

CHINESE GANGSTERISM AMONG MALAYSIANS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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CHINESE GANGSTERISM AMONG MALAYSIANS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science in
Forensic Science (Honours)**

February 2026

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “CHINESE GANGSTERISM AMONG MALAYSIANS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH” is genuine record of the research work done by Mr. Samuel Peter A/L Rames during the period of September 2025 to June 2026 under my guidance. I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly dissertation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation to be submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Science (Honours) (Forensic Science).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated and duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at Universiti Sains Malaysia or other institutions. I grant Universiti Sains Malaysia the right to use the dissertation for teaching, research, and promotional purposes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B40	Bottom 40% of Malaysian household income
DoSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
EG01	Ex-Chinese Gangster 1
EG02	Ex-Chinese Gangster 2
EG03	Ex-Chinese Gangster 3
EG04	Ex-Chinese Gangster 4
EP01	Ex-policeman 1
FYP	Final Year Project
GST	General Strain Theory
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
M40	Middle 40% of Malaysian household income
PCF	Participant Consent Form
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PO01	Policeman 1
PO02	Policeman 2
PO03	Policeman 3
PO04	Policeman 4
RMP	Royal Malaysian Police
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SSIG 1	Semi-structured Interview Guide 1
SSIG 2	Semi-structured Interview Guide 2
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
POCA	Prevention of Crime Act 1959
SOSMA	Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012

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CHINESE GANGSTERISM AMONG MALAYSIANS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneroka pengalaman hidup gangster Cina di Malaysia, memfokuskan di Kuantan, Pahang, menyatakan sebab kebanyakan orang kekal dalam ahli kongsi gelap untuk tempoh yang lama sebelum memutuskan untuk berhenti. Perspektif daripada bekas ahli kongsi gelap dan pegawai polis telah diperoleh dan dianalisis. Metodologi penyelidikan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi (temu bual separa struktur) untuk menyelidiki intipati pengalaman individu ini. Analisis tematik dan sumatif transkrip temu bual menggunakan perisian NVivo 15 mendedahkan enam tema utama dan enam tema yang muncul di bawah tiga bahagian utama: 1) Faktor untuk menyertai geng, 2) Sebab untuk kekal dalam geng, dan 3) Pengetahuan tentang ahli kongsi gelap.

Kajian ini dilakukan kerana kekurangan kajian mengenai ahli kongsi gelap Cina. Kajian ini memberikan pandangan berharga tentang pengalaman hidup ahli kongsi gelap Cina di Malaysia. Kajian ini menyerlahkan dunia ahli kongsi gelap Cina yang tidak diucapkan di Kuantan dan juga memberikan ideologi yang berbeza mengenai ahli kongsi gelap. Tidak seperti kes dan ideologi ahli kongsi gelap biasa yang diberikan oleh ahli kongsi gelap di seluruh dunia, ahli kongsi gelap Cina di Kuantan mempunyai perspektif yang bertentangan dengan ahli kongsi gelap dan aktiviti geng. Bekas ahli kongsi gelap dan pegawai polis telah memberikan pandangan dan perspektif mereka mengenai perkara ini.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of Chinese gangsters in Malaysia, focusing in Kuantan, Pahang, highlighting the reasons to why most people remain in gangs for a long period before deciding to quit gangsterism. Perspectives from ex-gangsters and police officers were obtained and analysed. The research methodology employed a phenomenological approach (semi-structural interview) to delve into the essence of these individuals' experiences. Thematic and summative analysis of interview transcripts using NVivo 15 software revealed six main themes and six emerged themes under three main sections: 1) Factors to join gangs, 2) Reasons to remain in gangs, and 3) Knowledge on gangsterism. This study is done due to the lack of studies on Chinese gangsterism. It provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of Chinese gangsterism in Malaysia.

This study highlights the unspoken world of Chinese gangsterism in Kuantan and also provides a whole different ideology on gangsterism. Unlike usual gangsterism cases and ideology given by gangsters all around the world, the Chinese gangsters in Kuantan have a complete opposite perspective on gangsterism and gang activities. The ex-gangsters and police officers had provided their insights and perspectives regarding this matter.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This undergraduate qualitative final year project (FYP) thesis aims to explore the experiences of Chinese gangsters in Malaysia; focusing on why they decide to join, continue to remain in their respective gangs, and their turning point to leave their gangs. This research attempts to address the worrying concern of Chinese gangsterism among the community in Pahang. In this thesis, several issues will be covered. They are the problem statement, research objectives, a brief literature review, theoretical framework, methodology and data analyses.

1.1 Background

This section covers pertinent backgrounds of the study. First is about gangsterism among the Chinese in Malaysia. Second is the relationship between socio-economic factors and gang involvement. Third is the turning point from gangsterism.

