

The difference and similarity of the organizational commitment-rewards  
relationship among ethnic groups within Japanese manufacturing  
companies in Malaysia

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – Growing number of research to identify antecedents of organizational commitment (OC) has been done not only in the West but also in the East including Malaysia because OC is found to be associated with various work-related outcomes. However, to date, the influence of ethnic identity on the OC-rewards relationship was not explored although the leader has to recognize the different cultural underpinnings of each community in a plural society like Malaysia. Therefore, this study investigates the differences in the relationship between rewards and organizational commitment (OC) between three ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese, and Indians, in Malaysia.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Hierarchical regression analysis was used to analyze survey data gathered from 12,076 employees who work for 32 Japanese manufacturing companies located in Malaysia.

**Findings** – The results of the analysis show that satisfaction with the personal evaluation was more associated with OC and role clarity was less associated with OC in Chinese than in other ethnic groups. However, differences were not found in the

relationships of other rewards with OC at the 1 % significance level. These results indicate that the ethnic difference in the OC-rewards relationship is rather small.

**Research limitations/implications** – The major limitation concerns generalizability. The validity of the current research should be tested by the data of various foreign affiliates located in Malaysia and other multiethnic societies.

**Practical implications** – The results of this study could support the revision of human resource management practices, enabling workers to contribute to their companies on a long-term basis in multi-ethnic countries.

**Originality/value** – Although previous research has elucidated OC–rewards relation in particular countries, it has not met the potential requirements of the managers who face the difference in OC–rewards relation among the employees of different ethnic groups. In this sense, this research was the first attempt to tackle this theme contributing to the literature.

Keywords: Malaysia; organizational commitment; ethnicity; rewards; Japanese companies

## **Introduction**

Attracting and retaining local employees is one of the most important concerns for foreign companies. How can they achieve this aim? One possible solution would be heightening the organizational commitment (OC) of employees. OC is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization (Mowday et al., 1979), and a higher OC is found to be associated with various work-related outcomes such as workplace performance (Baird et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2019), ethical behavior (Fu, 2014; Grego-Planer, 2019), and better discrimination between those who stay and those who leave a workplace compared to job/benefit satisfaction (de la Torre-Ruiz et al., 2019; Porter et al., 1974). These studies are all based on social exchange theory, where employees are expected to perform better when they perceive extrinsic, social or intrinsic rewards provided by the employer and that are worth reciprocation (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Therefore, a growing number of studies working to identify antecedents of OC have not only been conducted in the West but also in the East including Malaysia, as are shown later.

Furthermore, some of these studies have found inter-country differences, including the study of Ahmad and Oranye (2010), who investigated antecedents of OC in nurses working in Malaysia and England and found job satisfaction that was more strongly

associated with OC in the former than in the latter. Another study revealed that individual cultural values significantly influence the attractiveness of Japanese companies for jobseekers in Malaysia, which indicates that the difference in cultural values within countries should be recognized and investigated separately from generalized national cultural values (Kim et al., 2018). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the influence of ethnic identity on OC was not explored even though "the leader has to recognize the different cultural underpinnings of each community" (Chin, 2002, p. iii) in a plural society like Malaysia. Malaysia's heterogeneous workplace has often been a cause of cross-cultural conflict and inter-ethnic dilemmas (Montesino, 2012). Therefore, the current research should identify the difference in the OC-rewards relationship among three main ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese, and Indians, which dominated 68.8, 23.2, and 7.0 percent of the total Malaysian population in 2017, respectively (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018), in Japanese manufacturing companies in Malaysia.

This study is very meaningful due to two main reasons. One is political and the other is due to economic reasons. The Malaysian government has been aiming to restructure economic imbalance and the income distribution among different ethnic groups since the initiation of the New Economic Policy, which is also called "Bumiputera Policy," in 1970

(The Government of Malaysia, 1976). The aim was to have a proportional representation of different races at all occupational levels (Menon, 2008). For this purpose, leaders or managers in Malaysia have had to be truly sensitive to cultural differences between ethnic groups to develop original methods and to make all ethnic groups appropriately committed to their workplaces (Ahmad, 2001).

Establishing ethnic diversity in a workplace is desirable even from an economic viewpoint. In previous research, ethnic board diversity in Malaysian firms was found to be positively associated with firm financial performance because board diversity ensures the breadth and depth of the board's judgments (Abdullah et al., 2017; Cheong and Sinnakkannu, 2014). Moreover, other research by Bakar and McCann (2014) found that ethnic similarity in supervisor-subordinate relationships promotes the perceived quality of leader-member exchange, which indicates that a workplace of low ethnic diversity may not manage ethnically diverse employees because vertical communication is a significant promoter of OC in the Malaysian setting (Lo et al., 2010). This study could also become a good reference for companies, especially those from relatively culturally homogeneous societies like Japan, which intends to extend its business to Malaysia and must grasp the characteristics of each ethnic group to appropriately manage them.

## **Literature review**

Windeler and Riemenschneider (2016) investigated OC and its antecedents of IT professionals in the United States and found that they are different between ethnic groups, which indicates that ethnicity is an important consideration for researchers studying OC. However, the variables used for antecedents of OC were only supervisor-related variables (mentoring and LMX) and lack other financial and non-financial variables. In the Malaysian setting, although a growing number of studies has been conducted to identify antecedents of OC (Bashir and Long, 2015; Cheah et al., 2016; Karim, 2010; Lau et al., 2017; Mahdi et al., 2014), no research has identified the difference of the OC-rewards relationship between ethnic groups to the best of our knowledge. Therefore, it is difficult to forecast this relationship and how it occurs.

We employ eight rewards in this paper as the antecedents of OC. They are Satisfaction with personnel evaluation; Satisfaction with other treatments; Fatigue; Supervisor support; Co-worker support; Autonomy; Training provision; and Role clarity. These rewards are selected because they comprise three representative well-tested variables, such as extrinsic, social, and intrinsic rewards (Mottaz, 1985; Newman and Sheikh, 2012). Moreover, these variables are considered indispensable in Malaysia as related variables were used individually in previous research including financial compensation

(Govindasamy, 2009; Normala, 2010), autonomy or discretionary power (Govindasamy, 2009; Karim, 2010), support from supervisors/ colleagues (Normala, 2010; Ramli and Desa, 2013), training or skill/ability provision (Ahmad and Bakar, 2003; Bashir and Long, 2015; Juhdi et al., 2013), and role clarity (Karim, 2010).

