Negotiating Multi-layered Cultural Identities: A Study of Pan-Chinese Immigrant Descendants in Belgium

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Abstract

This study makes use of hybridity identity theory and the dynamic perspective of identity negotiation as a framework for exploring how pan-Chinese immigrant descendants in Belgium culturally and ethno-nationally identify themselves, how they negotiate with various ethno-national identity labels, and how they perceive differences between their immigrant parents' heritage culture and the culture of Belgian host society. Ethnographic and qualitative research methods were employed to collect data from 2017 to 2019 at Sun Yat-sen heritage school in Brussels. Based on 200 hours of participant observation and 30 interviews conducted with immigrant descendants, the results indicate that cultural differences could be observed in participants' familial and social life, including education, parenting, and lifestyle. Moreover, three vital dimensions whereby pan-Chinese immigrant descendants negotiate, perform, and situate their cultural and ethnic identity are food practices, popular cultural consumptions, and friendships. Notably, few participants identify themselves as either Chinese or Belgian; the majority espouses a dual identity and tends to place their identity "in-between" the pan-Chinese and Belgian ethnic affiliations. This study further finds that the descendants of Taiwanese immigrants find it difficult to settle their cultural and ethnic identity as they frequently struggle to establish a sense of belonging, and are caught between three ethno-national labels: Taiwanese, ethnic Chinese (Huaren), and Belgian. The findings highlight the fluid, dynamic, context-specific, and multi-layered nature of the development and negotiation of cultural and ethnic identities in the immigrant context.

Keywords: Belgium; hybrid identity; in-betweenness; identity negotiation; Pan-Chinese immigrant

Introduction

In the 1980s, the Mainland Chinese government implemented a series of policies regarding economic reform that permitted Chinese citizens to emigrate to other countries. Since then, a large number of Mainland Chinese citizens subsequently left China to make a life overseas. Since the 1990s, emigration destinations have expanded beyond the traditional English-speaking nations to include a range of countries across Europe. In this paper, the notion of "pan-Chinese immigrants" refers to immigrants from societies that predominantly speak the Chinese language, such as Mainland China and Taiwan. Currently, the number of pan-Chinese immigrants in European countries stands at 2.5–3 million, compared to less than 1 million in the 1980s. Thus, Europe has become one of the most popular destinations for pan-Chinese immigrants, followed by North America and Oceania (Song, 2011).

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Compared to European immigration destinations that have attracted hundreds of thousands of pan-Chinese immigrants, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain, the community in Belgium is relatively small in both number and scale. The complexity of the linguistic landscape in Belgian society is one of the main factors that limit the country's appeal as a destination for pan-Chinese immigrants (Sluka et al., 2018). Belgium is currently home to approximately 45,000 immigrants from Mainland China, and only 400 from Taiwan (Lin, 2018; Latham & Wu, 2013). This is very small compared to other immigrant communities in Belgium, such as Moroccan and Turkish immigrants and their descendants, both of which have a population of roughly half a million, respectively. Moreover, the national population in Belgium is approximately 11 million (STATBEL, 2019); there are around 1.2 million immigrants, accounting for 11% of the total population. Of these, the pan-Chinese community accounts for roughly 3.75% of the immigrant population, and 0.41% of the total Belgian population.

Although the pan-Chinese immigrant community in Belgium is relatively small, the country has a long history of immigration, with the first wave of pan-Chinese immigrants dating back to the 1920s. These early immigrants traveled by boat, and therefore, mainly settled in Belgian coastal cities, such as Antwerp. They typically came from the south-eastern provinces of Mainland China, such as Guangdong and Zhejiang. According to Pang (1998), the majority of Mainland Chinese immigrants between the 1920s and 1930s were Cantonese, who accounted for about 80% of the early Chinese immigrants' population in Belgium. However, around 8% were Zhejiangese, 2% were ethnic Chinese who migrated from Singapore to Belgium, and others came from Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Hubei, and Fujian. Notably, even though Chinese immigrants migrated to Belgium from different regions of Mainland China, the population still only numbered in the hundreds.

The second wave of Mainland Chinese immigrants came in the 1950s. The internal Chinese political situation significantly deteriorated following the Cultural Revolution, and land reforms forced several Chinese people to leave their homeland and emigrate to Europe. Most of these immigrants were from the New Territories of Hong Kong and Hakka regions in the south-eastern parts of Mainland China. However, it is important to note that the Belgian government decided to stop receiving immigrants after World War II. Subsequently, the Chinese immigrant population decreased to less than one hundred in 1955, and those who were not accepted in Belgium migrated to other European counties, such as the United Kingdom and France. As a result, the population of Chinese immigrants increased dramatically in these counties in the 1950s (Pang, 1998).

