



A Study on Local Interior Designers' Perceptions of the Design Orientation and Appearance Attributes of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Yek Ming Liew¹, Edina Mohd Nasser¹ Abdul Halim Husain¹

¹⁻³ Akademi Seni Budaya Dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA), Malaysia
liewyekming@st.aswara.edu.my

Abstract. Among the many lighting options on the market, Chinese traditional hanging lanterns are also one of the appliances often used by people as home decorations and lighting setting. However, as the design of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns generally has a strong Chinese cultural element, it is often used by the Chinese as a decoration to create an atmosphere for festive occasions. As such, many Chinese, especially Malaysian Chinese millennials may consider that traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are an outdated traditional ornament that is only suitable for celebrations and festivals. This study aimed to explore the current trend of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns through interviews with interior designers who regularly work with millennial home design. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher discovered interior designers' perceptions of the design orientation and appearance attributes of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns, and explored the types of lanterns that are currently popular among Malaysian millennials.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Lanterns, Malaysian Chinese Millennials, Lighting, Home Decoration, Interior Design

1 Introduction

Lighting is a vital part when doing interior design work. The right lighting setup can add another dimension to a space and bring out the balance of light and shadow.

Lanterns are culturally rich home accessories that can enhance a space decoration, it is also a lighting arrangement that local designers often use. In addition to illumination, great lantern lighting can bring new energy and create an impressive ambiance to an interior.

Different designs of lanterns can often be seen in Malaysia, traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are also can be seen for sale in supermarkets. Since most of the traditional Chinese hanging lanterns include red color, the design attributes are very prominent

and the appearance is full of cultural elements. As such, how an interior designer applies such lanterns in interior design will depend on the interior designer's perspective on the design of the traditional Chinese lanterns.

The objectives of this research study are to explore interior designers' perspectives on the appearance attributes of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns, and, to discover the types of hanging lanterns that are relatively common and popular among local interior designers and Malaysian millennials.

1.1 Problem Statement

Traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are one of the most famous iconic items that can truly represent Chinese culture to the world. Although many Chinese believe that traditional Chinese lanterns are with positive meaning and symbolize joy and can bring good fortune, nowadays, Malaysia Chinese millennials think that traditional Chinese lanterns are obsolete decorations compared to most exotic lanterns, such as Moroccan hanging lanterns and Turkish hanging lanterns, are in large choices of sizes, rich in colours and are more diversified in styles for interior decorations and ornaments for home furnishings in modern living even during festive celebrations. They will only hang traditional Chinese lanterns at the front door or gates during festivals or celebrations such as spring festivals or other important occasions for instance wedding day. On the other hand, due to the changes of the times, young people are generally more inclined to contemporary values and therefore omit the original traditional values; Malaysian young Chinese lose confidence in inheriting Chinese culture, and their recognition of traditional Chinese culture has also declined [1] [2].

All of the above shows that traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are declining in the home life of Malaysian Chinese millennials and are not as popular as they used to be. Inevitably, the use of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns for interior lighting and decoration could be one of the crucial questions that local interior designers must consider when working on interior design projects, especially when dealing with Malaysian Chinese millennials.

2 Literature review

2.1 The Significance of Lanterns to Chinese

Lanterns are the most representative luminaire and lighting fixture in Chinese civilization, also known as "Dengcai" (colorful light). Lighted lanterns provide colorful visual effects, giving people a positive and auspicious feeling; Chinese people believe lighting up lanterns will bring prosperity and wealth to the family members, and therefore classify lanterns as decorative objects that symbolize auspiciousness [3].

In the early Han Dynasty, people would hang illuminated red lanterns on the 15th day of the first lunar month to add to the New Year's festive atmosphere and symbolize the peace of the nation. People also started the lantern riddle-guessing activity with

national characteristics, showing the intelligence and wisdom of ancient Han working people and their desire for a better life; such activities have continued to this day [2] [4] [5].

2.2 History of Chinese Lanterns

Chinese lanterns are an ancient Chinese traditional handcraft and were invented during the time of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 AD - 220 AD) for the purpose as the light source for working and reading in the dark.

The origin and making of Chinese lanterns can be traced back more than 1800 -2000 years ago to the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC - 8 AD). Later, people would hang red lanterns before and after the fifteenth day of the first lunar month to symbolize reunion and to create a festive atmosphere [4] [6].