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Satisfaction with personnel evaluation*

Although research considering ethnical differences in the OC-rewards relationship is limited, we propose certain hypotheses to be tested by drawing from the limited literature. The most often referred difference is related to the strength and greed for money. Chinese, compared to others, are usually portrayed as being more committed to self-improvement (Yeoh, & Yeoh, 2015), motivated by the opportunity to grow (Islam and Ismail, 2008), acquisitive and highly inspired by financial rewards (Ahmad, 2001; Moran et al., 2007; Lim, 1998; Lim, 2001), compared to Malays and Indians, possibly due to the immigrant psyche without which they may have not emerge as the first middle-class society with their business and entrepreneurship qualities expanding tin mining industries (Yeoh, & Yeoh, 2015). However, it is described that Malays express favorable attitudes toward Islamic principles, which emphasize that the pursuit of financial gains



should not be at the expense of the community and they tend to accept unequal relationships between young and old and superior and subordinate (Sulaiman, 2000). Such asceticism is similarly observed in Indians because Hinduism advocates that all claims of wealth and pleasure are to be positive and stronger by the doctrine of dharma, which constrains them not to engage in any form of activity leading to the accumulation of wealth and material goods (Gopalan and Rivera, 1997). This leads us to the following hypotheses:

H1: The relationship between satisfaction with personnel evaluation and OC is positively stronger for Chinese than non-Chinese.

### *Role clarity*

Another difference may be observed within role clarity, which is the extent to which an employee knows what is expected of him/her for the adequate performance of his tasks and job responsibilities (Rizzo et al., 1970). The difference may be attributed to religious diversity between ethnic groups. For instance, it is said that Malays express favorable attitudes toward religion and accept fate as being unchangeable and final, which is in line with Islamic principles (Sulaiman, 2000). Therefore, Malays believe that there is a correct or appropriate form of behavior for nearly all situations and generally seek

guidance from such people as religious leaders and old people (Goddard, 2015; Richardson et al., 2017). Besides, in the culture of high context, it is said people make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than in a low-context culture because their meaning is implicit in the communication among intimate members (Hall, 1976). The Malay language is more analogous than digital in that a single word can be used in many different contexts (Salleh, 2005).

Similarly for Indians, the range, scope, and type of work undertaken by an individual is determined by their particular role and due to the concept of dharma, which refers to prescribed duties that are to be performed by individuals based on their particular role in life (Gopalan and Rivera, 1997; Sinha, 1978). However, unlike the Malay or Indian cultures, the Chinese culture argues that religion is to be manipulated to suit their goals as fate is negotiable if appropriate sacrifices are offered to the gods (Lim, 2001). Indeed, in previous research, a comparison of Malay, Indian and Chinese perceptions about leadership shows large differences; Malays and Indians feel more strongly than Chinese that leaders should be more aware of morality, which is closely linked with religious influence originating from Islamic and Hindu beliefs (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H2: The relationship between role clarity and OC is weaker for Chinese than non-

Chinese.

### *Other rewards*

However, it is difficult to determine other ethnical differences in this theme. Indeed, it is said that collectivism, respect for elders, harmony, maintaining face and a religious orientation are common and shared values among all of the main ethnic groups (Schermerhorn, 1994). Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) argued that the commitment of employees with collectivist values may arise from a good relationship with peers. For instance, the Chinese have been devoted to maintaining good social relationships based on the concepts of *guanxi* (building human networks) and *mianzi* (maintaining face for social status) (Ramasamy et al., 2007; Sendul et al., 1990). Empirical research in a setting of Malaysian Chinese also revealed that *guanxi* networks significantly contribute toward social exchange relationships in a company and employees' job involvement (Ahmed et al., 2013). However, other ethnic groups are also said to have similar collectivistic personalities. For instance, it is argued that Malays are accustomed to relationship building and ensuring disagreements are not discussed openly (Goddard, 1997) or their actions do not upset the feelings of others (Kennedy, 2002; Lim, 1998) because social harmony and getting along with others are emphasized within the Malay

communities (Chee, 1992; Sendut et al., 1990). Malay culture is shaped by the interrelated concepts of *budi* (intellectual and ethical qualities) and *adat* (norms, values, beliefs, and traditions) (Richardson et al., 2017). Likewise, Indians also attach importance to being a team player, supporting the decision of others and maintaining superior-subordinate relationships and the corporate image, and corporate behaviors seeking harmony and unity are given priority over-focusing on practicality and reality (Gopalan and Rivera, 1997; Husain, 1961; Kakar, 1971; Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008). Indian texts, such as the Vedas and Upanishads, emphasize the importance of peace and harmony, which can be attained only by establishing a living connection with all beings (Das, 2014).

According to Abdullah (1992), a Malaysian generally has no real identity unless he/she belongs to a group and there is a tacit consensus on morals between employers and employees that is similar to the relationship between parents and children regardless of their ethnic group. Moreover, previous research indicates that perspectives of what makes an excellent leader do not differ between three ethnic group managers because Malays are narrowing the commercial gap with the Chinese as the nation strives toward Vision 2020 (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008). To the best of our knowledge, there has been no empirical research that investigates the comparative strength of collectivism between

ethnic groups, and therefore, it might be reasonable to assume that there is no difference in personal support variables and OC among ethnic groups.

Additionally, the researcher may suppose that there is no significant difference between ethnic groups in the remaining rewards, i.e., satisfaction with other treatments, fatigue, autonomy, and training as the researcher has not encountered any information indicating a possible ethnical difference in the association between these rewards and OC. Moreover, previous research suggests that the three ethnic groups, i.e., Malay, Chinese, and Indians, do not differ significantly on work-related values except for the dimension of religiosity (Abdullah and Lim, 2001; Fontaine and Richardson, 2005; Lim, 2001). In support of this finding, another study examined the perceptions of the Malays, Chinese and Indian managers and executives on business ethics in Malaysia and showed that the differences among the ethnic groups on perceived business ethics were limited (Rashid and Ho, 2003). Therefore, we are led to the following hypothesis.

