

# NIE23066 - Cultural Heritage and Identity Formation: A Study of Second-Generation Immigrant Children through Parental Perspectives in Singapore

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## Objective

The study aims to investigate the influence of immigrant parents on the identity formation of their children in Singapore, particularly focusing on second-generation immigrants. By conducting qualitative interviews with immigrant parents, the research seeks to understand how parents perceive and shape their children's national identity through cultural transmission. Additionally, it aims to deepen understanding of how cultural heritage influences identity formation among second-generation immigrants in Singapore and compare these perspectives to provide insights into the impact of cultural heritage, societal norms, and personal experiences on parental perceptions. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience in Singapore and its implications for social cohesion and multiculturalism.

## Literature review

### Identity in the Social Matrix

The interplay between a child's alignment with familial cultural expectations and the assimilative pressures of the host society's norms can engender profound identity conflicts. This struggle often manifests as a delicate balance between preserving the integrity of inherited cultural traditions and the pursuit of broader societal acceptance. The resolution to this dichotomy tends to emerge through an iterative process of identity negotiation—a pathway where the young individual learns to harmonize these divergent cultural narratives, forging a cohesive self-identity that honours both their heritage and the new cultural milieu they inhabit.

### Role of family and social networks

Family narratives empower parents and help children feel connected to their ethnic identity, potentially mitigating the negative impacts of perceived discrimination

### Multicultural and Multilingual Context

Immigrant families often adopt the cultural practices of the dominant culture in multicultural societies. Communication is a critical component in multicultural societies where families often become multilingual, with children learning the dominant language at school while speaking their native language at home. Similarly, immigrant families often embrace the local customs and practices as part of their assimilation journey, leading to the birth of a distinct identity—one that does not fit neatly into the boxes of 'local' or 'foreign'.

## Methodology

A qualitative interview method was used for data collection. The participants included 61 foreign-born parents with children in mainstream schools from primary to post-secondary levels. Data collection involved online surveys and semi-structured interviews conducted in Mandarin or English. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with diverse immigrant parents in Singapore. The interviews were designed to be conversational, facilitating insights into parental perspectives on identity formation. Thematic analysis of transcripts identified recurring themes and patterns.

## Findings and discussion

### Parent and Child Agency in Language Maintenance

- I. Speaking their mother tongue languages at home
- II. Choosing Mandarin as their second language
- III. Adopting "Singlish"

### National Identity

- I. The desire for their children to view Singapore as their 'home'
- II. Expecting sons to do National Service

### Cultural Transmission & Assimilation

- I. Incorporating practices from their ethnic culture.
- II. Adopting 'Singaporean' habits and integrating them into their own cultures, thereby forming an entirely new transnational culture.
- III. Adapting to 'Singaporean' practices in education -- Parenting influenced by local colleagues

## Future work

Given that this study emphasizes the parental perspective, a complementary investigation could focus on the children themselves—examining how they navigate their identities through interactions with various individuals, including parents, friends, and teachers. Additionally, further exploration is warranted into how both parents and children perceive their national identities, with particular attention to the differences between those born in the host country and those who have migrated there.