

MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS INTERACTION IN PASIR  
MAS, KELANTAN

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# **MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS INTERACTION IN PASIR MAS, KELANTAN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country, other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Taoism, and other traditional belief systems are also practiced. The objective of this study is to explore the relationship or religious interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in one of the east coast states in Malaysia, Kelantan. A small town, Pasir Mas is chosen as it consists of two major religions, Islam and Buddhism, forming two religious communities living side by side in a traditional village namely Kg. Tendong. It is an ethno-religious study of Malay Muslims and Chinese as well as Siamese Buddhists in terms of their religious interaction in the said location. The study in Pasir Mas could be perceived as a subset study over the dominant set of ethnic groups in Malaysia. In order to measure the quality of interaction, some indicators have been prepared to be applied on a total of one hundred and forty (140) respondents that were drawn from Muslims and Buddhists. The sample size together with the above-mentioned indicators showed that the quality of interaction is encouraging in the sense that the 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 Pasir Mas 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 Pasir Mas. 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.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Inter-religious Interaction, Muslim and Buddhists.

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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.

## **2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PASIR MAS**

Kelantan (see Appendix I) is one of the states in Malaysia, which is located in the northeast of Peninsula Malaysia. It comprises of 15,022 km<sup>2</sup> areas (see Appendix II), and bordered by Thailand in the north, Terengganu in the southeast, Perak in the west, and Pahang in the south.

In the northeast of Kelantan is the South China Sea. Kota Bharu is the capital city which has been declared an “Islamic City” or “*Bandaraya Islam*” by the state government.

The total population of Kelantan is 1.4 million people comprising of 95% Malay, 3% Thai, 1.9% Chinese, and 0.1% others (see Appendix III). The state has ten *jajahan*<sup>1</sup>, namely Kota Bharu, Pasir Mas, Tumpat, Pasir Puteh, Bachok, Kuala Krai, Machang, Tanah Merah, Jeli, and Gua Musang. Since 95% of Kelantan’s population consists of Malay and under the Malaysian Constitution, all Malays are considered Muslims. Islam has become the most influential religion in the state.

*Jajahan* of Pasir Mas is located in the western portion of Kelantan which is about 200 square miles in area. The Kelantan River forms the eastern boundary of the *jajahan*, while the Golok River forms the western one. The state capital of Kota Bharu which is a political, administrative and commercial centre of the state lies 11 miles away from Golok River.

Under *jajahan* of Pasir Mas there are 10 *daerah* (districts). They are; Alor Pasir, Bunut Susu, Chetok, Gual Periuk, Kangkong, Kuala Lemal, Kubang Gadong, Pasir Mas, Rantau Panjang and Kubang Sepat. In the district of Kubang Sepat there are seven mukims. Those mukims include Tendong, Sakar, Kubang Pak Amin, Kubang Sepat, Paloh, Hutan Chenggal and Padang Embun.

In Mukim Tendong there are six *kampung* (villages) with a total population of 3,548 people. Malays 3,221 or approximately 90.8%, Chinese 297 (8.4%) and others (including Siamese) 30 (0.85%) (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 2000). These six villages are Kampung Tendong Hilir, Kampung Tendong Hulu, Kampung Gaung, Kampung Resak, Kampung Cherang Tok Rong and lastly Kampung Cabang Empat Tendong which is known as

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<sup>1</sup> State political system of Kelantan is distributed to several levels starting from *negeri* (state) *jajahan*, *daerah* (district), *mukim* and *kampung* (village). This system is quite different to other states of Malaysia because Kelantan has additional level which is *jajahan*.

Kampung Tendong where the study is conducted. Kampung Tendong has a multiracial society. It comprises of Malays, Chinese and Siamese natives. Despite the difference in ethnicity, their relationship is harmony and it indicates social stability of the diversified population of the state.

The total population of Mukim Tendong as recorded by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2000, is 3,548, which comprises of 3,221 Malays, 297 Chinese and 30 others (including Siamese) (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 2000). Moreover, according to the report *Carta Kebersihan Luar Bandar Daerah Kubang Sepat, 2006* prepared by the Health Department of Pasir Mas, Mukim Tendong comprises of 3,867 with 727 houses. It also stated that Kampung Tendong has 716 people with 143 houses. However, this study is confined to Muslims and Buddhists of Kampung Tendong, not to the whole population of Mukim Tendong.