The Belgian government re-opened its immigration policy in 1974 and welcomed Chinese immigrants mainly for family-reunification or asylum purposes. At this time, many Chinese immigrants followed this migration trajectory and were reunited with their family members. The population of Chinese immigrants grew from hundreds to two thousand in 1975. In 1981, the Belgian government further released the constraints of its immigration policy and was recognized as an immigrant-receiving country. This recognition was meaningful and not only facilitated the Belgian government in enhancing their immigration/migration policies, but it also enabled them to seriously consider the issues regarding how to give foreign populations more opportunities to access social resources and achieve better social integration. This recognition also meant that the Belgian government acknowledged those foreign immigrants who constituted a critical part of its national demographic and needed equal treatment. In the 1980s, because of the friendly immigration atmosphere in Belgian society and due to the Tiananmen incident, many Mainland

Chinese citizens chose to leave their home country and migrate overseas. The Chinese immigrant population in Belgium soon exceeded 10,000 (Pang, 2002a).

The latest immigration wave from Mainland China to Belgium began in the 1990s. Rapid economic development in China occurred when the government implemented a series of open market and reform policies. Consequently, people's economic conditions improved and there were more opportunities to migrate or travel overseas, which further diversified the demographic structure of the Mainland Chinese immigrant community in Belgium. Statistics show immigrant demographic diversification in this period. Differed from the previous and early Chinese immigrants were poor, low-skilled, and came from peasant backgrounds in the south-eastern parts of Mainland China. In the 1990s, students and skilled migrant workers constituted most of the Chinese immigrant community in Belgium, coming from different regions across Mainland China (Pang, 2002a).

Taking student migrants as an example, in the late 1990s, only 300 Chinese students applied for student visas to study in Belgium; in 2003, this figure tripled to 1, 267 students. In the 2003–2004 academic year, Chinese students at KU Leuven, the largest and highest-ranking university in Belgium, constituted the largest proportion of international students; a pattern that continues to this day. The plenty of Chinese international students choose to stay in their host countries and do not return to their homeland after graduation; therefore, Chinese students have become the dominant migrant population in the Belgian Chinese immigrant community. A similar trend was evident in the increasing number of Chinese professionals and businesspeople arriving in Belgium. Skilled Chinese migrants who hold a Belgian work permit B visa rank number four in Flanders after Japan, India, and the United States. More recently, business investment and business operations have become an emerging and popular migration trajectory for many Chinese people (Pang, 2008a). In 1990, there were only 30 Chinese companies in Belgium that mainly operated in trade and the chemical, metal, and food sectors. However, Chinese investment increased rapidly to more than 600 million euros, and by the end of 2016, Chinese companies had bought and owned 65 Belgian companies. Investments from Chinese companies in the Belgian economy further increased to 2.5 billion euros. These investments also brought a lot of work opportunities and job offers mainly for Chinese people but also for locals. This enticed many skilled-migrant workers and businesspeople to migrate to Belgium (Damman, 2018; De Beule et al., 2011).

Another prominent pan-Chinese immigrant group in Belgium is Taiwanese immigrants, who started to come to Belgium more recently. The early Taiwanese immigrants arrived in Belgium in the 1970s, when Taiwan was still largely an agricultural society that could only offer its citizens limited income. At that time, many Taiwanese people chose to emigrate overseas, with the majority choosing to migrate to the United States as Taiwan had a significant historical and economic connection with the US. Notably, after the Kuomintang (KMT) lost the civil war to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Mainland China, the KMT party resettled its regime and the government of the Republic of China (ROC) on the island of Taiwan in 1949. The KMT government subsequently received a huge amount of economic and financial aid from the United States. At that time, the US considered the ROC regime in Taiwan as "free-China" compared to the communist authority in Mainland China. Although Taiwan does not have formal diplomatic relations with the United States in the present days, Taiwan and the United States have established very close cooperation in many social, economic, and political fields. For many years, Taiwan has been the United States' tenth-largest international trading partner. Thus, the close relationship has

encouraged the US government to adopt a more friendly attitude toward immigration applicants from Taiwan, thus, nearly one million Taiwanese immigrants live in the US, mainly in California, New York, New Jersey, and Texas (Hsieh, 2017).

There are approximately two million Taiwanese people live overseas. However, the population in Belgium is very small with around 400 Taiwanese immigrants, according to 2017 statistics. The community is mainly composed of early and first-generation restaurant owners and women who immigrated to Belgium through intercultural marriages. Based on the authors' participant observations while staying in Belgium, these women constitute about 60% of the Belgian-Taiwanese immigrant community. The authors met many of them at the Sun Yat-sen heritage school in Brussels. The demographic of the Taiwanese immigrant community in Belgium has also experienced diversification as many people from Taiwan (especially the younger generations) choose to migrate, live, and work in Belgium. New migration trajectories have facilitated by the rapid development of international business and globalization, mainly via the mobility schemes of Working Holiday programs, and the mutual employee and expatriate exchange programs developed between Taiwanese and Belgian high-tech companies (especially in the semi-conductor industrial sectors). These programs offer people from Taiwan (ages 20s to 40s) opportunities to temporarily work and live in Belgium for one to five years. As these Taiwanese migrants are temporary residents, the authors did not consider their experiences in this study (Lin, 2018; Lin et al., 2020).

