The Relationship between Citizenship Acquisition and Ethnic Identity of Immigrant Women in Taiwan

Yuan-Yu Chiang, Yu-Han Tseng, Chin-Chen Wen

Abstract—In the last few decades, many southeast-Asia women migrate to Taiwan by marriage, and it usually takes several years for them to acquire Taiwanese citizenship. This study investigates the relationship between their citizenship acquisition and whether they develop Taiwanese identities, and how does it affect their ethnical identity towards their original ethnics. Furthermore, the present study also explores that whether citizenship acquisition help the immigrant women to explore the host society further and make commitment to it, or the identification towards mainstream Taiwanese society is only symbolic and superficial? One hundred and ninety-two immigrant women were measured using Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised and a global 10-point ethnic identity question. Correlation tests, t-test, and hierarchical regression were performed to answer the above questions. The results revealed that citizenship acquisition does help immigrant women to identify with Taiwanese society, but it does not affect how they identify with their own ethnics. Furthermore, the results also indicated that acquiring citizenship would not help these immigrant women become involved in deeper cultural exploration of Taiwan nor would it encourage them to make commitments to the host society.

Keywords—Immigrants, international marriage, ethnic identity, Taiwan.

I. INTRODUCTION

AN immigrant's identification with the host society usually improves their adaptation [1], [2]. In the last several decades, many southeast-Asian women (mostly from Vietnam and Indonesia) migrated to Taiwan through international marriages [3]. However, it usually takes 3 to 5 years for them to acquire citizenship from the Taiwan government [4]. As a result, these new immigrants do not have legal access to most societal resources such as public medical coverage and cannot apply for most job opportunities. Therefore, it is a legitimate question to ask whether these immigrants' identification with Taiwan society was damaged by the denial of these rights and privileges. The present study aims to explore whether granting citizenship would affect the immigrants' identification with the host society.

Why would obtain citizenship or not affect an immigrant's ethnic identification with the host society? Some researchers [5] argue that, the general public attitude towards immigrants

Yuan-Yu Chiang is with the Department of Human Development, Tzu-Chi University, Hualien, Taiwan, 97074, R.O.C. (phone: 886-3-8562677-3167; e-mail: pcengine0727@gmail.com).

Yu-Han Tseng is with Department of Psychology, Soochow University, Taipei, Taiwan, 11102, R.O.C. (correspondent author Phone: 886-2-28819471#6892; Email: yohanlian@scu.edu.tw).

Chin-Chen Wen is with the Department of Human Development, Tzu-Chi University, Hualien, Taiwan, 97074, R.O.C. (phone: 886-3-8562677-3196; e-mail: melody@mail.tcu.edu.tw).

can be detected through a nation's immigrant policies and regulations. If the general publics' attitudes towards immigrants are more acceptable, the immigrant policies and regulations of that nation are usually less restrictive, and vise versa. When not granted citizenship or permanent residency for a long period of time, some immigrants might feel rejected by the mainstream society. This might lead them to believe that they are discriminated against, and it eventually damages their dignity and hurts their identification with the host society [6]. For example, [7] found that, when Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands felt that they were being discriminated against by the majority of Dutch people, these Turkish immigrants tended to identify more with their Turkish culture and religion, and identify less with mainstream Dutch culture. Based on the above findings, it seems that granting citizenship does affect immigrants' identity with the mainstream society. This leads to our first research question (assumption 1-1): Compared to those who do not have citizenship, would immigrants granted citizenship identify more with the mainstream society? On the contrary, would immigrants not having citizenship identify more with their original culture and ethnic group (assumption 1-2)? Moreover, because citizenship acquisition is often correlated with the years the immigrant resides in the host society, the present study will control the effect of the years of living in the host country to see whether the event of acquiring citizenship alone will affect an immigrant's identity.

Another issue that needs to be considered is what is meant by "identify with the mainstream society" or "identify with their original culture" Some researchers adopt a straightforward, one-dimensional, self-evaluation [8]. For example, the immigrants are asked to indicate the strength of their identification with the mainstream society using a 10-point scale in which 10 indicates the strongest identification [9]. However, from Eriksons' perspective [10], identity formation should include two dimensions: crisis/exploration and commitment. According to this view, immigrants first experience crisis in their ethnic identity and then begin ethnic exploration. Such exploration continues until they form some sort of identity commitments. Therefore, some [11] argued, ethnic identification should include two dimensions: exploration and commitment.

