

Chinese Tea Art and Mandarin Learning: Perceptions of Malay University Students

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ABSTRACT

In increasingly multicultural educational settings, culturally responsive pedagogy has become an important approach to enhancing learner engagement and motivation in third language (L3) acquisition. Although previous studies have extensively discussed motivation in second and third language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner, 1985), limited attention has been given to the role of culture-based experiential activities in Mandarin language learning among Malay learners in Malaysia. This study examines Malay university students' perceptions of Chinese tea art and investigates the influence of interest in Chinese tea art activities on their motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3). Grounded in Gardner's (1985) Socio-educational Model, the study employed a quantitative research design involving 149 Malay university students enrolled in Mandarin courses at a Malaysian public university. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The findings revealed that respondents generally held positive perceptions of Chinese tea art, particularly in terms of cultural appreciation, openness to intercultural learning, and willingness to participate in tea-related activities. However, their understanding of the historical and philosophical aspects of Chinese tea art remained relatively limited. The study also identified a strong positive relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and motivation to learn Mandarin ($r = .744, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of cultural engagement are associated with stronger learning motivation. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of integrating culture-based experiential activities into Mandarin language education to enhance intercultural competence and learner motivation in multicultural learning environments.

Keywords: Chinese tea art; Mandarin as a third language; culturally responsive pedagogy; learner motivation; intercultural competence

INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of multilingual competence in a globalised world has led many university students to acquire additional languages beyond their mother tongue and national language. In Malaysia, Mandarin has emerged as one of the most popular third languages (L3) among non-native Mandarin learners due to its growing economic significance, cultural influence, and relevance in regional and international communication.

Consequently, understanding the factors that motivate learners to study Mandarin has become an important area of inquiry in language education research.

Among the many factors that influence language learning, motivation has long been regarded as one of the most important predictors of learner success. Gardner's (1985) Socio-educational Model emphasises that learners' attitudes towards the target language community and its culture significantly influence their motivation and language learning outcomes. Similarly, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) argued that language learning motivation is dynamic and shaped by learners' identities, emotions, learning environments, and sociocultural experiences. These perspectives suggest that cultural engagement may play a crucial role in fostering learners' motivation to acquire an additional language.

The role of culture in language education has received growing attention as educators seek to create learning experiences that extend beyond the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. Language learning is no longer viewed solely as the acquisition of linguistic knowledge but also as a process of understanding the cultural values, traditions, and social practices embedded within the target language. Within the context of Chinese language education, Chinese culture has been recognised as an essential component that enhances learners' intercultural understanding and engagement with Mandarin learning (Xu & Hu, 2024). Among the diverse elements of Chinese culture, Chinese tea art (茶艺) represents a unique cultural practice that embodies philosophical values such as harmony, respect, balance, mindfulness, and appreciation of nature. Chinese tea art has recently attracted scholarly attention as a potential pedagogical resource in Chinese language education. Cao (2025) argued that Chinese tea culture offers a meaningful platform for integrating language learning with cultural understanding, enabling learners to experience Chinese traditions beyond conventional classroom instruction. Similarly, Li (2022) found that the incorporation of tea culture into Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teaching could enhance learners' cultural awareness and stimulate greater interest in learning Chinese. Such findings indicate that tea-related cultural activities have the potential to create richer learning experiences by connecting language learning with authentic cultural practices.

The educational value of Chinese tea art can also be understood through Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which proposes that meaningful learning occurs through direct experience and reflective engagement. Participation in tea art activities allows learners to interact with Chinese culture in an authentic and experiential manner, thereby facilitating deeper cultural appreciation. In addition, Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital suggests that cultural knowledge and experiences can serve as valuable educational resources that enhance learners' social and intellectual development. Exposure to Chinese tea art may therefore function as a form of cultural capital that strengthens learners' familiarity with Chinese cultural practices and reduces the perceived distance between learners and the target language community.

Despite growing recognition of the role of culture in language education, empirical research examining the relationship between Chinese tea art and Mandarin learning remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on the integration of Chinese festivals, music, films, calligraphy, and other cultural elements into language learning contexts, while Chinese tea art has received comparatively little scholarly attention. More importantly, previous studies on Mandarin learning motivation among non-native Mandarin learners have largely concentrated on instrumental factors such as employment opportunities, economic benefits, and academic advancement. Although recent studies have demonstrated that cultural interest and positive learning experiences can enhance motivation in Chinese language learning (Cheng et al., 2025; Alghameeti et al., 2025), little is known about how specific cultural practices such as Chinese tea art influence learners' motivation to study Mandarin, particularly among Malay university students in Malaysia.