2.3 Different Types of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Traditional Chinese hanging lanterns basically can be classified into Quanzhou-style and Fuzhou-style lanterns by the weaving method of the lantern's framework [3]. In addition, the hanging palace lantern with a long history of more than 1900 years is also a unique handcraft in China, and it has also become a symbol of Chinese traditional culture (Figure 1).

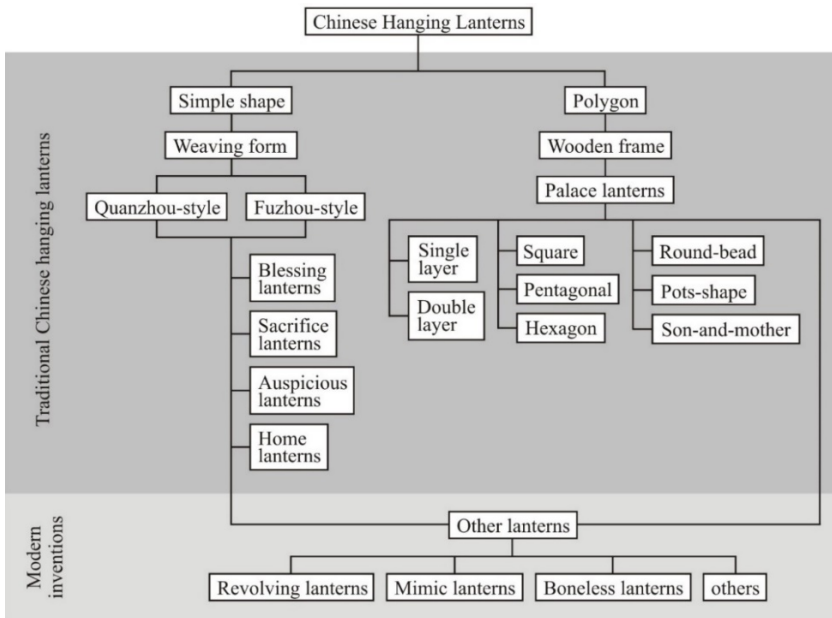


Fig. 1. Classification of Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Quanzhou-style lanterns.

Quanzhou-style lanterns, also known as paper lanterns, are representative of typical Chinese lanterns. As the name suggests, the surface of the Quanzhou-style lanterns is usually covered with paper (Figure 2). The structure of the lantern is woven from bamboo strips with tough texture and elasticity such as *Phyllostachys makinoi* bamboo strips and can be divided into a round shape, cylinder shape, and olive shape three different shapes (Figures 3 & 4).



Fig. 2. The Surface Of Quanzhou-Style Lanterns Covered With Papers
(Source: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/E9O6IOI705440873.html>)



Fig. 3. The Structure Of Quanzhou-Style Lanterns Is Woven From Bamboo Strips
(Source: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/E9O6IOI705440873.html>)



Fig. 4. Different Shapes Of Quanzhou-Style Lanterns
(Source: http://www.mazucity.org/2019-02/11/content_867327.htm)

Fuzhou-style lanterns

Fuzhou-style lanterns also use Makino bamboo with tough-textured and strong elasticity as the main structural material which cut into long strips and drilled into a small hole at the upper and lower ends (Figure 5).

When a lantern is needed, just press down and the long bamboo strips will be pressed into a round shape, egg shape, or orange shape. As a Fuzhou-style lantern can be shrunk and expanded like an umbrella, it is also commonly known as the umbrella style (Figures 6 & 7).



Fig. 5. Fuzhou-Style Lantern Structure

(Source: <http://library.taiwanschoolnet.org/cyberfair2004/C0418500197/maind.htm>)



Fig. 6. Fuzhou-Style Lantern Can Be Shrunk And Expanded Like An Umbrella

(Source: <http://library.taiwanschoolnet.org/cyberfair2004/C0418500197/maind.htm>)



Fig. 7. Fuzhou-Style Lanterns

(Source: <https://new.qq.com/cmsn/20180813/20180813054230.html>)

Palace lanterns

“Gōng Dēng”, also known as palace lantern, they are originally used as illuminated lamps in ancient palaces since Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 AD) to Tang Dynasties (618 – 907 AD) [7].

Palace lanterns are mainly made of small wood as the skeleton and are generally equipped with intricate decorations to show the wealth and luxury of the emperor (Figure 8). Traditional hanging palace lanterns have different names due to their different origins. “Liùfāng” palace lantern from Beijing Palace Lanterns, also known as the hexagon palace lantern (Figure 9) [8].



