Re-Negotiating Multiple Identities: How Indonesian Chinese Mothers Define Their Identity in Taiwan Society

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on how Indonesian Chinese mothers define their layered identity as new residents in Taiwan where they practice their citizenship. In Taiwanese multicultural society, an enormous number of Indonesian Chinese women migrated to the country through marriage. Using the concept of "self definition," this research examines how Indonesian Chinese mothers recollect their multiple identities after migrating to Taiwan and interacting with Taiwanese society. Interviews were employed to identify and interpret Indonesian Chinese mothers' identities. This research finds that Indonesian Chinese mothers had to contend with their identity when they began to integrate into Taiwanese society, which is referred to as Chinese society. The contradictory identities they faced in their native country brought up recollections of the ambiguous identities they encountered while they were threatened as a foreigner in a place where they ought to be accepted as members of society.

Keywords: Layered Identity, Multicultural, Citizenship, Self-Definition, Contradictory Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Migrant mothers are a phenomenon in Taiwanese society that has been part of Taiwanese society for several decades (Kasai and Lin 2023). As a pluralistic nation, intermarriage migration is still present today, contributing to the urbanization of Taiwanese society. The rise in living standards and public education levels in Taiwanese society, coupled with the empowerment of women to achieve independence, have led to a change in the societal mindset. Taiwanese women no longer determine marriage as essential to starting a family, which has resulted in a decline in the country's marriage rate (Ng 2023; Chiu and Yeoh 2021). This situation causes, inter-country marriage has become frequent in Taiwan, particularly among Taiwanese men with immigrant women from other nations, including mainland China, and Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar (Kasai and Lin 2023; Yeung and Mu 2020).

On April 30, 2024, the National Immigration Agency of the Ministry of Interior, Republic of China reported that a total of 211, 136 marriage immigrants in Taiwan (excluding the marriage migrants from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau). The number is dominated by women with 182, 783 individuals (86.6%); while the 28,353 individuals (13.4%) are men.

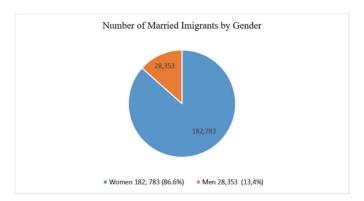


Figure 1. Number of Married Immigrants by Gender in Taiwan from Jan 1978 - Apr 2024

Figure 2 shows that Vietnam accounted for the greatest proportion of married immigrants from Southeast Asia, followed by Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia. Smaller groups of immigrants came from Malaysia, Singapore, and other countries, all of which are included in the "others" group. These reports only report the number of immigrant

mothers based on their nationality, not their ethnicity in the home country.

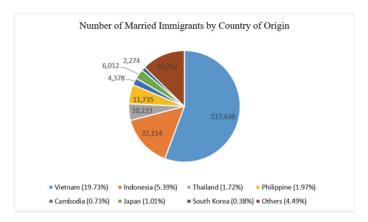


Figure 2. Number of Married Immigrants by Countries of Origins

Specific to Indonesian marriage migrants, they are classified as ethnic Chinese (Indonesian Chinese) and non-ethnic Chinese or native Indonesian. Indonesian Chinese are a minority group experiencing socio-political discrimination during the New Order regime.

According to the 2010 Indonesian Population Census, the total of Indonesian Chinese population was only 1.2% of Indonesian total population (Suryadinata 2019). Their differences from the indigenous Indonesian culture, customs, religion, and beliefs are substantial (Dawis 2009). Nonetheless, there are certain challenges that Indonesian Chinese encounter while assimilating into Indonesian society. A series of discriminatory laws and regulations that the Suharto regime used assimilation efforts to force through during the authoritarian era in Indonesia (Setiano 2008), They are including the ban on ethnic Chinese's cultural pillars: Chinese organization, media, and school (Survadinata 2007), name changing policy, limitations on native-favoring economic policies, and changes to citizenship laws that negatively impact ethnic Chinese citizens due to the absence of socialization combined with the need for them to possess a Certificate of Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia (Suryadinata 2023), Unclear legislation and the policy's lack of socialization caused many ethnic Chinese stateless; they are neither PRC nor Indonesian citizens. During Soeharto's authoritarian rule, inadequate assimilation policy resulted in the most serious anti-Chinese riots in May 1998. These racial riots occurred in several Indonesia's cities. In Jakarta, the violence including the killing and rape of ethnic Chinese women besides the material losses in the communities (Suryadinata 2007).

