless, relies on the imposed-etic strategy. Indeed, it is useful in determining the universal trait higher order components within the targeted cultural group i.e Malaysia. However, the approach seems to ignore the very existence of the local, indigenous personality trait dimensions (Ortiz et al., 2006). Further, using translated tests would bias toward finding cultural similarities because emic constructs are not included in these imported measure (Triandis, 1972). Church (2001) reviewed the issues raised in the cross-cultural personality measurement that recognizes the importance of indigenous approach. More specific guidelines on steps of doing the indigenous study was also discussed (Church & Katigbak, 1988). Indigenous approach allows more flexibility in terms of number of possible traits that might exist in specific culture like the multicultural and multi-religious Malaysians. The likelihood of the existence of the indigenous dimension of the people is high that warrants systematic studies on the trait dimensions of the Malaysians. Hence, it is the main purpose of the present study to investigate the dimensions of personality structure. Since there has been no specific attempt to study the indigenous

personality dimension of the Malaysian people, the present study is provisionally exploratory. We based our study to the previous work (Mastor, 2006) and expanded the investigation by employing statistical method to uncover the underlying personality structure of the Malaysians.

We have two main objectives in the current study. First, we summarize the earlier findings on the lists of commonly used terms or trait adjectives describing one's character, mood or behavior in the Malaysian contexts. Our aim is to emphasize the prior collection work of trait-related terms are independent, thus not relying on the existing Big Five model characteristics. In the previous study, we have done initial search for indigenous terms and meanings that describe personality of the Malay, Chinese and Indian people. We also asked cultural informants to write items describing the behavioral or contextual phenomenon of the traits.

The second objective is to select and refine the items, based on the earlier work, that describe the traits in the form of behavioral or values statements. These items were then transformed into questionnaire format and responded by the targeted group (Malaysian people) and data collected were subject to appropriate analyses, to be explained throughout this paper. It is expected that simple structure of personality dimension of the Malaysian people would be discovered and verified. The present study is thus, preliminary and further follow-up studies are necessary.

## METHOD

### *2.1 Participants*

In this study, 1,200 undergraduate students at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (mean age = 23.2, SD = 3.2) voluntarily participated. 13 questionnaires were found to be incomplete responses thus retaining only 1087 samples useable for analyses. Of these samples, 376 (34.6%) were men and 703 (64.6%) were women and 8 not reported gender. By race, they were 597 (54.9%) Malays, 389 (35.8%) Chinese, 66 (6.1%) Indians and 18 (1.7%) others. They were administered the questionnaire and were initially briefed on the appropriate way to respond to the questionnaire. Most of the data collection took place during their class session, after receiving permission from the respected lecturers.

#### *2.1.1 Replication sub-samples*

We divide the total samples into two sub-samples of approximately equal size for the use of testing the replication of factorial structure and numbers. The division was made through the SPSS select data procedures where we prompted for two sub-samples of equal number. Sub-sample 1 comprised of 537 participants and sub-sample 2 consists of 542 participants.

Sub-sample 1 comprised of 190 men and 347 women (295 Malays, 193 Chinese, 33 Indians and 1 other). Sub-sample 2 was 186 men and 356 women (302 Malays, 196 Chinese, 29 Indians and 7 others). The majority of the samples were second and third year students of various academic majors. Calculation of factor congruence using these two sub-samples was done following Harman (1976).

### *2.2 Instruments*

2.2.1 The instrument was based on the collection of personality-descriptors from undergraduate students in the previous study (Mastor, 2006). In that previous study, each of the respondents was given a form where they were asked to fill up the required information. We asked these students to identify at least four desirable traits and four undesirable traits they understand and that commonly observed or portrayed among them or others in various situations. They also provided meaning of the terms and examples of the items that describe the trait. All of the information provided by students were mostly in *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) and later translated into English. For example, if one respondent write trustworthy as the trait, the corresponding items may read like these: 'I keep secrets' or 'I am known as a trustworthy person among my colleagues'. We expect that if all respondents provide a complete 4 desirable and 4 undesirable traits, we might get around 1,000 names of the desirable and undesirable trait names respectively. However, when we collected the forms from them, not all subjects responded to all eight trait names. We managed to get around

800 trait names of both desirable and undesirable, respectively.

