Transnationalism and Gendered Identity: The Case of the “One and a Half Generation” Taiwanese Migrants

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Introduction

After a decade of contention and debate, transnationalism has finally gained credence as a valid and significant perspective for rethinking international mobility and migration (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995; Portes, 1997; 2001; 2003; Portes et al., 1999; Foner, 1997; Kivisto, 2001; Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). There is now a general acceptance that while the phenomenon of transnationalism is not new and while not all migrants are transnationals, an increasing number of people who are involved in movement and settlement across international borders maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country. In other words, it is not unusual to find people leading lives in which they are incorporated simultaneously into two or more states and organise their daily economic, familial, and social relations within networks that extend across their borders (Fouron and Glick-Schiller, 2002, p. 171).

The literature on transnationalism continues to grow and there is increasing acknowledgment of and interest in the study of transnational households. Many of these studies focus mainly on the multiple ways transmigrant parents adopt transnational practices in their lives in multi-layered, multi-transnational social fields. Migrant children – both those who were born in the destination country (commonly referred to as the second
generation) and those who migrated with their parents, grew up and attended school outside their home country, and were nurtured within a terrain of transnational connections and influenced by the economic, social and cultural capital their parents had obtained through emigration – somehow seem to have attracted less attention. These young people have inherited a field of social relations that links them to their home and host countries through their parents and their networks of economic activities, social organisations and transnational media – how does the transnational terrain help to shape their knowledge, consciousness and identities?

Traditionally, sociological research on the second generation of migrants has been mostly concerned with their trajectories of assimilation. More specifically, the assumption of “straight line” assimilation is the dominant explanation given to account for the second generation’s gradual but ultimate assimilation into the host society and the shedding of their migrant cultural identity as they find that internalising the cultural values and identity of the mainstream is tied to the substantial reward of upward mobility (Levitt and Waters, 2002, p. 15). In 1993, Portes and Zhou observed that the assimilation process of the second generation was more segmented. In the US they could do well and assimilate into white middle-class society or they could experience downward assimilation into urban African-American ghetto life and culture; or, alternatively, they could live in ethnic enclaves, remaining tied to their ethnic culture and community (Warikoo, 2005, p. 804).

In their study of second-generation young people of various ethnic backgrounds in San Diego and Miami in the US, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found the paths of assimilation to be much more divergent. These paths were indicated by dissonant, consonant and selective acculturation. The first type of acculturation is typified by a situation in which the second generation adapt more quickly to the mainstream society than their parents, while the second model sees both the second generation and their parents learning the new culture and abandoning their old one at the same pace, a situation most commonly found among middle-class migrants. The third describes a process in which the second generation becomes embedded in a co-ethnic community that not only supports the parents’ home language and norms but also enables both generations to assimilate gradually into the mainstream society. While these concepts seem deceptively simple, the implications of the notion of selective acculturation in migrant transnationalism should not be underestimated. If the parental generation maintains a high level of transnationalism (implying that they should also have a high level of education and income), will that lead to more selective acculturation, and in turn, the emergence of a transnational identity among the second generation? In this context, does this also mean that downward assimilation is discouraged in the presence of a transnational identity?

These questions will form the main research focus of this paper. However, in seeking answers to these questions, the present paper will focus mainly on the 1.5 generation of Taiwanese migrants in Australia. The rationale for studying the Taiwanese is twofold: their immigration to Australia was extremely rapid – in 1981 the number of Taiwan-born settlers arriving in Australia was only 122, but by 1987 the figure had jumped to 1,146, peaking in 1991 at 3,491 (Ip, 2001). The Taiwanese were also considered typical transmigrants. A majority of them arrived in Australia under the Business Migration Program, and many households became “astronaut” families, with the parents regularly travelling back to their home country to keep their businesses running and then spending time with their children settling in Australia (Ip et al., 1998; Chiang, 2001; Beal and Sos, 1999). In 2001, the total population of Taiwanese in Australia was 22,418 (an increase of
14.7 per cent over 1996). However, it remains difficult to assess the proportion of such transnational households. Nonetheless, given the relatively short history of their settlement in Australia, many of the migrant children are of the 1.5 rather than the second generation.