1.1.1 Gangsterism among the Chinese in Malaysia

The opening of a mining port in Larut, Perak back in 1848 by Long Jaafar was the starting point of Chinese gangsterism as mine workers in Perak (Nazri & Mokhtar, 2024). He brought these miners via his agents, Low Sam and Chung Keng Kwee who were the leaders of Hai San triad group (Nazri & Mokhtar, 2024). Hai San, a well-known Chinese secret society was both influential in mining and selling of tin during the late 19th century in Malaya (Hoong, 2024). They are originally from China who were brought to Malaya as immigrant labourers by the British (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022). They then formed secret societies that began taking on the role of governing the Chinese community (Seng, 2022).

In contemporary Malaysia, Chinese organised crime continues to operate within both metropolitan and peri-urban areas, engaging in activities such as extortion, illegal gambling, and drug dealing (Wilson, Rajasakran, Sinnappan, & Periyayya, 2024). Prevention of Crime Act 1959 had aided in crime prevention where it allows detention of suspected criminals

without a trial (Sudramoorthy, 2024). However, the law was lifted and arguably led to the increase in crime rates (Sudramoorthy, 2024).

Previous researches like Suppiah, Muthusamy, and Ismail (2021), and Raviechandran & Tharshini (2023) on gangsterism among Malaysian youth had focused predominantly on Indian youths, and there are not many studies on Chinese gangsters. These two studies highlighted factors such as family disorganization, peer influence, and economic difficulties as explanatory variables for youth involvement in gangs. A qualitative study by Zakaria, et al., (2022) investigated the motivational factors of deviant behaviour among adolescence in institutional settings in Malaysia and discovered that issues related to family dynamics and peer social influence were pivotal factors associated with delinquent.

A study conducted by Durairaja, Mat Saat, and Kamaluddin (2019), examined the criminogenic and psychological antecedents of Indian gangsterism in Malaysia and concluded that low self-control and high impulsivity were prevalent among gangsters. Extrapolated, these findings suggest the same antecedents could drive Chinese youths towards gangsterism, although studies with the Chinese community are scarce.

1.1.2 Socio-economic factors that led to gang involvement

When scrutinizing gang culture in Malaysia, specifically the Chinese community; socio-economic factors like economic disparities, unemployment and poor living conditions seem to play huge roles in enrolment in gangsterism (TheReporter, 2022). Earlier, Morgan and Suhaili (2020) opined that gang involvement continues to be a significant problem, especially among minority groups where socio-economic inequalities are more pronounced. In data obtained from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM, 2025), the Chinese community is considered a minority in Kuantan.

Socio-economic reasons had been one of the most cited causes to why people turn to gangsterism, especially youngsters (Maigemu & Adamu, 2024). Most youngsters turn to gangsterism to obtain some perks they would not receive as youths which includes financial support (Maigemu & Adamu, 2024). Spinks (2024) highlighted that socio-economical factors are one of the leading factors in gangsterism involvement. Spinks (2024) discussed that gang activities were often being viewed as an alternative source of income for some people seeking pathways to financial stability.

Vargas (2023) had earlier opined that socio-economic factors lead to crime, specifically poverty, unemployment and inequality. Vargas (2023) emphasised the role of community resources including access to healthcare, mental health services, and job opportunities; in mitigating the socioeconomic pressures that often lead to criminal behaviour. Vargas (2023) also suggested that the frustration and relative deprivations experienced by individuals in disadvantaged communities can lead to increased criminal behaviours.

Despite the above stated factors, not all gangsters are uneducated or poor. For example, in Edmonton, Canada, some join gangs to protect their families from local gangs or their rivals (Edmonton Police Service, 2024). The underlying factors of gang involvement among the Chinese in Kuantan may differ. At this point, these factors are still underexplored.

1.1.3 The turning point from gangsterism

Turning over a new leaf and leaving a person's comfort zone is often a hard choice to make as it causes the person to think of many possibilities and consequences of their actions. According to Marasan, Puteh, and Kassim (2024) certain moments can change a person's life trajectory to either positive or negative. For example, Jasni, Abu Bakar, Omar, and Nasir (2022), had

earlier shown that ex-prisoners who experienced age-graded life events such as marriage, stable work, parenthood, and other events; later exit from criminal lifestyles.

Sometimes, to turn away from a life of crime, people may go through hardships or face problems as their gangs do not want the person to leave the lifestyle. For example, one of the participants is Dziewanski's (2021) study was stabbed, shot at thrice, beaten and hospitalized twice just because he wanted to quit gangsterism. Dziewanski (2021) also opined that adapting normal lifestyle once leaving behind gang life is hard but doable.

Although contemporary literature on gangsterism do discuss about the Malaysian context, studies on Chinese gangsters leaving their respective gangs are very limited. Studies like Marasan, Puteh, and Kassim (2024) and Jasni, et. al. (2022) focused more on ex-inmates' return to criminal lives but not gangsters who decide to leave the criminal life while being free.

1.2 Problem statement and study rationale

There is one problem statement for this FYP. The problem statement underlying this study is the limited body of research on the factors that influence Chinese gangsters in Kuantan to remain within their respective gangs. This gap underscores the need for a focused examination that can contribute to a clearer understanding of Chinese gangsterism in Malaysia.

