



# The Socio-Cultural Patterns of Selected Southeast Asian Countries: A Case of the Philippines and Singapore

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## 1. Introduction

Turning back the hands of time, Southeast Asia was once a peninsular region of East Asia. After World War II, the region was deciphered as a separate entity working for its global recognition. Historically and geographically, Southeast Asia is comprised of eleven countries with East Timor as the latest member. It is located on the equator, which means almost the entire region falls within the humid tropics. It is conventionally divided into two cultural, linguistic, and geographic regions, namely: Mainland or Continental Southeast Asia which includes the countries of Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam; and Insular or archipelagic Southeast Asia, which includes the island or peninsular countries of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, East Timor, and Indonesia.

All the aforementioned countries with the exception of Thailand became victims of western intrusions that resulted in the region's or country's loss of national identity, violation of human rights, suppression of civil and political rights, destruction of its natural and human resources among others that resulted in the raise of nationalist movement, nationalist leaders, and eventually outbreak of revolution. Having a common pattern of colonization with the exception of Thailand, people of the region took a step forward by creating a community of shared socio-cultural patterns and practices. Despite the contradiction in traditional values, the social structures of the countries in the region are similar like the importance of family and kinship system, community system, type of economic system and political structure; hence, working as one system will surely commensurate for regional peace and development in the social world of the people in the region, hence this study.

According to Jocano's theory, each culture has its own standards of desirability. In cross-cultural settings, people need to adjust to local conditions. It is necessary that people set aside their cultural baggage and adapt to local culture. People need to embrace the local culture in order for them to live harmoniously with the people that they lived with.<sup>i</sup> Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said that the biggest contribution that younger Chinese outside China can make to Mainland Chinese culture is to be examples of the economic value of multiculturalism.<sup>ii</sup>

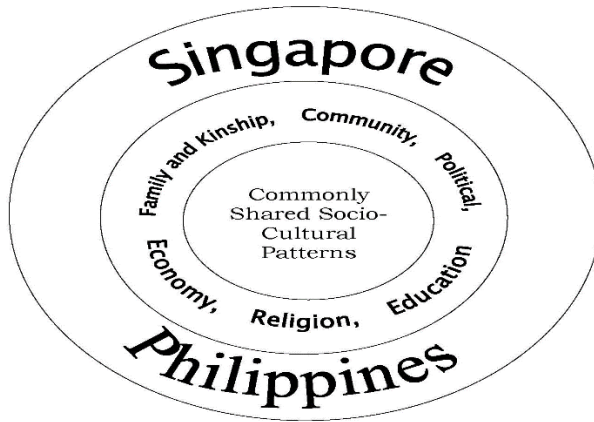


Figure 1  
Paradigm Showing the Commonly Shared Socio-Cultural  
Patterns of Selected Southeast Asian Countries

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to find out the socio-cultural patterns of people in the Philippines, and Singapore. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of: Age, Gender, Civil status, Nationality, Highest educational attainment, Occupation, Religion, and Language / dialect spoken?
2. What were the perceptions of the respondents on the socio-cultural practices of the people as embodied in the countries' basic social institutions: Family and kinship system, Community system, Political system, Economic system, Religion, and Education?
3. How did the socio-cultural practices of the respondents compare when grouped according to: Age, Gender, Nationality, Highest educational attainment and Religion?
4. What were the perceived preferences of the respondents with regard to their socio-cultural lifestyles in terms of: Housing, Clothing, Music/Arts/Entertainment, Food preference, Communication and Social interaction?
5. How did the socio-cultural lifestyles of the respondents compare when grouped according to: Age, Gender, Nationality, Highest educational attainment, and Religion?

### 3. Method of Research Used

The research method used by the researcher in this study was the descriptive survey method. For data gathering, the researcher used questionnaires, interviews, and non-participatory observations of the commonly shared culture patterns of selected countries in Southeast Asia.

The subjects of the study were 50 residents, 25 per country, who lived in Singapore and the Philippines. All the respondents were nationals who were living in the said countries. A profile of the respondents was drawn in terms of age, gender, civil status, nationality, educational attainment, language spoken, occupation, and religion.