**Research Method and Data Sources**

The data for this paper are drawn from two separate studies. The first is a qualitative component of a survey on Taiwanese immigrants in Australia conducted in 2003 by the OCAC (Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee) of the Taiwanese government.¹ It involved in-depth interviews with 20 Taiwanese migrants in Brisbane, aged between 18 and 25, who had migrated to Australia with their parents in the early 1990s. Of the 20 informants, 8 were 25 years of age, 5 were 24, and 4 were 23. The remaining informants were 19, 21 and 22.

The second source of data is another study on ‘Transnationalism and Taiwanese Young People in Australia’ (TTYP) conducted between July 2003 and June 2004.² This project involved in-depth interviews with a total of 24 Taiwanese migrants aged between 16 and 28 in Sydney (9), Melbourne (3) and Brisbane (12). These migrants were clearly much younger than the subjects of the OCAC study at the time of the interviews, and most had not yet worked full-time. Interviews in both studies were carried out by the investigators involved using both Mandarin and English languages. Where Mandarin was used, the interviews were translated and transcribed by a bilingual research assistant. The length of the interviews was between 45 and 90 minutes. Most informants were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with personal contacts the researchers had in local Taiwanese community organisations, student social networks and through family connections.

**Background of the Taiwanese 1.5 Generation**

As part of the OCAC study on contemporary Taiwanese migrants in Australia, the project purchased a dataset from the 2001 Census from the ABS. This dataset made it possible to provide a simple but interesting profile of the Taiwanese 1.5 generation, particularly those in the 15 to 24 age bracket, which includes two of the largest cohorts within the Taiwan-born migrant population in Australia (Figure 1).

**Education – Field of Study**

In terms of education within these two cohorts, in 2001, for those who were tertiary educated, males were found to be engaged in what are commonly referred to as the more “serious” disciplines of science, medicine and engineering, while females were observed more frequently in service fields and the humanities (see Table 1).

**Employment and Occupation**

Similarly, the occupations of those who were gainfully employed seemed to reflect a rather traditional gender line.

This is further illustrated by the histogram in Figure 2.
The gender divisions within the 1.5 generation Taiwanese migrants, although cursorily observed above, are instructive. As Ip (1993, p. 66) indicates, for many Chinese male migrants in Australia a job was not only a reflection of their social status (any occupational downgrading after migration could lead to trauma and family tension) but also a reflection of their social identity. Likewise, in a more recent study on masculinity among Chinese male migrants in Australia, Hibbins (2006) found that male gender identity was often significantly embedded in their occupation and employment status. To further examine the identities of the Taiwanese 1.5 generation, this paper will go on to consider their experiences in education, occupation, friendship and marriage.

**Transnational Experiences and Asserted Identities**

In the TTYP study, it is interesting to observe that around a quarter of its 1.5 generation informants lived in a third country before their arrival in Australia with their parents. Some of these informants had lived for a period of time in Hong Kong or the PRC (People’s Republic of China) because it was necessary for their parents to manage their businesses in these locations. Alternatively, others were found to have settled in Australia through the “backdoor” via New Zealand. In many cases the parents had considered New Zealand a destination that offered better educational opportunities than Taiwan, but had ultimately decided that Australia could offer their children more promising educational and employment prospects. In either case, it was not uncommon to find that many young people in this study were members of “astronaut” households. Andy (a pseudonym) is an example.