While studies have been undertaken on gangsterism among other minority ethnic groups, the Chinese context remains largely unexplored. For instance, studies by Durairaja, Mat Saat, and Kamaluddin (2019), Morgan and Suhaili (2020), and Durai (2020); examined Indian gangsters in Malaysia, focusing on the crimes committed and the geographic areas of their operations. By contrast, there has been little attention given to Chinese gangsterism, particularly in relation to the factors that sustain membership over time.

Existing research that comes close to this issue has predominantly concentrated on deterrence and disengagement, often in international settings. For example, van der Westhuizen and Gawulawo (2021) investigated the reasons youths in Cape Town either avoided joining gangs or chose to exit them. Forkby, Alstam, and Örnö (2023) opined that tension and stress in gangs make people to not engage in gangsterism activities. However, studies that specifically address why gang members persist in their involvement for prolonged periods before eventually leaving, remain absent.

A related aspect underlying the phenomenon of gangsterism is the mental health of individuals engaged in gangsterism (Bacak, DeWitt, & Reid, 2021). Their findings indicated that gang involvement is often accompanied by psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and paranoid ideation (Bacak, DeWitt, & Reid, 2021). While this highlights the individual costs of gangsterism, it does not directly explain the persistence of gang membership among Chinese individuals in Malaysia.

1.3 Research Question

This section focuses on the research questions that will be answered by individual respondents using a semi structured interview guide (SSIG).

1. What caused individuals to remain in a gang?
2. What was the turning point that made individuals leave their respective gangs?
3. What are participants' thoughts on Chinese gangsterism in Kuantan?

1.4 Objectives

This section states the objectives of this qualitative research. First, is the general objective. Second, are three specific objectives.

1.4.1 General Objective

To investigate the life of Chinese gangsters in Kuantan.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To understand participants' perceptions on Chinese gangsterism in Kuantan.
2. To explore what the gangsters obtain when they engage in gangsterism activities.
3. To investigate the reasons that made (or will make) gangsters leave their respective gangs.

1.5 Operational Definition

Three terms are defined in this section. The first is gangsterism. Second, is the term gang members. Finally, ex-policeman is defined contextualized to this FYP.

1.5.1 Gangsterism

There is no common definition of the term gangster in research done previously. For this FYP, the terms gang, gangster, and gang members; are defined based on previous local studies. It is also defined by referring to the Malaysian Penal Code (Act 574) and other laws. The study on Indian gangsterism in Malaysia by Durairaja, Mat Saat, and Kamaluddin (2019), defined 'gangsterism' as a dangerous and illegal phenomenon involved by a group of people having the same criminal objective. These people commit criminal acts and violent acts mostly as a group.

Another research on gangsterism among Indian youths in Malaysia was by Morgan and Suhaili (2020), who defined gang as a criminal group. The term 'criminal group' brings the meaning of a group of more than two people for a specified period of time where the group performs one or more violent and criminal acts that are punishable by the law (United Nations, 2020).

The Malaysian Penal Code (Act 574) defines the term gang somewhat differently. Section 130u of Act 574 states:

“Organized criminal group means a group of two or more persons, acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious offences, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a material benefit, power or influence.”

Serious offense in the above legislation were described by Durairaja, Mat Saat, and Kamaluddin, (2019). Some of the serious offenses mentioned by Durairaja, Mat Saat, and Kamaluddin (2019) are armed robbery, street fights, gang fights, theft, and drug related crimes. Such crimes bring danger to the offender and people in his surroundings, but mostly to victims.

Section 391 of Act 574 explains the term gangsterism with references to a crime committed by a group of people. This is known as gang-robbery. This section states that:

“When two or more persons conjointly commit or attempt to commit a robbery, or where the whole number of persons conjointly committing or attempting to commit a robbery, and of persons present and aiding such commission or attempt, amount to two or more, every person so committing, attempting, or aiding, is said to commit gang-robbery”

The Societies Act 1966 (Act 832) provides a definition for gangsterism. Under section 5 of Act 832, a gang is defined as a group that has not been declared lawful by the authorised Minister. Any groups that are not declared or acknowledged by the authorised Minister is a gang.

Gangsterism is deemed as an unlawful group in section 41 of Act 832. This section states that:

(1) For the purposes of this Act any of the following societies shall be an unlawful society, that is to say
(a) a society or a branch thereof which has been declared unlawful by the Minister under section 5

(b) a society or a branch thereof which is not registered under section 7

(c) a branch of a registered society, where the branch was established in contravention of subsection 12(1), or continues to exist in contravention of the proviso to subsection 12(3)

(d) a society or a branch thereof which has had its registration cancelled under section 2a, 13, 14 or 16.