Before the social interaction of Muslims and Buddhists is discussed, it is necessary to examine briefly the history of Chinese migration into Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> Trade and seeking job opportunities were two major reasons for the settlement of the Chinese in Malaysia.

It is recorded by Tan et. al (2005) that Chinese trade in the Malay Peninsula started as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese traded with kingdoms on the peninsula that they called *Tun Sun* (said to be situated at the mouth of the Johore River), *Chu Li* (believed to be a port at the mouth of the Kuantan River, Pahang) and *Ch'ih Tu* (thought to be in Kelantan). In the same source, the authors presented a Chinese chronicle that *Ch'ih Tu* had sent diplomatic and trade missions to China during the Tang Dynasty (619-906 A.D), and the Chinese emperor presented a gift of 100 rolls of silk to the kingdom of *Ch'ih Tu* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (2005: 4). These were the best examples of early relationship of Kelantanese with the Chinese.

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<sup>2</sup> Malaysia formerly known as Malaya or *Tanah Melayu*, gains independence in 1957 and Malaysia formed as a nation in 1963. Before 1963, Malaysia was known as Malaya.

On the other hand, seeking jobs opportunities was the economic reason which attracts the Chinese to settlement in Malaysia. Historically, mainland Chinese faced overpopulation, natural calamities and the exploitation of peasants by landlords brought tens of thousands of Chinese out of the coastal provinces of China to Nanyang (Tan et. al., 2005: 9). The majority of those who joined the migration into Malaysia came to work in the land or involve in trade. Some of them negotiated with the Malay rulers and chiefs of tin mines to acquire the lands for plantation or cash crops.

In the case of Kelantan, the Chinese migrated and settled in a significant numbers in Kelantan since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The settlers were generously given land for farming by the Sultans and powerful royal families. According to Robert L. Winzeler (1985: 18) the Chinese settlers occupied and owned much of the land about 40 kilometers along both sides of the Kelantan River. They socialized well with local Malays and became highly assimilated to the local way of life. Today, Chinese descendents wear Malay-style dress, speak the Malay Kelantanese dialect and observe Malay customs. However, they have retained their Chinese religion and customs.

Majority of the Chinese in Kelantan are the followers of Theravada Buddhism. In Mukim Tendong, the Kuan Yin statue sits in a temple is believed to have been built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the Chinese population is small with 297 individuals, they preserve their religious practices. They celebrate Chinese festivals, enjoy Chinese norms, cultures, and lifestyles like consuming liquor, eating pork and having dogs as pets.

Teo Kok Seong (2003) stated about the Chinese in Kelantan as having some Malay and Thai influences in culture and language, reflecting the processes of cultural and language contact, interaction and influences. The language spoken by these Chinese is a reflection of the

processes of assimilation on their part to the local Malays and Thais. Being a minority group, these Chinese are a good case study of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic experience.

Uniquely, even though the Chinese differ in their religious belief with that of the Malays, there is no reported case of hostile and turmoil among the two communities in Kampung Tendong. Thus, this study plans to examine the factors which bind their social interactions.

At present, the Muslims are mainly Malay<sup>3</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.

In this study, social interaction is analyzed in terms of Chinese community participation among the majority of Malays in Kampung Tendong and how both religions of the two groups interact towards each other. When discussing social interaction, it is undeniably significant to discuss acculturation and assimilation processes. Acculturation and assimilation are two sides of the single process by which a group borrows cultural traits and becomes accepted by the dominant group.

Acculturation is the psychological and social counter-part of cultural diffusion. Originally “acculturation” was referred to the colonial racist idea that so-called “savages” and “lower peoples” experience mental evolution when they imitated the so-called “civilized” or “higher peoples” (Winthrop, 1991).

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<sup>3</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.

Teo Kok Seong (2003) has defined acculturation as the process of adopting the social patterns and cultural traits of another dominant group. He also noted that acculturation is a type of sociocultural change experienced by an entire or a section of an ethnic group as a result of interethnic contact with a dominant society and culture with a change in one or usually in both entities. This change does not necessarily involve the loss of ethnic identity, which is opposed to assimilation (2003: 6).