In the present study, we gather all items according to their respected group of trait names. For instance, all items describing honesty were re-grouped, together with their corresponding items. Our next task was to evaluate and select the items accurately capture the meaning and scope of the traits. In other words, some items were discarded due to improper or ambiguous in meaning. Total items were 419 of which 189 items were desirable personality traits and 230 items were for non-desirable traits. They were randomly arranged in the questionnaire. Each of the items were scaled using the 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Samples were expected to read and reflect the items and decide whether the item closely depicts them accordingly.

All questionnaires were written in the Malay language. We anticipate that all samples were fluent in the language since one of the basic requirements for university admission is a good pass in the language. Further, at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the language of instruction is the Malay language.

Data were subjected to the item analyses, factor analyses at the item level and scale level and also reliability analyses.

## RESULTS

### *3.1 Frequency of the trait names*

In Table 1, we presented the desirable and undesirable trait terms in Malay and their equivalent English terms. Total number of trait names given by the respondents were more than 800, nevertheless, the actual, more frequently cited trait names were given the priority in the item development. In addition, most of the trait terms were seen as overlapped or redundant. Although the basic criteria of selection was that frequency must be bigger than 10, we also include the trait names of less frequently mentioned (but frequency must > 7). We finally identified 23 desirable traits and 21 undesirable traits. Most of the terms were common to the respondents as the lists were derived from their everyday experience and interaction with people.

Table 1.0: List of trait terms collected from cultural informants

| No. | **Desirable*** | **Undesirable*** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hard working *Rajin* | Laziness *Malas* |
| 2 | Warm *Mesra* | Angry hostility *Pemarah* |
| 3 | Good-heart *Baik Hati* | Stubborn-ness *Degil* |
| 4 | Generous *Murah Hati* | Arrogant *Sombong* |
| 5 | Honest *Jujur* | Selfishness *Mementingkan Diri* |
| 6 | Loving *Penyayang* | *Dengki* |
| 7 | Helpness *Menolong* | Spendthrift *Boros* |
| 8 | Trustworthy *Amanah* | Jealousy *Cemburu* |
| 9 | Considerate *Bertimbang Rasa* | Revengeful *Pendendam* |
| 10 | Responsible *Bertanggung Jawab* | Egoistic *Ego* |
| 11 | Confidence *Yakin* | Lier *Penipu* |
| 12 | Self-work *Berdikari* | Hot tempered *Panas Baran* |
| 13 | Open-minded *Berfikiran Terbuka* | Self-consciousnes *Pemalu* |
| 14 | Modest *Sopan* | Stingy *Kedekut* |
| 15 | Tolerance *Bertoleransi* | Postponer *Bertangguh* |
| 16 | Respectful *Hormat* | Prejudice *Buruk Sangka* |
| 17 | Forgiving *Pemaaf* | Sensitive *Sensitif* |
| 18 | Sincere *Ikhlas* | Coward *Penakut* |
| 19 | Punctual *Menepati Masa* | Low Self-confidence *Kurang Yakin Diri* |
| 20 | Happy *Periang* | Giving-up *Mudah Berputus Asa* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 21 | Sympathy *Simpati* | Greedy *Tamak* |
| 22 | Patience *Sabar* | |
| 23 | Perseverance *Tabah* | |

* Words in italic = equivalent Malay terms

Desirable trait terms are like to help people, trustworthy (*amanah*), sympathy (*simpati*), generous (*baik hati*), respectful (*hormat*), patience (*sabar*), hardworking (*rajin*) and forgiving (*pemaaf*). The undesirable personality trait names that the respondents know and observe were stubbornness (*degil*), arrogant (*sombong*), angry hostility (*panas baran*), laziness (*malas*) and many others. We conceptually examined the terms (desirable *vs* undesirable) and made selection based on the higher frequency of repetition. However we did not select all corresponding items of the selected trait terms since many of those were not properly written or were not actually capture the intended meaning of the terms. At least five to ten items per trait were included in the questionnaire. At this stage, we found some of the terms seem complement to each other. For instance, Lazy and Hardworking are two opposite characteristics and possess bipolar qualities. However, we let the items stand on their own grouping without integrating them into some kind of clear opposite characteristics in the first place.