**(2) Where a society is unlawful under subsection (1), or its registration is cancelled under this Act, every branch of the society shall immediately thereupon be unlawful and the approval of the Registrar for its establishment shall be deemed to be revoked, and where a branch of a society is unlawful under subsection (1) or the approval of the Registrar for its establishment is deemed to be revoked as aforesaid under this subsection, every branch subordinate to that branch shall immediately thereupon be unlawful and the approval of the Registrar for its establishment shall be deemed to be revoked.*

The same act (section 52, Act 832) talks about the Triad societies. Triad societies were the original cult, with the virtuous aim of “Obey Heaven, and Act Righteously” (Comber, 1956: 147). This section says:

(1) Every society, whether it is registered or not, which uses a Triad ritual shall be deemed to be an unlawful society.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) a Triad ritual means any ritual commonly used by Triad Societies, any ritual closely resembling any such ritual and any part of such ritual.

(3) Any person who is or acts as a member of a Triad society or attends a meeting thereof or is found in possession of, or having the custody or control of any books, accounts, writings, lists of members, seals, banners or insignia of, or relating to, any Triad society whether such society is established in Malaysia or not, shall be guilty of an offence and

shall be liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding fifteen thousand ringgit.

Referring to the above Acts, definitions of ‘gangster’ are dissimilar across Acts and sections. In Malaysia, most research about gangsterism did not explain the definition of gangsterism. As a reputable source, Britannica (2024) defined ‘gangster’ as a member of an organisation that makes money illegally and systematically by performing illegal acts.

Despite these explanations, not all gang activities are considered illegal as there are also some gangs that give back to the community. However, being in a gang is illegal when viewed from the point of view of Act 574. The study by Morgan and Suhaili (2020) on Indian gangsters in Penang is referred. There are nine types of gangsterism practices: fights, selling and distributing illicit goods, murder, fundraising activities, robbery and theft, gambling, hanging out and enjoying, special ceremony for gang members, and also their annual meetings (Morgan & Suhaili, 2020).

The term gangsterism is essential in this FYP as it explains the major focus of this study. Gangsterism is essential to be explored to understand gangsters and gang related activities. The presence of such unlawful societies are the starting point of this study.

1.5.2 Gang Members

Each gang members has at least one form of identification on themselves that show which gang they belong to (Moorthy, Kamaluddin, & Inbaraj, 2020). By entering a gang, an individual’s involvement in gangsterism activities can be enhanced by evidencing that identification (Lauger, 2020). This portrays that gang members’ involvements in gangs keeps the gangsterism activities going and hence posing new threats to the community. Malaysian Laws have other

ways to define gang members. Section 130v of Corrosive and Explosive Substances and Offensive Weapons Act 1958 (Act 357) states that:

*“(1) Whoever is a member of an organized criminal group shall be punished with imprisonment for a term * of not less than five years and not more than twenty years. (2) Until the contrary is proved, a person shall be presumed to be a member of an organized criminal group where— (a) such person can be identified as belonging to an organized criminal group; or (b) such person is found with a scheduled weapon as specified under the Corrosive and Explosive Substances and Offensive Weapons Act 1958.”*

From the above act it is stated clearly that any individual who is a member of an organised criminal group, he or she can be labelled as gang members; as an organised criminal group is often linked to gangsterism.

Being involved in a gang will cause the gang members to be punished. Section 400 of Penal Code (Act 574) explains that:

“Whoever shall belong to a gang of persons associated for the purpose of habitually committing gang-robbery, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to twenty years, and shall also be liable to whipping.”

This specific legislation states that gang members are not only tied to the gangs who are involved in drug cases, cartel cases, and other heavy cases; but also, to other cases like robbery, stealing, robbery with murder, and many more. This section explains that gang members are the ones who are involved in committing crime acts with the same motive. Herein, it is shown that the term gang members bring the meaning of any individuals who are involved together in one gangsterism activity.

1.5.3 Policemen/Ex-policemen

The term ex-policemen refer to men who had either retired willingly from the police force or due to disciplinary actions. Specific to this FYP, the ex-policemen who will be interviewed are those who willingly retire from service. Cambridge Dictionary (2025) opined that the term “ex-policemen” are people who have retired or permanently stopped working as policemen.

In the Malaysian context, the application of the term “ex-policemen” is similar. According to section 2 of the Malaysian Police Act 1967 (Act 344), the term police is: “*police officer means any member of the Royal Malaysia Police*”. This FYP only includes ex-policemen who have retired from their service; they are not dismissed due to disciplinary behaviours.

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are two significances for this study. First is the better understanding of reasons gangsters remain in their respective gangs for a long period of time. Existing Malaysian studies by Durai (2020), Harun, Shaari, and Ahmad (2020), and Moorthy, Kamaluddin, and Inbaraj (2020) tend to focus on the reason that made people leave their gangsterism life. However, studies in international settings by Dziewanski (2021), Maigemu and Adamu (2024), and Edmonton Police Service (2024) had extended research in this area to include reasons why gangsters remain in their gangs. Therefore, this current study is significant as it allows a deeper understanding regarding the life of ex-Chinese gangsters in Malaysia

Second is to share information to the police regarding the lived experiences of ex-gangsters to aid case management. It is important for the law enforcers to understand the life of the Chinese gangsters to aid case managements or relevant investigations in the future. This current study would play an important role in helping the police to help people obtain justice post gang or syndicate victimisation.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, three issues are covered. First are the theoretical framework and relevant theories that are associated with this study. Second is past research done on gangsterism in Malaysia. Third is the identified gaps in knowledge.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical framework that guides this FYP. Two theories are discussed. First is General Strain Theory (GST) (Agnew, 1992). Second is Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Akers, 1998).