Teo (2003) also states that acculturation depends on the communication which flow between the two cultures in contact. This is because for him, it is a phenomenon which results when groups having distinct cultures come into first hand interaction with subsequent changes, conscious or subconscious, in the original cultural patterns of both groups.

On the other hand, the word assimilation is derived from Latin word which means “to render similar” (Wikipedia; ‘*Assimilation*’, retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007 in <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assimilation>>). The process of assimilation carries different connotations in various disciplines. In linguistics, for instance, assimilation is a process in which a sound becomes similar to an adjacent sound. In biology, assimilation is the conversion of nutrient into the fluid or solid substance of the body, by the processes of digestion and absorption. In philosophy, assimilation is the incorporation of new concepts into existing schemes.

However, in sociology and anthropology, assimilation is the process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture. It also leads to language shift or language assimilation, the progressive process whereby a speech community of a language shifts to speaking another language. The best example which usually quoted by the scholars is Americanization of Native Americans or cultural assimilation of Native Americans in



the United States and Jewish assimilation (Wikipedia; '*Assimilation*', retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007 in <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assimilation>> ).

According to Winick (1956) assimilation is a process of sociocultural change which involves the loss of ethnic identity. Within his general framework, assimilation is associated with only a total change in the reference group. Whereby, the process occurs when the members of a group see them as belonging ethnically to another group. However, the complete loss of ethnic identity on the part of the “new” members does not mean that there is ready acceptance of membership to another ethnic group by that ethnic group. Recognition and acceptance as “equals” by the majority members of the dominant group are true criteria of “total assimilation”. If and when the “new” members are not treated as “equals” at societal level, then it is only “partial assimilation” which is synonymous with “assimilation” (1956: 3-4, 46).

For the present study, the researcher uses acculturation and assimilation to mean a single process, adopting a culture to one owns. This is because, the study is designed to measure the extent to which the Buddhists have interact with the local Malays consequently merged, to that degree, a process of adopting Malay culture into a part of their own culture.

### **3.0 MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS INTERACTION IN PASIR MAS, KELANTAN**

Social interaction is 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.

Therefore, the major concept of the study was social interaction. There are various elements to be indicators of measuring social interaction. Thus, the indicators of social interaction in this study were; mixed interaction among the Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong, their similar workplace, sharing leisure time together and religious understandings and factors that promote and stifle interaction. The detail explanations of these five are as follows:

### **3.1 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, mixed 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.

Six items were constructed in measuring mixed interaction among the community of Kampung 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.

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%.

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>4</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.

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<sup>4</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).

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.

### **3.2 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.

Based on the study, 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 Qur'ān “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 values shared by Islam as well as Buddhism. These universal values of two religions that bind their adherents closely.

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 affected the Muslims.

The other component measured the various forms in which whether respondents socialize or interact well in 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.

### **3.3 Sharing Leisure Times Together**

This measures the frequency of gathering of the respondents during leisure times. It includes spending time together, visiting neighbors of other ethnic group, participating in collective activities together, minority Buddhists feel a sense of belonging, and acceptance by majority Malay Muslims as well as the approachability of the two groups.

This segment generally sought the views of respondents on level of satisfaction when interacting with the residents of other religious beliefs at Kampung Tendong (i.e. getting along very well with one another, being comfortable in the midst of one another and the like). This was an attempt to find an answer to the research question, “How do Muslims perceive and interact with Buddhists in Kampung Tendong? And how do Buddhists there perceive and interact with Muslims?”

Item one, the aim was to find the extent to which the respondents are comfortable in dealings with their Buddhist or Muslim neighbors. The results showed a majority of 85.4% stressed out that they were comfortable with their neighbors. Meanwhile, 14.6% said that they were not comfortable in dealings with their neighbors. Once again, the Malays constitute a big number, 13.1% were uncomfortable with the Buddhist neighbors, than the Buddhists, 1.5% who expressed that they were also uncomfortable with Malay neighbors. As been explained earlier, one possible reason of dissatisfaction of Buddhists toward Malay neighbors was that, they might experience unfair treatments from other Malays.