### *3.2 Factor analyses of the items prior data standardization*

For initial analysis, we factor analyze the items first in order to get a global picture of the distribution of items loadings. Factor analysis is a technique to extract dimensions underlying a particular construct (Floyd and Widaman, 1995). One of the benefits of doing this is that no single item being left out for that might be significant contribution to the extraction of the factor. Thus, our aim into running the factor analysis was to explore possible number of factors underlying the personality structure and also to look in general, common theme represented in the observed dimensions. At first, we run the factor analyses separately for desirable and undesirable traits but it was difficult to ascertain the factors independently. As noted, the existence of bipolar trait characteristics was suspected.

Thus, we combined all data on desirable and undesirable traits and run the factor analysis with imposed five factor solution on the total sample. Five factors solution was chosen due to the assumption that five factor was optimal for the Malaysian, based on earlier studies in Big Five mentioned. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation yielded a long list of items loaded on the first factor and other items on four factors. Table 2.0 presents the eigenvalues and variance of each solution. Factor 1 constitutes the largest component consisting of 137 items (first five eigenvalues were 19.8, 17.5, 15.7, 13.9 and 12.8; 20.% of the variance was accounted for). After examined the items, they are more likely to represent those good or desirable traits. However, we anticpated that there were several smaller factors or sub-factors embedded in the first factor, probably a combination of agreeableness and conscientiousness type of items.

The other four factors were quite interpretable although we believe they also consist of few embedded scales within that factor. Secondary factor loadings were also observed among items loaded on factor 2 and factor 3 or factor 2 and factor 4. These four factors were found to compose of items related to the undesirable traits. First factor consists of items capturing wasting time and money which refers to lackadaisical type of characteristics; Second, items related to jealousy, angry hostility-hot temperament type; Third, items describing the disorganized and irresponsibility type of behavior and; Fourth, items related to self-consciousness-pessimistic type of character. No specific names we can think of at this moment since we hold our reservation that they were not yet distinct and some items may be dropped along with the hierarchical factor analyses. We repeated the analysis using 6, 7 and 8 factor solution and items on the factor 1, nonetheless, did not spread out well into other factors. The remaining four factors yielded more items aligned to other added factors. Interpretation of the factors at this point was not yet clear.

Table 2.0: Eigenvalues values on different factor item solution based on combined desirable and desirable traits (N=1087)

| Factor solution | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 factor | 19.8 | 17.5 | 15.7 | 13.9 | 12.8 | | | |
| 6 factor | 17.9 | 16.8 | 13.9 | 13.6 | 12.8 | 10.4 | | |
| 7 factor | 17.3 | 14.4 | 14.3 | 12.8 | 12.3 | 10.1 | 9.0 | |
| 8 factor | 15.2 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 13.2 | 9.8 | 9.7 | 9.7 | 9.5 |

*3.3 Data standardization*

In order to avoid acquiescence bias, we standardized the data. Acquiescence occur when overall tendency to endorse rather than reject statements either always strongly agree or strongly disagree. Based on the suggestions by many authors (Hofstee, et al., 1998), data of each respondent were subjected to the ipsatizing procedure. We ipsatized the existing data by subtracting all item scores from the total item means and standard deviation. Succeeding analyses were subsequently based on these standardized data.

*3.4 Replication of factors*

With all original items remained unchanged, we used the two sub-samples described earlier and run the factor analyses with different number of rotation (non-sorted by size) and then calculated the congruence indices on the emerged factors. Table 3.0 shows the congruence indices of incremental factor solution after the data were standardized. Congruence indices for factor solution of two, three and four were high. Two factor solution produces loadings of desirable and non-desirable trait groups, as expected. We selected the factor solution with the largest number of factor for which the mean congruence were greater than 0.90 and all individual congruence coefficients were at least 0.85 (Haven & ten berge, 1977). It is clear that four factor-solution produces a more stable factor replication with all congruence indices bigger than the three factor solution's indices. Congruence indices decrease substantially in the five, six and seven factor solution. In all cases, the most replicable factor solution across the sub-samples was also replicated in the total sample.

Table 3.0: Factor congruence after data standardization

| Factor solution | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 0.986 | 0.985 | | | | | | 0.985 |
| 3 | 0.966 | 0.958 | 0.958 | | | | | 0.961 |
| 4 | 0.979 | 0.975 | 0.976 | 0.968 | | | | **0.975** |
| 5 | 0.523 | 0.415 | 0.971 | 0.966 | 0.924 | | | 0.760 |
| 6 | 0.968 | 0.976 | 0.954 | 0.339 | 0.369 | 0.939 | | 0.758 |
| 7 | 0.167 | 0.148 | 0.180 | 0.005 | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.769 | 0.181 |

*3.5 Initial item factor and reliability analyses after data standardization*

We then factor analyzed the data, imposing four-factor solutions on the total sample. Still we get the large number of items rearranging themselves on their respected factors. The items that loaded on each factor were subjected to reliability analyses. Initial alpha for each of the factor were low, except the alpha for Factor

3. After examining the item-total correlation of each items, we dropped items which have a negative and low item total correlation. Most of the dropped items were not really belonged to the factors they loaded, conceptually and empirically. In addition most of their loading magnitudes were less than 0.20. Table 4.0

shows the number of retained and discarded items along with the initial alphas.

