

## **Social Interaction among Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, Pasir Mas, Kelantan, Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

*The main objective of this study is to explore the quality of interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong. The researcher prepared some relevant indicators to measure quality interaction. These indicators include (i) mixed interaction and (ii) sharing workplace. Using a convenience sampling technique, a total of one hundred and forty (140) respondents were drawn from Muslims and Buddhists of Kampung Tendong, Pasir Mas, Kelantan. The sample size together with the above-mentioned indicators showed that the quality of interaction based on frequency is above average (i.e., 67.83%). Precisely, for “mixed interaction” was 82.7%, “sharing workplace” was 72.44% and “sharing leisure times together” was 66.72%. The results show universal values of the two religions, namely Islam and Buddhism that bind people together. On the other hand, the discouraging factor of interaction among the residents of Kampung Tendong was that trivial issues of religious differences. Therefore, the significance of the study lies mainly in showing the level of interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong. This result is essential to the policy-makers to develop a better pattern of inter-racial interaction in a remote area of Peninsular Malaysia. The study finally discusses the need for broader and more comprehensive research in this area.*

**Keyword : Muslim, Buddhist, Social Interaction, Universal Values**

### **Background**

Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country. However, the other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Taoism, and other traditional believing systems are also practiced. People may wonder why there are many diversified religious followers can co-exist together. Thus, one of the objectives of this study is to explore the relationship or religious interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, Pasir Mas, Kelantan. It is an ethno-religious study of Malay Muslims and Chinese as well as Siamese Buddhists in terms of their religious interaction in Kampung Tendong. The study in Kampung Tendong could be perceived as a subset study over the dominant set of ethnic groups in Malaysia. This is due the fact that Mukim Tendong is a multi-racial society. Malays are the dominant group which comprises 90.8% of the total population, Chinese 8.4% and others (including Siamese) 0.85% (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 2000). The research would be helpful in developing good inter-racial relationships among all groups in Malaysia because it focuses on cross religious and social interaction among Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, Pasir Mas. Below is a detailed explanation on historical background of Kampung Tendong and its population.

### **Statement of the problem**

As far as the interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong is concerned, they live in peace and harmony. They engage their daily activities in a normal way and share same place of work. The Buddhists are mostly Siamese and Chinese. They speak Kelantanese Malay dialect, and dress quite similar to that of the Malays. Some even call themselves as ‘*orang Cina-Melayu*’ or ‘Chinese-Malay people’ (Hanapi Dollah, 1986). In short, one could perceive the daily activities of the Buddhists are almost similar to the Malays. It means the residents of Kampung Tendong as a whole share a common political, economical, and social environment. Yet, when it comes to religion, it is different. Therefore, this study looks into the religious interaction in Kampung Tendong and argues that a good relationship between the two is due to the universal values shared by both religious traditions.

### **Justification of the study**

This study is good for interethnic and inter-religious understanding that may lead to national writing in a multi-racial, multi-religious and diversified society. There are many books written on Islam and Buddhism by scholars around the world, unfortunately there are limited sources which stress on the comparison between the two religions. Apparently, the studies focus more on religious doctrines and not about their religious and social interaction. However, there are a few related works to the study: The works of Morgan and Lawton (1996), Mc Donald (1984), and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1998) are some examples of studies that focus on the comparison between religions. These authors deal with the world's major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Unfortunately, they incline to use the descriptive approach in describing those religions. Therefore, the scope of comparison is not broad enough. However, among the studies that use the comparative approach are those by Hariri (1980), Prasert Yenprasit (2004) and Sri Mulyati (1982). The authors manage to compare Buddhism and Islam but again in these studies they only focus on one area of comparison, not comparing all religious issues as a whole. For instance, Hariri only discusses the issue of life after death according to Buddhism and Islam and Prasert Yenprasit stresses on the concept of man according to Theravada Buddhism and Islam.

There are several studies that focus on the social interaction between the dominant group and minority group. However, these studies were conducted outside Malaysia which include the studies by Abdo A. Elkholy (1960), Abdullah Bin Taib (1978) and Abdur Rahman I. Doi (1992). Indeed, the first two studies provide information about social interaction and thus may be useful for comparisons of this study. As stated before, Abdullah Bin Taib (1978) in his dissertation stresses that the Malays perceive other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indians in Malaysian as different to them and not part of the son of the soil (*Bumiputra*). Due to this perspective, Malays possess unfavorable feelings on other ethnic groups in their surroundings. Even though these three ethnic groups share similar experiences, backgrounds, and social life, yet they have different perceptions upon others. In the same way, the study shows that the Malays have similar perception over local residents of United States of America (USA) even though the Malays used to study in USA. Additionally, there are two books by Hanapi Dollah (1986) and Teo Kok Seong (2003) that deal with the local situation which focus on the Chinese community in Malaysia.

