

# Literature review of Identity Negotiation of Second-and 1.5-Generation Chinese Immigrants in Australia

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**Abstract:** The process of identity negotiation among Chinese youth growing up in a multicultural Australian context is complex and challenging. Despite the large composition of Chinese immigrants in the Australian population and their contribution to society, very limited research has addressed the circumstances of the later generations and their identity negotiation issues, even less about a comprehensive review of what is currently known about the identity negotiation experiences of second- and 1.5-generations Chinese immigrants. By drawing on insights based on theories of Berry's acculturation framework and Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation management, the current article aims to compile, review, and examine cumulative research that sheds light on literature pertaining to (a) the concepts of acculturation, its process and four acculturation strategies;(b) identity, identity negotiation and identity management strategies from the communication perspective; (c) young Chinese immigrants' identity negotiation experience in Australia.

**Key words:** second- and 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants; identity negotiation; acculturation; Australia; factors; influence

**DOI:** 10.69979/3041-0843.25.04.080

## 1 Introduction

As global interconnectedness continues to increase and multicultural societies evolve, study related to acculturation has become significant in concentrating on the unique experiences of cultural minorities (Tong, 2014). Acculturation is a long and complex journey and identity is the core issue of the acculturation and adaptation process because the first and fundamental question the immigrants should address is how they define themselves and how they connect to others in the host society (Liu, 2015). This study focuses on investigating the research related to second- and 1.5-generation of Chinese immigrants negotiate their bicultural identities and live between Chinese and Australian cultures. Chinese immigrants are defined to those come from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan and second generation is defined as the new generation of offspring of contemporary immigrants, including not only foreign-born children but also those who arrive overseas at preschool age (0-4 years); whereas the 1.5 generation is often divided into two groups: children arriving in the host country between the age of 6 and 13 years and those arriving at their adolescence (Zhou, 1997).

Immigrant youth often experience complex identity challenges while acculturating into mainstream societies (Toomey, Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2013). When exposed to cultural norms different from their parents' heritage, they may question the authenticity of their ethnic identity and struggle to feel valued in either cultural space. For second- and 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants in Australia, identity negotiation is shaped by living between two worlds. Unlike first-generation migrants—who often attempt assimilation yet remain perceived as “foreigners” due to visible ethnic difference (Liu, 2015)—younger generations experience a sense of “in-betweenness.” Immersed in Australian schooling, social media, and peer environments (Bartley, 2010), they are encouraged to be independent and assertive (Yeh & Drost, 2002). At the same time, families expect them to preserve Chinese language and cultural values at home (Cheng, 1994). Thus, Chinese immigrant youth must navigate tensions between parental and community expectations and the norms of the broader Australian society (Lee & Zhan, 1998).

Australia provides a meaningful context for examining such identity negotiation. As a highly diverse nation where multiculturalism is officially celebrated, Chinese immigrants have grown to become the second-largest migrant group.

However, research specifically addressing the descendants of Chinese immigrants remains limited. There are several reasons why a focus on Chinese adolescent immigrants is valuable. First, unlike their first-generation immigrant forebears who have meaningful connections to their home country's culture and are well prepared for confronting cultural clashes in the new country, the children of immigrants have no choice in the decision-making process of immigration and are faced with unique and different identity struggles (Liu, 2015). They are expected to maintain their ethnic languages and traditions at home and are always reminded of their Chinese roots, whereas at school they are taught to act more 'Australian'—assertive and independent in thinking and decision-making (Yeh & Marc, 2008). Second, diverse research illustrates that the young evaluate their ethnic background and explore their identity during the adolescent period (Phinney, 2006; Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006). They experience a greater sense of cultural difference and increased questioning of belonging to their cultural group during adolescence (Phinney, 2006). Furthermore, adolescent immigrants may have greater risk than their older generation of psychological and acculturative stress, which is represented as potential difficulties they may experience while navigating between heritage culture and mainstream culture (Berry et al., 2006).

The purpose of the present research is to examine the dynamic identity negotiation process in which second- and 1.5-generation of Chinese immigrants are involved and how family, personal and societal factors influence their self-defined cultural identities. In order to achieve the research aim, this article will review, summarize and evaluate current understanding and research in terms of substantial empirical findings in relation to identity negotiation research: (a) the concepts of acculturation, its process and four acculturation strategies will be identified ;(b) identity, identity negotiation and identity management strategies from the communication perspective will be employed as the thesis framework; (c) young Chinese immigrants' identity negotiation experience in Australia will be emphasized to illustrate identity negotiation theories in practice.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Acculturation and Berry's Acculturation Framework**

Immigration experiences are always linked with acculturation (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). As a result of immigration, it is inevitable that people from different cultural backgrounds come to live together and acculturate into a new cultural context. Although there are competing views in relation to the concepts of acculturation, this thesis employed Berry's (2005) definition that describes acculturation as a dual process of cultural and psychological change that occurs when two or more cultural groups or individuals come into contact. He proposed that there were two independent dimensions underlying people's acculturation process: individuals' connection with their heritage cultures and with their societies of settlement (Berry, 1980).

