

# Perception of Ethnic Minorities in joining Malaysian Armed Forces

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**Abstract:** This is a conceptual paper for a future study that is based on a review of the literature about the Malays' long-standing dominance in the Malaysia Armed Forces in Malaysia due to the lack of enrollment of other races. On the other hand, several presumptions were made by veterans and military authorities regarding the likely causes of non-Malay people's lack of interest in enlisting in the military. Some of them said that their personal impressions of non-Malays were the cause of their decision to forgo entering the military, while others claimed that government policies were to blame. Examining the various elements that influence non-Malay youth, particularly the young Malaysian Chinese inclinations to is never easy to find qualified candidates from underrepresented groups to apply for the military. For academics to use as a source for their research, the theoretical paper denotes supplemental works of literature. The findings of this further study might reveal how ethnic minority's view joining the armed forces as a career option. Due to the small proportion of ethnic minorities in the armed services who participated, earlier research was done to investigate and determine any potential underlying causes of the circumstance.

**Keywords:** *military personnel, perceptions, ethnic minorities, authorities*

## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is a multiethnic nation made up primarily of the Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic groups. Due to the tiny number of recruits from other races, most of the Malaysian armed forces have been held by Malaysians for decades [2]. On the other hand, military officials and veterans have made numerous assumptions on the reasons why non-Malays are less likely to enlist in the military. Some of them said that non-Malays were persuaded by their own opinions about not enlisting, while others claimed that government policies were the driving forces behind their decision. There isn't agreement on the assertions, though. Investigating the different elements that affect the intentions of non-Malaysian youth, particularly young Malaysians, is crucial. Free Malaysian Today, 2017 stated that history of

non-Malay started to join the Malayan Armed

Forces was since the British Retired) Mohd Arshad Raji stated that during the 1960s till the late 70s, the non-Malay military personnel had roughly 30% of the total manpower. Another statement by the President of The Malaysian Armed Forces Chinese Veterans Association Major (Retired) Tan Pau Son stated the non-Malay officers outnumbered Malays in the military when he served in the armed forces in the 1960s [5]. Nonetheless, the number of non-colonized era, during the battle of Japanese Invasion and the Invasion of the communist party into the Federation of Malaya. A statement by the National Patriot Association President Brigadier-General (Malay joining the armed forces has dropped over the years. In a press conference in 2017, Raja Mohamed Affandi Raja Mohamed Noor,

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the retired chief of Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) said that the military hopes there are more recruits from different races to join the armed forces.

*“The involvement of other races in the ATM is so we can share the responsibility of defending the sovereignty of the nation. So, we are seeking 10% participation of youths from various races to join as members of the armed forces and enroll in MTD.”*

The retired Brigadier-General Mohd Arshad commented that the issue happened due to the military services having developed a clear ethnic split. He added that the government policies favoured on ethnic centric in the 1980s were one of the causes of this issue. Furthermore, Major (Retired) Tan Pau Son also said that the government was too selective in recruiting Chinese who intend to join the military. He explained that “It is not because we (Chinese) do not want to join, but the selection process is rigorous on Chinese” [5].

Another hand, the former Defense Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi pointed out that there were less than one percent of the recruit for 2008/09 batches were Chinese and Indians, even countless promoting activities had been carried out to attract the non-Malay in public and private institutions [1]. In the contrary, he had claimed that several factors of the low recruitment rates for non-Malay are affected by their personal perceptions: i) strict discipline, ii) low wages, iii) families influence, iv) negative perception, v) lack of patriotism. Moreover, the career army officer Major General Datuk Toh Choong Siang also attributed in The Star newspaper saying that the Chinese youngster aims to become the leader in a short period; therefore, the military is not desirable to start a career.

Additionally, most of the related studies found were only conducted in Western countries such as United Kingdom, United States and Belgium. For example [7] conducted two pieces

of research to examine the perceptions of Pakistani Muslims and Sikhs living in Britain in joining the British Armed Services as a potential career. Another study conducted by [8] explored the recruiting and retention challenges and ways to attract underrepresented groups to join the US military forces. [7] also conducted a similar study to [8] to examine factors leading to ethnic-cultural minorities being underrepresented in Belgian Defense.