H3: The relationship between the other six rewards (i.e., satisfaction with other treatments, fatigue, supervisor support, co-worker support, autonomy, and training) and OC is equally strong for Malays, Chinese and Indians.

As a procedure to gauge these differences, variables of ethnic identities as moderators between OC and rewards were employed. Previous research not only used continuous

variables, such as tenure (Indartono and Chen, 2011), organizational learning culture (Joo and Shim, 2010), collectivism/masculinity (Hofman and Newman, 2014), person-organization fit (Jehanzeb and Mohanty, 2018), and traditionality–modernity (Juma and Lee, 2012), but also dichotomous ones, such as nationality (Hong et al., 2016; Jung and Takeuchi, 2014; Lok and Crawford, 2004), educational background (Kokubun, 2018) and gender (Indartono and Chen, 2011) to examine the moderating effect on these relationships by including the interaction with the main variables in the regression equations. However, to the best of our knowledge, the current research is the first to use ethnic identities as moderators. Therefore, the significance level to test the above hypotheses was determined at  $p < 0.01$ , which is a statistical standard that is stricter than most other related papers to secure generalizability and bear scrutiny in future studies. However, the researcher also considered any observed difference at  $p < 0.05$  in the discussion section.

## **Research methodology**

### *Participants*

The survey was conducted from August 2005 to March 2016. Nearly all the employees who work for 32 Japanese manufacturing companies were asked to take part in the

survey to avoid any sampling bias, which may have an uncontrollable impact on the survey results. The surveys were anonymously gathered by a paper and pencil questionnaire that was written in two languages (Bahasa and English) developed by the back-translation method. The response rate was 88.8%, high enough as the researcher promised a copy of the summary results to the HR department of each firm who distributed and collected the questionnaires. Among 22,206 surveys collected, we use 12,076 surveys of Malaysian employees directly hired by Japanese manufacturing companies in Malaysia. Among them, 9,389 were Malays, 1,853 were Chinese and 701 were Indians and were obtained in the states of Selangor (13), Penang (6), Johor (5), Kedah (4), Kelantan (1), Perak (1), Kuala Lumpur (1) and Negeri Sembilan (1) (the figures in parentheses are the number of companies). The other demographic information of the participants is shown in the tables of A1. We controlled for all of the demographic variables to attenuate any concern about sample compatibility.

Contractual employees were excluded, even if Malaysian because they are likely to demonstrate different perceptions and behaviors regarding the OC–rewards relationship than standard employees. The contract workers' perceived status relative to the client's standard employees has been shown to influence their OC in previous research (Boswell et al., 2012). Likewise, the data of foreign workers were not used because immigrant

status is associated with OC in previous research by Glazer and De La Rosa (2008).

These eliminated surveys will, however, be used in future analyses by the author.

The reason why the researcher selected respondents from Japanese firms is mainly because of its significant influence on this country. It is said that collectivistic features of the Japanese manufacturing workplace are strongly present in Japanese overseas subsidiaries (Wasti, 1998) and the Malaysian government has encouraged Malaysians to incorporate the positive elements of the Japanese work ethic through “Look East Policy” launched by the fourth (and the present) Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir in 1982.

However, to add another reason for selecting such a sample in the current research, it could be ethnocentrism of Japanese companies. It is pointed out that Japanese companies often lack the habit of seeing foreign cultures fairly and tend to focus on differences rather than similarities of cultures due to the lack of interaction with a diverse culture (Keeley, 2001). Therefore, if this research can provide hints for correctly understanding the similarities and differences between ethnic groups within culturally homogeneous Japanese enterprises, it should be possible to provide more generalizable information for enterprise managers who want to understand how to treat different background employees in a multicultural setting.



## *Measures*

The survey questions were adapted from Kokubun (2006) that have been recently used in research in other East Asian countries including Malaysia (Kokubun, 2017, 2018, 2019). The questions are constructed based on the above-mentioned social exchange theory and therefore include various items related to OC and rewards supposed to be exchanged in the workplace. The questionnaire was developed in English before being translated into Bahasa Malaysia, the Malaysian official language. It was then translated back into English to ensure the translation's accuracy. The variables measured were as follows:

*Satisfaction with personnel evaluation.* This variable is composed of four items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied).

*Satisfaction with other treatments.* This variable is composed of three items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied).

*Fatigue.* This variable is composed of three items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (incorrect) to 5 (correct).

*Supervisor support.* This variable is composed of six items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (I don't think so) to 5 (I think so).

*Co-worker support.* This variable is composed of four items. The items were measured

on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied).

*Autonomy.* This variable is composed of four items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (I don't feel so) to 5 (I feel so).

*Training provision.* This variable is composed of two items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (I don't think so) to 5 (I think so).

*Role clarity.* This variable is composed of two items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (I don't think so) to 5 (I think so).

*Organizational commitment.* This variable is composed of four items. The items were measured on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (I don't think so) to 5 (I think so).

*Control variables.* Several demographic variables were included to control for individual differences. The figures without any conversion were used for age, organizational tenure, and year of survey participation. Ethnic identities (Malays, Chinese or Indians), Gender, educational background, turnover experience, marital status, indirect/direct department, and managerial/non-managerial position were also measured.

### **Analysis and findings**

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of all of the items (except control variables) to examine the measurement invariance between Malays, Chinese, and

Indians. The reason why EFA was chosen rather than other methods (e.g., confirmation factor analysis) was that exploring the most fitted factor composition common for different ethnic groups was considered more important than confirming the applicability of the items used in Kokubun's previous studies. The results of the factor analysis with varimax rotation are presented in Table 1, which confirms a nine-factor solution for all of the items of satisfaction with personnel evaluation, satisfaction with other treatments, fatigue, supervisor support, co-workers support, autonomy, training provision, role clarity, and OC. The factor structure was the same for Malays, Chinese and Indians; therefore, we are convinced that they ascribed to the same meanings for the scale items used in the current study (Milfont and Fischer, 2010).

Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha reliability, and correlation coefficient, for Malays, Chinese, and Indians are presented in Table 2 to 4. We tested our hypotheses using a hierarchical regression analysis. We entered the control variables in Step 1 and the main effects of satisfaction with personnel evaluation, satisfaction with other treatments, fatigue, supervisor support, co-workers support, autonomy, training, and role clarity in Step 2. In Step 3, we entered ethnic identities (1 for the identified ethnic groups and 0 for others), and in Step 4 to 6, we used the interaction terms with main effects for the entire sample to test Malay, Chinese and

Indian moderation. By these steps, it is possible to show a moderation effect in ethnic identities if interaction terms have a significant correlation with the dependent variables even after inputting control and main variables in the model (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). Besides, we conducted a separate regression analysis using Malays, Chinese, and Indians. All of the regression results are presented in Table 5.



Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations (Chinese).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1 Gender	0.555	0.497																		
2 Age	35.166	7.967	0.104**																	
3 Tenure	10.375	7.969	0.031	0.831**																
4 University graduate	0.479	0.500	0.069**	-0.394**	-0.455**															
5 Turnover experience	0.593	0.491	0.017	0.209**	0.041	-0.186**														
6 Marital status	0.412	0.492	-0.016	-0.566**	-0.509**	0.263**	-0.145**													
7 Indirect department	0.704	0.456	-0.074**	-0.094**	-0.136**	0.211**	-0.018	0.107**												
8 Position	0.205	0.403	0.158**	0.402**	0.275**	0.111**	0.053*	-0.288**	0.050*											
9 Year	2008.769	3.076	0.025	0.242**	0.196**	-0.040*	0.085**	-0.123**	0.124**	0.063**										
10 Satisfaction with personnel evaluation	3.069	0.844	0.031	0.167**	0.121**	-0.155**	0.054*	-0.080**	-0.080**	0.112**	0.054**	(0.774)								
11 Satisfaction with other treatments	3.480	0.952	0.013	0.219**	0.201**	-0.165**	0.023	-0.117**	-0.044	0.073**	0.089**	0.495**	(0.754)							
12 Fatigue	3.328	1.122	-0.042	-0.188**	-0.122**	0.121**	-0.049*	0.072**	0.002	-0.040	-0.006	-0.254**	-0.305**	(0.824)						
13 Supervisor support	3.545	0.859	0.078**	-0.005	-0.021	0.016	0.007	0.037	-0.025	0.067**	0.001	0.457**	0.355**	-0.182**	(0.830)					
14 Co-worker support	3.912	0.670	0.063**	0.109**	0.098**	-0.036	0.011	-0.083**	-0.056*	0.074**	0.054**	0.378**	0.347**	-0.136**	0.391**	(0.801)				
15 Autonomy	3.772	0.799	0.140**	0.224**	0.207**	-0.070**	0.046*	-0.170**	0.003	0.184**	0.060**	0.251**	0.215**	-0.153**	0.258**	0.340**	(0.714)			
16 Training provision	3.221	1.021	0.080**	0.045	0.020	-0.064**	-0.010	-0.012	-0.038	0.061**	0.080**	0.407**	0.320**	-0.123**	0.381**	0.322**	0.290**	(0.651)		
17 Role clarity	3.848	0.958	0.006	0.132**	0.135**	-0.173**	0.055*	-0.093**	-0.138**	0.030	0.002	0.326**	0.267**	-0.198**	0.304**	0.329**	0.356**	0.297**	(0.507)	
18 Organizational commitment	3.655	0.853	0.090**	0.245**	0.219**	-0.170**	0.033	-0.158**	-0.035	0.121**	0.125**	0.463**	0.444**	-0.247**	0.395**	0.408**	0.417**	0.409**	0.366**	(0.762)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . \*Significance at the 5% level; \*\*Significance at the 1% level.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and correlations (Indians).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1 Gender	0.502	0.500																		
2 Age	37.225	7.639	0.023																	
3 Tenure	13.512	7.266	-0.180**	0.697**																
4 University graduate	0.114	0.318	0.241**	-0.118**	-0.224**															
5 Turnover experience	0.712	0.453	-0.073	0.132**	0.034	-0.138**														
6 Marital status	0.217	0.412	0.046	-0.527**	-0.409**	0.105**	-0.101**													
7 Indirect department	0.414	0.493	0.344**	-0.047	-0.200**	0.200**	-0.092*	0.029												
8 Position	0.058	0.235	0.212**	0.110**	0.026	0.389**	-0.016	-0.043	0.136**											
9 Year	2008.769	3.076	-0.157**	0.323**	0.395**	-0.140**	0.077*	-0.210**	-0.195**	-0.089*										
10 Satisfaction with personnel evaluation	3.241	1.013	0.044	0.034	0.035	-0.095*	0.057	-0.039	-0.005	0.038	0.052	(0.740)								
11 Satisfaction with other treatments	3.808	1.031	-0.014	0.084*	0.130**	-0.100**	0.069	-0.045	-0.062	0.001	0.158**	0.550**	(0.744)							
12 Fatigue	3.585	1.173	-0.192**	-0.004	0.081*	-0.075*	0.098**	-0.041	-0.194**	-0.086*	0.165**	-0.137**	-0.069	(0.798)						
13 Supervisor support	3.683	1.020	0.058	0.027	0.038	-0.036	-0.034	-0.023	0.056	0.021	0.005	0.476**	0.438**	-0.146**	(0.856)					
14 Co-worker support	3.932	0.843	0.110**	0.012	0.017	0.004	0.002	0.024	0.023	0.029	0.009	0.479**	0.527**	-0.073	0.436**	(0.805)				
15 Autonomy	3.823	0.943	0.212**	0.090*	0.038	0.064	0.025	-0.023	0.084*	0.092*	0.030	0.278**	0.245**	-0.025	0.338**	0.303**	(0.711)			
16 Training provision	3.504	1.174	-0.039	0.016	0.022	-0.085*	0.068	-0.009	-0.039	-0.003	0.098**	0.450**	0.369**	-0.033	0.395**	0.409**	0.291**	(0.636)		
17 Role clarity	4.226	0.962	-0.023	0.101**	0.095*	-0.089*	-0.008	-0.086*	0.010	0.020	0.121**	0.274**	0.363**	0.040	0.332**	0.318**	0.345**	0.274**	(0.525)	
18 Organizational commitment	4.097	0.895	0.039	0.114**	0.139**	-0.113**	-0.030	-0.039	0.007	-0.003	0.137**	0.351**	0.447**	-0.030	0.453**	0.422**	0.389**	0.350**	0.474**	(0.773)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . \*Significance at the 5% level; \*\*Significance at the 1% level.