The discrimination policies also caused an identity crisis among the Indonesian Chinese. Some of them have a strong bond with their ancestral culture due to the beliefs that their parents and predecessors instilled in them. Furthermore, the Indonesian government's policies and rules foster doubt and ambiguity about their identities.

Wang Gungwu argues that Since the end of Western colonization in Asia, no group of Chinese overseas experienced as many disruptions as the Chinese minority in Indonesia. (Suryadinata 2023). For Indonesian Chinese, identity is inseparable from politics (Freedman 2003), their identity statement is not entirely clear. Some fundamental questions such as "Am I Chinese?" "Am I Indonesian?" "When am I to be Chinese?" and "When am I to be Indonesian?" are difficult to be answered. While other Indonesians are free to declare their nationality and ethnicity, Indonesian Chinese are not allowed to do so; this seems like an unwritten social norm in Indonesian society.

Ethnic Chinese who are no longer new immigrants to Indonesia. The majority of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were born and raised locally for multiple generations, and have encountered difficulties and conflicts in forming their identity. Yet, the collective memories from parents, and grandparents, those who directly experience discrimination and rejection in Indonesia indirectly influence the respondents in the process of searching for and defining their identity. Moreover, indirectly influencing the respondents in the process of searching for and defining their identity. The assimilation policy caused a gap between the Chinese and the society since the Indonesians tend to define Indonesianized Chinese are still considered as "Chinese" rather than Indonesian (Suryadinata 2007).

Furthermore, after the forced assimilation policy of the New Order was abolished in 1999, Indonesian Chinese are once again allowed to practice their culture. Presidential Instruction Number 14/1967 regarding restrictions on Chinese religion, beliefs, and customs was revoked by President, Abdurrahman Wahid, in 2000. Since then, Chinese organizations have resurfaced, Mandarin is now widely learnt and used by both Chinese and non-Chinese residents, and Chinese cultural expressions can be displayed publicly (Suryadinata 2023). In 2003, Wahid's successor, Megawati Sukarnoputri recognized Chinese New Year was observed as a national holiday in Indonesia.

Indonesian Chinese take great pride in their ethnicity. They continue to talk in dialect within their community and take considerable joy in celebrating Chinese holidays, despite the state's prejudice against them. Some of them are proud of their ancestry even though they are unable to speak Mandarin or its dialect (Dawis 2009).

This situation indicates that they are proud of and aware of their ethnicity. In the case of Taiwan as the host country, they travel to a nation that shares the same culture as their

ancestors. They believe that the local Taiwanese should embrace and acknowledge their Chinese heritage, but this has never been a reality. These Indonesian Chinese mothers are grouped based on their nationality. The grouping by the Taiwanese community creates a counter to the construction of their multiple identities. This study focuses on how Indonesian Chinese women re-negotiate their multiple identities when they move to Taiwan, a Chinese society, and whether or not they are welcomed as locals or continue to be considered outsiders.

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND SELF-DEFINITION

According to Rich (2014), the administrative data record in a formal document consists of four dimensions. The first the first dimension of ethno-racialism is documentary race; this refers to an individual's initiative in choosing their identity; the second is social race, which is the attachment that is unilaterally assigned to someone by another party based on their outward appearance or habits; the third is personal race, which is about an individual's personal views regarding their race; and the fourth is public race, which is related to racial identification in which an individual is passively grouped/recognized by others in social life (Pap 2021). Based on the classification, characteristics that have emerged naturally or externally and result from group cultural learning that are intended to be portrayed as a part of a culture can be used to classify an individual's identity.