The first book discusses how the Chinese community in Kampung Mata Ayer, Pulau Chondong, Kelantan assimilated Malay culture into their own. While, the second book explains the historical background of Chinese in Kelantan and their pattern of communication which is similar to that of the majority of Malays by using Kelantanese dialect. From their studies, the researcher collects much information about the Chinese way of life particularly in Kelantan. On the other hand, a book by Mohamed Yusoff Ismail (1993) is very important because it studies socio-religious aspect that emphasizes the ethnicity of the Buddhists and their social and religious structure. Even though it does not carry a comparative approach, its emphasis on the socio-religious study is the best example of this type of research. The literature reviews by the researcher indicate that a thorough piece of work on the religious interaction between the two has yet to be conducted. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the religious and social interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, to determine the real interaction that takes place between them.

### **Research Methodology**

The methods adopted in the study are library research and field studies. There are two sources of data: primary source which includes interviews with Muslim religious scholars and Buddhist monks, and a survey questionnaire directed to villagers of all walks of life. Meanwhile the secondary source is collected through library research obtained from both print and electronic media such as books, journals, magazines, internet and statistical reports. The researcher started the field work by using a survey method through distribution of questionnaires to 200 respondents of Muslims and Buddhists. The researcher then interviewed ten important knowledgeable persons like Muslims religious scholars and Buddhist monks. The researcher used *Bahasa Melayu* as the medium of communication in her study as it is the common language of communicates between them. All data obtained and collected through these methods were then examined and analyzed by the researcher. Thus, this research applies both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

### **Definition of Terms and Concepts Under Muslim**

A Muslim is a person who adheres to a religion called Islam. Islam is a religion revealed 1400 years old ago. Muslims believe that there is only one God (*tawĒd*), called Allah (*subĒnahu wa taĒĒla*).

Islam was revealed to Rasūlullah Muḥammad bin ʿAbd Allāh. Muslims believe that Muḥammad (*ʾallāhu ʾnālāhi wasallam*) was the last Prophet of Allah (*subḥānahu wa taʿālā*). The word “Islam” stems from the fourth verbal form of the root *slm*: *aslama*, which literally means “to submit” or “to surrender”. Thus, the word Islam has come to mean “submission”, “surrender”, “resignation”, and “obedience” to Allah (*subḥānahu wa taʿālā*) and His guidance (Mir Zohair Husain, 2003: 1). The religious scripture of Islam is the Holy Qurʾān and the place for communal worship is called Mosque (*Masjid*). Islam is a way of life, governing religious practice and morality as well as social relationships, marriage, divorce, kinship, economy and political relations. Someone who believes in Islam is a Muslim. Muslims believe that Islam teaches the true and successful way of life for all people. At present, the Muslims are mainly Malay<sup>1</sup> residents of Kampung Tendong who profess Islamic religion. A unique aspect to distinguish Muslims and non-Muslims (who confess other religious faiths other than Islam) of Kampung Tendong is their dress code. The female Muslims are identified through their *hijabs* that cover their heads and most often they wear long and loose dresses. Majority of males wear headgear tailored (*kopiah*) specially for the purpose of prayers.

### **Buddhist**

A Buddhist is a person who believes in Buddhism. It is a world faith, a philosophy and a way of life based on the teachings of Buddha, a person of noble birth who was born in India about 2,500 years ago. In the beginning, he led a luxurious lifestyle, lacking nothing materially and his father wanted him to follow his footsteps and become the king of the *Sakya* clan. However, after observing great sufferings at the age of 20 Buddha left the life of luxury and became an itinerant monk to pursue spiritual knowledge.

After years of practicing extreme austerities and engaging in prolonged and intense meditation, Frithjof (1989) noted in his book that Buddha realized that neither the extreme of self-indulgence nor the extreme of self-mortification lead to an end of suffering. He said “avoiding these two extremes I have realized the middle path” (1989: 27). Buddha traveled all over India for about 40 years. After his death, Buddhism spread throughout South East Asia, China, Japan, Tibet and the West. In the study, Buddhists are the occupants of Chinese<sup>2</sup> and Siamese<sup>3</sup> of the Buddhist faith in Kampung Tendong. Buddhists largely are identified by their Chinese or Siamese names, which are different from the Malays.

### **Social Interaction**

The term “social” refers to human kind, living together in organized colonies or groups. It also involves the mutual relations and welfare of individuals. Jary David and Julia Jary (1991: 245) defined “social” as also pertaining to human society and/ or to human interaction in organizations and groups.