In item two, respondents were asked whether they are comfortable of being in the houses of their Buddhist or Muslims neighbors. Seventy three percent of the respondents answered negatively stating that they were uncomfortable of being in the houses of other religious believers. Specifically, with 45.4% of Muslims stressed that they were not comfortable being in the home of the Buddhists. While, 24.6% did not have problem being in their houses. On the other hand, the Buddhists responded that 26.9% of them were not comfortable in the house of Muslims, only 3.1% were not having that problem.

However, 72.3% of the majority Muslim respondents were uncomfortable being in the house of the believers of other religious faiths. This scenario is reflected to item four, 57.8% claimed that Buddhists were too proud of their religion.

Item three sought to find out whether the respondents think that their neighbors are good neighbors or otherwise. Nearly all 89.4% of the respondents' responses positively while 10.6% responses negatively that their neighbors were not good neighbors. Out of these figures, the Muslims constitutes 62.1% of those who insisted that the Buddhists were the good neighbors, while 27.3% of the Buddhists who said that Muslims were the good neighbors. Only 8.3% of Muslims said negatively that the Buddhists were not good neighbors, while only 2.3% of Buddhists responses. This might be due to past experiences that had such as been treated badly or even engaged in several quarrels with the Buddhists or Muslims.

Item four, then, requested the respondents to verify whether they think that Buddhist or Muslim neighbors are proud of their professed religion. The results revealed the same figure as item three. Majority of the responses noted that their Buddhist neighbors regard their religion as superior to Islam and vice versa. Precisely 58.9% of the Buddhists said "yes", and 41.1% said "no".

The last item is “sharing leisure times together”. It attempted at finding out the extent to which the respondents feel being threatened by the opposite religious believers. It is observed that, 90% of the respondents which Muslims constitutes of 59.2% and Buddhists 30.7% expressed that they were not threaten by them. Only 14 (10%) of them responded that they did feel threatened with the other religious followers surrounding them. Out of the 10%, Muslims constitutes of 7.9% while, Buddhists only 2.1%.

### **3.4 Religious Understandings**

These include the level of understanding over the respondents’ faith and faith of each other religion, namely Islam or Buddhism. The measurements are important to identify the frequent interaction among the religious and pious persons towards other religion and their understandings towards other religion. Religious understanding is important in formalizing a society. This is because receiving correct information about own religion and other religion would make life more meaningful because mutual understanding of the society could be achieved.

This segment is divided into two parts. The first is about intra-religious understandings which focus on one’s own religious perspectives. How far it followers understand its teachings, tenets, and so on. So in this part, the religions under study are mainly Islam and Buddhism. Whereas, the second part stresses on the issue of inter-religious understandings of the community in Kampung Tendong. It focuses on the cross-religious understandings of the Muslims and the Buddhists; how Muslims perceive Buddhism and its adherents; and how Buddhists perceive Islam and its followers. These items were designed to answer the research



question “What are the factors which make both ethnic groups interact? Are there hindrances which might disrupt positive religious interaction?”

The discussion of intra-religious understandings is essentially highlighted. The frequency distribution and percentages of the respondents’ opinions towards four items designed to examine the intra-religious understandings of the respondents. The first item was to determine the level at which respondents understand their own religious teachings. Almost all of the respondents noted that they did know and understand their religious teachings, principles and the like. Specifically, 97% responded “yes” while, 3.33% reported that they did not really understand about their religious tenets.

In item two, 77.8% of the respondents frequently visited their house of worship for the purpose of fulfilling religious rituals. Whereas, 22.2% did not regularly go to their house of worship either mosque or temple.

Item three of ‘intra-religious understandings’ sought to find out whether respondents were committed in performing their religious duties. The results showed that 80.7% were committed while, 19.2% not that committed in fulfilling religious obligations.

With item four, respondents were asked whether they followed strictly their religious teachings. To this, 76.3% gave positive answer that they uphold their religious teachings strictly. As opposed to, 23.6% gave negative answer which noted that they were not a committed believer who followed religious obligations wholeheartedly.

Majority of the respondents did know and regularly practiced their religious obligations regardless of their religions, either Islam or Buddhism. Both parties showed that they are committed to their religious teachings. Hence, one could note that the Buddhists have full freedom to practice their religion in Kampung Tendong although they are small in number. A

respondent who is an authority in Kampung Tendong gave his overall perceptions of his Chinese neighbors:

Chinese who are Buddhists in this village are religious persons and there is a special place - temple - for them to practice their religion. Their religious ceremonies and events do not disturb the Malays. Even if they - the Buddhists – ask permission to conduct several religious events I would permit them because there is no such racial tension arise from their ceremonies because these ceremonies have been practiced ever since.