Based on the above arguments, it is reasonable to assume that there are at least two different definitions of ethnic identity: The first definition involves superficial, subjective, and symbolic identity. For example, an immigrant female states that she identifies with the mainstream society. The second type of identity involves deeper, behavioral, and substantial identity.

Such immigrants not only claim that they identify with the host society, but also enthusiastically explore the host culture.

The present research assumes (assumption 2) that being granted citizenship might help an immigrant to accept the idea that they are now members of the host society, but this identity, per the first definition, is only symbolic.

II. METHODS

A. Participants

All 192 participants of this study were female immigrants aged 20 to 53 (mean = 35.1) recruited from Hualien County in Taiwan. The researchers recruited the participants primarily through two methods: minority support groups and government- provided language classes. These participants are mainly from Vietnam (53.6%) and Indonesia (35.4%), while the other 11% of participants are from Thailand, Philippines, and Cambodia. It should be mentioned here that most immigrants (over 99%) to Taiwan are female, and the distributions of their nationalities are about the same as the distribution of this present study. Regarding the time that they have been on Taiwan, 46 of them (24.0%) are within 5 years or less, 58 of them (30.2%) are between 6 to 10 years, 68 of them (35.4%) are between 11 to 15 years, and 20 of them (10.4%) have been here for more than 16 years. Among that total, 110 of them (57.3%) have been granted Taiwanese citizenship, the remaining 82 (42.7%) have not.

B. Instruments

The present study uses questionnaires to collect data. Since most (about 89%) of the participants are from Vietnam and Indonesia, the questionnaires were translated into Vietnamese and Indonesian versions. The remaining 11% of the participants used the Mandarin version of the questionnaire with the researchers' assistance.

Two instruments were used to measure a participant's ethnic identification with the host society. The first instrument is Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised, MEIM-R [12]. It consists of six 5-point Likert-type questions measuring identity exploration and identity commitment. An example of identity exploration would be: "I have spent time trying to find out more about my native ethnic group, such as its history, tradition, and customs." An example of identity commitment would be: "I have a strong sense of belonging to my native ethnicity." in which 1 represents strong disagreement and 5 represents strong agreement. For research purposes, all questions were modified and asked a second time to measure their ethnic identification with Taiwan. Examples of the modified questions would be: "I have spent time trying to find out more about Taiwan, such as its history, tradition, and customs." "I have a strong sense of belonging to Taiwan. There are total 12 questions.

The other research instrument measures to what extent a participant agrees to view herself as a member of a particular ethnic group [13]. The present study uses one 10-point scale to indicate strength of identification: "Do you agree to identify yourself as Taiwanese?" in which 1 represents strong disagreement and 10 represents strong agreement, and this question was asked again: "Do you agree to identify yourself as your native ethnicity" to indicate their identification to their native ethnicity.

III. RESULTS

Comparisons are made using t-test between the group granted citizenship ($N = 110$) and the group not granted citizenship ($N = 82$). When using the 10-point scale is measured: "Do you agree to identify yourself as Taiwanese?" Those who have citizenship ($M = 7.80$, $SD = 2.23$) identify more ($t = 2.84$, $p < .01$) with the mainstream society than those who do not have citizenship ($M = 6.79$, $SD = 2.66$). When asked whether they identify with their native ethnic group, those who do not have citizenship ($M = 8.30$, $SD = 2.36$) scored slightly higher, but not significantly higher ($t = 1.31$, $p = .19$), than those who have citizenship ($M = 7.82$, $SD = 2.51$) (Fig. 1).
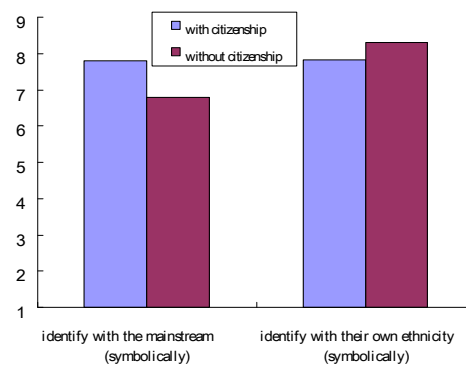