Table 4.0: Initial alphas and the dropped and retained items

| Factor | Initial α | No. of original item | No. of dropped items | No. of remaining item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.60 | 137 | 79 | 58 |
| 2 | 0.51 | 103 | 40 | 63 |
| 3 | 0.72 | 104 | 57 | 47 |
| 4 | 0.50 | 45 | 20 | 25 |

For each of the factor, we again factor analyzed the items to identify a smaller number of reliable dimensions within the factor (principal component with varimax rotations were used). With smaller number of items and only relevant meaningful items, factors that emerged were then more interpretable. We also managed to identify the items of desirable and undesirable traits that aligned to each respected factors with positive and negative loadings shared the same factors. Conceptually, there were meaningful match between each other. This finding implies that the items were actually representing bipolar dimensions. For example, we found that items on Laziness (6 items) corresponds inversely with Hard working (7 items). Some other items were not perfectly opposite, but again, they were bipolar statements. Thus, we matched all in-group items and ended up with many items were in pairs. No pair items, however, for the Prejudice scale. With all items matched up, we now see the clearer dimensions that represent each scale and their associated factors. All scales and factors were interpretable and we give their names accordingly. Table 5.0 shows the already given names to factors and scales after identifying the construct of the items and also the estimated reliability coefficients for each scales and factors.

Table 5: Bipolar traits matching and reliability coefficients after data were standardized and factor analyzed.

| Factors | Scales | Item No | Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Concern for Others (α = 0.90) | Lie -Trustworthy | 6 | 0.54 |
| | *Dengki*-Sympathy | 10 | 0.72 |
| | Stubbornness-Compliance | 8 | 0.63 |
| | Selfishness-Helpfulness | 12 | 0.74 |
| | Egoistic-Caring | 12 | 0.66 |
| | Uncontrolled-Patience | 10 | 0.72 |
| Conscientiousness (α = 0.90) | Postponer-Punctuality | 10 | 0.79 |
| | Neglectfulness-Meticulousness | 10 | 0.68 |
| | Laziness-Hard working | 15 | 0.82 |
| | Thriftiness-Responsible | 10 | 0.72 |
| | Indecisiveness-Decisiveness | 8 | 0.63 |
| | Not Confidence-Confidence | 6 | 0.45 |
| | Giving-up-Persistence | 7 | 0.72 |
| Neuroticism (α = 0.94) | Accommodating-Sensitiveness | 17 | 0.85 |
| | Calmness-Angry Hostility | 10 | 0.62 |
| | Contentment-Jealousy | 10 | 0.85 |
| | Good Heart-Prejudice | 3 | 0.71 |
| | Forgiving-Revengeful | 7 | 0.71 |
| Extraversion (α = 0.86) | Self-consciousness-Warmth | 25 | 0.86 |