### 4. Treatment of Data

For more valid and meaningful interpretation of the data, the following statistical tools were used: percentage was used to present the profile of the respondents; the weighted mean was used to compute the 5-point rating scale used in research-made questionnaire; standard deviation was used to determine the socio-cultural practices of the respondents; and analysis of variance was used to compare the socio-cultural lifestyle of the respondents.

### 5. Findings

The following findings were gathered from the study:

#### 5.1. Profile of the Respondents

**5.1.1. Age.** In the Philippines, the age bracket 26-35 got 40%; while in Singapore, the age bracket 36-45 got 32%. The distribution of the ages reveals that the respondents are mature enough to feel and understand the cultural beliefs and practices of their countries.

**5.1.2. Gender.** The researcher was able to get 64% women respondents in the Philippines, while 52% women respondents in Singapore.

**5.1.3. Civil status.** In Southeast Asia, where conjugal relationship between husband and wife is sacred, family foundation is important. The result reveals that marriage as a social and moral institution is given priority. In the Philippines, married respondents numbering 56% dominated; while in Singapore, 52% of the respondents were married.

**5.1.4. Nationality.** The 25 respondents of each country under study were all bona fide nationals or citizens of the country they represent.

**5.1.5 Highest educational attainment.** In the Philippines, 76% of the respondents attained bachelor's degree, a proof that Filipinos consider a college/university degree as a passport to an improved life. In Singapore, there is also a great emphasis on higher education. 52% of the respondents are holders of a bachelor's degree.

**5.1.6. Occupation.** The Filipino respondents who are engaged in business constituted 24%. While in Singapore, 36% of the respondents are mostly from education field.

**5.1.7. Religion.** The Philippines, the only Catholic nation in Asia, had 84% Catholic respondents, while Singapore had 36% Catholic respondents. Depending on their background or individual choice, residents of Singapore practice a whole range of religions.

**5.1.8. Language spoken.** All respondents are proficient in English and in their local dialects. Because the various ethnic groups find it easier to communicate with each other through English, it has remained the most widely-spoken language.

## **5.2. Commonly Shared Socio-Cultural Practices as embodied in the Country's Basic Social Institution**

**5.2.1 Family and kinship.** In the Philippines, the family is still the basic building block of society and no less than the constitution of the land has expressed this. The Filipino families are famous for their strong family bonding or close family ties. The families are cooperative and value the virtue of helping each other and other people; hence the spirit of "bayanihan" or concern and dependability. In Singapore, the family is also the center of the social structure and it emphasizes unity, loyalty, and respect for elders. The citizens claim they are an egalitarian or equalitarian society, yet they retain strong hierarchical relationship that can be observed in the relationship between parents and children, teachers and students, and employers and employees; hence, the cultural value of group dependence is evident because of multiplicity of race in Singapore.

**5.2.2 Community system.** The two countries have a total verbal interpretation of *Practiced to a High Extent* for their socio-cultural practices embodied in community system. It is in the community where people understand the influence of culture, the social interrelationship, the values inculcated by the leaders and elders like community volunteerism, concern for others, a sense of belonging, neighborhood cohesion, and the preservation of traditional mores and practices. The family in a community is the agency that keeps a community healthy and livable; hence, both countries used in the study showed the functions and services of community system by their shared socio-cultural beliefs and practices through the perception given by the respondents used in the study.

**5.2.3 Political system.** The Philippines has a total verbal interpretation of *Practiced to a High Extent* in its political system while Singapore has a verbal interpretation of *Practiced to a Moderate Extent*. The existence of the kind or type of political system depends on the type of environment that includes human and natural. Even the type of economic activities prevalent in a specific locale may, to a certain extent, determine the prevailing mode of government. The Philippines is a democratic state introduced by United States; there is a freedom of human activities to meet their needs and wants. In Singapore, the island state is a republic with a parliamentary system and the road to political participation is through a cadre system of political party, which lies in educational and professional merits, as well as loyalty. The law and order is strict and fines and penalties are imposed.