Table 5. Results of hierarchical regression analyses.

Variables	Organizational commitment (Malays, Chinese, Indians and Others, n=12,076)					
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Gender	0.08 **	0.02 **	0.02 **	0.02 **	0.02 **	0.02 **
Age	0.05 **	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Tenure	0.07 **	0.05 **	0.05 **	0.04 **	0.04 **	0.05 **
University graduate	-0.11 **	-0.07 **	-0.07 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 **	-0.06 **
Turnover experience	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Marital status	-0.01	-0.02 *	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02
Indirect department	0.04 **	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Position	0.02 *	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01
Year	0.06 **	0.07 **	0.07 **	0.06 **	0.06 **	0.07 **
<i>Rewards</i>						
Satisfaction with personnel evaluation		0.07 **	0.07 **	0.07 **	0.06 **	0.07 **
Satisfaction with other treatments		0.16 **	0.16 **	0.16 **	0.16 **	0.16 **
Fatigue		-0.01	-0.01	-0.03	0.00	-0.01
Supervisor support		0.15 **	0.14 **	0.14 **	0.15 **	0.14 **
Co-worker support		0.09 **	0.10 **	0.12 **	0.09 **	0.10 **
Autonomy		0.16 **	0.16 **	0.19 **	0.16 **	0.17 **
Training provision		0.13 **	0.13 **	0.11 **	0.13 **	0.14 **
Role clarity		0.17 **	0.16 **	0.13 **	0.18 **	0.16 **
<i>Ethnic identities</i>						
Malays			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Chinese			-0.04	-0.05	-0.06 *	-0.04
Indians			0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
<i>Interaction terms</i>						
Malays×Satisfaction with personnel evaluation				0.00		
Malays×Satisfaction with other treatments				0.00		
Malays×Fatigue				0.02		
Malays×Supervisor support				0.01		
Malays×Co-worker support				-0.03		
Malays×Autonomy				-0.03		
Malays×Training provision				0.03		
Malays×Role clarity				0.03		
Chinese×Satisfaction with personnel evaluation					0.03 **	
Chinese×Satisfaction with other treatments					0.00	
Chinese×Fatigue					-0.02 *	
Chinese×Supervisor support					-0.01	
Chinese×Co-worker support					0.01	
Chinese×Autonomy					0.01	
Chinese×Training provision					0.00	
Chinese×Role clarity					-0.04 **	
Indians×Satisfaction with personnel evaluation						-0.02 *
Indians×Satisfaction with other treatments						0.00
Indians×Fatigue						0.00
Indians×Supervisor support						0.01
Indians×Co-worker support						0.01
Indians×Autonomy						0.00
Indians×Training provision						-0.02 *
Indians×Role clarity						0.02 *
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38
F	56.94 **	428.33 **	366.43 **	262.20 **	263.48 **	262.74 **

\*Significance at the 5% level; \*\*Significance at the 1% level.

Table 5. Results of hierarchical regression analyses (continued).

Variables	Organizational commitment (Malays, n=9,389)		Organizational commitment (Chinese, n=1,853)		Organizational commitment (Indians, n=701)	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Gender	0.08 **	0.02 *	0.07 **	0.03	0.08	0.02
Age	0.05 **	0.01	0.13 **	0.05	0.03	0.02
Tenure	0.07 **	0.05 **	0.01	0.02	0.09	0.05
University graduate	-0.09 **	-0.07 **	-0.12 **	-0.05 *	-0.12 **	-0.07 *
Turnover experience	0.03 *	0.02 **	-0.03	-0.02	-0.05	-0.05
Marital status	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	0.04	0.04
Indirect department	0.05 **	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.01
Position	0.02 *	0.01	0.06 *	0.00	0.03	-0.01
Year	0.06 **	0.07 **	0.08 **	0.05 **	0.11 **	0.05
<i>Rewards</i>						
Satisfaction with personnel evaluation		0.07 **		0.14 **		-0.02
Satisfaction with other treatments		0.16 **		0.15 **		0.15 **
Fatigue		0.00		-0.05 **		0.00
Supervisor support		0.15 **		0.10 **		0.18 **
Co-worker support		0.09 **		0.11 **		0.12 **
Autonomy		0.16 **		0.18 **		0.16 **
Training provision		0.13 **		0.13 **		0.07
Role clarity		0.17 **		0.08 **		0.24 **
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.37	0.08	0.43	0.05	0.41
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.36	0.08	0.42	0.03	0.40
F	34.60 **	317.20 **	18.22 **	80.51 **	3.81 **	28.43 **

\*Significance at the 5% level; \*\*Significance at the 1% level.

Step 1 presents the results when only the control variables are included in the regression to predict OC. Five out of nine demographic variables were found to positively influence OC ( $p < 0.01$ ). These demographic variables are gender, age, tenure, indirect department, and year, which indicates that variables of male, older, experiences and indirect who participated in the survey in more recent years tend to have a higher OC than others. However, university graduates were negatively associated with OC ( $p < 0.01$ ), which indicates that university graduates tend to have a lower OC than others. Using a more relaxed criterion, the position was also positively associated with OC ( $p < 0.05$ ). Other demographic variables, i.e., turnover experience and marital status, showed no significant relationship with OC ( $p < 0.01$ ).



Step 2 presents the results when the main variables are added to the regression. All of the eight reward variables except fatigue were significantly associated with OC. Observing the adjusted  $R^2$ , these rewards explained 34% of the additional variance in OC, which indicates that these rewards are important for OC.

Step 3 presents the results when the variables of ethnic identities are added to the regression. None of these variables are significantly associated with the regression.

Step 4 to 6 present the results of how the variables are moderated by ethnic identities. The relationship between satisfaction with personnel evaluation and OC was moderated by Chinese and shows that the relationship was stronger for Chinese than other ethnic groups ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, the OC of Chinese was affected more by satisfaction with personnel evaluation compared with non-Chinese. On the contrary, the relationship of role clarity with OC was weaker for Chinese than other ethnic groups ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which suggests that role clarity is a less important factor in forming OC for Chinese than non-Chinese. These results are consistent with H1 and H2. However, the relationships of other rewards (i.e., satisfaction with other treatments, fatigue, supervisor/co-worker support, autonomy, and training provision) with OC were not moderated by the sample ( $p < 0.01$ ), which shows that their relationships were equally strong for all of the ethnic groups. These results are consistent with H3.