*3.6 Factor analyses of the scale after the matching*

When we factor analyzed the scales, we found all scales aligned to the expected factors. Table 6.0 shows the loadings of the scales on their factors. The pattern of eigenvalues showed a break after the four factors and the four factors were clearly interpretable as Factor 1: Concern for Others (the first six eigenvalues were 14.22, 11.24, 10.44, 7.26, 3.47 and 3.18); Factor 2 as Conscientiousness; Factor 3 as Neuroticism and Factor 4: Extraversion. Trustworthy, Sympathy, Obedience, Helpfulness, Caring and Patience scales loaded clearly on Factor 1: Concern for Others (range of loadings = 0.71-0.82, M = 0.76). Caring has a negative secondary loading on the Factor 3: Neuroticism. Punctuality, Meticulousness, Hard working, Responsible, Decisiveness, Confidence and Persistence scales loaded on Factor 2: Conscientiousness (range of loadings = 0.548-0.817, M = 0.67). All scales on this factor have also secondary loadings on the other factors. Meticulousness, Hardworking, Persistence and Responsible scales also loaded on the Factor 1: Concern for Others. This signifies the tendency of individuals to be hardworking, meticulous, persistent and responsible were in the interest of other people. For example, being responsible and hardworking for the employer as concern for others as well. Factor 3: Neuroticism consists of Sensitiveness, Angry Hostility, Jealousy, Prejudice and Revengeful scales. Of all scales, two have negative secondary loadings on the Factor 1, which are Prejudice and Revengeful. This is probably a meaningful result that being prejudice and revengeful, imply that one do not care about others, in contrast with being concern for others. Factor 4 consists of a single scale that relates to the dimension of warmness-self-consciousness, a resemblance of one specific facet in the Extraversion factor in Big Five. In fact, some conceptual correspondence of the scales and Big Five facets and domains were observed. Since the scales derived from the items constructed independently from the Big Five framework, we can tentatively suggest that resemblance is not arbitrary. In other words, discovered partial resemblance with Big Five factor while searching for the indigenous dimension may hint that some universal factors may be embedded in the Malaysian dimensions.

Table 6.0 Factor loadings of scales with varimax rotation (N=1087)

| | Component | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Trustworthy | **.823** | .271 | .094 | .001 |
| Sympathy | **.774** | .270 | .181 | .186 |
| Obedience | **.773** | .228 | -.109 | .185 |
| Helpfulness | **.755** | .214 | .009 | .195 |
| Caring | **.737** | .225 | **-.382** | -.082 |
| Patience | **.713** | .252 | -.280 | .162 |
| Punctuality | .091 | **.817** | **-.315** | -.022 |
| Meticulousness | **.308** | **.788** | .001 | .061 |
| Hardworking | **.446** | **.699** | .141 | .197 |
| Responsible | **.517** | **.629** | .116 | .092 |
| Decisiveness | .281 | **.629** | **-.323** | **.358** |
| Confidence | .229 | **.570** | **-.325** | **.405** |
| Persistence | **.506** | **.548** | .252 | .331 |
| Sensitiveness | .174 | -.102 | **.856** | -.076 |
| Angry Hostility | .109 | .030 | **.802** | .180 |
| Jealousy | -.057 | -.014 | **.767** | -.047 |
| Prejudice | **-.321** | -.123 | **.691** | -.184 |
| Revengeful | **-.555** | -.103 | **.598** | .020 |
| Extraversion | .186 | .212 | -.009 | **.871** |

## DISCUSSION

In the present study we aimed to explore the dimension of personality structure indigenously through a single study. Although with some limitation in term of no follow-up studies were carried out yet, we found several encouraging results from our initial work. First, items collected from the cultural informants prove to be useful in capturing specific personality trait dimensions. Of course, this could be possible after the items were refined and improved. Second, four factor solution was shown to be a reliable number of factors in the Malaysian personality dimension. In fact, these dimensions possess bipolar characteristics. When we merged the two positive (desirable) and negative (undesirable) items, they matched each other, to most of them. Factors were interpretable. In addition, all scale and factor terms were cross referenced with the authorized Malay dictionary and we found them valid as personality descriptors.

Third, quite surprisingly that the indigenous factors in our study resemble partially of the Big Five. One interesting finding is that openness domain was not represented in the Malaysian personality scales. In our previous work on Big Five, openness was hardly replicated with its modest reliability and loading replication. This may bring some clues on why openness factor in NEO was low and hardly recovered factor. Even in the indigenous approach, the openness is absent, the likelihood that it would also absent in the imported scales is then logically expected. However, the partial resemblance found in this study could not be subjected to the prior conception of the dimension especially when the items were taken directly from the cultural informants. Further some of the lower order traits were different from the Big Five facets. *Dengki* is one of the negative poles on the first factor that seems indigenous to the people of Malaysia, especially the Malays. It is characterized a combined feeling of hate and jealousy to individuals who gets promoted, won the competition or whosever superior than the person.

