

The influence of Taiwanese immigrant mothers on the education and ethnic identity formation of their children

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Abstract

This study examines how Taiwanese immigrant mothers influence their children's formal, informal, and incidental education and thence their children's ethnic identity formation. Most Taiwanese immigrant families in Australia experience significant conflict about whether to maintain their original ethnic identity or develop a new ethnic identity. This affects second generation immigrants in particular. In childhood, education significantly influences children's ethnic identity. Mothers play an important educational role in selecting schools, peers and access to media. Formal education occurs mainly in local schools, while informal education occurs through media, peers, after-school learning, and weekend schools (e.g., swimming class, Chinese language class, music school.). Incidental education occurs when children casually take on values and attitudes in daily life. This process is nonetheless highly influential. Two questions are addressed: 1) *How does the mother transfer her culture to her children in the Australian context?* 2) *How do mothers influence their children's formal, informal and incidental education and, in turn, their ethnic identity formation?*

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 Taiwanese immigrant mothers in South-East Queensland, Australia. Participants comprise two groups: 20 Taiwanese female immigrants married to Taiwanese men; and 20 Taiwanese female immigrants married to non-Taiwanese men. A social constructionist perspective was adopted to explore how Taiwanese immigrant mothers influence their children's formal, informal, and incidental education on and thence the ethnic identity formation of their children. The results show that: 1) Taiwanese immigrant mothers play a vital role in retaining their original cultural and ethnic identity and transferring it to their offspring; 2) Taiwanese immigrant mothers tend to select highly reputable private or Government schools, informal schools where peers have Taiwanese/Chinese background, and media related to Taiwanese/Chinese culture. In this regard, Taiwanese immigrant mothers can meet together frequently and share their experiences on the progress of their children; 3) Mothers' selection of schools and informal education activities strongly affect the incidental learning of their children, in particular instilling Taiwanese/Chinese cultural values and Chinese language at home; 4) As the children mature, conflict can arise between mothers and adolescent children over the selection of these acculturation/education agents/channels. Implications of the findings on understandings of acculturation theory, the development of second generation children and youth, and for policy and practice in the areas of education and resettlement are discussed.