On the other hand, the word interaction carries different connotations in various disciplines. However, in Sociology, it is defined as “a mutual or reciprocal action” between two or more individuals (or between groups) (Borgatta and Borgatta, 1992:1697). In the same source, interaction is generally defined as “a dynamic interplay and relationship of joint determination between two or more variables”. For them, interaction also carries the meaning of “basic social process represented in a mutual relationship between two or more individuals or groups”. In the same view, in the book of E. Shaw (1981) interaction defines as when individuals “emit behavior in each other’s presence, they create products of each other or they communicate with each other”.

As an example “if person A meets person B on the street, stops and chats about weather, listens to the troubles of the day, and then each other proceeds on his way, they are said to have interacted” (1981:23) In other words, social interaction is a process of changing sequence of social actions between individuals (or groups) who modify their actions and reactions according to the actions by their interacting partner(s). It seems that there are events in which people attach meaning to a situation, interpret what others mean, and respond accordingly. In the next chapter, the researcher presents a review of the related literature on social interaction in detailed.

<sup>1</sup> According to Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Malays are those who confess Islam, speak Malay language, practice Malay culture and those who were born before or on the Independent Day of the Federal or Singapore and settle in Federal or Singapore. See *Perlembagaan Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: International Law Book Services.

<sup>2</sup> Chinese populations of Southeast Asia or outside China are a set of distinct communities linked by language and culture to the mainland Chinese society, but in many respects are very different from that natal society. See Teo Kok Seong (2003: 1).

<sup>3</sup> Siamese refers to the native of Siam which is now known as Thailand. Thailand is situated in the north of Kelantan. Because of this closed location to Kelantan, Siamese are easily found in various places of Kelantan.

## Universal Values

Oxford Dictionary (1989:1397) has described universal as “affecting or done by all people or things in the world or in a particular group”. Meanwhile, value is of two meanings “quality of being useful or worthwhile or important” and “moral or professional standards of behavior or principles” (1989: 1411). In the field of philosophy, universal values are described as an attempt to establish a finite set of concepts that are recognized by all human beings as morally good (Wikipedia; Universal Values, retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007 in (<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_values](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_values)>). In other words, a value is universal which is applicable at all times (i.e in the past, at the present and in the future), to all humans (i.e in different cultures, different genders and different religious background) and under all circumstances (i.e among members of a family, in work setting and between nations). Thus, for this study, the researcher highlights some universal values of both religions under study which foster their relationship.

## Islamic and Buddhist Perspectives on Social

Social interaction, as discussed before, a basic social process represented in a mutual relationship between two or more individuals or groups. In the religious perspectives, in general, social interaction is a prominent role plays by all religions in order to be kind to the fellow beings. All religions promote peace and harmonious life. One way to achieve it is through interaction among the believers and non-believers of their specific adherence. With regards to Islam and Buddhism, both have their own perspectives of social interaction and their attitude towards other religions. For Islam, the basic principle of social interaction is prescribed in the Holy Quran and *Hadith* of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. In the Holy Quran there are several verses which deal with adherence of other religions. Indeed, there is a verse cited as the numerous guidelines that urge humanity to engage in meaningful social interaction. The verse of Al-Quran<sup>1</sup> is quoted below: “And vie with one another to attain your Sustainer’s forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth which has been readied for the God-conscious who spent (in His way) in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow men because God loves the doers of good” (Al- Quran, 3: 133-134). There is a prominent *Hadith* which addresses the issue of relations among people.

The *Hadith* is; “let him who believes in God and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent, let him who believes in God and the Last Day be generous to his neighbor, and let him who believes in God and the Last Day be generous to his guests” (Imam Nawawi, *Hadith* 15). Islam is against all distinctions and discriminations based on race, color, nationality, language or caste. It brings all people together on a pure human basis and at the same time grants them full freedom to practice the religion of their choice. The Quran says: “There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from (the way of) error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.” (Al- Quran, 2:256). The Quran also commands the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to tell the non-believers: “Say O you who deny the truth! I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which you have (ever) worship, and neither will you (ever) worship that which I worship. Unto you your moral law, and unto me, mine.” (Al- Qur’án, 109: 1- 6). Based on this verse, Dr Muhammad Sharif Chaudry (2006: 90) in his work stressed that Prophet Muġammad (*ġallallahu Ėalaihi wasallam*) gave absolute freedom to the Jews and Christians of Najran of Madinah. This is formulated in the first constitution of Islam which is called *Saġifah al-Madinah*, the Constitution of Madinah or also known as Charter of Madinah. Likewise, Buddhism also promotes peace and harmonious way of living. Thus, in order to attain peace in this life, there is an attitude to be practiced among Buddhists which is tolerant.