Fig. 8. Beijing Palace Lantern Structure

(Source: <https://tv.cctv.com/2012/07/13/VIDE1409103301706747.shtml>)



Fig. 9. Beijing “Gōng Dēng”, Also Known As Beijing Palace Lantern

(Source: <https://tv.cctv.com/2012/07/13/VIDE1409103301706747.shtml>)

3 In-depth semi-structure interviews

In-depth interviews are not aimed to generate new insights through the number of interviewees or conducting extensive research. Conversely, a smaller sample size such as five interviews can be saturated, which can serve as a benchmark for qualitative research and assist researchers in conducting fine-grained, in-depth investigations to enhancing validity and conceptual persuasion [9] [10] [11] [12]. In-depth interview meth-

ods include structured interviews, unstructured interviews [13], and semi-structured interviews [14] [15], which can be determined according to the content and direction of the research [16] [17].

The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with local professional interior designers with at least ten years of working experience and have millennial clients for the data collection. Based on their work experiences and understanding of their clients’ lighting arrangement requirements to answer the following interview questions [18] [19].

3.1 In-depth Interview Questions Design

The main respondents of the in-depth interview are interior designers who often handle residential design projects for Malaysian millennials. The interview questions were designed by referring to the “4-stage Funnel Approach” (Figure 10 and Table 1).

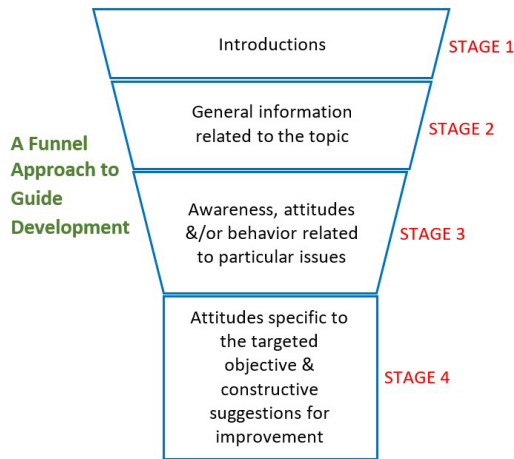


Fig. 10. Mapping of Funnel Approach to Guide Development with Interview Questions. Adopted From: [20]

Table 1. Interview questions.

Interview questions	
1	What do you think about the color of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns?
2	What do you think about the material used in traditional Chinese hanging lanterns?
3	How would you describe the form of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns?

4	How would you apply traditional Chinese hanging lanterns into your interior design works?
5	What types of hanging lanterns are relatively common for use in home decoration nowadays?
6	Among the lanterns that you have mentioned, which is the most popular among Malaysian millennials?

3.2 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is one of the most cost-effective and time-effective methods, also known as judgment sampling, subjective sampling, or selective sampling [21]. With this method, a researcher will rely on own judgment when choosing respondents who are willing to provide the information for the study [22].

3.3 Verbatim Transcript for In-depth Interviews

The researcher applied verbatim transcripts and captured each word from the audio file in the text exactly as it was originally spoken which contains filler words, false starts, grammatical errors, and other verbal cues that provide useful context and set the scene of the recorded scene [23].

ATLAS.ti is currently one of the most popular multifunctional CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) tools [24]. ATLAS.ti can create multiple code chain connections and the ability to create networks up to the third stage of coding. It can help to find the relationships and patterns in data and produces network diagrams that can simultaneously represent research themes and patterns [25] [26].

Deductive coding is a narrower and more useful coding method helps to analyses and summarizes across cases. It can help to focus coding on those issues that are known to be important in the existing literature reviews [27] [28].

The researcher focuses on the interview content and applied a deductive coding approach, with the assistance of ATLAS.ti to analyze the data from the in-depth interviews with the five professional interior designers. The researcher also used the “Network” function in ATLAS.ti to demonstrate the codes and grafts for the in-depth interviews’ data analysis.

4 Data Analysis and Results

All contents of conversations during the interviews were fully recorded with a mobile phone for data preservations and verifications. All audio contents were converted into verbatim manuscripts, after integrating all the information provided by the respondents and extracting the relevant contents, all important points are displayed in the form of network diagrams.