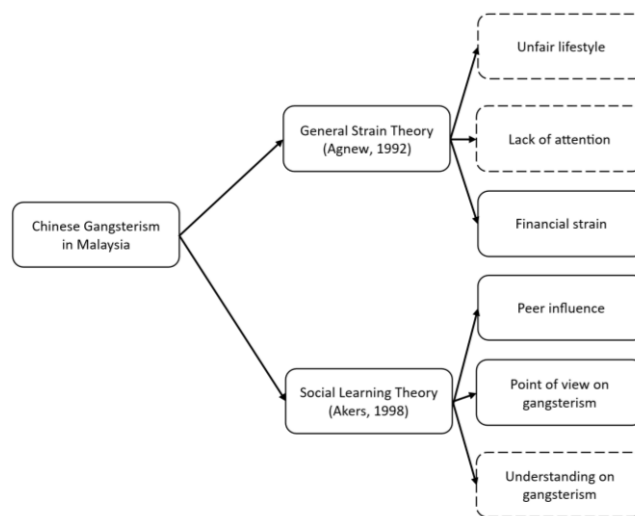


Figure 1: The proposed theoretical framework

2.1.1 General Strain Theory

General Strain Theory (GST) was developed by an American sociologist, Robert Agnew in 1992. According to GST (Agnew, 1992), various experiential strains leave negative impacts on people that made them to get involved in gangsterism activities. In other words, strains could cause negative emotions. Agnew (1992) stated that people arguably are pressured into delinquency by negative affective states such as socio-economical strains, familial strains, and environmental strains.

It is essential to understand that poverty is one of the leading strains when it comes to involvement in gangsterism (Harun, Shaari, & Ahmad, 2020). People who live in poverty are

motivated by the amount of money a gangster make and seeing it as easy money make them more motivated to get involved in gangsterism activities (Spinks, 2024). Some individuals get involved in theft and robbery to cope with their financial situations (Campbell, 2024).

Agnew (1992) earlier theorised that people who have anger issues and relatable emotions are more pressured into delinquency by negative affective states. These negative affective states might prompt people to make use of illegitimate channels of goal achievements and manage their negative thoughts with the intake of illicit drugs (Agnew, 1992). This is known as emotional coping (Agnew, 1992).

Agnew (2007) suggested that there are three types of strain faced by people in their lives: 1) financial strain, 2) lack of attention, and 3) unfair lifestyle. For this FYP, only 'Financial Strain' is explored. Under financial strain, people from lower class tend to portray more violent behaviour when compared with those from upper classes (Agnew, 2007). Difference in classes also contributes to unfair lifestyle differences.

2.1.2 Social Learning Theory

Akers (1998) proposed that the learning process of an individual operates within a framework of social structure, social interaction, and situational context. The central element of the Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Akers, 1998) is that it focuses on how an individual's attitudes, values, and orientations toward crime are developed and reinforced. These attitudes and values influence whether a person engages in conforming or non-conforming behaviour, as individuals often formulate personal justifications for their actions, whether good or bad, and may exhibit behaviours in response to specific situations (Akers, 1998, as cited in Akers, 2009).

Building on this premise, Akers (1998) argued that an individual's engagement in criminal behaviour is strongly influenced by social interactions and associations. People are more likely to engage in crime when they frequently interact with others who have committed offences, provide rationalisation for criminal behaviour, or act as deviant role models. The strength, frequency, and duration of these associations significantly increase the likelihood of one's involvement in criminal activities (Akers, 1998, as cited in Opp, 2020). Furthermore, Akers (1998) identified several conditions under which such violations occur: (1) when an individual is differentially associated with others who commit or approve of criminal acts, (2) when violent behaviour is perceived differently by the individual, and (3) when violent acts are defined as acceptable or justified. Thus, according to SLT (Akers, 1998; Akers, 2009), the probability of committing crime is shaped not only by present social influences but also by prior learning experiences related to deviant behaviour.

For this FYP, only two domains of SLT (Akers, 1998) are explored. These are peer influence and point of view on gangsterism. These two domains were selected because Akers (1998) theorised that the involvement of a person in gangsterism activities are caused by their peers and their knowledge on gangsterism.

2.2 Past Studies on Gangsterism in Malaysia

This section discusses two issues. First is the screening method used for this study. Second is the previous studies on Chinese Gangsterism in Malaysia.