Whereas in the second part of “religious understandings” is inter-religious understandings. The first item attempted to find the extent of the respondents knowledge on other religious teachings like Buddhism or Islam. As it is observable in the table, nearly half of the respondents did know about other religions. However, majority of them agreed that they did not know about others’ faith. Generally, 55.8% did not know while 44.2% knew about it.

Item two further requested the respondents to verify whether they had ever learnt about other religion (i.e Buddhism or Islam). Of all respondents, 88.5% of them stressed that they never learnt about other religions. Only 11.5% persons in Kampung Tendong did learn about other religions. Out of these 16 respondents, 7.2% of the Buddhists admitted that had learnt about Islam while only 4.3% of the Muslims had learnt about Buddhism.

Item three looks for religious understandings of the respondents. That means the question was aimed at knowing one’s understandings toward a religion. This issue is important in measuring the level of inter-religious understandings of the respondents.

Thus, the results showed that majority of 76.3% did not understand other religions at all. But only 23.7% of the respondents did know about other religions quite well. Therefore, it is confirmed that the community of Kampung Tendong did interact socially but on religion, majority of them did not know about one another.

The last item under ‘inter-religious understandings’ asked whether the respondents had ever read any readings about other faiths. As shown in the table, more than half of the respondents (51.1%) did not read any publication of other religions. Whereas, 48.9% noted that they did read other religions’ publications. Approximately 60.9% of Buddhist respondents did read some works about Islam.

For overall results of inter-religious understandings, majority of the responses, irrespective of Muslims or Buddhists said that they did not know about other religions and did not even learn or read any publication. The study shows that the Buddhists know better about Islam more than the Muslims know about Buddhism. It is suggested that, they might need to read about Islam in order to understand the nature and attitude of the majority of Muslims around them.

### **3.5 Factors That Promote and Stifle Interaction**

Under this segment, it was an attempt to answer the research question “Is there any hidden or unseen conflict or controversy that might adversely affect positive relationship?” Two types of questionnaires being used, for the first, it is observed that positive interaction is seen in their style of living. Both parties seem to interact each other. The results showed 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 resident of Kampung Tendong was that differences of religions. This is because both religions do promote similar concept of ethical values likes respecting the elders regardless of their religious believe, not to harm others, not to commit vices and wrongdoings, and so on. Again, the concept of universal values play an important roles in promoting social interaction among the community of Kampung Tendong.

Due to universal values, Muslims and Buddhist practiced mixed interaction, sharing workplace, and leisure times together.

However, when it comes to religion, the results showed lower understandings of both groups. From here, one could assume that trivial religious issues are the sole factor that could discourage close relationships among them. In current situation, the residents of Kampung Tendong are socially interacted but in term of religiosity, there are unspoken issues to discuss publicly. As a result, both parties kept the misconceptions of other religious teachings inside them. If they are alert and well versed in other religious practices and tenets, almost definitely, they would interact better. Intimacy and close relationships among them would be achieved.

As a conclusion, it is a beautiful, uplifting sight to behold when Muslims and Buddhists of Kampung Tendong come together, set an objective, and reach it using each other's unique capabilities and not searching for fault in their differences. The researcher strongly agreed with the statement by Dr Osman that cultural differences do not prevent the various ethnic groups from interacting across the boundaries (2002: 78).

Therefore, effective ways of interaction between Muslims and Buddhists in Kampung Tendong must be drawn and practiced by each person regardless of their religious beliefs. Lack or weak of interaction might cause negative response of non-Muslims towards Islam. As expressed by Osman (1991: 33) the lack of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims can be a very important cause for the negative response of non-Muslims towards Islam.

However, it is sad to predict that the peaceful life enjoyed by the residents of Kampung Tendong today, will be affected by misunderstanding, argument and suspicious that are avoidable if they take some time to learn about each other's religion and obligations. By so doing, harmonious life enjoyed today could be maintained and even strengthen in future.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

In the previous discussion, the five indicators of social interaction are used they are mixed interaction, sharing workplace, sharing leisure time together, religious understanding as well as discussion factors that promote and hinder interaction. Those five 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.