Doug Cooper mentioned the recognition and feeling of identity are dependent on one's willingness to set aside past experiences. A person's natural appearance is determined by their established habits or appearance. A person's identity is not determined by their outward appearance or by the beliefs, expectations, or compulsions of other people or wider societies. This includes the position or function that is ascribed to them by the recognition factor. Instead, identification is a component of one's internalized self-concept and how much of a member of a cultural group they are (Liliweri 2018).

Each identity of a person or entity can be grouped and identified, dissimilarities can be distinguished by definitions and classifications from outside parties or membership determined based on criteria by the group. However, identity is a complex thing because it comes from various sources, such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, habits, and so forth (Pap 2021). Thus, a person's definition of their identity is a self-concept as part of self-definition where we will highlight the differences between ourselves and an entity under certain conditions (Van Niekerk et al. 2010), it also relates to control in conveying the

impression of a deliberate effort to achieve the desired goals (Taylor, Peplau, and Sears 1994).

Identity is a topic that is always fascinating to talk about since each person has multiple identities, and by learning about each of these identities, one may become part of a new group (Singer 2011). These varied identities are made up of cultural, societal, and personal identities. Many more specific characteristics, such as gender identity, religious identity, and professional identity, are contained inside each identity. In a pluralistic society, each person simultaneously embodies all three of these identities. They may decide to highlight one or more of these identities depending on the circumstances, especially when it comes to cultural identity, which is determined by factors like ancestry, custom, language, and religion. Conversely, a person's identity is an internal representation of their presentation of themselves and that of others. In general, the identity that a person addresses or bestows upon another is predicated on opinions or judgments drawn from fragile and limiting assessments, and needing an objective approach (Liliweri 2018).

For example, in Indonesia, people generally see ethnic Chinese as an exclusive group, they are non-Muslim, and speak Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, and other dialects. The image of ethnic Chinese held by Indonesian culture is not totally accurate, though, as there are also Chinese who identify as Muslims, and younger generation of Indonesian Chinese who only speak Indonesian or English. As a result, perception is not always an accurate and correct evaluation; rather, it needs to take consideration of how a person defines and interprets their identity as well as their level of knowledge and comprehension of it. The social self is one of these, and Shirley Samuel defines it as the racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious elements of an individual's identity (Liliweri 2018), or self-concept in concrete forms, like language and physical shape, or in abstract forms, like behavior, personality, and inherited family customs.

In addition, identity is a person's "feeling" about him/herself (Liliweri 2018). This concept covers the essential aspects of him/ her, such as gender, class, nationality, and ethnicity. "Who am I?" will come into question when the group that ought to embrace them rejects their sense of self, moreover, they have experienced a fractured identity after leaving their country of origin (Covan 2021). Following the rejection, self-identity negotiations will take place, which will subsequently lead to more negotiations. Identity formation should be viewed theoretically as the result of mutually beneficial interactions marked by flexible and dynamic processes. Hence, unavoidable conflicts during these exchanges help individuals and institutional contexts develop their identities by producing path-generating moves beyond a one-time, unidirectional relationship. Due to the above, community interpreters try to

develop identities separate from their existing roles and to define themselves beyond what is stated in the government document. (Yoo 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies a qualitative method using a case study approach and a literature study to discuss conducting descriptive analysis research with direct observation and analysis to examine the research topic in detail. The case study method allows in-depth research on a particular object to obtain conclusions referencing its general truth. Bennett and Elman argue that the case study method is the most widely used method for getting rigorous and detailed research results and can be used to study social phenomena and relationship behavior to determine community members' motivations (Hammersley 2013). This research also uses a direct observation approach to collecting data. Direct observation can give advantages and flexibility to get more subjective research results because it directly participates in the research topic.

A literature review can serve to develop a general understanding of information variables and knowledge related to topics. The literature study in this research focuses on collecting various data through online data and printed data such as books, research articles, newspapers, and policies published by the government (Johnson et al. 1950). Interviews are an effective process to understand the cases by asking related questions by structuring or scheduling them. By using interviews, we can get the interviewee's interpretation of the issues to glean valuable information that can be used for research (Johnson, Janet B., Joslyn, Richard A. 1950).