This gap warrants further investigation because learners may be motivated not only by practical considerations but also by meaningful cultural experiences that foster a stronger connection with the target language community. Understanding learners' perceptions of Chinese tea art and their interest in tea-related cultural activities may offer valuable insights into how culture-based learning experiences can contribute to Mandarin language education. Such knowledge is particularly important in multilingual societies such as Malaysia, where intercultural understanding and cross-cultural engagement play an increasingly important role in higher education.

To the authors' knowledge, few empirical studies have explored Chinese tea art as a cultural factor influencing Mandarin learning motivation among Malay university students. Therefore, this study examines Malay university students' perceptions of Chinese tea art and investigates whether interest in tea art activities is associated with motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3). By doing so, the study contributes to the growing literature on culture-integrated language learning and offers empirical insights into the potential role of Chinese tea art as a motivational resource in Mandarin language education.

Research Purpose and Research Questions

This study investigates how engagement with Chinese tea art, as a form of cultural learning, shapes Malay university students' perceptions and motivation towards learning Mandarin as a third language (L3). By examining learners' responses to Chinese tea art and their interest in tea-related cultural activities, the study seeks to provide insights into the potential contribution of culture-based learning experiences to Mandarin language education. Guided by these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Malay university students perceive Chinese tea art positively?
2. To what extent does interest in Chinese tea art activities influence Malay university students' motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3)?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students' interest in Chinese tea art activities and their motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3)?

H₀: There is no significant relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation among Malay university students.

H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation among Malay university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation in L3 Mandarin Learning in the Malaysian Context

Motivation has long been recognised as one of the most influential factors in second and third language acquisition. Gardner's (1985) Socio-educational Model highlights the importance of attitudes towards the target language community, cultural openness, and integrative motivation in shaping language learning outcomes. Gardner (1985) emphasized that favourable attitudes towards the target language culture can encourage learners to invest greater effort in language learning and sustain their motivation over time. Building upon Gardner's work, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) argued that language learning motivation is dynamic and continuously shaped by learners' identities, emotions, learning environments, and sociocultural experiences. In multilingual educational settings, meaningful cultural experiences may strengthen learners' emotional attachment to the target language and sustain long-term motivation.

Recent studies on Chinese language learning have further highlighted the importance of motivation in determining learners' engagement and achievement. Cheng & Hu (2025) reported that learners with higher levels of intrinsic motivation were more likely to employ effective language learning strategies and demonstrate greater persistence in learning Chinese. This finding suggests that language learning motivation extends beyond instrumental purposes and may be enhanced through meaningful cultural engagement. On the other hand, in the Malaysian context, Mandarin is increasingly learned as a third language (L3) by students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, particularly Malay university students. This tendency is also evident in studies involving Malaysian learners, where Mandarin is frequently associated with employability, business opportunities, and socioeconomic mobility. Comparatively less attention has been given to the role of cultural experiences in shaping learners' motivation. While these factors remain important, the potential contribution of culture-based learning experiences to Mandarin learning motivation remains underexplored. The limited

empirical evidence in this area warrants further investigation into how exposure to Chinese cultural practices may shape learners' motivation to learn Mandarin.

Intercultural Competence, Cultural Engagement, and Language Learning Motivation

The integration of culture into language education has been closely associated with the development of intercultural competence and language learning motivation. Byram (1997) argued that successful language learning extends beyond linguistic proficiency and requires learners to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Kramsch (1993) emphasised that language and culture are inseparable, suggesting that culture should be embedded within language instruction rather than treated as supplementary content. Through meaningful cultural experiences, learners can understand language within its broader social and cultural context, thereby fostering deeper engagement with both the language and its associated culture.

The motivational value of cultural engagement has also been highlighted in language learning research. Gardner (1985) proposed that learners who develop positive attitudes towards the target language community are more likely to exhibit stronger integrative motivation. Building on this perspective, Dörnyei (2009) argued that meaningful cultural experiences can contribute to learners' future self-images as successful language users, thereby sustaining long-term motivation. Consequently, participation in culturally meaningful activities may not only enhance intercultural understanding but also encourage learners to invest greater effort in language learning. These perspectives suggest that culture-based learning experiences can serve as an important bridge between intercultural competence and language learning motivation.