4.1 Designers' Perspective on the Color of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

According to the respondents, most of the traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are in red. R1, R3, and R4 believe that the red color used on traditional Chinese hanging lanterns represents and symbolizes Chinese traditional culture, and often use as home decoration during the festive season. R2 highlighted that traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are only suitable for interiors with Chinese design styles, not for modern design concepts (Figure 11 and Table 3).

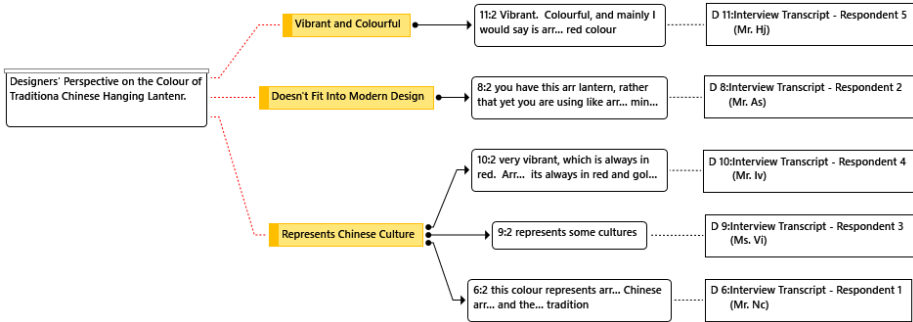


Fig. 11. Designers' Perspective on The Colour of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns.

Table 2. Designer's Perspective on The Colours of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Respondents	Answers		
	Represents Chinese culture	Does not fit into modern design	Vibrant and colourful
R1	1	-	-
R2	-	1	-
R3	1	-	-
R4	1	-	-
R5	-	-	1
Total	3/5	1/5	1/5

4.2 Designers' Perspective on the Material Used in Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

In terms of materials, each respondent has different preferences regarding the materials used on lanterns. Although traditional Chinese lanterns are mainly made with bamboo,

wood, paper, or modern materials such as nylon cloth with plastic, respondents feel that the materials used to make lanterns do not reflect much in interior design (Figure 12 and Table 4).

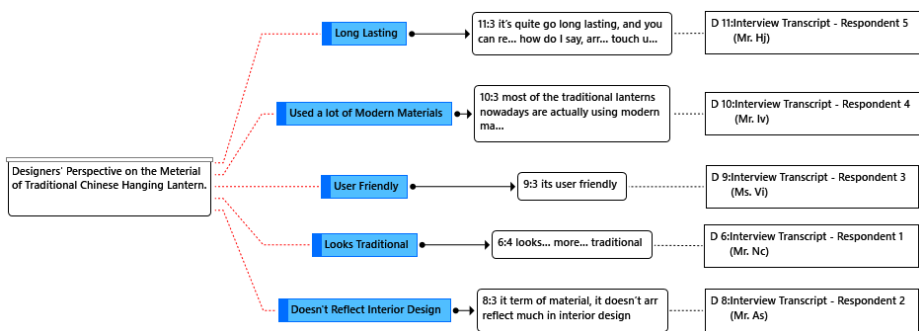


Fig. 12. Designers’ Perspective on The Material Used in Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Table 3. Designer's Perspective on The Materials in Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns.

Re- spondents	Answers				
	Looks tra- ditional	Does not reflect inter- rior design	User friendly	Used a lot of modern materials	Long lasting
R1	1	-	-	-	-
R2	-	1	-	-	-
R3	-	-	1	-	-
R4	-	-	-	1	-
R5	-	-	-	-	1
Total	1/5	1/5	1/5	1/5	1/5

4.3 Designers’ Perspective on the Form of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

For the various forms of traditional Chinese hanging lanterns, R1, R4, and R5 believes that different forms of lanterns symbolize different meanings and they are good enough for interior decoration. R2 thinks that traditional Chinese hanging lantern in hexagon form is beautiful; compare to this, R3 prefers lanterns in a smooth form, such as sphere and ellipsoid which is cute to her (Figure 13 and Table 5).