2.2.1 Screening Method

Figure 1 is referred. Articles were searched in the Google Scholar database using specific keywords related to this FYP. The specific keywords that were used were 'Gangsterism,' 'Gangsters,' 'Chinese' and 'In Malaysia.' A total of 1370 articles were found from the database. Initial searching yield 1100 articles related to the title as the initial searching involves checking

the keywords and abstract of the papers to remove studies that do not focus on Gangsterism using the advanced searching tool of Google Scholar.

The second screening method that involves checking for articles based in Malaysia yielded 172 articles which eliminated non-Chinese related studies. Chinese Gangsterism all over the world were still included in the second screening. Next, there were only 19 articles that made past the third screening which eliminates the studies that did not take place in Malaysia. Finally, 16 articles were chosen to be reviewed for this literature review.

Figure 1: Screening criteria for systematic literature review

Screening Method	
Date range of publication	2018-2023
Study design type	Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews)
Study population	Study that focuses on Chinese individuals in Malaysia
Study location	Studies that take place in Malaysia

2.2.2 Previous Studies on Chinese Gangsterism in Malaysia

This study aims to understand more about Chinese gangsterism in Kuantan while focusing more on the reason they remain in their respective gangs before leaving them. Before that, the status quo of gangsterism in Malaysia should be reviewed first for present day knowledge to identify the knowledge gaps. Gangsterism in Malaysia can be divided into two subtopics. First is the profile of Chinese gangsters in Malaysia. Second is the reason that made the Chinese community engage themselves in gang activities.

2.2.2(a) Profile of Chinese Gangsters in Malaysia

There are very limited studies done on Chinese gangsterism in Malaysia. This section discusses two main topics. First is the culture of Chinese gangs in Malaysia. Second is the identification or markers of Chinese gangsters that are present in Malaysia.

Chinese gangs have different approaches when it comes to gang activities when compared to Indian gangs. An infamous gang called Gang 04 was originated from Bentong, Pahang by a Chinese gangster, Wah Kee who was also a key person in training P. Kalimuthu or known as Bentong Kali; focused more on bounty money and small fights over territories (Putri, 2018). However, when the Indians took over the 04 Gang under the leadership of Bentong Kali, more serious offenses were committed such as murder, drug trafficking, and owning of weapons (Putri, 2018).

The Chinese community in Malaysia have adapted the Mandari language which have slightly different pronunciation and style in comparison with traditional Mandarin (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022). Despite having some dialects like Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, and others; modern Malaysian Chinese have adapted English and Malay languages with Mandarin being the bridge to language gaps (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022).

It is easier to tell Indian gangsters apart from civilians compared to Chinese gangsters. This is because there are no specific identifications on an individual that shows his or her involvement in Chinese gangs (Nambiar, 2020). Unlike Indian gangsters who have tattoos on their bodies to show their identity in gangs, Chinese gangsters might not have such identifications (Nambiar, 2020). However, certain gangs have their respective flags or logos that differentiate between the gangs that they are committed to. Figure 2 is referred.

Figure 2: Different logos of different gangs in Malaysia as per Royal Malaysian Police



As can be seen from the image above, gangs like 3821, Hai San, Wah Kee and Sio Sam Ong who are some of the leading gangs in Malaysia have different types of flags to differentiate among themselves. The Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) also stated that there are around 8,214 Chinese gangsters that are still active in Malaysia. This number is way lesser than Indian gangsters who have 28,926 active members, but more than Malay gangsters who have 1,923 members (Sim, 2015). Latest about these gangs could not be found due to lack of reports on this matter.

2.2.2(b) Conditions surrounding Chinese remaining in gangs

Due to lack of studies on Chinese gangsters, studies related to Indian gangsters are considered as both Indians and Chinese are minorities in Kuantan, with some evidence that members of these minor groups do get involve in gangsterism (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). The existing studies like Durai (2020), Morgan and Suhaili (2020), and Raviechandran and Tharshini (2023) focus more on Indian gangsters compared to Chinese gangsters. This shows that Chinese gangsters are seriously unexplored.

Morgan and Suhaili (2020) suggested that there are seven major factors that motivated individuals to get involved in gang activities. One of the biggest and highly ranked reason is due to failure of parents in bringing up their kids (Morgan & Suhaili, 2020). Problems that start from homes such as a broken family and abusive extended families; might lead youngsters to search for people and a place that will take care of them. Subsequently, these vulnerable youths turn into gangsterism as they fall for the promises and benefits offered by gangs.

Suppiah, Muthusamy and Ismail (2021) opined that families with both parents are less likely to get their children involved in gangsterism activities. Wright (2025) opined that every boy needs a father figure in their lives to grown and be men due to the inability of a single mother to make a boy into a man. Indian children who have only one parent have a higher tendency to get involved in gangsterism activities (Suppiah, Muthusamy, & Ismail, 2021). Gangs are said to have family-like bonding (Durai, 2020), suggesting that individuals from broken families want to feel loved and have a sense of belonging as reasons remaining in their respective gangs.