Pang (1998) argued that pan-Chinese immigrant communities in Belgium are situated in a structurally invisible social position and are underrepresented in many societal domains, such as immigration policy, the mainstream labor market, mass media, and people's daily discourse. Because of their disadvantaged social position, there has been little research regarding this minority community. Therefore, Lin (2018) argued that it is important to investigate issues pertaining to the pan-Chinese immigrant community and fill the research gap. As the majority of pan-Chinese immigrants in Belgium, particularly the first generation, work in the catering industry, extant studies on pan-Chinese immigrants focus on restaurateurs' immigrant life experience in Belgian host society. For instance, Pang (2002) explored differences in the business models, interior designs, and menu content of different generations of restaurant owners in pan-Chinese communities in Antwerp and found that most of the restaurants had been taken over by the second generation in the 1980s. Their business models had become more innovative and diverse, interior designs more modern, and menus began to include items made with local ingredients and flavors. Pang (2008b) also looked at how characteristics of the pan-Chinese catering industry (e.g. long working hours) influenced social mobility and the parenting styles of pan-Chinese families and parents. The study found that many pan-Chinese immigrants, especially the first generation, spent most of their time running their restaurants, leaving them with very little time to devote to their children's education or other social or leisure activities. This has negatively impacted their children's social mobility and limited their level of engagement in the host society. One of the most recent studies of pan-Chinese restaurateurs' lives in Belgium was conducted by Dongen (2019), who explored the operational experiences of pan-Chinese immigrants who run Belgian fry shops. Dongen found that the owners adopted multiple localization strategies to run their shops to help them integrate into the host society. Furthermore, since fries are regarded as one of the symbolic national foods of Belgium, the Chinese fries shop owners insisted on speaking Dutch when interacting with local customers. They were also more likely to play

Belgian-style music, advertisements, and dress in the local fashion to create a "Belgian style" and lessen their minority image.

Compared to the studies mentioned above, few studies have examined how their Belgian-born descendants negotiate their identities and other relevant issues. Pang (2008b) explored the life, language-learning, and discrimination experienced by second-generation pan-Chinese immigrants in Belgium and found that they had quite different perceptions and subjective interpretations concerning various ethno-national identity labels, such as Chinese, Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese, and Huaren (華人). Even though the majority hold dual identities, choosing to identify as both Belgian and Chinese or half Belgian and half Chinese, they still made diverse interpretations regarding the meaning of being immigrant descendants and other identity labels that they chose to adopt. However, as the study was based on a one-time close-ended survey, it lacked evidence of the diverse, complex, and dynamic situations that pan-Chinese immigrants may face when negotiating their ethno-national identity in daily life. Accordingly, to fill the existing research gap regarding pan-Chinese immigrant descendants in Belgium, this study chose this particular group as a research subject, examined how they identify themselves culturally and ethnically, and how they negotiate and interpret different ethno-national identity labels in daily life. Worth to note that adolescence is an important stage of life where people tend to establish their ethnic/cultural identity (Costigan et al., 2009). This study explores the daily life experiences of 1.5- and second-generation pan-Chinese immigrant descendants in Belgium, and investigates how they negotiate the differences between their heritage culture and the Belgian culture, how they identify themselves culturally and ethnically, and how they perceive and interpret different ethno-national identity labels (e.g., ethnic Chinese (Huaren), Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese, and Belgian).

Rather than following the viewpoint of an academic theory, such as the acculturation model proposed by Berry (2003, 2006), this paper uses the hybridity theory (Bhabha, 1994, 2004) as the framework to examine and interpret the research data. The drawback of acculturation theory is that it divides immigrants' life adaptation and cultural identities into four categories: separation, marginalization, integration, and assimilation. It looks at both immigrants' willingness to maintain their heritage culture and motivation to interact with the local culture and people. However, this categorical model has been criticized by scholars because it ignores the fact that immigrants' cultural/ethnic identities and adaptation consequences are dynamic, fluid, and significantly influenced by immigrants' distinct lived circumstances. In this regard, it is more appropriate to consider immigrants' cultural and ethnic identities as a temporary outcome or strategic choice that attempts to fulfill people's practical needs in a specific life circumstance (Nagel, 1994). Hybridity identity theory is somewhat similar in that it argues that immigrants' ethnic and cultural identities are changeable and constructed through constant dialogue, negotiation, and subjective interpretation, depending on particular social, life, and cultural contexts. Accordingly, identities are not only based on how people regard themselves but also concern how others in society look at us. Therefore, the formation of peoples' identity involves a series of negotiations and inter-subjective constructions conducted by both ourselves and others in society. As a result, scholars tend to regard identity as a temporary and changeable outcome according to different lived environments (Jenkins, 2004). In this regard, hybridity identity theory not only provides a dynamic and flowing perspective for researchers to explore the complex process of how people negotiate and shape their identity but also helps researchers explore other essential aspects that are not present in the acculturation model. This overemphasizes the categorization framework and

ignores the dynamic and fluid natures of people's identity (Mostafaee, 2016; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