Professor Tachibana (1975) has commented over the ethical conduct of Buddha, regarding tolerant as ‘the Buddha himself was a person of a wonderful tolerant nature...he showed an unparalleled toleration...Even in the case in which his disciples committed offences, the Buddha never used any harsh language, but simply rebuked them gently for their committal...No angry words came out of his mouth in these time’ (Tachibana, 1975: 237-239). In the case of social interaction, Buddhism taught and urged its adherents to engage in social interaction with all folks of humanity. In a guidebook called *Di Zi Gui*<sup>2</sup> (2005), stated some Buddhism perspectives on social interaction are to attain a meaningful life. Those teachings are as follows;

<sup>1</sup> All Qur’anic translation of this work please refers to *The Message of The Qur’an* by Muhammad Asad.

<sup>2</sup> *Di Zi Gui* in English means standards for being a good student and child. It is the guide to a happy life.

“Human beings, regardless of nationality, race, or religion – everyone – should be loved equally. We are all sheltered by the same sky and we all live on the same planet earth” (*Di Zi Gui*, 2005: 65).

“A person of high ideals and morals is highly respected. What people value is not based on outside appearance” (*Di Zi Gui*, 2005: 65). “A person’s outstanding abilities will naturally endow him with a good reputation. Admiration from others does not come from boasting or praising oneself” (*Di Zi Gui*, 2005: 65-66). All of above statements show that the aim of Buddhism is to guide everyone to lead noble life without harming anyone, to cultivate humane qualities in order to maintain human dignity, to radiate all-embracing kindness without any discrimination and to train the mind to avoid evil and to purify the mind to gain peace and happiness.

### **Measurement Procedures**

The major concept of the study was social interaction. There are various elements to be indicators of measuring social interaction. Abdullah Bin Taib in his PhD dissertation (1978) highlighted 15 indicators to measure social interaction among Malay students in America. Those indicators were the Index of Social Position (ISP), occupational experience, education, religious education, age, sex, residence, marital status, overseas experience, “*usra*” attendance, ABIM membership, ideology, length of stay in the United States, goals of studying in the country and language competence (1978: 93). Meanwhile, Abdul Mu’min employed five indicators; group characteristics, generalized norms, everyday sociability, togetherness and costs and rewards (2006: 30-31). Thus, the indicators of social interaction in this study were; mixed interaction among the Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, and their similar workplace. The detail explanations of these two are as follows:

#### **Mixed Interaction**

It refers to a situation whereby Muslims and Buddhists socialize in the community, either interacting with their fellow religious adherents or adherents of other religions. Thus, mix interaction includes the frequency of their participation. The study measures this by considering how active and frequent the respondents participate in collective activities like visiting each other, celebrating events together, going out together like going to restaurants and cafes and helping each other.

#### **Sharing Workplace**

Generally, a workplace is not merely a place to work but rather a place where people could interact and understand about others way of life. Hence, the Buddhists in this study either directly or indirectly have to work with Malay Muslims in Kampung Tendong. If they are working under governmental sectors definitely there will be Muslims working together with them. If they are self-employed, for instance, a farmer or a businessman, they still have to deal with the majority Malay Muslims. So, when discussing sharing workplace, Chinese Buddhists can not isolate themselves from their fellow Malay Muslims. Thus, measuring the sharing workplace includes the frequency of the fairness of people in their dealings with others. A question arises whether there is no difference in terms of the interaction and treatment among the Malays toward the Chinese and vice versa.

#### **Demographic Data**

The questionnaire provided information regarding social and demographic variables such as gender, academic level, religion, ethnic group, age, length of stay in Kampung Tendong, occupation, amount of salary and marital status. For the purpose of the study, religion was divided into two groups: Muslim, (67.1%) and Buddhist (32.9%). Academic level was categorized into five categories; none (2.9%), primary (13.7%), secondary (56.8%), Vocational and *Politeknik* (9.4%), and university (17.3%). Ethnic group included; Malay (65.5%), Chinese (32.4%), Siamese (0.7%), others (1.4%).