Although the interview uses a smaller sample of participants, it allows deeper responses. By asking open-ended questions, researchers can get broader responses, which then generate additional questions, which can be continued to investigate further the answers and attitudes of the respondents. A single interview can also provide information about actions taken or attitudes held by others. An interview researcher not only observes what the respondent says, but also how the respondent behaves during the interview, if the respondents were hesitant in answering several questions more than others, and being conscious of the context in which the interview takes place (Mosley 2013).

Ten ethnic Indonesian Chinese marriage migrants of Hakka Chinese heritage who were living in a district in the southern part of Taiwan were interviewed for this study. All of them had either naturalized or acquired Taiwanese citizenship. All of them have been

married for over ten years. These interviews were conducted from February to June 2021. We decided to focus our research on ethnic Chinese immigrants since they are a group of people with a history of social integration issues in Indonesia, including identity issues, citizenship, and ethnicity,

RE-NEGOTIATING AND SELF-DEFINITION IDENTITY OF INDONESIAN CHINESE MOTHERS AMONG PERCEPTION

Taiwan is a multicultural country. In addition to its diverse local communities, Taiwan is home to many migrants, including intermarriage migrants between Taiwanese men and Southeast Asian women. These mothers migrated to Taiwan with their characteristics, diverse with many different ethnicities and cultures. Migrant mothers who come to Taiwan also come from different tribes with different cultural experiences in their country of origin (Hsia 2021). In a multicultural context, background differences in a multicultural setting require changes to deal with the host culture's exclusivity (Yeung & Mu 2020).

In the context of immigrant mothers, there is a stereotype of "foreign brides" who barter marriage via commercial matchmaking for escape from poverty, they were seen as suspicious, because of the Under-developed of Southeast Asia (Cheng 2021). Due to variations in ethnicity, religion, and cultural background, stereotypes and stigma are created in host communities towards immigrants (Kasai and Lin 2023), they even have to negotiate their identities in the workplace (Lin 2023). Southeast Asian immigrant mothers in Taiwan is exacerbated by the low socio-economic level of multicultural families in general. (Lee et al. 2016). Meanwhile, social class issues are tied to the economic resources of migrants and their capabilities to realize individual achievements along with challenges in their educational qualifications and cultural capital which have different interpretations in immigrant countries. (Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki 2017).

There are 32,114 Indonesian Chinese mothers living in Taiwan, and intermarriage between Indonesian women and Taiwanese men ranks second in the percentage of cross-border marriages in this country. Even though the census does not record the ethnicity of migrant mothers in Taiwan, in reality, many migrant mothers from Indonesia are ethnic Chinese. However, their Chinese background does not contribute to validating their identity in the immigrant country, Taiwan. This is reflected in their narrative that the Taiwanese consider them more as Indonesians than as Chinese. This is the reverse of what they experienced in Indonesia

National identity and cultural identity are identities that can be held simultaneously without conflict. In terms of national identity, it can refer to a collective identity that is a national agreement within a country, whereas cultural identity is a representation of a culture's characteristics so that national identity and cultural identity do not conflict in diverse, pluralistic societies, particularly in Asian countries that uphold a citizenship understanding based on descendants (Anis and Battistella 2012). However, ethnic Chinese in Indonesia are rejected and seen as ethnic invaders whose culture differs from indigenous since the Indonesian government and society seek to define ethnicity as a national identity (Suryadinata 2007). As an immigrant citizen of Indonesia, ethnic Chinese citizenship was only fully recognized until the fall of the authoritarian regime on May 21, 1998, at which point the reform government in 1999 abolished the Certificate of Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia (SKBRI). Following then, the many discriminatory policies against the ethnic Chinese gradually came to an end (Setiano 2008).