In summary, this study makes use of hybridity identity theory and the dynamic perspective of identity negotiation as the framework to explore how members of the pan-Chinese immigrant descendants in Belgium identify themselves culturally and ethno-nationally, how they negotiate with various ethno-national identity labels, and how they perceive cultural differences between their immigrant parents' heritage culture and the culture of the Belgian host society. Based on this framework, three research questions are explored: (1) How do pan-Chinese immigrant descendants understand Chinese and Belgian cultures? (2) How do they articulate their ethnic and cultural identity? (3) How do they negotiate different ethnic identity labels and cultural differences in daily life?

Methodology

The authors collected the research data over two years in Belgium, working as Chinese language teachers at the École Sun Yat-sen in Brussels from 2017 to 2019. This school is one of the oldest Chinese heritage schools in Europe, and one of the few schools in Belgium founded by immigrants from the Republic of China (Taiwan). It is also one of the few schools in Europe that still teaches traditional Chinese characters with a spelling system made up of Mandarin phonetic symbols (Hsu et al., 2012). Currently, 10 classes are taught at École Sun Yat-sen, divided into three educational phases: kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school. On average, 100 to 150 students enroll each semester of whom 80% are the descendants of immigrants from Mainland China, 10% are descendants from Taiwanese immigrant families, and the remainder is international or local Belgian students. There are a total of 15 teachers and staff members, all of whom are immigrants from Taiwan. It is important to note that both authors also came to Belgian from Taiwan as international student migrants; they conducted this study and were Chinese language teachers at the school.

During our fieldwork, the first author was responsible for teaching students in the sixth grade of primary school, while the second author was in charge of teaching third-grade students at secondary school, teaching a total of 35 students. The data collection process was divided into two parts. The first part was based on both authors' field notes, while the second part consisted of semi-structured interviews with 30 students at École Sun Yat-sen. The average age of student participants was 15.5. The gender distribution of these research participants was equal, and the majority of them still lived with their parents. Many of them came from families where both parents were pan-Chinese immigrants who owned ethnic restaurants. However, some of the student participants came from intercultural families, and in most cases, had pan-Chinese immigrant mothers and Belgian fathers. These students were gathered via purposive sampling with the criteria of who grew up and was educated in Belgium, rather than their immigrant parents' homeland. Five were 1.5-generation, 25 were second-generation, and all were between the ages of 13 and 18. The interviews lasted for an average of 1 to 1.5 hours, and the interviews were recorded after gaining the students' permission. The recordings were written out verbatim to enable follow-up analysis, and the constant comparison method of inductive qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the collected data. To analyze the data, the authors first reviewed the transcripts and field notes to develop an in-depth understanding after which the data was compared and coded. The coding process consisted of open-, axial-, and selective-coding. Finally,

the themes that emerged were further developed into the framework used for the analysis of this study (Boeije, 2002).

Research findings

Who am I?

With regard to how the student participants identified themselves culturally and ethnically, the majority of them hold dual identities and liked to describe themselves as "*both Chinese and Belgian.*" Their parents' backgrounds, the languages used in their daily lives, and their appearance were the three most frequently mentioned aspects of how the participants defined themselves:

> *I consider myself to be "both Chinese and Belgian," since my mom is Chinese from Mainland China and my dad is Belgian… I speak both Chinese and Dutch. My appearance is different from my Belgian counterparts; I have black hair, dark eyes, and yellow skin, but they don't. These aspects make me feel that I'm not 100% identical to my Belgian peers, and that "I am both Chinese and Belgian," rather than purely Belgian or Chinese. (B067)*

Few student participants identified as entirely Chinese or Belgian since most considered they were different from their Belgian peers either in terms of culture, ethnicity, or appearance. The participants were more likely to hold dual identity since the majority of them were raised in culturally mixed, pan-Chinese, and Belgian families, and their experiences crossing and negotiating these differences further affected how they identified themselves (Liu, 2015). Another finding was that some participants whose parents were from Taiwan found it more difficult to negotiate the ethno-national identity labels among "Belgian," "Taiwanese," and "ethnic Chinese (Huaren)" as some Taiwanese immigrant parents refused to accept the use of the label "Chinese" to depict their cultural and ethnic identities. How to identify oneself culturally and ethnically not only bothers Taiwanese living overseas but also bothers the people living in Taiwan (Li, 2020).