For example, with regards to Indian gangs, Wilson, Rajasakran, Sinnappan, and Periyayya (2024) said that poverty and unemployment are the leading factors that caused involvement of an individual in gangsterism activities. Lacking job opportunities and a proper income made them more vulnerable turning into gangsterism (Wilson, Rajasakran, Sinnappan, & Periyayya, 2024). During the same period of Wilson, et. al. (2024), a Hong Kong study by Fraser and Joe-Laidler (2024) provided some evidence that without a proper income, a Chinese individual will enter poverty, subsequently leading to enrolment in gangsterism.

Focusing on the reason behind people staying in their respective gangs, studies have been done overseas but not in Malaysia. A study by Bacak, DeWitt, and Reid (2021) stated that by remaining in their respective gangs, gangsters, especially youngsters; will find some peace of mind. Being in a gang had a positive impact on gang members, providing a sense of belonging, increased self-esteem, and by enhancing a sense of protection despite not providing actual protection (Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009; cited in Bacak, DeWitt, & Reid, 2021).

Earlier, Whittaker, et al. (2020) opined that gangsterism activities were sustained due to the visible income gangsters continuously obtained, particularly in drug-dealing activities. According to Whittaker, et al. (2020), gangsterism activities that were postcode-focused have now changed to money-focused. This statement is supported by Wilson, Rajasakran, Sinnappan, and Periyayya, (2024) as they quoted involvement in gangsterism activities is due to their origin from financially unstable backgrounds.

2.3 Gap Knowledge

In this section, two gaps in knowledge are discussed. First is the unknown reasons why gang members remain in their respective gangs. Secondly is limited body of research on this topic.

2.3.1 Unknown Reasons Why Gang Members Remain in Their Gangs

As of today, there is a lack of research regarding the reasons that make Chinese people remain in their respective gangs in Malaysia. This current research will be a huge step in contributing to understanding the life of ex-gangsters. It will aid future efforts in preventing vulnerable Chinese youth from joining gangs and become a reference point for scholars about the phenomenon of Chinese gangsterism.

2.3.2 Limited body of research on this topic

There are very limited theory-based studies on this phenomenon in Malaysia. The findings in this current research, will provide real lived reasons given by ex-gangsters and investigative

police personnel on decisions to join and remain in gangs. The outcomes of this study will contribute to the limited body of research in this field regarding Chinese Gangsterism in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section covers the elements of this research's methodology. First is the research design. Second is the sampling issue. Third is the research tool. Fourth is the research procedure. Fifth is the study flow chart while the sixth one will be the Gantt chart of this research. The last segment of this chapter will be covering the ethical consideration.

3.1 Research Design

This research utilises phenomenology research design. The term phenomenology is a qualitative research design that mainly focuses on exploring and understanding individual's experience in their lives (Tavakol & Sandars, 2025). Phenomenology qualitative study design is used for this FYP because not all aspects of lived experience can be captured by quantitative questions. The interviewees open more about their lives in the form of interview compared to quantitative methods as their experiences cannot be quantified accurately. Before a pilot (n=2) and data collection commences, an official ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) USM Health Campus.

3.2 Sampling Issue

In this section, there are four issues highlighted. First is the study area. Second is study population. Third is sample size estimation and finally is the sampling method and subject recruitment.

3.2.1 Study Area

The study area chosen for this FYP is in Kuantan, Pahang. The reason behind the selection of this area is due to the lack of articles or news from the past five years regarding Chinese gangsterism activities reported. The whole city of Kuantan is chosen because there is a lack of

reliable statistics which pinpoints specific areas of Kuantan with high levels of gang related activities. The data on gangsterism in Pahang and Anti-Gangsterism department of Pahang are located in Kuantan.

3.2.2 Study Population

There are two populations of interest in Kuantan. First are the ex-gangsters (EG) that are still either working or living in Kuantan. Secondly are ex-policemen/policemen (EP and PM) who have or are involved in gangster case management in Pahang.

3.2.3 Study Criteria

There are four inclusion participant criteria for Chinese ex-gangsters. First is ethnicity. Second criteria are the language skill which is followed by age. Finally, are the nationality and state of participant.

Table 1: Participation inclusion criteria for Chinese ex-gangsters

Respondent Criteria	Details
Ethnicity	Chinese
Language skill	Able to communicate, read, or understand either English or Malay
Age	Any respondents who meet the other criteria's and more than the age of 18
Nationality & State	Malaysian from Kuantan

There are three inclusion participant criteria for policemen/ex-policemen. First criteria are their working experiences. Second is their language skills. Third is the working sector.

Table 2: Participant inclusion criteria for Policemen/Ex-policemen

Respondent Criteria	Details
Working experience	More than five years in service / Retired policemen
Language skill	Able to communicate, or understand either English or Malay or Tamil
Sector	Currently or worked under the crime prevention branch (<i>Jabatan Pencegahan Jenayah</i>)

However, there are two exclusion criteria for Chinese ex-gangsters. Exclusion criteria are established to identify characteristics that can disqualify a person from participating in this study. First are their mental and physical conditions. Second is their memory and hearing ability.