Age was categorized into seven categories; 18 to 25 (25%), 26 to – 30 (20.7%), 31 to 35 (11.4%), 36 to 40 (17.1%), 41 to 45 (7.9%), 46 to 50 (7.1%), 51 and above (10.7%). While length of stay in Kampung Tendong was divided into six groups; less than two years (8%), 3 to 10 years (12.4%), 11 to 20 years (17.5%), 21 to – 30 years (34.3%), 31 to 40 years (10.9%), 41 and above (16.8%). Occupation included; unemployed (8.7%), student (10.1%), self-employed (45.6%), governmental sector (16.7%), and private sector (18.8%). Amount of salary was categorized into six categories; RM 0 to RM 300 (22.8%), RM 301 to RM 500 (19.1%), RM 501 to RM 800 (26.5%), RM 801 to RM 1200 (14.7%), RM 1201 to RM 1500 (5.1%), RM 1501 and above (11.8%).

Meanwhile marital status included; bachelor (42.4%), married (56.1%), and divorce (1.4%). Lastly, gender consisted of male (68.6%) and female (31.4%).

### Measuring Interaction

Under this segment, the findings of the study of social interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong are presented in detailed. To measure social interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, simple frequencies and percentages, as well as means is calculated. The discussions and interpretation would begin with the two indicators of measurement.

### Mixed Interaction

Six items were constructed in measuring mixed interaction among the community of kampong Tendong. All these six sought to examine whether the respondents engaged in mixed interaction with their other religious neighbors. These items yielded an affirmative response from 113 (86.3%) of the respondents interacting with their opponent religious believers. Eighty-four (63.6%) did frequently interact with each other, 84 (63.6%) visiting one another, 115 (87.1%) facing no problems in their interaction while, 128 (97%) insisted that their neighbors did not isolate themselves from the community of Kampung Tendong. All particular details about these items are as stated in table 1. The first item sought to examine whether the respondents knew their neighbors well. The result for item one clearly indicated that majority of respondents knew particular details about their neighbors. Precisely, 98.6% of them agreed that they knew their neighbors while, only 1.4% of the respondents stated that they did not know their neighbors. Specifically, item one indicates that majority of the respondents knew well their neighbor. This occurs probably because, in rural area, people know and help each other to an extent that they do “things” in a collective way. For instance, in many occasions a number of them participate in *gotong- royong* (or collective effort) in cleaning their surrounding or public facilities like mosques, *balai raya* (multi purposes centre), markets, preparing a wedding ceremony, and many others.

This phenomenon is totally different in urban areas. Where normally, the people are less familiar with each other. Some do not know their neighbors’ names, occupations and others. The second item further asked the respondents to ascertain whether they interact with their neighbors of different religious faiths, namely, Islam or Buddhism. Eighty six percent answered that they do interacted while 13.7% said “no”. Here, it discovers that 86.3% of the respondents interact with their neighbors of different religious faith. Only 13.7% responded negatively that they did not interact with any neighbors of different religious faith. Based on item one, one could consider that majority of them normally interact well, in ceremonies or social functions in the village. A respondent said: There is no difference between the interaction of Malays towards Chinese and vice versa. In contrast, it is presupposed that those who were not communicated with their neighbors of different religious believe were those respondents who have no close relationship with neighbors of different religious faiths. From the result of survey, it can be deduced that for both groups, Muslims or Buddhists, might have unpleasant experiences with their neighbors of different religious beliefs. So this unpleasant experience leads to negative perspectives over them. Hence, they tend to keep themselves away from the other groups.

As reported by Razaleigh bin Muhamat (2003) over the case of aborigines who isolated themselves from communicating with the majority Malays in Malaysia were due to receiving bad treatment from the Malays and consequently led to bad feelings towards them. These past experiences led the disengagement of the aborigines with the local Malays. Item three sought to find out whether the respondents frequently interact with Buddhist or Muslim neighbors. Majority of them, 63.6% responded that they did frequently visit the Buddhist or Muslim neighbors. In contrast, only 36.4% said “no”. Item four requested the respondents to verify whether they frequently visit their Buddhist or Muslim neighbors. The results revealed the same figure as item three. Based on this figures, one possibility that could be drawn is their relationship was great in the extent that the Muslims and Buddhists were visiting each others. A respondent expressed: We have strong relationship with our neighborhood regardless of their religious adherence. There is no discrimination of races.

Item five attempted to find of the problems faced in dealing with their Buddhist or Muslim neighbors. Almost, 87.1% of respondents insisted that they have no problems in dealing with their neighbors irrespective of their religious faiths. 12.9% responded that they faced problems, of which 11.4% of them were Malays. This shows that the Malays faced more problems than the Chinese with only 1.5%. Item five discovered the percentage of those who faced problems in dealing with their neighbors of different religious faith.