> *I prefer to identify myself as "both Belgian and Taiwanese," since my mum is from Taiwan and my dad is Belgian. However, people here [in Belgium] don't know so much about Taiwan, so people here usually call me "Chinese." However, I don't like to be called "Chinese" since my mum told me that Taiwanese is not Chinese, and Taiwan is not a part of China. I don't like to get involved in complex political debates between Taiwan and Mainland China; however, sometimes I feel very confused. (Z135)*

Taiwanese society has experienced significant change regarding ethno-national identity developments in the past two decades. The National Chengchi University (2020) conducted a series of surveys on how people in Taiwan identify themselves and in general, the "Chinese" identity label has lost its attractiveness for Taiwanese society. In contrast, an increasing number of people in Taiwan chose to apply the "Taiwanese" label to describe their cultural and ethno-national identities. In 1992, more than a quarter (25.5%) of people in Taiwan identified as "Chinese," but only 17.6% of people identified as "Taiwanese," and 46.4% held dual identity. However, these figures are significantly different nowadays, as Taiwanese society experienced political democratization and cultural localization in the late 1990s. In 1996, Taiwan citizens could legally vote for and elect the president, which changed the political and cultural landscape of Taiwanese society. The opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won the

first presidential election and took power in 2000. During its governance until 2008, the DPP implemented a series of cultural localization policies, encouraging local culture and Taiwanese identity. Until the end of 2008, 43.7% of people in Taiwan identified as "Taiwanese," and the percentage of people identifying as "Chinese" declined to 4%. However, 44.7% of people in Taiwan still regarded themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese. These figures changed in 2020 when 67% of the population identified as "Taiwanese," 2.4% identified as "Chinese," and 27.5% identified as having dual identity. Zhong (2016) concluded that with ethno-national identity developments over the past two decades, the Taiwanese still struggle with how to identify themselves. Overseas Taiwanese and their descendants have to face more complex choices in determining their cultural and ethno-national identities compared to Mainland Chinese immigrants who only need to navigate between two main labels of "Chinese" and "Belgian." However, some of the Taiwanese immigrants and their descendants must further consider how to posit their cultural and ethno-national identities between the three different identity labels of "Taiwanese," "Chinese," and "Belgian."

Perceptions of cultural differences

Most of the students interviewed said that the differences between Belgian and Chinese culture were most apparent in terms of educational styles, parenting styles, and lifestyles.

In terms of education, the students said there were significant differences in teaching styles at their Belgian and Chinese schools (i.e., the École Sun Yat-sen), as well as their educational expectations. Belgian schools emphasize class participation and the expression of opinions, and Belgian teachers welcome independent thinking and critical judgments. On the other hand, teachers in Chinese schools are more likely to follow the one-way didactic teaching method, meaning that students have less involvement in class and fewer opportunities to express their opinions:

> *The two ways of teaching are somewhat different. Although the teachers in my [Belgian] school sometimes teach us via didactic instruction, most of the time, they prefer to ask some questions or assign us collaborative tasks related to the subjects. However, the teachers in my Chinese school usually teach us via didactic instruction, such as by reading content in a textbook and explaining it to us. There's definitely a difference, but it's difficult to judge which one is better or worse. (C035)*

Concerning parenting styles, some of the students said that Belgian parents tend to view their children as independent individuals and give them more opportunities to express their opinions. They also express their love and emotion toward their children more frequently via body language, such as hugs or directly articulating their love to them. In contrast, Chinese parents usually focus more on children's academic performance, are more likely to educate children authoritatively, and are less likely to express their feelings and emotions toward their children daily:

> *Yes, there are some differences ... My [Belgian] dad gives me more hugs. I feel more relieved when interacting with my dad. He does not push me as hard as my [Chinese] mum. ...My mum is a bit different from my dad; for example, although I like to play the piano, she attaches a lot of importance to it, and requires me to practice for two hours every day; it really puts me under pressure. My mum is also more concerned about my performance at school, and always reminds me that I have to study hard and that it's*

good for my future. ...the differences in parenting styles between my Chinese mum and Belgian father, I think, are because of the cultural differences between here [Belgium] and China. (G057)

In terms of lifestyle, some of the students stated that their Belgian parents emphasize broader options of life and leisure activities, while their Chinese parents place more emphasis on work and school performances:

I think that Chinese people attach more importance to their work than their spare time. I have some Chinese friends whose parents own restaurants here, and they spend almost all of their time working. That's a bit different from my parents. My [Belgian] dad says that we work to live, rather than live to work, so we often go out on holidays or at weekends. My dad often chats with me about my friends, school, and extracurricular activities, but my [Taiwanese] mum attaches more importance to my academic performance. (O152)