He was 17 when interviewed. He told us that he had moved to Hong Kong when he was two because his father was operating a hardware factory in the city of Shenzhen:

[My father] lived there with my uncles. My mother had to look after his export business in Hong Kong so she spent most of the time in Hong Kong. At the time the quality of education in China was not up to scratch, so it was necessary for us to move to Hong Kong where there was better education than China, and where it was easier for my father to visit us . . . I’ve always lived with my parents although they are not with me all the time. My mother is still looking after her business in Hong Kong and Dad is still managing his factory in China. Many of my relatives – my uncles and aunts and cousins – are now living in China (Shenzhen), so they spend more time in China than in Australia or in Hong Kong. I get along with them very well. I visited my father in China when I was on vacation and he visited us whenever he had time. My mother is here in Brisbane more regularly now but we also spent time in China with our relatives.

Similarly, Frank (a pseudonym), a 16 year-old, came to Brisbane when he was four. His grandparents sponsored his parents to join them, but he found himself returning to Taiwan two years later with his parents before “re-migrating” to Brisbane 6 years ago by himself because his parents wanted him to receive a “better education” in Australia. He now lives

| Table 1. Field of Study by Sex of Taiwan-born Migrants in Australia, 2001 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                  | Male            | Female          | Persons         |
|                                  | Numbers  %      | Numbers  %      | Numbers  %      |
| Natural and Physical Sciences    | 196 2.2         | 196 1.7         | 392 1.9         |
| Information Technology          | 438 4.8         | 242 2.1         | 680 3.3         |
| Engineering and Related         | 783 8.6         | 137 1.2         | 920 4.5         |
| Technologies                     |                 |                 |                 |
| Architecture and Building       | 143 1.6         | 82 0.7          | 225 1.1         |
| Agriculture, Environmental and  | 46 0.5          | 25 0.2          | 71 0.3          |
| Related Studies                  |                 |                 |                 |
| Health                           | 265 2.9         | 495 4.4         | 760 3.7         |
| Education                        | 51 0.6          | 272 2.4         | 323 1.6         |
| Management and Commerce         | 989 10.9        | 1,955 17.4      | 2,944 14.5      |
| Society and Culture              | 255 2.8         | 749 6.7         | 1,004 4.9       |
| Creative Arts                    | 156 1.7         | 446 4.0         | 602 3.0         |
| Food, Hospitality and Personal Services | 38 0.4   | 100 0.9         | 138 0.7 |
| Mixed Field Programs             | 19 0.2          | 32 0.3          | 51 0.3          |
| Field of study inadequately described | 53 0.6 | 84 0.7          | 137 0.7 |
| Field of study not stated        | 506 5.6         | 604 5.4         | 1,110 5.5       |
| Not applicable                   | 5,152 56.7      | 5,839 51.9      | 10,991 54.0     |
| Total                            | 9,090           | 11,258          | 20,348          |

with his grandparents in Brisbane but usually visits his parents in Taiwan for two months every year.

Grace (a pseudonym), a 17 year-old informant who came to Australia 6 years ago from Kaohsiung (in Southern Taiwan), was likewise left alone in Brisbane by her parents to live with her grandparents even though she was the only child in the family. Her mother now lives in Nanhai in southern China and manages her husband’s metal business while he travels frequently to Thailand and the Philippines and occasionally makes extended visits ranging from one to two months to Japan, which has become his major buyer. Grace gets to see them when they make occasional visits to Brisbane, twice a year on average, but she also visited them in Taiwan and China when she was on school vacation. In between she talks to them daily on the phone.

James (a pseudonym) was the youngest informant in the study – he was only 15 when he was interviewed. He had been in Brisbane for 7 years and his family was, like those of many of his contemporaries, transnational. His father now lives in Taichung (central Taiwan) with his older brother and sister, who have returned there to work as an accountant and a graphic designer, respectively. His mother stayed behind in Brisbane to look after him and his younger sister. His mother usually spends two months in Taiwan each year and his father visits Brisbane once a year for two months.