In addition, there is a lack of study in the Malaysian context, particularly on the intents of young Malaysian Chinese to enlist in the military. For instance, investigated the fundamental views of students graduating from private colleges who plan to join the military. The research, however, was limited to private college students of various ethnicities and the critical beliefs that affected their decision to enlist in the military. The likelihood that individuals will enlist in the military is still uncertain. The gap left by earlier talks and studies must be filled to fully understand how young Malaysian Chinese people view the military as a career and how likely they are to enlist.

## **Perception**

Perception is described as a belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem; the quality of being aware of things through the physical senses, especially sight; someone's ability to notice and understand things that are not obvious to other people," according to Cambridge English dictionary (n.d.). Examining young Malaysian Chinese people's perceptions about joining the Malaysian armed forces as a career is the main goal of this study.

## **Malaysian Chinese**

Malaysian Chinese is one of the three major races in Malaysia beside the Malay and Indian. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), the Malaysian Chinese has an

approximate population of 6.7 million out of 29.7 million of Malaysia total population. The Malaysian Chinese in this research refers to young Malaysian Chinese that currently studying at Xiamen University Malaysia.

### **Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM)**

Xiamen University Malaysia is the first China university overseas campus that located in Sepang, Selangor Malaysia. According to the university website, it was founded by a well-known Malayan Chinese educator Mr. Tan Kah Kee in 1921 in China. In 2014, the university has reciprocated by building up a campus in Malaysia. Xiamen University Malaysia has been chosen as the location to recruit sample population to conduct this research.

### **Young Adult**

According to Cambridge English Dictionary (n.d.), a young adult is an individual (both male and female) who is in their late teenage years or early twenties. Researchers have claimed that the young adult or older adolescent age range is between 15 to 29 years old (Bleyer and Albritton, 2003). Furthermore, the former Youth and Sports Minister of Malaysia Syed Saddiq Abdul Rahman has announced the maximum age of a “Youth” is 30 years old on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019 [7].

### **Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF)**

The Malaysian Armed Forces are the military of Malaysia in which consist of three main branches: Malaysian Army, Royal Malaysian Navy, and Royal Malaysian Air Force. The commander-in-chief of the forces is the king of Malaysia, Yang di-pertuan Agong of Pahang. According to Global Fire Power (2021), Malaysian Armed Forces has a total number of 410,000 military personnel with 110,000 active personnel [5].

### **Career choice**

According to IGI Global (n.d.), the definition of

career choice can be defined as an individual’s process of selecting a career path, which may include decisions about education and training requirements for a particular career. Another hand, the American Psychological Association (n.d.) defined career choice as the process of choosing a vocation in which the process typically influenced by various factors such as parental advice, vocational guidance, identification with role models, trial or part-time work, training possibilities, personal interests, and assessment’s ability. In this research, the career choice is referring to choosing a career in the armed forces sector.

## **Related Theories and Models**

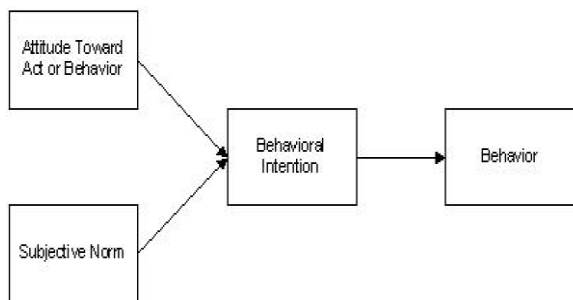
### **i. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) developed the Theory of Reasoned Action to understand human behaviour in specific contexts [4]. Luenendonk (2019) [explained that the TRA posits three elements or factors that shaped behavioural intention [13]. Firstly, the theory explains that an individual’s attitude or personal judgment on a particular behaviour is either positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable. The attitude must be specific, as it is only via specificity that the following behaviour can be predicted. Secondly, subjective norms that predominate or social pressure exerted by other people’s expectations, as viewed from an individual’s perspective. This consists of two components: a) individual’s normative beliefs and b) individual’s motivation. Thirdly, an individual perceives behavioural control in his capacity to accomplish a particular behaviour.