#### Commonly Shared Socio-Cultural Practices of the People Embodied in Political System

	Philippines			Singapore		
	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.
1. Enjoys political rights.	3.84	.80	High	4.04	.20	High
2. Practices Authoritarianism.	3.04	1.02	Moderate	1.68	.48	Low
3. Is socialist in political idealism but capitalist in economic plans.	3.24	.83	Moderate	1.20	.41	Not Practiced
4. Enjoys human freedom from want, needs, and fears.	4.24	.88	High	4.76	.44	Very High
5. Believes in political authority with a system of values, ideas, beliefs and attitudes that people share and accept.	3.84	.62	High	4.04	.20	High
6. Envisions a type of government of the people, by the people and for the people.	3.72	.61	High	3.29	.46	Moderate
7. Believes that national leadership is anchored on trust and faith and cultural identity.	3.48	.77	Moderate	4.36	.64	High
8. Believes that whatever is good is socialist and whatever is bad originates in capitalism.	2.72	.94	Moderate	1.48	.51	Not Practiced
9. Believes that the state is a representative of the political system of a society.	3.40	.76	Moderate	3.80	.41	High
10. Believes that people power is a way to curb political abuses and culture of impunity.	3.80	.82	High	2.80	.50	Moderate
Total	3.53	.47	High	3.36	.93	Moderate

**5.2.4 Economic system.** The respondents in the two countries have a verbal interpretation of *Practiced to a High Extent* for their economic system. Due to globalization, people must be proficient in the use of English as a language of instruction and business. This is the focus of Singapore. Economy and policies are interrelated; hence, there is a need to harness human and natural resources to maintain peace and development. Because of the culture of corruption, a country's economy suffers, like the Philippines'. People's initiative is important for the

countries' economic growth, peace, and development. Whether there is relative prosperity in these countries, still many live below the poverty level.

**5.2.5 Religion.** The Philippines and Singapore have a total verbal interpretation of *Practiced to a High Extent* in their religious practices. Of all the nations, the Philippines is unique, not only in Asia but also in the world because of its religious and political history, and cultural heritage; while Islam, on the other hand predominates in the Malay Peninsula like Singapore and southern Philippines. A growing number of Chinese in Singapore adhere to various Christian denominations. Residents in both countries practice a whole range of religions depending on their background and individual choice since there is no official religion in both countries.

**5.2.6 Educational system.** Both countries have a total verbal interpretation of *Practiced to a High Extent* for their socio-cultural practices embodied in their educational system. The Philippines is one of the literate nations in Southeast Asia and the main cause for the high literacy is the passionate love of the Filipinos for education. It is an obsession of every Filipino to acquire formal education as a means of improving one's livelihood and status. In Singapore, there is a great emphasis on higher education that helps the people acquire jobs. Singapore schools are among the best in the region and they excel in science and technology. Through education, the country was successful in preserving its cultural values and beliefs. Even the deprived sector of society is given priority in educational rights by the state.

#### Commonly Shared Socio-Cultural Practices of the People Embodied in Educational System

	Philippines			Singapore		
	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.
1. Education is a preparation for effective participation in social relations.	4.60	.58	Very High	5.00	.00	Very High
2. Education system in the country is below quality if compared with other countries.	3.44	1.19	Moderate	1.00	.00	Not Practiced
3. Daughters receive more education but less land than sons.	1.92	1.22	Low	1.00	.00	Not Practiced
4. There are more opportunities of employment for males than females in the country's labor force.	1.92	1.12	Low	2.12	.60	Low
5. Education is still provided by family, assisted by the elder members of the community.	4.04	1.02	High	4.64	.49	Very High
6. Education is important in economic growth of a country.	4.68	.63	Very High	4.84	.37	Very High
7. Transmission of cultural heritage is a function of education.	3.88	.73	High	4.52	.51	Very High
8. Education aims to develop new social patterns that bring about different specialization.	4.40	.65	High	4.60	.50	Very High
9. Education can help integrate into the cultural mainstream various sub cultures and identities that will help promote peace and development.	4.48	.65	High	4.88	.33	Very High
10. Education can help uplift the deprived sector of society.	4.52	.59	Very High	4.88	.33	Very High
Total	3.79	.42	High	3.75	.14	High

### 5.3. Comparison of the Socio-Cultural Practices of the Respondents

**5.3.1 Age.** All the components under the socio-cultural practices if compared according to age got a response of *Not Significant*. This response shows that regardless of age, the socio-cultural practices as an ingredient of a country's culture make it possible to uphold unique character traits of the ASEANS.