Jenny (a pseudonym), 17, was in a slightly different situation. She came to Brisbane 6 years ago with her parents, but a year later her parents divorced and she now lives with her mother, who runs a café in Brisbane. She admitted that she only saw her father when he visited Brisbane on business trips.
Despite their varied backgrounds, however, when asked how they saw themselves in terms of their identities they almost all took the question to be about their ethnicity. Typically, their immediate response was “Taiwanese”; none considered themselves to be simply “Australian”. As Jack, who had spent 14 years in Australia, put it succinctly, “I’m holding Australian passport, but I still tell people I’m Taiwanese”. When pushed for a further explanation as to why they identified themselves as Taiwanese the answers became more diverse, but many considered their ethnicity to be something primordial. For example, Maggie (a pseudonym), a 17 year-old student who moved to Brisbane 6 years ago, explained,

Why? Because you know you look different, your hair colour is different... I just feel that I can’t be a Westerner. (Is it because of cultural difference?) Maybe more than that – I look at myself in the mirror and somehow I just don’t see myself being Australian.

Others offered similar replies:

I feel that I am more Taiwanese because I don’t think I look like an Aussie. My skin colour is different and I don’t look the same as a Westerner. (Andy)

Somehow I feel I won’t be able to become an Australian because that’s the way you are. (Jenny)

I feel I am Taiwanese, not Australian. (Why?) Because I think I am different. Sure, I am an Australian citizen but it’s not the same when you realise what they do is different from what you do. (Frank)

I don’t think I look very Australian, or do I speak English very well. (Ann)

However, some considered cultural difference to be a key factor in shaping their identities. Tina (a pseudonym), a 19 year-old student who had spent 8 years in Brisbane, was more reflexive:

I still feel I am more Taiwanese than Australian. (Why’s that?) Because I feel I don’t share the same culture with Australians. You found out when you heard your teacher cracking a joke in class and everyone else was laughing like mad, and you still didn’t get it. I guess up to this day, I still have problems understanding Australian humour and jokes. I feel like an outsider, not sharing the same “background” and it’s something hard to achieve even if you put in the efforts. I know humour is a difficult thing but there are other things that make you feel you are not Australian... (For example?) Etiquette and social behaviour... sometimes I feel Australians are so rude when they cut in without letting you finish what you’ll have to say. I once told a friend about how I felt but she said, “No, that’s not rude at all”. What can you say? We’re different! (Tina)

James similarly saw culture as a key issue, but also believed there was something deeper:
I can’t see myself as an Australian because I just don’t identify with the Australian culture. I deal with it everyday but somehow my heart is not there. Like when I started reading Chinese novels, I feel alive and my heart was there ... (What don’t you like about Australian culture?) Nothing. It’s not a matter of like or dislike. It’s a kind of feeling that’s hard to explain. (Does this mean that you don’t feel you belong here?) No. You can be here and quite happy about being here but it is a different thing when you feel you’re not Australian. (James)

Findings from the OCAC interviews yielded a somewhat different picture. Although of the 20 informants only one 24 year-old graduate of Information Technology declared himself to be Australian, close to half (9) saw themselves as “half and half” – “Taiwanese-Australian”, while 6 considered themselves exclusively “Taiwanese”. Three informants were even more measured in their replies, stating that their identities “depended on where you are” or “where you live” or “the life course you’re in”.

Education and Employment

Given that all of the informants in the OCAC study were older and that a majority were already entering a different life stage – that of full-time participation in the workforce – it is not surprising that they identified themselves differently from the younger respondents in the TTYP study. More importantly, it also seemed that their identities were embedded in the way they selected their education and employment pathways.

As suggested by Chiang (2004), in Taiwanese society, there is a general expectation that when a young man finishes his tertiary education he will not only be gainfully employed in his field of study almost immediately (within a reasonable period of time) but will also embark on a journey of achieving financial stability and social respectability as a way of honouring his family and friends. Such pressures on young men often see them defining themselves as the sole provider for their families, and for this reason their education and career pathways as well as their personal identities are always tied to these considerations. They are also keenly aware of the fact that their prospects of finding a suitable spouse are heavily dependent upon their economic and social achievements. This explains why, in the OCAC study, every informant without exception held at least a tertiary, if not a postgraduate, degree.