According to Berry's Acculturation Model (1997), individuals can be categorized in four quadrants—integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization—on the basis of their level of identification with either the heritage culture or the mainstream society culture. When individuals identify with both cultures, they not only highly acculturate but they also have strong ethnic identity, they are described as 'integrated'. On the other hand, those who identify more strongly with the host society culture than with their heritage culture are described as 'assimilated'. Young Chinese immigrants usually identify as integrated because they uphold the two cultures through their personal interactions with family members and school peers; in some cases, they tend to assimilate to mainstream society when they have a strong desire and external pressure after being immersed in the culture of the host society (Garcia, 2019). The category of 'separation' applies to those who identify strongly with their heritage culture and do not acculturate, while 'marginalization' applies to those who have no strong identification with either the host or ethnic culture. Berry's acculturation framework can serve as a useful guideline for categorizing Chinese-Australian adolescents. The model can also serve as a strategy that young Chinese immigrants can use to deal with their identity negotiation challenges. Berry et al. (2006) found that the majority of adolescent immigrants chose an integration approach to acculturation and showed higher general psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Cohen, & Kassan, 2018).

### **2.2 Identity and Identity Negotiation**

In addition to acculturation, identity is a core issue of immigrants because the first and fundamental question the immigrants should address is how they define themselves and how they connect to others in the host society (Liu, 2015). Although identity theories have been widely discussed from different disciplinary fields, this study will use the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as a theoretical framework to examine identity and identity negotiation theories. Communication researcher Ting-Toomey (2005) refers to identity as “reflective self-images constructed, experienced and communicated by the individuals within [a] culture and in a particular interactive situation” (p. 217). Moreover, she identified two aspects of identity: value content and salience. Value content refers to the standards or expectations that individuals embrace mentally when they make evaluations (Liu, 2015). For example, Chinese culture values a focus on family ties, and as a result Chinese parents are more likely to live with their children and support them even though the children are adults; whereas western parents, who identify more with independence and individuality, may ask their children to move out of the family home and live independently.

On the other hand, salience of identity emphasizes the strength of affiliation that individuals have with their cultural group. While values might be a relatively stable dimension, salience may vary within individuals, depending in the context and the people involved in a particular social interaction (Liu, 2015). Situating identity in multiple contexts is relevant to the exploration of dynamic identity negotiation among younger generations of Chinese immigrants because navigating between their home and host cultural contexts is a crucial part of their daily life. For example, Chinese immigrants using English with local Australians is not only for the instrumental function of being able to communicate with the host society, but also for making their social identity salient, even though they speak Chinese with their family and Chinese friends. This example illustrates that individuals are likely to enact or change their behaviors to incorporate the norms of the host culture, hence the salience of social context is crucial to understand the dynamics of social behaviors (Liu, Dane, Sharon, Gallois, & Le, 2020).

According to Ting-Toomey (2005), identity negotiation is “a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others’ desired self-images” (p. 217). This theory helps to understand bicultural individuals’ identity formation and dialectical struggles, which are caused by identity salience and the affirmation of cultural values (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). Individuals desire affirmation of both bicultural identities in any type of communication situation. However, the affirmation of one’s cultural identity means the exclusion of others and outsiders may only see one side of his/her identity (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). Children of Chinese immigrants in Australia hope they are accepted by both cultural groups. However, as they grow up, they realize that no matter how long they have lived in Australia and how well they speak English, they are not completely accepted as a member of ‘ordinary’ (white) Australians and are still regarded as Chinese (Liu, 2015). On the other hand, they are also not accepted as ‘ordinary Chinese’ because they are deeply influenced by Western values and beliefs. Lack of a sense of belonging to either cultural group has been proven to result in a lower level of self-esteem and cultural homelessness (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). As a result, identity negotiation strategies are required for immigrants to deal with identity discrepancies between self-views and other’s views of them.

Based on the identity and identity negotiation theories, Imahori and Cupach (2005) proposed identity management theory and suggested that competent identity negotiation requires the ability to “successfully negotiate mutually acceptable identities in interactions” (Cupach & Imahori 1993, p.118). Two common strategies are identified: one is ‘alternating’ (also named situated or shifted) identity, which involves changing identities according to the circumstances, while the other is ‘fused’ (also called blended or hybrid) identity, which is characterized by combining two cultures to form a new culture (La Fromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Those with a blended identity are proven to have less identity conflict in comparison with those with shifted identity (Ward, 2012). In the case of Chinese immigrants in Australia, the first generation endorsed the shifted (alternating or situated) identity. In the early stages of immigration, they were always reminded that they were from ‘somewhere else’ and they had to choose which aspect of their identity to display in order to survive better in the host society. Surprisingly, the shifted identity strategy is also popular among second- and 1.5-generations. They weigh their Chinese ethnic identity and Australian identity equally and separately rather than blending them to form a new cultural identity (Liu, 2015).

Children who grow up in a mixed cultural context may experience a disruption in identity development because they

have to navigate simultaneously between cultures before being able to associate with any one culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Research has shown that identity disruption in adolescent development can lead to identity conflicts, tense relationships with family and peers, and mental health issues (Yeh, Kim, Pituc, & Atkins, 2008). As a result, negotiating and living between two cultures can be psychologically and socioculturally challenging (Szabo & Ward, 2015). Despite the increased research on immigrant youth in recent years, little has been investigated as to how they make sense of cultural identity exploration and what elements that contribute to influence a successful or unsuccessful identity negotiation within the context of Australia. The present study can address the gap between the increasing importance of second- and 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants in Australia and the limited knowledge related to their current circumstances. Gaining insight into the cultural self-concept of a specific group contributes to providing a wholesome and ethical service as well as improving the wellbeing of the growing immigrant population in Australia.

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