Comparison of Socio-Cultural Practices of the Respondents According to Age

Socio-Cultural Practices	15-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	55-above	F-Value	Significance
	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>		
Family and Kinship	.77	.54	.47	.47	.26	0.14	P=.97>.05 NS
Community System	.39	.34	.24	.24	.28	0.65	P=.63>.05 NS
Political System	.40	.39	1.00	.21	.13	0.48	P=.75>.05 NS
Economic System	.32	.40	.29	.29	.20	1.88	P=.12>.05 NS
Religion	.37	.35	.36	.25	.16	0.86	P=.49>.05 NS
Education	.33	.26	.23	.28	.16	1.02	P=.40>.05 NS

**5.3.2 Gender.** In the comparison of the respondents when grouped according to gender, there is *No Significant Difference* between males and females in their socio-cultural practices because at present, women have also the voice to express their opinion regarding their socio-cultural practices.

**5.3.3 Nationality.** There was *No Significant Difference* on the perception of the respondents according to nationality except on religious aspect that they perceived as *Very Significant*. The Philippines is considered as the only Christian country in Asia, but the founding of different religious sects minimally lessens the focus on the major religion of the country, which is Catholicism.

Comparison of Socio-Cultural Practices of the Respondents According to Nationality

Socio-Cultural Practices	Filipino		Singaporean		F-Value	Significance
	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>		
Family and Kinship	3.13	.63	3.11	.20	1.36	P=.26>.05 NS
Community System	3.90	.52	3.96	.13	3.97	P=.10>.05 NS
Political System	3.53	.47	3.36	.93	0.64	P=.59>.05 NS
Economic System	3.53	.42	3.76	.18	1.57	P=.17>.05 NS
Religion	4.08	.48	4.54	8.66	23.56	P=.00<.05 VS
Education	3.79	.42	3.75	.14	2.85	P=.10>.05 NS

**5.3.4 Highest educational attainment.** There is not much significance and difference in the socio-cultural practices of the respondents if compared according to their educational attainment. Although a higher education is an edge in job placement, the respondents believed that what matters is that they were able to acquire educational degree/courses which they could use in applying for a job, for government placement, for career advancement with financial remuneration, and



for improvement of their social relations. This is very much observed in Singapore and in the Philippines.

**5.3.5 Religion.** The respondents sought to compare their socio-cultural practices grouped according to their religious beliefs; all the items yielded a perception of *Not Significant* although they gave a *Very Significant* response based on their perception of their religion. It shows that under religious practices, all respondents gave a positive response to all items with the exception of religion itself, which got a result of *Very Significant*, which is understandable. As a whole, it could be said that those who belong to different religious affiliations did not differ significantly in their socio-cultural practices, except for their religion.

Comparison of Socio Cultural Practices of the Respondents According to Religion

Socio-Cultural Practices	Catholic	Buddhist	Muslim	Christian but non-Catholic	Protestant	Others	F- Value	Significance
	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>		
Family and Kinship	.49	.29	.20	.53	.45	.41	0.74	P=.59>.05 NS
Community System	.39	.22	.24	.20	.25	.31	1.24	P=.30>.05 NS
Political System	.54	.42	.28	.25	.40	.47	1.27	P=.28>.05 NS
Economic System	.38	.24	.33	.29	.39	.34	1.74	P=.13>.05 NS
Religion	.40	.15	8.36	.18	.38	.33	3.53	P=.00<.05 VS
Education	.34	.20	5.47	.19	.21	.26	0.67	P=.65>.05 NS

#### 5.4. Commonly Shared Socio-Cultural Lifestyle of the Respondents

**5.4.1 Housing.** Both countries gave a total verbal interpretation of *Preferred* as to their socio-cultural lifestyle in terms of housing unit. All respondents preferred single living as part of their religious background. The concept of group is important to younger people and those who work in multinational companies have adopted the western concept of living.