Not surprisingly, in considering their educational and employment trajectories, many also thought carefully about their own social identities and prescribed roles. For example, many believed that “serious fields” such as medicine, science, computer science and engineering were more masculine; while more flexible, less academic fields relating to services in hospitality, health and beauty, and childcare were feminine. This gender division was most apparent among the informants – while the male informants were educated in business administration, law, aerospace, architecture, engineering, and information technology, the female informants were often found in the “soft” disciplines of tourism management, arts, digital design, journalism and education – a trend that is consistent with the profile suggested by the Australian 2001 Census (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

The OCAC study also found that male informants seemed to hold a transnational outlook in determining their educational and career pathways. Many considered not only their future careers in the Australian workforce but also opportunities for returning to Taiwan to work. As Ms B12 commented,
I have an Australian friend who is a male nurse. To a Taiwanese male, choosing a job like that would be utterly inappropriate. Not only does it go against the traditional notions of career and gender, it will also be virtually impossible for a male to have such a career when he returns to Taiwan.

Such pressures on the 1.5 generation to conform to traditional gender expectations often see many choosing not to pursue careers in Australia because they perceive that finding a high status, high income job here is too difficult. Thinking that with the prestige of having an overseas degree they would have an advantage in getting ahead in Taiwan, some male informants confessed that they actually planned to return to Taiwan to work.

The OCAC study suggests that female informants seemed to be under much less pressure from their parents and society, and felt that they had greater flexibility in determining their education and career pathways. This is because traditionally in Taiwanese society daughters are expected to marry out, so ultimately education and career choices

| Table 2. Occupation by Gender of Taiwan-born Migrants in Australia, 2001 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                              | All ages 15–24 years old   |
|                              | Male   Female   Male   Female   |
|                              | Numbers % Numbers % Numbers % Numbers % |
| Managers and Administrators  | 572    18.2 301    8.5 26    3.5 10    1.1 |
| Professionals                | 865    27.5 1,018 28.8 215   28.6 231   25.6 |
| Associate Professionals      | 465    14.8 345    9.7 64    8.5 30    3.3 |
| Tradespersons and Related Workers | 150   4.8 51    1.4 27    3.6 5    0.6 |
| Advanced Clerical and Service Workers | 29   0.9 259   7.3 6    0.8 33   3.7 |
| Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Service Workers | 387  12.3 802  22.7 154   20.5 317   35.1 |
| Intermediate Production and Transport Workers | 136  4.3 43    1.2 33   4.4 4    0.4 |
| Elementary Clerical, Sales and Service Workers | 255  8.1 433  12.2 136  18.1 215  23.8 |
| Labourers and Related Workers | 142  4.5 151  4.3 61    8.1 31   3.4 |
| Inadequately described       | 72    2.3 42    1.2 6    0.8 5    0.6 |
| Not stated                   | 76    2.4 95    2.7 25   3.3 21   2.3 |
| Total                        | 3,149 3,540 753   902 |

will not affect the social standing or respectability of the family, particularly if a daughter marries a partner from a good social and financial background. In this context Ms B13 considered herself more “fortunate” than the young men she knew among the 1.5 generation:

Thank goodness my parents are more traditional because they don’t impose much pressure on me. They think a female should not flirt around; instead she should simply focus on her studies, graduate and then get married. I feel sorry for the [Taiwanese] young men here [in Australia] because they have been so overly protected by their families when they grew up. Now they can’t even face the prospect of getting out there to find a job in Australia simply because they heard that the job opportunities here are not great. Some even decided to return to Taiwan before they made any effort. In fact I know some parents had already made plans for their sons to leave Australia immediately after their graduation. Of course, most men are very picky when it comes to finding a job. They won’t even be interested in a job if it is not seen to be “respectable” by their peers. In a way, I can understand why many [Taiwanese] families were so concerned about how they were judged. To have a son who is a failure is extremely embarrassing. We females are more flexible. We don’t mind becoming secretaries and beauticians. It’s more difficult for men [to cope].