Chinese Culture and Mandarin Learning

Culture also plays an inseparable role in language learning because language reflects cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and social practices. Consequently, scholars have increasingly emphasised the integration of cultural elements into language instruction to promote deeper learner engagement and intercultural understanding. Within the field of international Chinese language education, cultural learning has been recognised as an essential component of effective Mandarin instruction. Xu & Hu (2024) argued that cultural knowledge enables learners to understand not only linguistic forms but also the sociocultural meanings embedded within language use.

Recent studies have begun to explore the educational value of tea culture in Chinese language teaching. Cao (2025) argued that Chinese tea culture provides an effective cultural medium for international Chinese language education because it combines linguistic, cultural, and experiential learning dimensions. Similarly, Li (2022) highlighted that integrating tea culture into Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teaching can enhance learners' cultural awareness and increase their interest in learning Chinese. While both studies highlighted the educational value of tea culture, they primarily focused on curriculum design and classroom implementation. Empirical evidence demonstrating whether learners' interest in tea-related activities is associated with language learning motivation remains limited. Collectively, these studies indicate that tea culture may offer a practical avenue for connecting language learning with authentic cultural engagement, an aspect that is often difficult to achieve through conventional classroom instruction alone.

Experiential cultural activities may contribute positively to language learning motivation by increasing learners' emotional involvement and cultural curiosity. According to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, meaningful learning occurs when individuals actively engage in experiences and reflect upon them. Participation in tea art activities may therefore create opportunities for learners to interact with Chinese culture in a more personal and meaningful manner, thereby strengthening their motivation to learn Mandarin. Despite growing recognition of the role of culture in language education, empirical research examining the relationship between Chinese tea art and Mandarin learning motivation remains limited. Most previous studies have focused on cultural festivals, films, music, calligraphy, and traditional arts, while Chinese tea art has received comparatively less attention within language education research. This limitation highlights the need for further investigation into the educational potential of Chinese tea art as a cultural learning resource.

Chinese Tea Art as Cultural Capital

Another useful perspective for understanding the educational significance of Chinese tea art is provided by Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, experiences, competencies, and cultural resources that individuals acquire and utilise in social and educational contexts. From this perspective, engagement with Chinese tea art may function as a form of cultural capital that enhances learners' familiarity with Chinese cultural norms, values, and social practices. Through participation in tea-related activities, learners gain cultural knowledge that may facilitate intercultural understanding and reduce perceived cultural distance between themselves and members of the target language community. As learners become more familiar with the cultural practices associated with the target language, their willingness to engage with the language itself may also increase. Alghameeti et al. (2025) found that positive learning experiences and affective engagement were significantly associated with higher levels of motivation among learners of Chinese as a foreign language. Their findings suggest that learning environments that promote cultural engagement may contribute to stronger motivation and sustained language learning efforts.

In the context of Mandarin learning, Chinese tea art may serve as a bridge connecting learners to Chinese cultural traditions while simultaneously enhancing their appreciation of the language. By fostering cultural understanding and emotional engagement, tea art activities may contribute to the development of both integrative motivation and intercultural competence. This view is consistent with Byram's (1997) conception of intercultural competence, which emphasizes learners' ability to appreciate cultural differences while developing meaningful connections with members of the target language community. Through tea art activities, learners may acquire not only cultural knowledge but also greater intercultural sensitivity and openness towards Chinese culture. From a pedagogical perspective, tea art activities offer opportunities to move beyond textbook-based learning by allowing students to experience Chinese culture in a more interactive and personally meaningful way. Nevertheless, empirical evidence examining the relationship between students' interest in Chinese tea art and their motivation to learn Mandarin remains scarce, particularly within the Malaysian higher education context. While previous studies have highlighted the educational value of Chinese cultural activities, relatively little attention has been given to the role of Chinese tea art in motivating learners to study Mandarin. Therefore, this study examines Malay university students' perceptions of Chinese tea art and explores the relationship between interest in tea art activities and motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study draws primarily on Gardner's (1985) Socio-educational Model, which highlights the role of cultural attitudes and integrative motivation in language learning. Gardner argued that learners who develop positive attitudes towards the target language community and its culture are more likely to demonstrate stronger motivation and greater commitment to language learning. In the context of Mandarin as a third language (L3), engagement with Chinese cultural practices may therefore contribute to learners' motivation by fostering a stronger sense of cultural appreciation and connection.