**5.4.2 Clothing.** The Philippines gave a total verbal interpretation of *Highly Preferred* while Singapore gave an interpretation of *Preferred* to socio-cultural lifestyle. In the Philippines, people especially in rural areas wear a wide – sleeved

jacket called 'baro' and the skirt called 'patadyong.' Older women in the barrios mostly wear them. In Singapore, the preservation of their traditional cultures like the costumes can mirror the fabulous heritage and identity ground in their individual attire.

Socio-Cultural Lifestyle in Terms of Clothing

	Philippines			Singapore		
	$\bar{x}$	<i>Sd</i>	V.I.	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.
Classic	3.88	1.09	Highly	2.88	1.01	Preferred
Trendy	4.24	.88	Highly	4.32	.85	Highly
Hippy	3.20	1.22	Preferred	4.04	1.10	Highly
Conservative	3.36	1.44	Preferred	2.20	1.19	Less
Glamorous	3.64	1.25	Highly	3.64	.86	Highly
Fashionista	3.52	1.94	Highly	3.24	1.23	Preferred
Total	3.64	.75	Highly	3.39	.33	Preferred

**5.4.3 Music/Arts/Entertainment.** The two countries gave a total verbal interpretation of *Preferred* in their socio-cultural lifestyle to the type of music, arts, and entertainment. Filipinos are lovers of music. They have various musical instruments and some are traditionally identified as part of their early culture. As an industrialized island nation, Singapore is updated with modern music, arts, and entertainment, which are of western influence. However, just like the Philippines, the people prefer modern and contemporary music especially heard in internet cafes as a way to drive away tension and stress.

**5.4.4 Food preference.** The two countries gave a total verbal interpretation of *Highly Preferred* in their socio-cultural lifestyle. The Filipinos consider rice as their staple food and it is blended with meat, pork, chicken, fish, bananas, or other fruits and vegetables. With the new trend of high living, the present Filipinos prefer to use electric stoves to cook their native foods. Since the Singaporean come from a diverse ethnic group, the people's food preference is their own food cuisine or the native food. Food in daily life consists of rice, fish, chicken, and vegetables, which are the staples. They mix the staples with rice variety of spices, chills, coconut, lime, and tamarind. The Chinese, Malay, Indians co – exist in the island beneath the venue of western cosmopolitan metropolis but their groups are religiously and culturally diverse.

**5.4.5 Communication.** The Philippines gave a total verbal interpretation of *Preferred*, while Singapore gave an interpretation of *Highly Preferred* in the socio-cultural lifestyle. The Filipinos are known for their talent in communication. They take pride in being the third largest English – speaking nation in the world. English is still widely spoken and written in the country. The Singaporeans, being a multi – diverse region, speak the local dialects of the ethnic enclaves like the Chinese,

Malays, Indians, Muslims, and Singaporeans. However, there are pockets of villages that speak Singlish, based on the local dialect and English. English is also a popular means of communication especially in the business world. Multinational companies use English as their mode of communication.

Socio-Cultural Lifestyle in Terms of Communication

	Philippines			Singapore		
	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.	$\bar{x}$	<i>sd</i>	V.I.
Local dialect	4.32	.85	Highly	5.00	.00	Very Highly
English	4.40	.96	Highly	5.00	.00	Very Highly
Multilingual	3.60	1.22	Highly	4.64	.49	Very Highly
French	1.84	.85	Less	3.12	.53	Preferred
Spanish	1.88	1.13	Less	2.64	.81	Preferred
Total	3.21	.69	Preferred	4.08	.27	Highly

**5.4.6 Social interaction.** The two countries gave a total verbal interpretation of *Highly Preferred* on the kind of social interaction they practice. Meeting people and interacting socially with them are ways to develop inter-connectivity with groups for closer bonding and friendship. In the Philippines, people interact through their neighbors and peers because of commonality of what is to be discussed. Community fellowship is also common especially in a parish where people perform certain functions. The Singaporeans are people whose concepts of group, harmony, and mutual security are more important than those of the individual. Personal relationships are the cornerstone of all business relationships. The country has a group-oriented culture, that social links are often based on ethnicity, education, or company.