The cultural dimensions viewpoint proposed by Hofstede (2011) could further assist in understanding the cultural differences between pan-Chinese immigrants and Belgians. Generally speaking, pan-Chinese immigrants, regardless of whether they have migrated from Mainland China or Taiwan, have a higher possibility of being affected by collectivist values as both societies still treasure and hold Confucian cultural values, which significantly affect people's daily life. From the educational aspect of traditional Confucianism, the power relations between teachers and students in the classroom and at school are unequal. Teachers sit higher in the hierarchy while teaching and interacting with their students and are thought to have more power and knowledge. An old Chinese and Confucian saying perfectly reflects the student–teacher relationship both in Taiwan and Mainland China. The old saying indicates that "*someone is a teacher for a day, students have to see him/her as a father for life*" (一日為師、終生為父). This old saying shows that in the Confucian cultures and societies, the social position and role of teachers are extremely high, and students are taught to highly respect their teachers. There is no doubt that Confucian cultural values further influence people from these societies regarding teaching styles (Tran, 2013). That is why teachers in Chinese heritage schools are more like to apply the one-way teaching style and emphasize lecturing rather than inviting students to participate in discussions. Furthermore, due to the Confucian culture and its value in the patriarchy, pan-Chinese immigrant parents are more likely to intervene in their children's lives to try and influence their decisions. As a result, pan-Chinese immigrants are more likely to demonstrate their parenthood indirectly, and in most cases, they do not show their love or say they "love" each other in front of their children. The narratives provided by the student participants demonstrate that Confucian values still have a strong impact on how pan-Chinese parents conduct themselves as parents, even if they have migrated and are living overseas (Gu, 2019).

Regarding lifestyle, Hofstede (2011) pointed out that people from Asian societies or those affected by Confucian culture emphasize the cultural value of restraint. Being hard-working and controlling an individual's desires are both positive cultural virtues. This could explain why pan-Chinese immigrant parents are more focused on their children's education preferences rather than their extracurricular activities. Another Chinese saying helps us understand this emphasis on children's schooling, "*studying hard is more valuable than anything else*" (萬般皆下品，唯有讀書高). Pan-Chinese immigrant parents emphasize studying hard and expect their children to get

good grades in all subjects, rather than focusing on extracurricular activities (Zhou & Zhong, 2018). It is worth mentioning that some pan-Chinese immigrant parents in this study believed that education is the most affordable and easiest channel for their children to achieve the goal of upward social mobility and improve their disadvantaged social status, especially when both parents come from immigrant backgrounds. Thus, some of the student participants' parents even indicated that "*they are proud of being a tiger mom or dad,*" when the authors chatted with them in private. They believed that strict educational and parenting styles are good for their children and further help them integrate into the host and mainstream society (Guo, 2013).

In contrast, Belgium is located in Western Europe and has different cultural schemes from Mainland China and Taiwan. Its cultural norms are more similar to the Western style, which focuses on the value of individualism, and emphasizes the equality of relations in both family and school domains. Belgians are also more likely to have relaxed and indulgent lifestyles. Moreover, in Western and Belgian cultures, parents are encouraging, welcoming to show their love, both verbally and non-verbally, to their children. Additionally, due to the cultural norm of individualism, the relationship between teachers and students is more equal in the classroom, and this value also affects Belgian parents' expectations of their children. Belgian parents are not only concerned about their children's school-work preferences, however, putting more emphasis on cultivating their children's capacities beyond the knowledge of textbooks and official subjects (Boiger et al., 2013). Accordingly, the discussions with students demonstrated that Belgian society has quite different cultural schemes from its Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese counterparts, and these cultural differences not only impact peoples' lives but are also becoming the cultural references for the student participants in this study to recognize and negotiate the educational, parenting, and lifestyle differences in their daily life and social interactions.

Although these students observed differences between the pan-Chinese and Belgian cultures, most did not say that one was better than the other. In contrast, they claimed that there was no "pure" Belgian or Chinese culture since Belgium is a multicultural society in which several cultures interact and mix. The student participants are used to living in this mixed style of cultural life daily, especially in intercultural families; therefore, they have a higher level of intercultural competence and are more welcoming in accepting differences between various cultures. Consequently, they also have cosmopolitan attitudes rather than applying cultural existentialism to evaluate cultures they are not familiar with (Wang, 2018).

As I see it, nothing can be said to be good or bad in terms of culture. Chinese culture is relatively disciplined, and I am made to focus on my academic performance, so I usually get high marks in class. While Belgian culture does not attach as much importance to academic performance as Chinese culture, people care more about quality of life, so I also have the chance to relax… For me, it is really hard to say which culture is better; I think that each culture has both good and bad aspects, and it is not necessary to always compare them. All cultures have their positive and negative aspects. (K077)

Chinese culture, Belgian culture, and other cultures are all mixed here. …I live in Brussels, there are not only Chinese and Belgian people but people from all over the world. It's quite diverse here, and you can see many interesting aspects of different cultures. For example, some restaurants sell Chinese cuisine with Belgian flavors. One of my friends is Spanish, and they celebrate some traditional Chinese festivals with us. I think that there is no pure culture here since different cultures interact and are influenced

by each other. It is different to find a pure, 100% culture, whether Chinese or Belgian. I could think of myself as Chinese, as Belgian, or as a mix [of both Chinese and Belgian], but I also welcome and try to accept other cultures. (Y105)

The narratives shared by the participants reveal that there are striking differences between the Belgian and pan-Chinese cultures in several societal domains, such as education, parenting, and lifestyle. However, the researchers found that the participants did not follow an essentialist perspective to make judgments about different cultures; they appeared open-minded, flexible, and able to accept and even appreciate differences between cultures. The students' narratives not only challenged essentialist understandings of culture as pure and fixed, but also revealed that by interacting and engaging with different cultures, they gradually constructed cross-cultural competence and a cosmopolitan personality, crossing ethnic and cultural boundaries, and even forming a hybrid of ethnic and cultural identities beyond a singular sense of belonging or group affiliation (Anthias, 2001; Park, 2005).