The TRA posits that an individual’s intention to engage in a particular behaviour is regarded as the strongest predictor of whether they would engage in that behaviour. In this case, an individual’s attitudes and subjective norms could predict intentions. If an individual views a particular behaviour or action more positively and the more significant the activity is to their peers,

family, or society, the more likely an individual is to develop their intentions to get in touch with the behaviour. Luenendonk (2019) mentioned three factors that influenced the relationship between an individual's intention and the actual behaviour. For an individual to predict a particular behaviour, the intention of that behaviour must be specific. Furthermore, the intention must be consistent or stable from the time it is given or measured to when the behaviour is performed [13].

Thirdly, an individual has total power to control whether to perform the behaviour, demonstrating that the behaviour is 100% voluntary by individual.



**Figure 13:** Framework of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

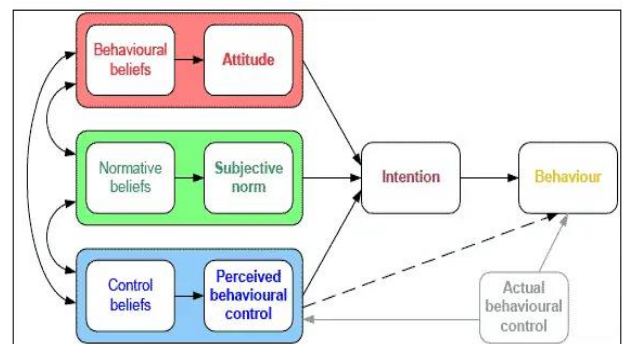
**Source:** Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)

**ii. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is an extended version of the Theory of Reasoned Action developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1985) [4]. Behavioural control is added in the TPB for greater accuracy in understanding an individual's attitude and predicting their behaviour. This theory explains that individuals perceived behavioural control could influence their intentions and subsequent behaviours or belief in their ability to do or engage in the desired behaviours. There are two elements that led to TPB identification of the perceived behavioural control.

The first is internal control, which shows how the individual perceives his or her control. Internal control focuses on the individual's perception of control over the activity, determined mainly by the individual's sufficiency of knowledge, skills, and abilities [11]. On the other hand, the second is external control, whereby external factors impact individuals' behaviour. For instance, peers or families' influences are likely to influence an individual to acquire a favourable attitude toward behaviour and boost his or her intention to complete the action.

**Figure 14:** Key variables of Theory of Planned



**Behaviour Source:** Fishbein and Ajzen (1985)

In terms of behavioural beliefs, LaCaille (2013) stated that a person initially develops beliefs about the results of a particular behaviour [11]. These beliefs influence an individual's attitude toward the judgement of the behaviour's outcome. The stronger the attitude toward a specific behaviour, the more likely the intention to act toward the specific behaviour. In addition, normative beliefs and subjective norms refer to an individual's perception toward the expectations of others, such as friends or families. These beliefs influence the way we perceive social pressure and how motivated individuals are to comply. The stronger the perceived norm or pressure, the more determined the intention toward a behaviour. Lastly, the control beliefs and perceived behavioural control refer to an individual's development of own beliefs about the elements that may either help or obstruct in performing a particular behaviour. Although many researchers, notably Ajzen [1], have used the term "self-efficacy" instead of perceived

behavioural control. However, LaCaille explained that these ideas are not identical. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs of their competency or internal control, whereas perceived behavioural control takes additional external or environmental elements into account. The more favourable perceived behavioural control, the more the likelihood of performing the behaviour [10].

## Previous Studies

### i. Overview of perception

According to OU (2017), *perception* can be defined as the process of becoming aware of comprehending sensory information in terms of philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science [13]. On the other hand, McDonald (2011) defined *perception* as an individual's viewpoint, making it a potent motivator for action. By analysing sensory information and linking it to previous experiences, one can construct a lens to see the world through sociocultural influences.

In the perception process, it consists of three stages: selection, organization, and interpretation. The first process is the selection phase, in which people convert stimuli from their surroundings into meaningful experience [13]. People receive a massive amount of information in daily life, such as things that humans hear and witness. However, our human brain could not perceive all the information sent to us because the human brain would experience information overload and malfunction. Thus, people perceive a certain amount of information from their surroundings through a selective process. In this case, some people compare this selection process to the process of creating a map. This means that a person is not able to include everything on a map. Therefore, generalizations and deletions must be made to eliminate redundant and unnecessary information while the vital information is highlighted in an unproportionate manner on the map.