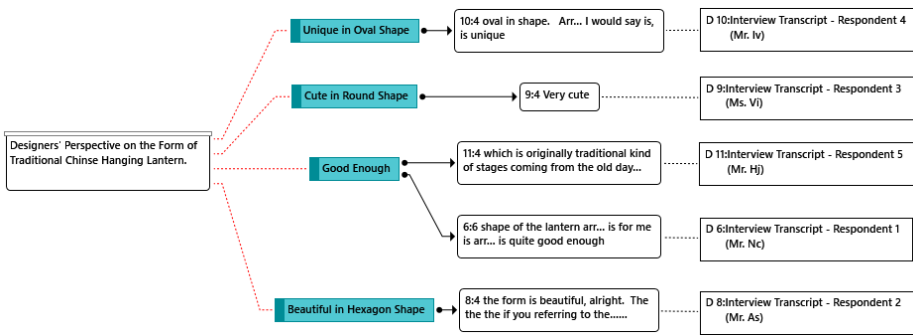


Fig. 13. Designers’ Perspective on The Form of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Table 4. Designers' Perspective on The Form of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns

Respondents	Answers			
	Good enough	Beautiful in hexagon shape	Cute in round shape	Unique in oval shape
R1	1	-	-	-
R2	-	1	-	-
R3	-	-	1	-
R4	-	-	-	1
R5	1	-	-	-
Total	2/5	1/5	1/5	1/5

4.4 Application of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns in Interior Design

As traditional Chinese hanging lanterns contain strong Chinese cultural elements, are very authentic, and distinguish in oriental concepts, R1 and R2 mentioned that they will change the colour if they will have to use it as a decoration item in their interior design project. R3, R4, and R5 all agreed that traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are more suitable for the oriental style of interior design or only use as a home decoration during the festive season (Figure 14 and Table 6).

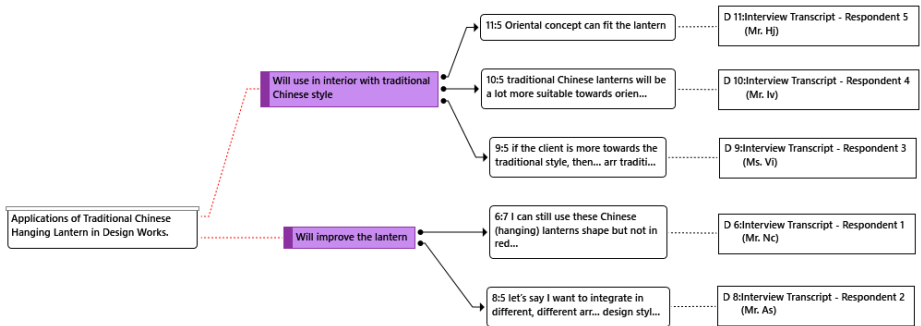


Fig. 14. Application of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns in Interior Design

Table 5. Application of Traditional Chinese Hanging Lanterns in Interior Design

Respondents	Answers	
	Will improve the lanterns	Will use in interior with traditional Chinese style
R1	1	-
R2	1	-
R3	-	1
R4	-	1
R5	-	1
Total	2	3/5

4.5 Common Hanging Lanterns for Use in Home Decoration Nowadays

Through the respondents' observation, among the many lanterns, hanging lanterns with an exotic concept is currently the most common and popular. R1, R3, and R5 mentioned that Japanese hanging lanterns that are made of paper and bamboo, are simple in design, are commonly used as modern interior decoration nowadays.

On the other hand, both R4 and R5 also mentioned that Turkish hanging lanterns with stained glass can create a relaxing and calming mood with the colourful lights, and Moroccan hanging lanterns that are made of monochromatic material, are also very commonly seen in interior designs currently.

At last, R5 added that Scandinavian lanterns that look like nautical lamps are currently the most common interior hanging lighting accessories (Figure 15 and Table 7).