Fig. 1 The comparisons of immigrants with citizenship and immigrants without citizenship on ethnical identities (on 10-point scale)
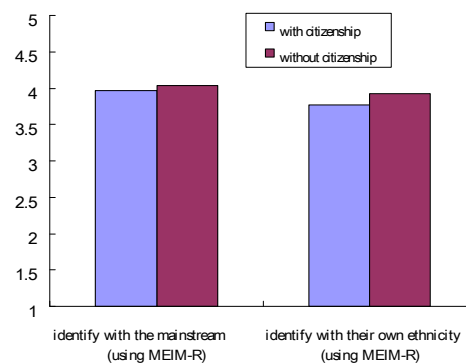

Fig. 2 The comparisons of immigrants with citizenship and immigrants without citizenship on ethnical identities (on MEIM-R, measuring ethnical commitment and exploration, on 5-point scale)

When participants are measured using MEIM-R, which measures exploration and commitment, there are no significant differences ($t = 0.61$, $p = .54$) between those who have citizenship ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.89$) and those who do not have citizenship ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.08$) on identify with the mainstream. When asked whether they identify with their native ethnic group, there are also no significant differences ($t = 1.06$, $p = .29$) between those who have citizenship ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.94$) and those who do not have citizenship ($M = 3.92$,

SD = 1.02) (Fig. 2). This result is in line with the assumption of the present study, that is, immigrants with citizenship would identify more with the mainstream society, but would not be involved in more exploration and commitment. For those who do not have citizenship, it seems they identify more with their original ethnicity than their counterparts do, but the difference is not statistically significant.

However, the above between-group comparisons cannot exclude the association of citizenship acquisition and time of residence in Taiwan. In other words, since it is possible that the longer they have been in Taiwan, the more likely it is that they would acquire citizenship, the differences between these two groups are not due to citizenship status, but are due to the length of time that they have been in Taiwan. For this reason, the present study performed further analysis, and the results are shown in Table I.

Table I reveals several findings: First, the longer these immigrants have lived in Taiwan, the more likely they have acquired citizenship ($r = .43, p < .001$). Furthermore, the longer they have been in Taiwan, the more likely they would consider themselves as a member of the mainstream society ($r = .17, p < .05$), and show less identity exploration and commitment to their own ethnicity ($r = -.16. p < .05$). Second, it shows that

citizenship acquisition is significantly correlated with identification with the host society using the 10-point scale ($r = .20, p < .01$), but it is not correlated with identification with the host society using MEIM-R ($r = -.04, p > .05$). That is, immigrants granted Taiwanese citizenship was more likely to answer that they are indeed Taiwanese than those who do not have Taiwanese citizenship. On the other hand, having acquired citizenship neither motivated these immigrants to explore the host society culture any further nor encouraged them to develop commitments to the host society. Third, citizenship acquisition does not affect the immigrants' identities to their original ethnical group, whether using 10-point scale or MEIM-R. Finally, it might be expected that the results from these two instruments would have been correlated; however, in most cases they were not, suggesting that the two instruments are measuring different concepts.

For example, on identification with the mainstream society, the correlation between the two instruments are not significant ($r = .13, p > .05$). The only significant result is the correlation between the question of ethnical identity ($r = .26, p < .001$). It seems that "identifying oneself as a member of the host society" and "exploration of and commitment to the host society" are two independent concepts.

TABLE I
THE CORRELATIONS AMONG THE YEARS LIVED IN TAIWAN, CITIZENSHIP ACQUISITION, AND ETHNIC IDENTITY FROM TWO MEASUREMENTS

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Years lived in Taiwan	-					
2. citizenship acquisition	.43***	-				
3. identify with one's own ethnicity (using 10-point scale)	-.12	-.10	-			
4. identify with the host society (using 10-point question)	.17*	.20**	.21**	-		
5. identify with one's own ethnicity (using MEIM-R)	-.16*	-.08	.26***	.09	-	
6. identify with the host society (using MEIM-R)	-.01	-.04	.10	.13	.70***	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Would it be possible that both "citizenship acquisition" and "identifying with the host society" are influenced by the duration of residence in Taiwan? Since the variable "years lived in Taiwan" correlated both with "citizenship acquisition" and "identify with the host society" using the 10-point scale, it is not clear whether "citizenship acquisition" per se can predict "identification with the host society" using the 10-point scale. It is possible that "citizenship acquisition" does not help immigrants to identify with the host society at all. Two variables ("citizenship acquisition" and "identification with the host society" using the 10-point scale) may correlate with each other simply because they both are the results of many years living in Taiwan.