Chinese tea art is viewed in this study as a form of cultural learning experience that introduces learners to Chinese values, traditions, and social practices. This perspective is further supported by Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasises learning through direct experience and reflection. Participation in tea art activities allows learners to engage with Chinese culture beyond the classroom, creating opportunities for meaningful cultural interaction. In addition, Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital suggests that exposure to culturally meaningful practices can enhance learners' cultural knowledge and intercultural competence, which may subsequently encourage greater engagement with the target language.

Drawing on these perspectives, the present study proposes that students who demonstrate stronger interest in Chinese tea art activities are more likely to exhibit higher levels of motivation to learn Mandarin. Figure 1 below presents the conceptual framework of the study, which illustrates the proposed relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation.

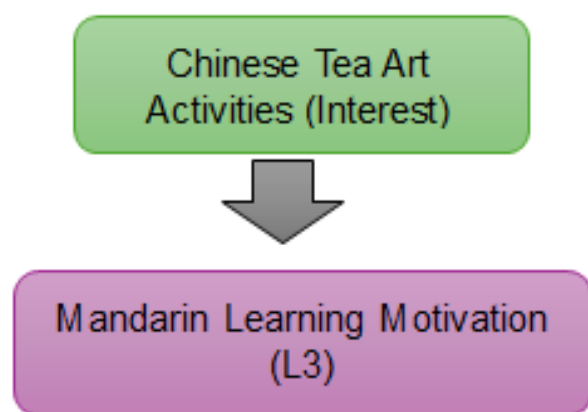


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative survey design to examine Malay university students' perceptions of Chinese tea art and its relationship with motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3). A survey approach was considered appropriate because it enables data to be collected from a relatively large group of respondents and facilitates the examination of patterns, attitudes, and relationships among variables in a systematic manner. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the quantitative design provided a useful means of assessing students' perceptions, levels of interest, and learning motivation within a higher education context.

The study involved 149 Malay university students enrolled in Mandarin language courses at a Malaysian public university. The respondents represented learners from various academic programmes who were studying Mandarin as a third language. As the study focused on non-native Mandarin learners, Malay students were selected to provide insights into how exposure to Chinese cultural practices, particularly Chinese tea art, may influence their learning experiences and motivation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections. Section A gathered respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, programme of study, and Mandarin learning experience. Section B measured students' perceptions of Chinese tea art, while Section C examined their interest in Chinese tea art activities and motivation to learn Mandarin. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

The perception scale assessed respondents' understanding of Chinese tea art, cultural appreciation, openness towards Chinese cultural practices, and willingness to participate in tea-related activities. The motivation scale included items related to both integrative and instrumental orientations towards Mandarin learning, while the interest scale focused on respondents' willingness to engage in tea art activities and explore Chinese culture through tea-related experiences.

Prior to the main analysis, the internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results indicated satisfactory to excellent reliability across all constructs. The perception scale recorded a Cronbach's alpha value of .851, while the interest in Chinese tea art activities scale yielded an alpha value of .951. The Mandarin learning motivation scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency with an alpha value of .960. The overall instrument achieved a Cronbach's alpha value of .955, indicating a high level of reliability and suggesting that the questionnaire was suitable for measuring the constructs under investigation.

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to describe respondents' demographic characteristics, perceptions of Chinese tea art, and interest in tea art activities. To examine the relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation, Pearson correlation analysis was employed. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings in relation to the research questions and the proposed hypothesis. The results are organized into four main areas: respondents' demographic characteristics, perceptions of Chinese tea art, interest in Chinese tea art activities, and the relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 149 Malay university students participated in the study. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 149)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	10.1
	Female	134	89.9
Age	18–20 years	54	36.2
	21–23 years	91	61.1
	24 years	4	2.7
Mandarin Learning Experience	No prior experience	49	32.9
	Currently taking Mandarin (Level 1)	62	41.6
	Currently taking Mandarin (Level 2)	8	5.4
	Currently taking Mandarin (Level 3)	14	9.4
	More than 2 years of learning experience	16	10.7
	Total:	149	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of gender, age, and Mandarin learning experience. Most of the respondents were female students (89.9%), while male students accounted for 10.1% of the sample. In terms of age, most respondents were between 21 and 23 years old (61.1%), followed by those aged 18 to 20 years (36.2%). Only a small proportion of the respondents were 24 years old (2.7%). Regarding Mandarin learning experience, 41.6% of the respondents were currently enrolled in a Level 1 Mandarin course, while 32.9% reported having no prior experience in learning Mandarin. The remaining respondents were either enrolled in higher-level Mandarin courses or had more than two years of Mandarin learning experience. Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the respondents represented diverse Mandarin learning backgrounds, making them appropriate participants for examining perceptions of Chinese tea art and motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3).