Specifically, 11.4% of the Muslims were having problems compared to 1.5% Buddhists. It can be assumed that the Malays as the majority of the society are superior than the minority Chinese in Kampung Tendong. As mentioned by John E. Farley (1995) majority group is any group that is dominant in society, that is, any group that enjoys more than a proportionate share of the wealth, power, and/or social status in the society. Thus, based on this expression, the Malays, on certain occasions might be creating problems to the Chinese who are the minority. While, the minority is any group that is assigned an inferior status in society, that is, any group that has less of those. However, because of the huge number of Malays in the location (3,221 persons), 11.4% who faced problems in dealing with the Buddhists is considered as small numbers or perhaps could be labeled as rare cases as opposed to the majority of 59.8%.

The last item is to examine whether their neighbors seem to keep away and isolate themselves from interacting with the respondents. Obviously, 97% of the respondents insisted that their neighbors socialize well with them and there was no such thing as keeping away from the society. The rest, only 3% reported that their neighbors keep isolating themselves and refused to interact with them. Again, three cases of the Malays responded that their Buddhist neighbors isolated themselves from the Malay community. Based on the above results, it shows that the majority of the community interacts well among each other regardless of their religious differences. Even though the Malays and Chinese differ in term of culture and norm, yet they live quite peacefully. An important probability that could be drawn here is that the shared concept of universal values in their religions binds them socially. As insisted by Dalai Lama<sup>3</sup> (2004) “the followers of many faiths sacrifice their own welfare in the service of others. The various religious traditions clearly have this similarity commitment as well as a sense of universal responsibility”. In other words, the universal values of the world’s religions that tie people together. Thus, it could be assume that the more people adhere to their religions, wonderful peaceful co-existence they will achieve. Another important possibility is that, the Chinese of Kelantan are unique and from other Chinese in other Malaysian states. This is because, the Chinese of Kelantan generally have dark complexion and, an appearance similar to that of the Malays and Thais (Teo, 2003: 58). Besides that, their language (that is capable of speaking Kelantanese dialect), clothing, food and eating style are also similar to the Malays (Teo, 2003: 58-65). These similarities make the process of interaction between the Malays and the Chinese in Kampung Tendong run smoothly. The results yielded an affirmation towards the process of Chinese assimilation towards Muslims culture.

### **Sharing Workplace**

In measuring interaction in the workplace, there were two types of questionnaires designed to the respondents. The first, sought “yes” and “no” respond, while, the second pattern requested the respondents to select a proper answer based on the scale of one to five. With these two kinds of questionnaires, there are six items to measure interaction in the workplace of the respondents. Items one to five are using the “yes” and “no” options. Only item six uses the scale. In addition, tables are used to explain the findings clearly. For item one, it attempted to find whether there are non-Muslims or non-Buddhists in the workplace of all the respondents, either Muslims or Buddhists. Majority of 81.5% indicated that there were non-Muslims or non-Buddhists in their job settings. There were 24 (18.5%) of respondents who have no colleague of different religious faiths in their workplace. Interestingly all of these respondents were Malays. It can be assume that some of the Malays were working among their ethnic group without sharing the workplace with the Buddhists. While, all the Buddhists who are the minority, have to share their workplace with the Malays. Item two sought to examine whether the respondents were having close relationship with non-Muslims and non-Buddhists in their workplace. More than half of the respondents responded that they have a close relationship with the people of different faith. Precisely, 56.9% said “yes”, while, 43.1% said “no”. However, more than half of the Malay respondents, 51.6% said that they have no close relationship with the Buddhists in their workplace.

It might due to religious differences, for some strict Muslims were quite rigid about their faith and as a result they tend to have no close relationship to non-Muslims either in their work setting. While, item three attempted to find out whether the respondents were comfortable to share work setting with colleagues of other religious faiths. Nearly 74.6% of respondents said “yes”, whereas, 25.4% responded negatively.

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<sup>3</sup> The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. He was born on July 6, 1935, in a small village called Takster, in northeastern Tibet. His Holiness was recognized at the age of two, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of his predecessor the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (S. Hadi Abdullah. ed., 2004: 72-76).

It can be assumed that due to lack of information and knowledge of other religions such as the issues of religious customs, rites and rituals and practices, the respondents tend to have bad feeling of sharing their work setting with other religious believers. With item four, the aim was to find out whether adherents of other religious faiths understand the respondents religious obligation. Generally, with the majority of 60%, indicated that both parties, Muslims and Buddhists did understand the religious obligations of the two religions. Only 40% stressed that other religious believers at their workplace did not know about their religious duties. The last item asked the respondents whether segregation of religious groups exists in their job settings. Almost all of them answered that there was no such group existed in their workplace. It can be observed that 89.2% of the respondents noted "no" while, 10.8% claimed positively that there was separation of religious groups in their workplaces.