To examine this alternative explanation, the present research has performed a hierarchical regression analysis, as shown in Table II. This hierarchical regression analysis reveals that, even after controlling for the effect of "years lived in Taiwan", "citizenship acquisition" is still significantly correlated with "identification with the host society" using the 10-point scale ($\beta = .16, p < .05$). In other words, no matter how long these immigrants have lived in Taiwan, they are more likely to identify themselves as Taiwanese if they are granted Taiwanese citizenship.

TABLE II
HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION OF IDENTIFY WITH MAINSTREAM USING 10-POINT SCALE

Hierarchy	Independent variables	β	T	R^2	$_\Delta R^2$	F-change
Block 1	Years	.17	2.35*	.03	.03	5.51*
Block 2	Years	.10	1.21	.05	.02	3.94*
	Citizenship	.16	1.99*			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
Years = Years lived in Taiwan
Citizenship = citizenship acquisition

IV. CONCLUSIONS

On examining the first assumption, this result reveals that citizenship acquisition does help immigrants to identify with the host society. Immigrants granted citizenship are prone to consider themselves to be members of the host society when answering a global question, regardless of how long they have lived in Taiwan. However, those who are not granted citizenship identify less with the mainstream society, and this is in line with other research [6]. That is, if the immigrants cannot acquire citizenship or permanent residency, they feel that they are denied by the mainstream society, at least symbolically. Moreover, by not acquiring citizenship, their legal rights and

resources are limited, and their lives become more difficult. To alleviate such difficulties, some immigrants would turn to their own ethnic group, thus identifying more with own group [14]. Other studies [7] also found that, when immigrants sense being discriminated against, they identify more with their own ethnic culture and religion.

Interestingly, the present study found that, although the immigrants without citizenship identify with the mainstream society less, they do not identify with their own ethnic group more (Fig. 1 & Table I). There are two possible explanations for this: The first possibility is that all of the participants of this study moved to Taiwan for marriage, and their daily lives are limited within their families [14], [15]. Therefore, they do not have much chance to interact with their own ethnic group. Another alternative explanation is that, the immigrants with citizenships still strongly identify with their own ethnic groups (Fig. 1), and this tendency is not significantly different from those without citizenship. In this case, it might illustrate that the immigrants of this study have developed an "integration", not "assimilation", type of identity. That is, granted citizenship would lead those immigrants to identify both with the mainstream society and their own ethnicity, and that "integration" type of identity is usually viewed to be the best adjustment outcome for immigrants [16].

Based on the above findings, the present study suggests that the Taiwanese government could consider lowering the requirements of obtaining citizenship for immigrants, since obtaining citizenship encourages immigrants to identify themselves as Taiwanese. Furthermore, the government should also pay more attention to those who have not yet been granted citizenship, since their access to public services is limited and their lives are more difficult.

In addition, the present study found that, for immigrants, what is traditionally considered "identification" with the mainstream society may only be symbolic or superficial, because these immigrants obtaining citizenship neither explore the host society any further, nor did they make commitments to the host society. This supports the second assumption of the present study, that is, immigrants granted citizenship are more likely to verbally state that they are Taiwanese. However, again, such identity is only limited to symbolic allegation, not deeper exploration and commitment.

Stated differently, identifying one as Taiwanese and exploring Taiwanese culture might be two conceptually different issues. Unfortunately, research in the past did not distinguish the conceptual difference. Researchers often simply took either instrument to measure ethnic identity [17]. A recent study [16] found that, the instruments to measure immigrants' ethnic identity can be categorized into three different types: bilinear, unilinear, and typological. Each of them measures different dimensions of immigrants' psychological adjustment. This study affirms that there are different ways to measure ethnic identity. However, the nature of the underlying conceptual differences is yet to be explored.

In sum, the most important finding of the present study is that, there may be different conceptual meanings behind different ethnic identity measurements. Measuring an immigrant's ethnic identity by asking them to state their ethnic identity is one thing and asking whether they would explore and commit to the mainstream culture is another. Still others [18] have measured immigrants' ethnic identity by investigating their behavior, for example, mainstream language usage, or forming friendship members of the mainstream society. It is very likely that different instruments are measuring different concepts. Further research is needed to shed light on which instrument should be applied to which specific dimension of an immigrant's adjustment.

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