Perceptions of Chinese Tea Art

The first research question sought to examine Malay university students' perceptions of Chinese tea art. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the perception items.

Table 2 Malay University Students' Perceptions of Chinese Tea Art (N = 149)

Item	M	SD
I have basic knowledge of the history of Chinese tea art.	2.69	1.05
I understand the purpose and philosophy behind Chinese tea ceremonies.	2.62	1.04
Chinese tea art is an interesting aspect of Chinese culture to learn.	4.05	0.98
I respect the values and customs reflected in Chinese tea art.	4.24	0.86
Chinese tea art can enrich my understanding of Chinese culture.	4.13	0.82
I feel comfortable participating in Chinese tea art activities.	4.07	0.82
Chinese tea art does not conflict with my identity as a Malay/Bumiputera.	4.05	0.90
I am open to learning more about Chinese tea art.	4.18	0.85
Overall Perception Score:	3.76	0.64

The findings indicate that Malay university students generally held positive perceptions of Chinese tea art ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.64$). The highest-rated items were respect for the values and customs embodied in Chinese tea art ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.86$), openness to learning more about Chinese tea art ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.85$), and the belief that Chinese tea art can enhance understanding of Chinese culture ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.82$). These results suggest that respondents were receptive to Chinese tea art as a cultural practice and viewed it as a meaningful avenue for learning about Chinese culture. At the same time, respondents reported relatively limited knowledge of the historical background ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.05$) and philosophical foundations ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.04$) of Chinese tea art. This pattern is noteworthy. Although students may not possess extensive knowledge of tea culture, they nevertheless demonstrated a willingness to learn more about it and expressed appreciation for the cultural values associated with the practice. Such findings imply that positive cultural attitudes can develop even when learners' factual knowledge remains limited.

These results lend support to Gardner's (1985) proposition that favourable attitudes towards the target language culture can encourage learners to engage more positively with language learning. In the present study, respondents appeared to recognise Chinese tea art not merely as a traditional cultural practice but also as a culturally enriching experience that promotes greater appreciation of Chinese culture. This observation is particularly relevant in the Malaysian context, where Mandarin is often learned for instrumental reasons such as employment and economic opportunities. The results suggest that cultural factors may also play an important role in shaping learners' attitudes towards Mandarin and its associated cultural traditions.

Besides, the findings further resonate with the work of Cao (2025) and Li (2022), who highlighted the educational value of tea culture in Chinese language education. Both studies argued that tea culture offers learners opportunities to engage with Chinese traditions in a more meaningful and experiential manner. The present findings extend this line of research by showing that Malay university students generally view Chinese tea art positively, even when their understanding of its historical and philosophical dimensions remains limited.

From the perspective of Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, engagement with Chinese tea art may provide learners with access to cultural knowledge and experiences that enhance intercultural understanding. As learners become more familiar with Chinese cultural practices, they may develop greater confidence and willingness to engage with the language and culture of the target community. Consequently, Chinese tea art appears to have value not only as a cultural activity but also as a potential educational resource that supports intercultural learning and language development.

Interest in Chinese Tea Art Activities

The second research question examined students' interest in Chinese tea art activities. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Interest in Chinese Tea Art Activities (N = 149)

Item	M	SD
I am interested in joining Chinese tea art classes or demonstrations.	4.18	0.81
Chinese tea art activities make me want to learn more about Chinese culture.	4.17	0.82
I am willing to spend time participating in Chinese tea art activities.	4.09	0.85
I participate in Chinese tea art activities because they are enjoyable.	4.11	0.87
Overall Interest Score:	4.14	0.78

The results presented in Table 3 indicate a high level of interest in Chinese tea art activities among the respondents ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.78$). The highest mean score was recorded for students' interest in participating in tea art classes or demonstrations ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.81$), followed closely by the belief that tea art activities encourage them to learn more about Chinese culture ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.82$). The respondents also expressed a willingness to devote time to tea art-related activities ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.85$) and generally viewed such activities as enjoyable ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.87$). These findings suggest that Chinese tea art has considerable potential as a culture-based educational activity that can attract student participation and promote greater cultural engagement.