Therefore, the regulations that led to labeling and questions about their loyalties to the nation and the negative experiences with prejudice they had during the assimilation process caused them to undergo an identity crisis. Furthermore, Taiwan was regarded as a Chinese cultural community. Migrant mothers thought they had finally made it to a place where their culture was accepted, yet rejection led them respondents reevaluate their identity.

All the respondents in this study are Indonesian Chinese women who have lived in Taiwan for 11-29 years. For all of them, Taiwan is their first immigrant country. Not all respondents arrived in Taiwan for marriage reasons, one respondent first came to Taiwan to learn Mandarin; two of the respondents first came to Taiwan to travel and visit family who had married in Taiwan, and half of the respondents were married to Taiwanese men were recommended by their family member who lived in Taiwan or through a marriage agency.

Among the ten respondents, two respondents said clearly that they decided to marry a Taiwanese man because of safety reasons, particularly in light of the terrible killings and rapes of Chinese women during the May Riots in 1998, they consider Indonesia highly risky. Five of the respondents said they were introduced to their husbands by their family member who had married Taiwanese men, they were following in the footsteps of relatives to a married Taiwanese man and settled in Taiwan; One of the respondents first came to Taiwan to study, and then got to know her husband and got married; One respondent first met her husband while visiting Taiwan, and two of the respondents married to their husband after being introduced by a marriage agency. The other respondent got to know her husband when he visited Indonesia on a business trip.

All of the respondents encountered difficulties and prejudice while adjusting to Taiwanese society through their interactions with locals. Respondent C said that while residing with her in-laws, she frequently experienced verbal abuse. Unreasonable questions such as "Why do you eat pork?" and "Aren't Indonesians Muslim?" are frequently directed at Respondent E. These two questions reveal the lack of understanding of the Taiwanese regarding the customs and lifestyles of new family members, as well as their negative perceptions of Indonesians.

Respondent G stated that she was often mistaken for an Indonesian migrant worker by the Taiwanese natives. The respondent's confidence was badly harmed by this type of prejudice; she stressed that even though she spoke English with her spouse, other people still perceived her as a blue-collar worker. Biases of this kind are often the result of interactions between Taiwanese and Indonesians. Some of the author's friends who were enrolled in doctoral programs in Taiwan experienced a similar situation in which they were mistakenly classified as caregivers—a position that is frequently occupied by Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Why is it assumed that all Indonesians are migrant workers? This highlights the limitations of relying on only subjective impressions to classify the identities that others have provided; the findings are not objective since there is inadequate evaluation.

Respondent I claimed to have experienced both severe discrimination and verbal abuse. "One day, after obtaining a Taiwan identity card and becoming a naturalized citizen, I went to the bank to open an account and apply for an ATM card. However, the bank officer rudely rejected my application, stating that non-Taiwanese were not permitted to apply for such cards. I was very disappointed. And I also often get told that my husband married me because he can't be able to marry Taiwanese women," said respondent I. This judgment is an issue common in Taiwanese society, some fact shows that part of the intermarriage between Southeast Asian countries women and Taiwanese men develops because of economic reasons. It's more economical to have a "foreign bride" than to marry a Taiwanese woman.

Respondent J also experienced an unpleasant moment, she was once asked rudely: "Are you foreign bride?" or "You' are a foreign bride!" One day she got offered a translator job, not only was the pay very low, but when she received the translation fee, her employer asked, "After receiving the payment, are you going to gamble?" respondent J indicated she had been hurt by such stereotypes.

Although intermarriage can act as an 'integration facilitator' for migrants, citizenship for married migrants creates conditions for negotiation around identity, nationality, and class. In

this context, the family members of immigrants mothers in Taiwan play an important role as mediators who have a positive or negative impact on the lives of immigrants in the assimilation of migrants into the host society (Chiu and Yeoh 2021; Ng 2023). In the context of citizenship, female marriage migrants are often considered as immigrants and outsiders at the same time, their presence functions as national reproduction (Cheng 2021).