Food practices and popular culture consumption

Several studies have demonstrated that food practices and popular culture consumption are two important dimensions in the lives of immigrants and their descendants as they perform and negotiate their ethnic and cultural identities (Weller & Turkon, 2015; Yoon, 2019). In this study, we found that the participants attached ethnic and cultural meanings to their food practices and cultural consumption behaviors. The participants indicated that they eat different foods in different contexts, depending on the people with whom they are interacting, and that different food is consumed in the public and private domains:

We usually eat Chinese food at home. My parents came from Mainland China, and they tell me, 'We are Chinese, so of course we have to eat Chinese food.' However, when I go out with my Belgian or local friends, I tend to eat Belgian or Western foods like salad, sandwiches, pizza, fries, and so on. When I eat similar food to my friends, I feel as if we belong together. ...Overall, at home I eat like a Chinese person, but at school or when interacting with my friends, I eat like a Belgian. (R082)

Since my mum is from Taiwan, at home we usually eat Taiwanese or Asian foods, but at school or when interacting with my Belgian or local friends, I prefer to eat Belgian or Western foods, since this makes me feel like I fit in better with my local peers… and I don't feel like an 'immigrant' or 'outsider.' (I098)

The narratives above reveal the important ethnic and cultural functions of food. The food they eat not only represents who they are and where they come from, but for the participants in this study, in particular, choosing what food to eat is a strategy they use to draw ethnic and cultural boundaries, find a group to belong to, and construct a collective sense of identity. This explains why the participants choose to eat different foods when interacting with different people in distinct contexts since the food people eat in their daily lives goes beyond their nutritional functions and materiality (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Ternikar, 2014).

With regard to cultural consumption practices, a sizeable difference was observed between the male and female participants. Most of the male participants indicated that they watched mostly local Belgian TV shows and Western movies, listened to mostly Belgian music, and they had relatively less interest in consuming Chinese, Taiwanese, or other Asian popular cultures. They

said that this was likely because their male peers and friends at school are not interested in Asian culture. Sharing elements of Chinese or Asian culture is not viewed as "cool," but Western or Belgian pop music, video games, sports, and skateboarding are. In this way, by consuming Belgian and Western popular culture, pan-Chinese male descendants are more likely to be considered as "cool" as their Belgian counterparts and accepted by their peers as an "insider."

> *I seldom watch Chinese films or talk about anything related to China. …I tend to browse YouTube to watch videos and films or listen to music… most of them are Belgian, American, British, or French… it depends on whether it is interesting or sounds good. I spend most of the time playing video games or watching videos introducing games because my friends play the same games. We often talk about them… if you do not do the same things as your friends, then you will have no friends or no topics in common with your friends. (W137)*

The experiences and opinions voiced by the female participants were different from those of their male counterparts. The female participants indicated that their peers and friends at Belgian schools show more interest in and are more open-minded about Chinese, Taiwanese, and other Asian cultures. This being so, they shared that they are more likely to watch Chinese or Asian TV shows and movies and listen to Chinese or Asian music both at home and at school.

> *I like Chinese films, shows, and TV programs. I particularly like Dilraba Dilmurat, a famous actress from Xinjiang. She is really adorable and hardworking, especially in the show "Running Man China." I like to listen to Chinese pop music because it is pleasant to the ear. Actually, I don't watch Belgian TV shows because I find them very boring. However, my [Belgian female] friends at school also like to watch or listen to Chinese and Asian TV shows and music, especially K-Pop; they always tell me, "These Asian male singers are so cool and handsome, and their music is different to the music we have here…" When I heard their positive feedback about Chinese and Asian cultures, I felt proud, since I am partly made of Chinese and Asian components. (H074)*

These narratives revealed that popular culture exerts a different impact on male and female student participants (Trienekens, 2002). Chinese and Asian cultures are not very popular among young people in Belgium. Due to its cultural atmosphere, pan-Chinese immigrant descendants, especially males, put more effort into consuming elements of Belgian and Western popular culture to be accepted by their Belgian peers at school and be regarded as "cool." This is particularly evident among the male participants, who felt compelled to strategically hide their pan-Chinese identities and cultural tastes. In contrast, female Belgian students appeared to be more welcoming and open-minded towards Chinese and Asian culture, so the female participants were more confident about sharing aspects of their heritage with their Belgian counterparts, displaying pan-Chinese and Asian cultural identity in front of their friends. The narratives also revealed that popular culture is an important dimension for student participants to draw boundaries and express their ethnic and cultural identities (Sterling & Pang, 2012). Additionally, the perspectives of everyday nationalism and ethnicity provide a theoretical foundation to the arguments made above; in most cases, people show their ethno-national identity and present ethnicity in very banal ways. In this study, student participants showed their hybrid cultural and ethnic identities through their daily food and popular culture consumptions rather than constructing their identities on top-down political forces or based on macro-political slogans made by politicians or political elites (Smith,2015). These viewpoints explain why student participants' daily food and popular culture

consumption practices are two vital daily domains for them to show their ethnicity and ethno-national affiliation as the majority of them hold dual identities. They strategically exhibit different levels of their Chinese/Taiwanese/Belgian ethnicities and identities in different social interactions and lived circumstances to fulfill their practical needs.