Table 3: Participant exclusion criteria for Chinese ex-gangsters

Respondent Criteria	Details
Mental & Physical conditions	Diagnosed with memory-related diseases or cognitive impairment (e.g., dementia, Alzheimer's, brain injury) Has history of mental health issues (e.g., schizophrenia, severe anxiety, depression) On substance that could impair memory (e.g., alcohols, drugs)
Memory & Hearing	Impaired

There are also some exclusion criteria for policemen/ex-policemen. First are mental and physical conditions. Second is working experience of policemen/ex-policemen.

Table 4: Participant exclusion criteria for policemen/ex-policemen

Respondent Criteria	Details
Mental & Physical conditions	Has history of mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression) On substance that could impair memory (e.g., alcohols)
Working experience	Currently suspended or has been dismissed from service

Withdrawal criteria for participants in this study include considerations of their participants expectations, response pattern, and voluntary withdrawal. Respondents who meet the criteria in tables 1 and 2 may be removed from the study if they meet certain withdrawal criteria. Table 5 is referred.

Table 5: Withdrawal criteria for both group of participants

Respondent Criteria	Details
Non-compliance	Fail to follow instructions
Personal withdrawal	Decides to withdraw
Adverse reactions	Shows signs of distress
Condition participation	Expect compensation
Familiarity	Has been in such interviews or studies previously

3.2.4 Sample Size Estimation

There are 128,274 people who currently live in Kuantan (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Chinese being only 15.7% or more specifically 20,139 residents of the population in Kuantan, fits in the study criteria. However, due to the qualitative nature of this study, data collection will be stopped once data saturation is achieved. Eight interviewees were involved in this study with four of them being ex-gangsters while another four were policemen/ex-policemen.

3.2.5 Sampling Method and Subject Requirement

The type of sampling method that is used in this FYP is purposive sampling method. This is due to the interviewees need to fit the criteria mentioned in 3.2.3. The participants will be recruited based on their ability to provide in-depth discussion and expertise on this matter. Both subject groups (ex-gangsters and ex-policemen/policemen) will be interviewed using the same tool. The potential participants who meet the selection criteria will be approached for this research via the principal investigator's contacts.

The questions for this interview will be based on two main things. First is the researcher's experience. Second is from previous literature by Moorthy, Inbaraj, and Rahim (2019). The questions asked will be structured and are open ended questions.

3.3 Research Tool

In this section, the research tool used in this FYP are presented. There will be two different semi-structured interview guides. One will be semi-structured interview guide 1 (SSIG1) that will be used for the ex-gangsters as in Appendix C. Second one is semi-structured interview guide 2 (SSIG2) will be used for the ex-policemen or policemen. Refer to Appendix D.

SSIG 1 will be based on three main themes. First is the reason that made them to join gangsterism activities. Second theme will be focusing on the reason that made them stay in their gangs for a long period of time before quitting. Finally, is their opinion on gangsterism in Kuantan.

SSIG 2 on the other hand will also be focusing on the three themes. First is the factor that made people to join gangs. Second is the knowledge on gangsterism activities in Kuantan. Third is the reason behind the stay of gangsters in their respective gangs. This is done to obtain the point of view of policemen during their duties dealing with gangsters.

3.3.1 Section one: Factors to Join Gangs

As previously mentioned, the questions for this section were adopted from Moorthy, Inbaraj, and Rahim (2019). The questionnaire used in that study was used for experts in gangsterism field. The questions were adjusted to be used for the ex-gangsters. In this section, the factors that made Chinese people in Kuantan to join gangs will be discussed with both group of studies. This will provide an understanding on real life experiences of the ex-gangsters that made them to make this decision. Chinese is said to have the most secret society while Indians have the most members in the gang (Durai, 2020). The reason behind individuals joining gangs will be studied in this section.

3.3.2 Section two: Reasons That Made Them to Remain in Gangs

Interviewees will be asked questions based on their personal life experiences that made them to continue such illegal acts. The participant's history, either being in gangsterism or dealing with gangsterism will also be determined with the open-ended questions, focusing on the ex-gangsters' motives to continue gangsterism activities. Police officers and ex-police officers will be interviewed based on this theme to obtain their point of view on this matter. This section tends to aid in understanding the lifestyle of a gang member when engaging in gangsterism activities.

3.3.3 Section three: Knowledge on Gangsterism

Ex-gangsters, ex policemen, and current policemen that were interviewed will be asked questions on their existing knowledge on gangsterism. This information will be useful when relating the gangsterism lifestyle of ex-gangsters to the understanding on gangsterism from the point of view of the law upholders. The questions asked will be in reference to the study by Moorthy, Inbaraj, and Rahim (2019). Some questions will be adjusted to ask the ex-gangsters.

3.4 Research Procedure

This section will discuss the procedure that will be used in this research. First, is data collection. Secondly, is data analysis. Finally, the expected results of this FYP.