The second phase of the process is organization. In this phase, the human brain

organizes the information selected from the outside world by categorizing things or people into different categories [13]. The researcher also states that in this phase of the perception process, the social and physical occurrences, or objects that individuals experience will have form, color, texture, size, et cetera. Therefore, Ou (2017) stated that when a person is asked to describe what a human being is, some people may describe it from human characteristics such as skin color, hair, eyes, et cetera. The researcher also mentioned that perception in this phase has two characteristics. First, the human perception structure is provided by the organizing process. Second, the process demonstrates that human perception is stable, which means that once humans selected stimuli and classified them into categories, they become durable [12].

The third or final phase in the perception process is interpretation. This refers to the process of imparting selected stimuli with meanings. After categorizing the selected stimuli into structured and stable forms, the human brain tries to create a sense of these forms by ascribing meaning to them [13]. However, one should know that not everyone has the same interpretations of the same stimulus. According to Samovar, Porter, and Stefani (2000), the researcher stated that the differences happened due to individuals' different cultural backgrounds, significantly influencing the way they interpret and evaluate what they receive from the outside world. As a result, individual's different experiences and backgrounds will ascribe different meanings to the same stimulus, resulting in perception diversity.

In the meaning of the attribution process, people from similar cultures will probably share similar experiences and knowledge. They hence will likely attribute similar meanings to the same stimuli, resulting in similar perceptions. As a result of similar perceptions, communicators can comprehend the meaning of each other's verbal and nonverbal acts more efficiently and accurately,

ensuring that communication proceeds smoothly. On the contrary, if communicators use their own cultural experiences or knowledge to interpret strange behaviors in another culture, they will attribute entirely different meanings to the same stimulus, resulting in differences in perception and communication difficulties.

On the other hand, there are two vital fundamental dimensions of perception that would help understand how the human brain develops structure, stability, and meanings for the selected stimuli [12]. The first dimension of perception is the physical dimension of perception. Generally, this means that people have similar perceptions mechanisms such as sensory organs (eyes, ear, and nose) that enable humans to sense the surrounding environment. Once the sensory organs receive stimuli, they are sent to the brain via the neurological system, in which they are given form and stability and attributed meanings. Secondly, another dimension is the psychological dimension of perceptions. People's personal beliefs, values, attitudes, needs, interests, et cetera significantly influence how humans see the outside world. The main difference between the two dimensions is that an individual's values, attitudes, beliefs, or motive (the psychological dimension) are influenced rather than sensory organs (the physical dimension) to determine whether what stimuli will attract the attention of individual and then receive meanings [12].

## ii. Overview of Malaysian Chinese

The Malaysian Chinese has a long history in Malaysia. During the Portuguese conquest of Malacca, there has been a small Chinese community lived there. Moreover, in the nineteenth century has been many Chinese migrations from south China, primarily from the Fujian and Guangdong provinces to Malaysia. The booming British colonial economies in Malaya also attracted the Chinese to migrate for a better living [3]. As a result, there is an increasing

number of Chinese migrants as there were able to bring the families and relative to settle down in Malaya. Tan (1997) stated that the chaotic situation during 1920s and 1930s between the battle of Kuomintang government and Communists also led to the migration of Chinese to Southeast Asia.

In term of demography, the Chinese population in Malaya during 1957 was 2,333,756 out of 6,278,758 total population (Zhong, 1998, p.203). In 2020, the Chinese population increased to roughly 6.7 million while the total population was 29.7 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). According to the data published in 2003, the Hokkien Chinese has the largest population in Malaysia in which it has over 2 million population out of 5.3 million of Malaysian Chinese, followed by Hakka 1.092 million and Cantonese 1.068 million. **Refer to figure 3:**

Hokkien	2,020,914
Khek (Hakka)	1,092,835
Cantonese	1,068,008
Teochew	497,280
Foochow (Hokchiu)	251,553
Hainanese	141,045
Kwongsai	51,674
Henghua	24,654
Hockchia	14,935
Other Chinese	202,977
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,365,875</b>