## 5.5. Comparison of the Socio-Cultural Lifestyle of the Respondents

**5.5.1 Age.** Respondents gave an interpretation of *Not Significant* to all the items under the socio-cultural lifestyles. It indicates that the people in SEA have similar styles on housing, clothing, music/arts/entertainment, food preference, communication, and social interaction.

**5.5.2 Gender.** Regardless of gender, the respondents considered all the items under socio-cultural lifestyles as *Not Significant*. Since food is one of the basic needs of man, gender is not much of importance, given the feeling of satisfaction. As a whole, male and female do not differ on their socio-cultural lifestyle; thus, gender is not a factor to be given much concern on.

**5.5.3 Nationality.** All the respondents of the study regardless of their regional differences and similarities do not significantly differ on housing, clothing, music and the arts, food preferences, communication, and social interaction. The F-value differs but just the same, all the social material needs yielded *Not Significant*.

**5.5.4 Highest educational attainment.** When grouped according to the highest educational attainment in terms of socio-cultural lifestyles of the respondents, the findings yielded that academic degrees or educational attainment was *Not Significant*. In the Philippines and Singapore, education is important. People are concerned with the help their educational background can give them to acquire the basic and material needs through their jobs or work. In Singapore, education is important to improve the country's economy since there are strict policies especially by multinationals in accepting job applicants with basic educational background.

Comparison of Socio-Cultural Lifestyles of the Respondents According to Education

Socio-Cultural Lifestyle	Undergraduate	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree	Technical/Vocational Courses	Others	F- Value	Significance
	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>Sd</i>	<i>sd</i>		
Housing	.43	.36	.28	.20	.31	.14	1.06	P=.39>.05 NS
Clothing	.85	.56	.39	.41	.34	.47	1.98	P=.09>.05 NS
Music/Arts/Entertainment	.41	.44	.34	.22	.40	.18	2.20	P=.06>.05 NS
Food Preference	.58	.54	.28	.36	.27	.00	2.31	P=.06>.05 NS
Communication	.67	.61	.37	.11	.23	.14	1.00	P=.42>.05 NS
Social Interaction	.45	.30	.16	.28	.48	7.07	0.47	P=.80>.05 NS

**5.5.5 Religion.** The socio-cultural lifestyle of the respondents of the two countries in terms of their religion showed a *No Significant* bearing when compared. Although religion is the opiate of the people and is always attached to their beliefs and practices in all the items enumerated, still there is no significant difference noted in the responses. All the items yielded No Significant Difference as to their socio-cultural lifestyles when they were grouped according to religion. They believed that all the items interact with one another by an interconnected network that balances everything and it is in this aspect that religion plays an important role.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the findings presented, the following conclusions are drawn. The commonly shared cultural beliefs and practices of a region can show the cultural patterns and therefore identify the character, qualities, similarities, and differences of such practices, answering the questions of what, why, and how such beliefs and practices should or should not prevail, if gleaned from the modern changes happening in the world. Adaptation, assimilation, and integration are a path to change and develop without desecrating one's traditional orientation. This can also

be the basis of the country's governmental policies and laws to ensure universal human rights. Familiarity with commonly shared culture patterns is a basis for regional unity and development.

## 7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the conclusions.

7.1. The National Government and its Subsidiary Agencies: To conduct a study on the character, beliefs, and practices of the people in its respective countries and such study be the basis in the passage of policies, rules, and laws with an end in view, the protection of the rights and privileges of its constituents and how the state reacts on it

7.2. Educators/Curriculum Planners, Teachers, and Book Writers: To integrate in the instructional material the history, geography, culture, arts, and heritage of the country; to include culture and education as elective subject in the Teacher Education Curriculum particularly in the subject social dimension

7.3. Social Science Researchers: To focus on the writing and collection of facts about a country's strengths and weaknesses and how they can be enhanced and be resolved in the proper social framework and to use multi-language of instruction

7.4. Future Researchers: 1. A research study on the social impact brought about by a new wave of change that dissipates the traditional orientation of people in Southeast Asia 2. The interplay of family and religion in the enhancement of regional identity: the case of the ASEANS 3. A documentary analysis of China and India's contribution as harbingers of culture in SEA 4. A comparative study on the social agenda on the role of women in Asia

## 8. References

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