Based on the data collected, the result yielded that the respondents were having mixed interaction and even shared their leisure times together. Majority of them responded that they enjoyed the companies of other religious believers. They also participated in similar collective activities run by the authorities. They have no problems eating together and shopping at the same coffee houses, restaurants, markets, shop retailers and other places. All of these determine that the residents of Kampung Tendong were having positive interaction and they share their leisure times together. It could be said that the universal values of their religions encourage them to socialize well with others.

On the other hand, under the religious understandings, there were two important things to discuss. Both groups, either Muslims or Buddhists were having good understandings of their own religions and this deep understanding is not a disruptive aspect to their relationship. Furthermore, in term of the lack of understandings in other religious teachings would not also a determinant to hinder their positive interaction. In short, religious difference would not break but rather enhance and strengthen the good relationship of the two groups. The main reason is due to the shared values that their religions have in common.

The study discovered that, the possible variable that facilitates interaction is universal values shared by the two religions – Islam and Buddhism. These similarities would bind their relationship together and tightly bonded.

On the other hand, the study also found that the possible destructive element to their relationship is that trivial religious issues. These issues are the sole factor that could discourage close relationships among them. However, it could not break the strong ties among them. Why? Possible answer is the concept of universal values that shared by both religions that drive their good relationship.

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.

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## APPENDIX I: Maps of the Location

Map of Malaysia



Map of Kelantan



## APPENDIX II: Area of the Location

### Area of the Location

<b>JAJAHAN</b>	<b>KELUASAN (KM PERSEGI)</b>	<b>LUAS PERSEKILILING (KM)</b>
Gua Musang	8,177	615
Kuala Krai	2,277	258
Jeli	1,318	201
Tanah Merah	880	158
Pasir Mas	569	129
Machang	527	148
Pasir Puteh	424	106
Kota Bharu	394	117
Bachok	279	98
Tumpat	177	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,022</b>	<b>820</b>

Source: Jabatan Ukur dan Pemetaan Negeri Kelantan, Retrieved on 30 May, 2006 in <http://kelantan.gov.my/web/main.php?page=keluasankawasan>

## APPENDIX III: Population

DISTRICTS	TOTAL POPULATION							
	1980	1991	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Bachok	73,953	98,557	111,039	112,039	113,048	114,065	115,092	116,128
Kota Bharu	275,986	366,770	406,662	410,322	414,015	417,741	421,501	425,294
Machang	58,040	71,584	79,032	79,743	80,461	81,185	81,916	82,653
Pasir Mas	118,153	150,035	165,126	166,612	1668,112	169,625	171,151	172,692
Pasir Puteh	90,959	96,348	106,138	107,093	108,057	109,030	110,011	111,001
Tanah Merah	61,996	94,611	103,487	104,418	105,358	106,306	107,263	108,228
Tumpat	85,952	116,044	134,812	136,025	137,250	138,485	139,731	140,989
Gua Musang	18,578	63,816	76,655	77,345	78,041	78,743	79,452	80,167
Kuala Krai	62,301	90,830	93,550	94,392	95,241	96,099	96,964	97,836
Jeli	23,352	32,720	36,512	36,841	37,172	37,507	37,844	38,185
<b>Total</b>	<b>859,270</b>	<b>1,181,315</b>	<b>1,313,014</b>	<b>1,324,831</b>	<b>1,336,755</b>	<b>1,348,785</b>	<b>1,360,924</b>	<b>1,373,173</b>

Source : Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia,  
<http://kelantan.gov.my/web/main.php?page=keluasankawasan> (accessed 30 May, 2006).

### **PASIR MAS (52,771)**

Malay: 95.79% = 50549, Chinese: 3.81% = 2011, Indian: 0.18% = 95, Others: 0.22%  
 = 116.

### **TENDONG (16,525)**

Malay: 97.70% = 16145, Chinese: 1.91% = 316, Indian: 0.11% = 18, Others: 0.28%  
 = 46.

Source: Berita Harian, <http://www.bharian.com.my/Misc/Pilihanraya2004/kelantan>  
 (accessed 30 May, 2006).