**Figure 3:** Malaysian Chinese Speech Groups population (2003)

**Source:** Chee-Beng, Tan (1997)

Generally, the Malaysian Chinese mainly communicate in their native dialects, but they recognize Mandarin (Huayu) as their common language. Mandarin is used as the primary instruction in Chinese schools across the nation, and most Chinese Malaysians can speak and communicate in Mandarin. Besides that, Hokkien or Minnan dialect is the most widely spoken speech-group language [3]. In Malaysia, Hokkiens from various regional backgrounds coexist in the same towns. As a result, the Minnan

dialect in Malaysia is truly unique in that it is the product of the mingling of many Minnan dialects. However, Hokkien speakers in the southern provinces of Johor and Malacca can separate themselves from those in the northern states of Penang, Kedah, and Perlis, as the latter retain more traits of the Zhangzhou Minnan dialect. In terms of religious beliefs and practices, Tan (1997) stated that according to the 2000 census, roughly 86.61 percent of Chinese adhere to traditional Chinese religion and Buddhism. Chinese temples and religious shrines are prominent and can be seen throughout the nation. In addition, Malaysian Chinese worshiped Chinese deities as one of their beliefs. Most of Malaysian Chinese worshippers also build shrines for their preferred deities in their homes as a sign of respect to the deities. Not all Malaysian Chinese are Buddhist; roughly nine percent of Malaysian Chinese are Christians, both Catholic, and Protestants in 2000. There are also Chinese Muslims in Malaysia, but the number is relatively small, accumulating only one percent in 2000.

### iii. Layman's perceptions and intentions

In a study conducted by Sami (2015) in the Turkish context, the researcher investigated the intentions of young people to enlist in the military. There is a total of 91 male participants took part in the study. The age of the participants is between 18- to 24-year-old. Moreover, five factors have been pointed out to study the motivation of young Turkish in enlisting the all-volunteer militaries. The five factors are patriotism, sensation seeking, value of money for people, use of force in military interventions, other intentions to join the military. The researcher used the Theory of Planned Behavior as the model in this study [14]. According to Asare (2015), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was established by Icek Ajzen (1991) [1] to forecast an individual's behavior. According to the approach, behavioral intention is influenced by an individual's attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control.

This study had several hypotheses. According

to Sami, symbolic patriotism highly correlates with the participants' desire to join the military. Sensation seekers, according to the researcher, are more likely to support the military. Third, Sami predicted that participants would be more interested in joining the military if they believed the military would compensate them more. Sami also stated three hypotheses for the use of force; (i) use of force will mitigate the relationship between symbolic patriotism and military enlistment; (ii) use of force will moderate the relationship between sensation seeking and military recruitment; (iii) use of force will moderate the relationship between compensation and military enlistment.

Regarding the study's procedure, the quantitative research method was used by research, and the survey took place in two cities in Turkey, Istanbul, and Ankara. Descriptive analyses were used to analyse the demographics and construct. Furthermore, correlation analyses were used to analyse the relationship between constructs and demographic variables and correlations between constructs. All the independent variables were analysed using multiple regression, and simple regression was used to analyse the first, second, and third hypotheses. Lastly, interaction analysis was conducted to measure hypotheses 4a, 4b, and 4c.

The study's findings revealed that patriotism and sensation seeking are likely to influence the participants to join the military. More patriotic participants and sensation seeking have higher intentions to enlist into the service. However, the value of money demonstrates an inverse relationship. This explained that people who value money more would be less interested in joining the military. Therefore, the results support the first and second hypotheses, claiming that an individual's patriotism and sensation-seeking will influence their intentions to join the military. For hypothesis 3, the outcomes were not as expected. Sami (2015) said that in Moskoss (1977) study, the researcher firmly stated that offering financial incentives for recruitment may jeopardize the forces as it could possibly turn a patriotic duty

into a high-paid regular job. As a result, the participants perceive military careers as not a career source for earning tons of money [14].

## Conclusion

Finally, the patriotic sentiments of an individual would determine the person's views on the use of military equipment during times of chaos. Lastly, the use of force is not likely to affect individuals to join the military. The relationship shows that individuals are unlikely to join the service only to make money. The number of non-Malay enlistment in the Malaysian Armed Forces is still low. Other than that, future studies focusing on educational opportunities and benefits can be used as variables to examine the intentions and motivations to join the armed forces.

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