To further understand the meaning of the significant interaction terms, we divided each of the Chinese and non-Chinese samples into high- and low-satisfaction with the personnel evaluation and high- and low-role clarity groups one standard deviation above and below the mean (Aiken and West 1991), and the differences in OC between Chinese and non-Chinese are graphically shown in Figure 1.

However, using a looser criterion ( $p < 0.05$ ), the relationship of fatigue with OC was weaker for Chinese than other ethnic groups ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which suggests that fatigue is relatively less hindering in forming OC for Chinese than non-Chinese. Likewise, the relationships of satisfaction with personnel evaluation and training provision with OC were weaker, and the relationships of role clarity with OC were stronger for Indians compared to other ethnic groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that satisfaction with other treatments and training provision are relatively less important and role clarity is relatively more important in forming OC for Indians than non-Indians. For reference, the 'continued' tables represent the separate analysis of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. All of the eight reward variables were significantly associated with OC except for the fatigue of Malays and Indians and the satisfaction with personnel evaluation and training provision of Indians.

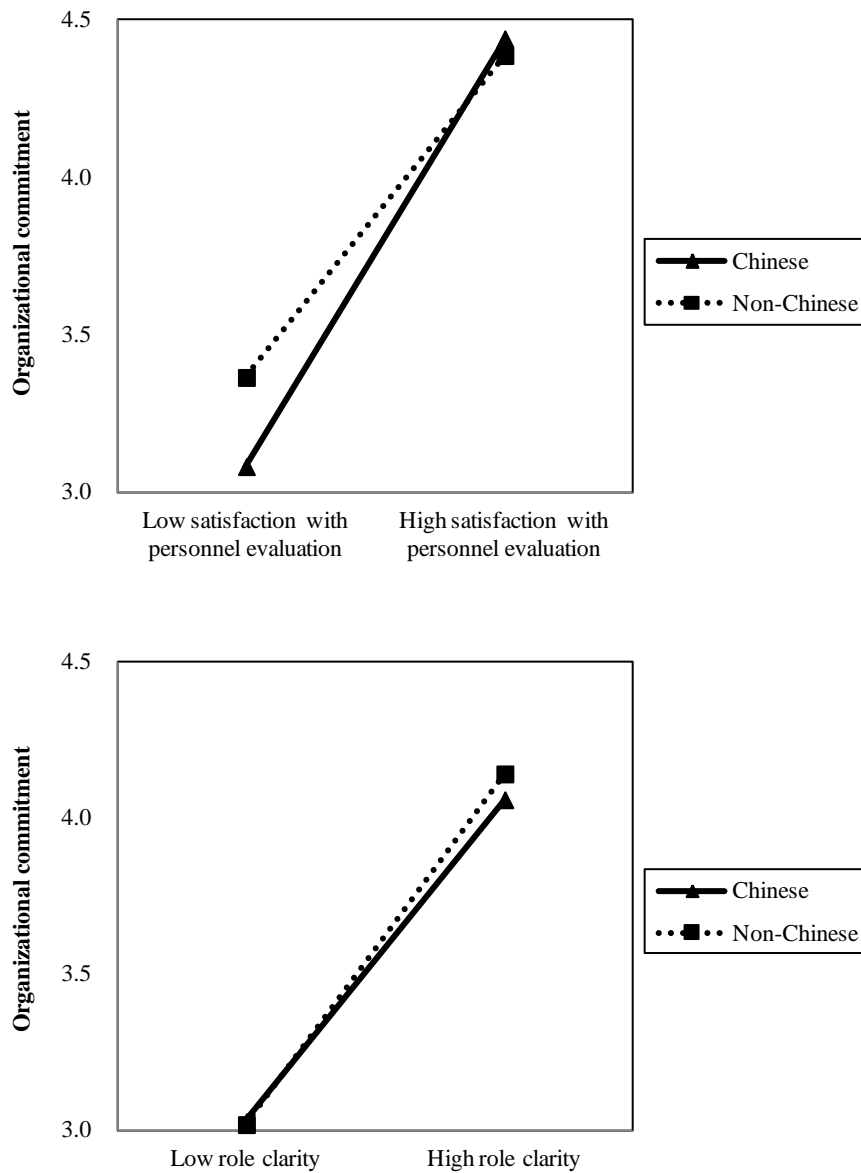


Figure 1. Organizational commitment, satisfaction with personnel evaluation and role clarity for Chinese and Non-Chinese

### Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the differences of OC's antecedents among the three

ethnic workers employed in Malaysia. Opinion data were collected from 32 Japanese manufacturing companies in Malaysia and we employed eight variables: Satisfaction with personnel evaluation; Satisfaction with other treatments; Fatigue; Supervisor support; Co-worker support; Autonomy; Training provision; and Role clarity. All the variables, except fatigue, were found to be associated with OC.

The interaction terms' results suggest that the impact of satisfaction with personnel evaluation on OC was greater for Chinese than other ethnic employees, supporting H1.

The relationship between OC and role clarity, however, was weaker for Chinese than other ethnic employees, supporting H2. The insignificant interaction results suggested no significant difference among the different ethnic employees regarding the relationships of OC with other variables, supporting H3. These are the results using a strict criterion ( $p < 0.01$ ).

However, using a looser criterion ( $p < 0.05$ ), the relationship of fatigue with OC was weaker for Chinese than other ethnic groups. Likewise, the relationships of satisfaction with personnel evaluation and training provision with OC were weaker, and the relationships of role clarity with OC were stronger for Indians compared to other ethnic groups.