Interestingly, 89.2% of the respondents insisted that there were no segregation of religious group in their work settings. It presupposed that in Kampung Tendong particularly or Kelantan in general did not discriminate any religious group in the workplace. This is because Islam promotes equal treatment to all mankind regardless of their religious faiths. As stated in the Holy Quran "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity" (60:8). On the other hand, Buddha teaches that "To avoid all evil, to cultivate virtue, and to cleanse one's mind – this is the teaching of the Buddhas" (Dhammapada: 183). These are universal value shared by Islam as well as Buddhism. This universal values of two religions that bind their adherents closely. A detailed analysis on "sharing workplace" is presented in table 2.

Item six is designed to ask the respondents whether religion guides it followers negatively like being arrogant and ignorant as well as lazy, stupid and backward. For the Muslims, the question was about whether Buddhists were arrogant and ignorant persons. This is presented in table 4.6 specifically, 79.8% strongly agreed and 11.7% agreed with item six, 2.1% were uncertain and 2.1% strongly disagreed. Here, majority of Muslim respondents insisted that the Buddhists were arrogant and ignorant. According to Osman Chuah Abdullah (2002), Chinese have the ethnocentric feeling that they are better than others. This feeling would reflect their personalities and their behaviors. So that, it projected out from their actions and deeds and effected the Muslims. Further analysis is shown in the table 3 as below.

Table 4 contains the question being asked to the Buddhists for item six. Buddhists were asked whether they agreed that Muslims are lazy, stupid and backward persons. Fifty percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with this item, while 25% were uncertain, whereas only 2.2% strongly agreed. In brief, this component measured the various forms in which respondents socialize or interact at Kampung Tendong. The main aim here was to answer the research question, "Are Muslims and Buddhists really interacting? To what extent do they really interact?" It is found that 74.6% of the majority of the respondents were comfortable to share their workplace with the believers of other religion. More than 56.9% even have close relationship with them. It is observable that, the Buddhists, the Chinese or Siamese in Kampung Tendong used to socialize and interact well with the local Malays in their daily life. They cannot avoid themselves from interacting with the majority of Malay Muslims. This is perhaps, there are Malays neighbors in their settlements. The same thing happens to their work life where there are Malays who work together with them regardless of their job. Even if, they are self-employed, these Buddhists still have to deal and interact with the majority of Malays. In contrast, a possible reason that leads Malay Muslims to socialize easily with Chinese and Siamese in their workplace is due to long history of co-existence. So that, in their work setting, the Malays do not have problem in interacting with their colleagues who of different faiths. Even more, their colleague would help each other regardless of their religious beliefs.

### **Conclusions**

In the previous discussion, the three indicators of social interaction are used they are mixed interaction and sharing workplace. Those two items are briefly explained below: Based on previous discussions, it can be said that the Muslims and the Buddhists in Kampung Tendong were having positive mixed relationship. This is due to several possible reasons. Firstly, they had no communication problem. As stated earlier, the Chinese are fluent in speaking Kelantanese dialect. By so doing, they are easily accepted by the Malays and this scenario could make the process of communication smooth and effective. Secondly, the residents of Kampung Tendong did not have any problem in running their daily activities. This is because the Chinese have similar features and appearance to that of the Malays, in terms of their dark complexion, styles of clothing, food and eating habits. These similarities make the process of interaction more meaningful.



Lastly, the result of the study yielded an affirmation towards the process of assimilation. The above two mentioned reasons are the best explanations of the assimilation process in Kampung Tendong. Most importantly, universal values are the sole factor that binds Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong tightly. They freely interact with each other because their religious faiths encourage them to do so. Thus, if they tightly adhere to the religion, peaceful co-existence among them would enhance. Under the indicator of 'sharing workplace, there is no doubt that the residents of Kampung Tendong were having positive interaction in their work settings. This is because majority of them did not have any problem and even comfortable in sharing the same career and place of work with the other believers. It could be assumed that the shared universal values of their religions that make them tolerant toward other religious followers. Another important point is majority of the respondents reported that there is no such segregation occurs in their workplace. Above all, both groups either Muslims or Buddhists insisted that their colleagues would help each other as a team in completing a task regardless of their faiths.