This finding supports Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes the value of learning through direct experience. By participating in tea art activities, students are exposed to Chinese culture in a more meaningful and engaging manner. The findings are also consistent with those of Cao (2025) and Li (2022), who highlighted the educational value of tea culture in Chinese language teaching. The present study further demonstrates that learners themselves are receptive to tea-related cultural activities. From Gardner's (1985) perspective, such interest may reflect a positive orientation towards the target language culture, which can strengthen motivation to learn Mandarin. Likewise, Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital suggests that tea art activities can broaden learners' cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness. Overall, the findings suggest that Chinese tea art has the potential to serve as a cultural bridge that promotes deeper engagement with both Chinese culture and Mandarin learning.

Relationship Between Interest in Chinese Tea Art Activities and Mandarin Learning Motivation

The third research question investigated whether a significant relationship exists between students' interest in Chinese tea art activities and their motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3). This section also will test the hypothesis of the study:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation among Malay university students.

H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation among Malay university students.

Table 4 Pearson Correlation Between Interest in Chinese Tea Art Activities and Mandarin

Learning Motivation

Variables	r	p
Interest in Chinese Tea Art Activities ↔ Mandarin Learning Motivation	.744**	.000
r = .744, p < .001		

Based on the results in Table 4 above, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between students' interest in Chinese tea art activities and their motivation to learn Mandarin as L3($r = .744$, $p < .001$). According to Cohen (1988), a correlation coefficient exceeding .50 indicates a large effect size. Therefore, the relationship observed in this study can be considered strong. This finding suggests that students who demonstrate greater interest in Chinese tea art activities tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation to learn Mandarin.

The results also indicate that engagement with cultural activities associated with the target language may positively influence language learning motivation. Chinese tea art appears to serve as a meaningful cultural gateway through which learners develop a deeper appreciation of Chinese culture and a stronger motivation to learn Mandarin. This finding is consistent with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which posits that positive attitudes towards the target language culture can enhance learners' motivation and engagement in language learning. It also supports previous studies suggesting that cultural exposure and intercultural experiences can foster greater interest and sustained motivation in foreign and third language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, indicating that a significant positive relationship exists between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation among Malay university students. In a nutshell, the findings of the study indicate that although students possess only a moderate level of knowledge regarding the history and philosophy of Chinese tea art, they generally hold positive perceptions of Chinese tea art. The respondents also demonstrated a high level of interest in participating in tea art-related activities. Furthermore, the results revealed a strong positive relationship between interest in Chinese tea art and motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3). This suggests that Chinese tea art has the potential to serve as an effective cultural learning medium that enhances learners' motivation and engagement in Mandarin language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Malay university students' perceptions of Chinese tea art and explored the relationship between interest in tea art activities and motivation to learn Mandarin as a third language (L3). The findings revealed that respondents generally viewed Chinese tea art positively, particularly in terms of cultural appreciation, openness to intercultural learning, and willingness to participate in tea-related activities. Although their knowledge of the historical and philosophical aspects of tea art was relatively limited, they demonstrated considerable interest in engaging with tea-related cultural experiences. More importantly, the study identified a strong positive relationship between interest in Chinese tea art activities and Mandarin learning motivation. This finding suggests that cultural engagement may play an important role in fostering learners' motivation and strengthening their connection with the target language and culture. The results support Gardner's (1985) view that positive attitudes towards the target language culture can enhance motivation while also highlighting the value of experiential cultural learning proposed by Kolb (1984).

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that cultural activities such as tea appreciation workshops, tea ceremonies, and other experiential learning opportunities can complement conventional Mandarin instruction and create more engaging learning environments. Beyond language learning, such activities may also promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of Chinese tea art not only as a cultural practice but also as a meaningful educational resource that supports motivation, intercultural competence, and culture-

based Mandarin learning. Overall, this study contributes to the growing literature on culture-integrated Mandarin language education by demonstrating that tea art-related cultural engagement is positively associated with Mandarin learning motivation among non-native Mandarin learners.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study should be interpreted considering several limitations. The study was conducted among Malay university students from a single public university, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other learner populations and educational settings. In addition, the quantitative design captured respondents' perceptions and self-reported motivation at a single point in time, without examining their actual learning experiences in greater depth. Future research could incorporate qualitative or mixed-method approaches to explore how learners experience culture-based activities and how such experiences influence their motivation over time. Further studies may also examine other forms of Chinese cultural practices, such as calligraphy, traditional festivals, music, or martial arts, to determine their potential contribution to Mandarin learning motivation and intercultural development.

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