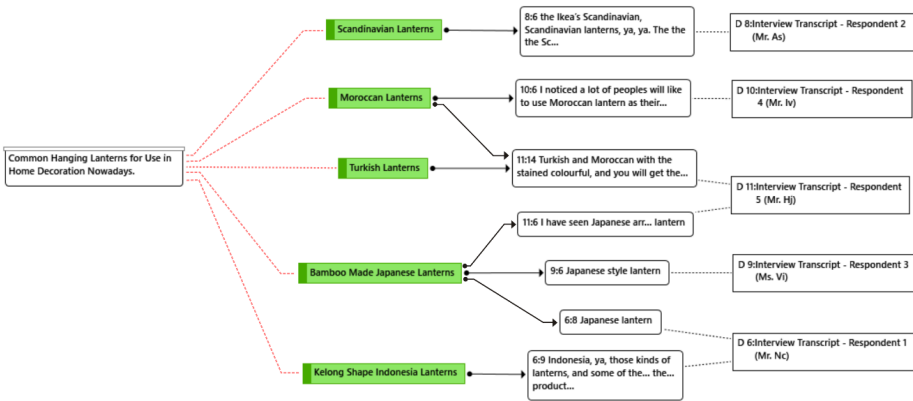


Fig. 15. Common Hanging Lanterns for Use In Home Decoration Nowadays

Table 6. Common Hanging Lanterns for Use In Home Decoration Nowadays

Re- spondents	Answers				
	Lanterns with exotic concept				
	“Kelong” shape Indone- sia lanterns	Scandina- vian lanterns	Bamboo made Japa- nese lan- terns	Moroc- can lanterns	Turkish lanterns
R1	1	-	1	-	-
R2	-	1	-	-	-
R3	-	-	1	-	-
R4	-	-	-	1	-
R5	-	-	1	1	1
Total	1/5	1/5	3/5	2/5	1/5

4.6 The Most Popular Hanging Lantern among Malaysian Millennials

All the respondents also pointed out the types of hanging lanterns that millennials prefer to use as decoration for their living space in the interview.

R1 believes that Japanese lanterns with simple forms are often used by millennials as interior light fitting; while R2 believes that Scandinavian lanterns that have a modern design are currently popular among Malaysian millennials.

According to R3, most people still will buy hanging lanterns that are similar to traditional Chinese hanging lanterns for their interior decoration purposes. Both R4 and R5 mentioned that Malaysian millennials are more inclined to use Moroccan hanging lanterns in their modern houses as it is easy to incorporate into indoor or outdoor arrangement (Figure 16 and Table 8).

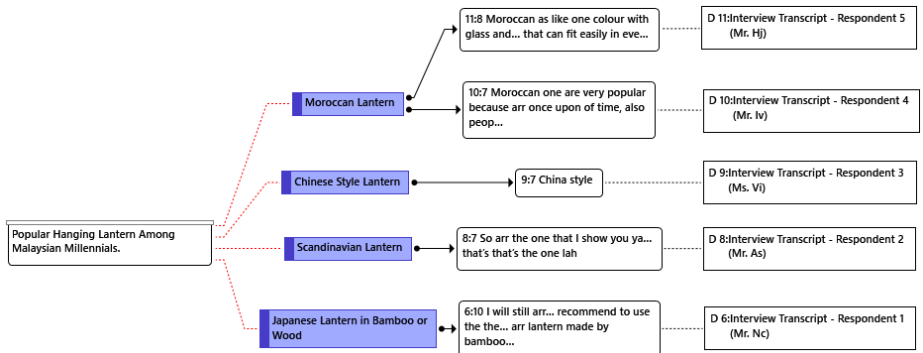


Fig. 16. The Most Popular Hanging Lantern Among Malaysian Millennials

Table 7. The Most Popular Hanging Lantern Among Malaysian Millennials

Respondents	Answers			
	Lanterns with Chinese concept	Lanterns with exotic concept		
	Chinese lantern	Bamboo made Japanese lantern	Scandinavian lantern	Moroccan lantern
R1	-	1	-	-
R2	-	-	1	-
R3	1	-	-	-
R4	-	-	-	1
R5	-	-	-	1
Total	1/5	1/5	1/5	2/5

5 Conclusion and Discussion

In the impression of local interior designers, traditional Chinese hanging lanterns are generally red which represents Chinese culture and it is a common decoration item during the festive season.

From the responses and information, it can be shown that the designers believe that traditional Chinese hanging lanterns can only fit in interior designs with Chinese concepts and are unsuitable to hang in an interior space with a modern concept.

Analyzing the designers' answers to the question of the appearance of traditional Chinese chandeliers, the designers did not have any negative reactions to the form and material of the lanterns compared to the more direct and enlightening answers given to the color of the lanterns. This shows that the form of the lanterns and the materials used do not directly influence the designers' interior design work.

On the other hand, designers believe that, among all the lanterns with exotic designs, Moroccan hanging lanterns with modern-looking metal surfaces are more popular among Malaysian Chinese millennials.

This study can be extended to serve as a supplement and reference for future researchers when creating and developing project base research and studies.

The findings and analysis from this study can be used as design guidelines for future designers designing lanterns or similar products targeting Malaysian millennials; in terms of concept, it can be biased towards a modern direction, or incorporate elements of foreign lanterns into the design.

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