As a conclusion, one might say that the residents of Kampung Tendong were having positive interaction between the two groups, namely Muslims and Buddhists. Even though they have huge differences of religious beliefs, cultures, norms and practices yet it could not break or even shaken the closed relationship that they have. Uniquely, there is no conflict or collision case reported by the local government or authorities. It shows that they were having good interaction with each other. In line with the findings, the suggestions below may be useful for policy-makers, especially regarding the interactions between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong. In the first place, the lack of collective activities designed for the Muslims and the Buddhists in Kampung Tendong did not hinder interaction among them. This may be due to the everyday interaction between them. The Buddhists cannot isolate themselves from the large majority of Muslims. They use to settle among Muslims, work together and most of the time sharing leisure times together. Their daily social activities do promote interaction. However, the existence of collective activities and programs that promote interaction particularly between the Muslims and the Buddhists in Kampung Tendong should be frequently organized by the authority and by the residents themselves. These programs aimed at bringing Muslims and their Buddhists counterparts would further deepen the willingness of those who are already engaged in interactions and the few reluctant ones to interact.

In the second place, the discussion of Islamic principles of brotherhood and unity should be one of the main issues during Friday sermon (*khuġbah jumĒat*). It should also be discussed in various religious talks. The religious leaders should be encouraged to educate and remind the Muslim residents about the need to constantly observe the Islamic values on human interactions (Abdul Mu'min, 2006: 68). Muslim residents should pay precaution attention to social interaction, especially to Buddhists. This is because the study found a group of the Muslim respondents 11.4% faced problems in their relationship with the Buddhists in comparison to the Buddhists with 1.5%. In the third place, the leaders, either religious or social leaders, should play an exemplary role in promoting interaction among the residents of Kampung Tendong. They have a responsibility to stress on the issue of interaction to the masses by developing awareness, knowledge and skills of uniting them into one cohesive group. They must acknowledge that all individuals are equal and share the same characteristics of homo-sapiens regardless of their religions. Indeed, the researcher believes that if these suggestions are taken into considerations by the authorities and the residents, themselves, they might help to improve social interaction among them.

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Table 1  
Measuring Interaction: “Mixed Interaction”

	Response	Muslims		Buddhists		Total	
		N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Do you know your neighbors?	1. Yes	92	66.2	45	32.4	137	98.6
	2. No	1	0.7	1	0.7	2	1.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you interact with your Buddhist/ Muslim neighbors?	1. Yes	76	58	37	28.2	113	86.3
	2. No	16	12.2	2	1.5	18	13.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>70*</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30*</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you frequently interact with them?	1. Yes	54	40.9	30	22.7	84	63.6
	2. No	39	29.5	9	6.8	48	36.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>70.5*</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you frequently visit them?	1. Yes	54	40.9	30	22.7	84	63.6
	2. No	39	29.5	9	6.8	48	36.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>70.5*</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you face problems in dealing with them?	1. Yes	15	11.4	2	1.5	17	12.9
	2. No	79	59.8	36	27.3	115	87.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you think that they are kept away from you?	1. Yes	3	2.3	1	0.8	4	3
	2. No	90	68.2	38	28.8	128	97
	<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29.5*</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: \* Decimals have been rounded off.

Table 2

Measuring Interaction: “Sharing Workplace”

	Response	Muslims		Buddhists		Total	
		N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Is there any Buddhist/ Muslim in your workplace?	1. Yes	67	51.5	39	30	106	81.5
	2. No	24	18.5	0	0	24	18.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you have close relationship with them?	1. Yes	44	33.8	30	23.1	74	56.9
	2. No	47	36.2	9	6.9	56	43.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you feel comfortable working with them?	1. Yes	67	51.5	30	23.1	97	74.6
	2. No	24	18.5	9	6.9	33	25.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>
Do you think that they understand your religious obligation in worksetting?	1. Yes	54	41.5	24	18.5	78	60
	2. No	37	28.5	15	11.5	52	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>
Is there any segregation of religious groups in your worksetting?	1. Yes	14	10.8	0	0	14	10.8
	2. No	77	59.2	39	30	116	89.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3

Measuring Interaction: “Sharing Workplace” (Response from Muslims)

	Response	Muslims		
		N.	%	
Do you agree that Buddhists are arrogant and ignorant?	Strongly Disagree	2	2.1	<b>Mean Score= 4.7444</b>
	Disagree	0	0	
	Uncertain	2	2.1	
	Agree	11	11.7	
	Strongly Agree	75	79.8	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>95.7</b>	

Table 4

Measuring Interaction: “Sharing Workplace” (Response from Buddhists)

	Response	Buddhists		
		N.	%	
Do you agree that Muslims are lazy, stupid and backward persons?	Strongly Disagree	12	26.1	<b>Mean Score= 1.9688</b>
	Disagree	11	23.9	
	Uncertain	8	17.4	
	Agree	0	0	
	Strongly Agree	1	2.2	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>66.7</b>	