### *4.1 Status of the Malaysian personality dimensions*

As noted, we admit that the present study is just preliminary. However, our study produced significant findings. In addition, the current study characteristics help support the claim: Our work is based on the bigger sample size (N > 1,000), acceptable magnitude of factor congruence and using of a standardized data. We also employ the exploratory factor solutions which do not constrain or force any structure on the new data set (Church & Burke, 1994). Thus, our factorial findings were genuine. Moderate to strong reliability coefficients of the scales and factors also supported our early findings of the dimensions of personality structure. Although editing of the items were done prior to data collection, but overall meaning of the construct remain intact – leaving the subjects to interpret them correctly. The items were all written in Malay, which allow original and natural indigenous experience and description of the item slant towards indigenous one. The semantic concepts within the item description were also close to the heart of the Malaysian. Reliability analyses of the facets also suggest that some were at high level of replicability – implying that the items were understood the same with other people. This could be due to the fact that most of the items relate to the attitudinal and behavioral exemplars of the people, not much on the values description. This would avoid possible differences between subjects in endorsing the items.

We also found some dimensions which may be indigenous. For instance, few scales on conscientious and neuroticism seem unstable with several nontrivial secondary factor loadings that influence factor orientation. This indicates less tightly conception of conscientious and neuroticism could be due to cultural specific nature of the Malaysians. We can see that, Decisiveness scale loaded on conscientiousness and also neuroticism (inversely) and Extraversion – that those who were decisive seen also as not being neurotic and being more extravert and conscientious. Another example is Prejudice and Revengeful were also loaded inversely, on the Factor 1; Concern for Others. The relation is meaningful if we analyze the pattern from indigenous perspective. In the Malaysian context, those

who were revengeful and prejudice always perceive other people in negative way. Factor 1 that relates to concern on other people also signifies the very nature of collectivist culture of the Malaysian people. Relationship with other is seen as keeping mutual trust between people.

In addition, some traceable elements of the Big Five components were found in our study. All items were derived directly from respondents without any prior attempt to relate those to the current Big Five dimensions. This might suggest that the Malaysian personality structure correspond well with the universal model of personality. At least at this point with the present work, initial dimension is now available for further investigation.

*4.2 Some limitation*

We realized that some limitation remained valid that remind us about the degree of extent to which we can claim indigenous dimension of the Malaysian people. First, the method we used in the study. Since the study employed a cultural informant approach, the collection of trait adjectives terms was not comprehensive. There might be more which could be achieved though the lexical method. Lexical studies thus could provide more number of personality adjectives and thus actual dimensions could be produced.

Second, we concern about the use of Malay language in extracting the terms from Chinese and Indian respondents. Although all respondents understand the Malay language, their understanding relates to the use of the language in educational settings. When they were in the same cultural groups, they do not speak Malay. Questions may arise that the Malaysian Chinese and Indian may have some personality descriptors that are expressed in their native language which were not included in the terms or item accumulation. Language effects could be the confounding cause towards incomplete coverage of the terms at the very beginning. They may have other own personality-descriptors within their culture which is truly indigenous. It involves the language to describe people characteristic and behavior. Goddard (1997) has studied the semantic influence on Malay and found that a verbal utterance of the word may not necessarily imply the actual meaning of the word. If someone says thank you when being offered a drink, for example, that thank you may mean a kind refuse or a kind acceptance. Malays especially do not tend to be a straightforward.

Third, the use of college students alone may limit the accumulation of trait terms because non-college samples, like adult and older people may have even more trait terms culled in the forms of proverb, symbolic languages and story form. Some important dimensions may have been missed because initial scale construction was only based on a content analysis of various personality descriptors and critical incidents obtained from a large number of students.

## CONCLUSION

The study is far beyond claiming the complete indigenous structure of the personality dimension of the Malaysian people. We found only four dimensions and this only accounts for about 60% of the variance. In addition, indigenous work in other cultures discovers more than five factors. Possibility of getting more than four factors is very likely due to more trait extraction could be done through lexical approach. Further work on adding and refining items on each scale, replicate the study with revised items among new samples are also recommended. In fact, validation of the personality-related terms should be carried out, prior to data collection, with the local expertise on the cultural meaning of the terms – which involve the Malay, Chinese and Indian sociologists and psychologists. We suggest that new study would allow native language, like Chinese and Indian trait adjectives-related, to be included in the accumulation of the terms. This would help improve digging up the indigenous terms as many as possible from all three main races. Further studies thus require translators or collaborators of the Chinese and Indian origins, born in Malaysia. In subsequent revision, more items will be added to the existing items. More items give a better opportunity to convey the intended construct and aggregating across item increases reliability. Also, since there exist some resemblance with Big Five factors, we foresee

that our future work will involve relating the indigenous dimension with that Big Five.

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