Making Friends

Friendship is another life domain that made participants realize the extent of their cultural and ethnic differences from their Belgian or local counterparts. These differences are not significant at a young age but become more severe when people enter adolescence (Shih, 1998).

I remember very clearly that when I was at primary school, I had many friends from different backgrounds: Belgian, Moroccan, Turkish, and Chinese friends. We played together, and there were no problems between us. However, things changed when I began high school. My [white] Belgian peers would single me out, and sometimes would even say, "You are Chinese, you won't understand this." It really hurt me when I heard what they were saying about me. (T145)

This narrative shared by a research participant echoed previous findings concerning immigrant descendants' friendship-making experiences. Cultural differences, immigrant backgrounds, the color of their skin, and appearance create difficulties for some pan-Chinese immigrant descendants in expanding intercultural friendships and making friends with locals. It is also important to point out that these cultural differences would cause issues later on. At a younger age, it was easier for student participants to make local friends. However, as they became teenagers, they faced more difficulties in expanding and interacting with their local peers because of their cultural and ethnic issues. Thus, as these issues become more severe, they would, in turn, seek opportunities to make friends with people of similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This means that for those pan-Chinese immigrant descendants, they may have had more diverse friendship networks when they were young than in their adolescence (McMillan, 2019).

Conclusion

This study gathered data via participant observation and a series of semi-structured interviews with 30 pan-Chinese immigrant descendants in Belgium to understand how they navigate the differences between pan-Chinese heritage and local Belgian cultures. Central issues were how the participants identified themselves culturally and ethnically, and how they negotiated different ethnic identity labels in their daily lives. This study found that cultural differences are apparent in many daily and social life domains, including education, parenting, and lifestyle. Although most participants highlighted significant differences between the pan-Chinese and Belgian cultures, it is interesting to note that they did not espouse an essentialist point of view or judge one culture to be superior to the other. Based on interviews and interactions between the authors and student participants at the school, some were aware that culture is socially constructed (Nagel, 1994). Each culture has its own meaning as well as positive and negative aspects; there is no need to compare which is better than the other.

Moreover, the study found that daily food practices and popular culture consumption are two important social and personal angles for the participants to negotiate and express their cultural and ethnic identities. The participants indicated that they had friends from a wide range of countries with various ethnicities, but they felt more anxious and confused regarding issues of cultural and

ethnic identities and differences when interacting with other local peers during adolescence than they did as children. Moreover, the majority of participants espoused a dual identity rather than identifying as either Chinese or Belgian, and most positioned themselves in-between the pan-Chinese and Belgian cultural and ethnic affiliations. However, some of the participants whose parents are from Taiwan found it even harder to decide how to identify themselves between three different identity labels: Taiwanese, ethnic Chinese (Huaren), and Belgian. This is due to the complex political cross-strait relations and the significant ethno-national identity developments in Taiwan over the past two decades. Overall, this study found that the majority of pan-Chinese immigrant descendants' cultural and ethnic identity negotiation and performance strategies are in line with the perspective of "in-betweenness," in that they do not position themselves in their parents' heritage culture or local Belgian culture. However, they are more likely to regard themselves as people who can comfortably travel back and forth among different cultures and identity labels, even though most of them hold hybrid identity affiliations, identifying as both "Chinese/Taiwanese and Belgian." Notably, the findings in this study further demonstrate that people's cultural and ethnic identities are not static; they are dynamic, fluid, context-specific, and multi-layered. People can strategically apply different identity negotiation strategies and use different parts of their identities to fulfill their practical needs in response to specific lived circumstances (Liu, 2017).

About the limitation of this study, most of the research participants are second-generation pan-Chinese immigrant descendants, while some participants are 1.5-generation, which limited the study in some degree. For future research, it would be beneficial to incorporate more generations of immigrant descendants as this could further assist scholars to compare how different generations experience identity negotiation in their daily lives, how they identify culturally and ethno-nationally, and their feelings on the meaning of different identity labels (i.e., Chinese, Taiwanese, Huaren, and Belgian). Furthermore, as Taiwanese immigrant descendants face more difficulties in identifying themselves culturally and ethno-nationally, and navigating among different identity labels, it would be interesting for further research to compare Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant descendants' cultural and ethno-national identity negotiation strategies and performance practices in their daily lives.

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