### *Implications for theory and practice*

OC, the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization (Mowday et al., 1979), is found to be associated with various work-related outcomes including workplace performance (Baird et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2019). Therefore, a growing number of studies to identify antecedents of OC have not only been conducted in the West but also the East including Malaysia. These studies are based on social exchange theory which provides a rationale for the voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the rewards they receive from others (Blau, 1964). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there have been no studies dealing with ethnic differences in the relationship between OC and antecedents in multi-cultural societies including Malaysia. The present study contributes to the literature in the area of human resource management and social exchange theory by highlighting five differences and similarities between the factors that enhance the OC of Malay, Chinese and Indian employees working in Japanese manufacturing companies in Malaysia.

First, compared to non-Chinese, Chinese typically respond more positively to the existence of extrinsic rewards, namely, rich treatment and working conditions in the workplace at the 1 % significance level. This result agrees with the stereotypical views that Chinese are more materialistic and acquisitive and seek rewards more than other

ethnic groups (Moran et al., 2007; Lim, 1998; Lim, 2001). This characteristic may partly be because of the nature of immigrants that has been historically constructed in China as their ancestors couldn't survive unless eagerly earning money (Yeoh & Yeoh, 2015). In contrast, Malays and Indians are often described as ascetic due to religious principles (Gopalan and Rivera, 1997; Sulaiman, 2000). Negatively stronger association of fatigue with OC for Chinese than non-Chinese by a more relaxed significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ) might be attributed to the same mechanism.

Second, it was also found that OC is less associated with role clarity for Chinese than non-Chinese at the 1 % significance level. This difference may partly be attributed to their religious understandings; Malays and Indians are obedient to their religions and accept their particular role as unchangeable (Gopalan and Rivera, 1997; Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008; Sulaiman, 2000), whereas Chinese can manipulate religion to suit their goals (Lim, 2001). This gap may engender an ethnic difference and flexibility toward the role.

Third, social rewards, namely, high-quality relationships with others in the workplace, show no significant difference between ethnic groups in association with OC. In the Malay culture, it is important to get along with people and avoid interpersonal conflicts and they make a great effort to avoid upsetting the feelings of others based on the

concepts of *budi* and *adat* (Chee, 1992; Goddard, 1997; Kennedy, 2002; Lim, 1998; Richardson et al., 2017; Sendut et al., 1990). Similarly, Indians also attach importance to maintaining harmony and unity based on texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads (Das, 2014; Gopalan and Rivera, 1997; Husain, 1961; Kakar, 1971; Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008). Chinese are also committed to maintaining cordial social relationships, which may originally come from Confucian cultural traditions that emphasize the concepts of *guanxi* and *mianzi* (Ramasamy et al., 2007; Sendul, Madsen, & Thong, 1990). Therefore, this research confirms that social rewards are equally important for all three ethnic groups even for engendering a higher OC.

Fourth, no strong difference is shown for the association of autonomy, training provision, and satisfaction with other treatments (welfare system, etc.) with OC at the 1 % significance level. This suggests that these rewards are nearly equally important irrespective of ethnic identities. Indeed, although some previous work suggests that Chinese typically enjoy the competition and seek growth opportunities (Islam and Ismail, 2008; Yeoh and Yeoh, 2015), other research suggests that Malays also have high entrepreneurship when they have high self-efficacy (Alam et al., 2015). Therefore, the present research confirms that the ethnic difference within work-related concerns is rather small. Companies may not be able to enhance the OC of Malaysian employees

without planning careers with these intrinsic rewards irrespective of ethnic groups. However, it is sometimes said that foreign companies, especially Japanese companies, are bad in this area as expatriates often have a negative view regarding authority delegation and continue holding the most important works in the subsidiaries (Keeley, 2001).

Additionally, our research also found that OC is not different between ethnic groups after controlling for the effect of other demographic variables. This agrees with the results of former research, which found no difference in work motivation among ethnic groups in Malaysia (Kokubun, 2017). Historically, there have been accusations that Malays do not prioritize work and are averse to exerting themselves fully in the workplace, although other writers, particularly more contemporary ones, stress that this is a completely erroneous view rooted in European colonial thinking (Richardson et al., 2017). The current research indicates the possible truth of the latter consideration and expresses a need for reconsideration of ethnocentric stereotypes.

Fifth, several rewards unexpectedly show differences between Indians and other ethnic groups in association with OC if we allow a more relaxed significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ). These rewards are satisfaction with personnel evaluation, training provision, and role clarity. Among them, the satisfaction with a personnel evaluation and training



provision was lower in association with OC for Indians than other ethnic groups, which indicates that Indians are more likely to devalue rewards related to self-enhancement. One possible reason is a typically lower absorption of Indians' voices in the workplace due to their smaller population, and under these circumstances, more Indians have bosses of different ethnicity. In support of this, it was found that ethnic similarity in supervisor-subordinate relationships has a positive association with subordinate perceptions on leader-member exchange quality (Bakar and McCann, 2014). Previous research in India indicates that the benefits employees perceived from attending a training program had a positive relationship on their commitment level (Dhar, 2015). However, this also indicates that trainings in Malaysian workplaces may not reflect these same results due to their smaller vote and minority status.

Regarding role clarity, which was higher in association with OC in Indians than in other ethnic groups, the difference may be due to religious principles where most Indians are socialized to believe their present nature and current state of affairs are unchangeable and result from their actions and lifestyles in previous births according to the theory of karma (Gopalan and Rivera, 1997). Another possible cause may be their culture, which is historically constructed under the Indian caste system. In contrast to indolent, independent and militant Chinese, Indian laborers were seen by colonial

governors of British Malaya as subservient, docile, less self-reliant, more malleable and easier to control because they were imported from south Indian lower caste communities (Ramasamy, 1994). In support of this argument, research indicates that Malays and Chinese managers working in the banking sector were more adaptive to the business environment than Indian managers (Zabid, 1989).

However, the overall differences among the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia are observed in only 2 of the 8 rewards between Chinese and non-Chinese, i.e., satisfaction with personnel evaluation and role clarity. For the other six variables, there was no strong difference based on the strict standard ( $p < 0.01$ ), but there were within fatigue, training provision, and role clarity based on the more relaxed standard ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the difference in the OC-rewards relationship between ethnic groups is rather small, simply comparing with the number of similarities. Managers in Malaysia are recommended to treat all the ethnic groups fairly without bias while paying attention to the differences in the degree of reaction to personnel evaluation and role clarity. This conclusion is important, especially for people from more ethnically homogeneous societies like Japan who often excessively rely on ethnocentric methods of human resource management.