The prejudice and stereotypes from the host family or society caused self-esteem and crisis of belonging issues among the respondents. The results of interviews with 10 respondents showed that identity recognition was divided into two groups, half of the respondents placed their ethnic identity as a priority, and the other half placed their national identity as their first identity.

The first group of respondents who emphasized their ethnic identity as their first identity, tried to explain the existence of their Chinese ethnicity in their home country through verbal explanations and introductions to their interlocutors. They tried to attract their new family member or those who questioned their Chineseness. In fact, in Indonesia, Indonesian Chinese do have the same customs, culture, and celebrations with small differences, Indonesian Chinese celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival by eating zongzi, a stinky rice dumpling; the Mid-Autumm Festival with moon cake, Lunar New Year, etc.

The second group of respondents who emphasized their national identity in the first place, two respondents said they experienced severe discrimination in their host families and communities. Respondent C said she had to do all the household work, take care of her childrens and husband, cook for all family members including parents, sister and brother-in-law, and still had to work on her husband's family farm; and the elders in the host family even scolded her for coming from the poverty family; Meanwhile, at the same time, her family in Indonesia considered she has boosted her status after marrying a Taiwanese man. According to respondent C, her family in Indonesia regarded her has become a "Taiwanese woman". Respondent C's experience shows two very contrasting sides, in the host country she is considered to be from a poor country, and in certain contexts, she is not qualified enough to be Taiwanese. However, in contrast to all of her Indonesian family, her family of origin believes that her identity status has improved.

Another respondent, respondent J, said that her spouse opposed her attending the school, as did her husband's relatives. She managed to pay for her own education, work as a waitress at a breakfast café, and complete her high school education in Taiwan in order to fulfill her dream. The rejection from society that she often feels is humiliating questions, "Are you going to run away?" or "Do you often send money to asssit your family's economy in Indonesia?" She emphasized that the question probably is to show caring for

her, but it was unpleasant. Respondents C and J grew up in the Hakka community in Indonesia, appreciate their own ethnic culture, and are even more fluent in Hakka than speaking ndonesian (a strong Hakka accent was heard when she speaking Indonesian during the interview). They felt rejected in a country that she expects will welcoming her.

Continuity is based on a sense of self and consistency over time, reflecting the uniqueness of the individual's existence experience from the collective experience. Over time, continuity fosters a sense of stability and personal identity, whereas differentiation conveys the idea of an isolated existence. An experience of own desire becomes possible in the continuing application and rejection of thoughts wherein the self (as knower) manifests as an active processor of experiences (Van Niekerk et al. 2010). Consistent with the experiences of the interviewees, discrimination, rejection, and stereotypes that developed among the host community's families led to an identity crisis that impacted their self-definition.

CONCLUSION

Although in the context of globalization, identity characteristics can become increasingly faded, because collective identities disappear over time, and will be increasingly depleted because they are not in that cultural community. However, and rejection and labeling by others indicate different experiences in the context of assimilation, marginality, and conflicts in the integration process, making self-identity more deeply embedded, because rejection manifests as active processing. Ethnic identity does not flow from opinions or prejudices, but (identity) is built from within, rejection even can make the identity stronger. Furthermore, personal positioning influences cultural negotiation (Anderson and Macleroy 2017).

Respondents who acknowledge their cultural identity as their primary identity do so because of a desire to fit in with the host society. This study shows how respondents' perceptions of themselves are altered by rejection and hostility. Since Indonesia is their country of origin, they accept both the definitions of public race—where respondents are addressed or grouped by the host community—and documentary race, which records identity based on official documents. Labeling makes them feel as though they do not need to emphasize their ethnicity.

We also discovered the crucial importance of cultural and national education for migrants's host families. To prevent bias and misunderstandings, husbands (or spouses) and other host family members need to become familiar with and comprehend the culture of the

newcomers. The host family's acceptance and warmth can provide newcomers with a sense of security and self-assurance. To maximize the advantages of government empowerment programs for married migrants, support from spouses and host families can expedite integration. In addition to minimizing resistance, bilateral learning can serve as a bridge across disparities.

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