### **Study limitations and suggestions for future research**

This study is subject to some limitations. First, the limitations of the sample to only Japanese manufacturing companies may have confined the generalizability of the findings. Although Adler (1986) suggested that national culture has a greater impact on employees than does their organization's culture, the validity of the current research should be tested by the data of various foreign affiliates located in Malaysia and other multiethnic societies. Second, similarly, the results of this study are based on workplace survey in the manufacturing industry and may not apply to society at large. We need to wait for future research to see how different ethnicities show different responses to rewards in different environments. Third, self-report data from single respondents may have resulted in common method bias. Future research might consider the inclusion of supervisor-rated scales to reduce common method bias and remedy the weakness of the present study design.

### **Conclusion**

A growing number of research to identify antecedents of organizational commitment (OC) has been done not only in the West but also in the East including Malaysia because OC is found to be associated with various work-related outcomes. However, to date, the

influence of ethnic identity on the OC-rewards relationship was not explored although the leader has to recognize the different cultural underpinnings of each community in a plural society like Malaysia. Therefore, this study investigates the differences in the relationship between rewards and organizational commitment (OC) between three ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese, and Indians, in Malaysia.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to analyze survey data gathered from 12,076 employees who work for 32 Japanese manufacturing companies located in Malaysia. The results of the analysis show that satisfaction with the personal evaluation was more associated with OC and role clarity was less associated with OC in Chinese than in other ethnic groups. However, differences were not found in the relationships of other rewards with OC at the 1 % significance level. These results indicate that the ethnic difference in the OC-rewards relationship is rather small.

The results of this study could support the revision of human resource management practices, enabling workers to contribute to their companies on a long-term basis in multi-ethnic countries.

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Table A1. Demographic information

	Ethnicity				Total
	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others	
	Total	9,389 77.7%	1,853 15.3%	701 5.8%	

	Gender		Total	Age					Total
	Male	Female		Below 20 years old	20-29	30-39	40-49	50 years old and above	
	Malays	4,997 53.2%		4,392 46.8%	9,389 100.0%	70 0.7%	3,274 34.9%	4,212 44.9%	
Chinese	1,028 55.5%	825 44.5%	1,853 100.0%	1 0.1%	572 30.9%	704 38.0%	498 26.9%	78 4.2%	1,853 100.0%
Indians	352 50.2%	349 49.8%	701 100.0%	1 0.1%	122 17.4%	300 42.8%	248 35.4%	30 4.3%	701 100.0%
Total	6,426 53.2%	5,650 46.8%	12,076 100.0%	73 0.6%	4,017 33.3%	5,279 43.7%	2,471 20.5%	236 2.0%	12,076 100.0%

	Tenure					Total	Turnover experience		Total
	Below 2 year	2-5 year	6-9 years	10-19 years	20 years and above		Have experience	Have no experience	
	Malays	1,055 11.2%	1,759 18.7%	1,412 15.0%	4,346 46.3%		817 8.7%	9,389 100.0%	
Chinese	320 17.3%	367 19.8%	184 9.9%	757 40.9%	225 12.1%	1,853 100.0%	1,098 59.3%	755 40.7%	1,853 100.0%
Indians	47 6.7%	81 11.6%	68 9.7%	381 54.4%	124 17.7%	701 100.0%	499 71.2%	202 28.8%	701 100.0%
Total	1,438 11.9%	2,232 18.5%	1,692 14.0%	5,543 45.9%	1,171 9.7%	12,076 100.0%	7,552 62.5%	4,524 37.5%	12,076 100.0%

	Educational background								Total
	Lower Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Specialized College	College/ Vocational	University	Graduate School	In the middle of school years	Others	
	Malays	4,013 42.7%	1,897 20.2%	886 9.4%	1,051 11.2%	1,094 11.7%	137 1.5%	15 0.2%	
Chinese	162 8.7%	216 11.7%	127 6.9%	412 22.2%	637 34.4%	250 13.5%	8 0.4%	41 2.2%	1,853 100.0%
Indians	230 32.8%	199 28.4%	36 5.1%	127 18.1%	66 9.4%	14 2.0%	3 0.4%	26 3.7%	701 100.0%
Total	4,455 36.9%	2,344 19.4%	1,057 8.8%	1,601 13.3%	1,816 15.0%	406 3.4%	26 0.2%	371 3.1%	12,076 100.0%

	Marital status			Total	Department		Total	Position		Total
	Married	Single	Others		Direct department	Indirect department		Managerial position	non-managerial position	
	Malays	2,633 28.0%	6,517 69.4%		239 2.5%	9,389 100.0%		5,300 56.4%	4,089 43.6%	
Chinese	763 41.2%	1,067 57.6%	23 1.2%	1,853 100.0%	548 29.6%	1,305 70.4%	1,853 100.0%	379 20.5%	1,474 79.5%	1,853 100.0%
Indians	152 21.7%	524 74.8%	25 3.6%	701 100.0%	411 58.6%	290 41.4%	701 100.0%	41 5.8%	660 94.2%	701 100.0%
Total	3,611 29.9%	8,173 67.7%	292 2.4%	12,076 100.0%	6,332 52.4%	5,744 47.6%	12,076 100.0%	686 5.7%	11,390 94.3%	12,076 100.0%

	Year											Total
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2016	
	Malays	1,460 15.6%	70 0.7%	3,312 35.3%	316 3.4%	1,718 18.3%	35 0.4%	510 5.4%	212 2.3%	1,413 15.0%	332 3.5%	
Chinese	336 18.1%	2 0.1%	1,016 54.8%	19 1.0%	153 8.3%	8 0.4%	154 8.3%	46 2.5%	41 2.2%	70 3.8%	8 0.4%	1,853 100.0%
Indians	115 16.4%	4 0.6%	229 32.7%	28 4.0%	26 3.7%	13 1.9%	216 30.8%	26 3.7%	22 3.1%	11 1.6%	11 1.6%	701 100.0%
Total	1,942 16.1%	78 0.6%	4,631 38.3%	367 3.0%	1,903 15.8%	56 0.5%	888 7.4%	286 2.4%	1,480 12.3%	415 3.4%	30 0.2%	12,076 100.0%