Ms B3 reported similar experiences. When she decided to study education, she was thinking about finding a teaching job eventually. However, her choice was not consistent with what her parents expected of her. Nonetheless, they did not object, perhaps because “teaching is considered a female occupation”. This led Ms B3 to remember a few instances she had heard from friends in which parents had been so determined to pressure their male children to become doctors or lawyers that she finally decided that “Taiwanese males in [my] generation just don’t have the choices for making their career decisions because they have far too much limitations imposed on them by their parents”.

This finds resonance in what Ms B7 reported:

I’m studying art; I guess it’s a “feminine” course. If a [Taiwanese] male chooses to do this, I’m sure his parents will raise their voices and say, “How can you expect to support your family by doing a course like that?”

Friendship and Marriage

Researchers have long speculated about whether there is a connection between transnational identity formation and transnationalist practices (Rumbaut, 2002; Fouron and Glick-Schiller, 2002; Foner, 2002; Levitt, 2003; Skrbis, 1999). Findings from both the TTYP and OCAC studies indicate that most of the 1.5 generation Taiwanese had not developed a transnational identity, particularly in view of the social and friendship networks they had in Taiwan and Australia.

Among the TTYP informants, given that many had migrated to Brisbane at an early age, it was not uncommon to find that they had few friends in Taiwan and that most of their
friends in Brisbane were Taiwanese. Regardless of their gender, almost all informants found that it was hard to keep in touch with their few remaining contacts in Taiwan. Characteristically, many agreed that “It’s hard to keep in touch especially when you have your life here and they have theirs over there. Even when you talk on the phone, there’s not much to talk about” (Frank). Still, many tried to stay in touch with their old classmates using email, MSN, and mobile phones, but most concluded that their best friends were still the ones they had locally, whom they saw regularly.

Language and culture were the most important considerations for them in forming close and intimate friendships with Taiwanese rather than Australians. In fact, despite the fact that all of the informants in both studies claimed that they did not exclusively form friendships with Taiwanese (and many indicated that they had Australian friends), when it came to describing their Australian friends many considered them only to be “acquaintances” while declaring their close friends to be, without exception, “Taiwanese”.

Henry (a pseudonym) explained that he preferred to have Taiwanese as close friends because “they are Asians and using Chinese is easier”. More specifically, he believed that

> We [Taiwanese] have similar thinking, like all Asians. ABC [Australia-Born Chinese] always stick with the Aussies but I consider myself Asian – because I am Chinese [I hang around the Chinese].

Likewise, Frank suggested that although

> [Australians] are very friendly and helpful; somehow it’s not the same as having friends with similar ethnic and cultural background. You seem to have the same kind of understanding and you don’t need to worry about offending someone from a different cultural background by doing the wrong thing, saying the wrong word or something.

This feeling was echoed by Andy, who admitted that he felt “more at ease using Mandarin when talking with my Taiwanese friends”. However, James also made a strong point:

> It is natural to form friendships with them [the Taiwanese]. It was also easier to do so because you didn’t have to worry about your English. (How’s your English?) Just all right. I don’t think I speak that well. In fact, I must say that I like Chinese a lot more. I just love the Chinese language. I prefer to read Chinese more than English . . . not because I can’t or don’t understand English. Somehow I feel I was born for the language . . . you know, you’re more natural with it. I don’t think I am the only one who feels that way. I know that there are others who also prefer the Chinese language. I know people who prefer to read Harry Potter in Chinese and order the Chinese translated version from Taiwan rather than getting the English version here. Strange to you but I can understand that. (Does that mean that you’re not interested in English at all?) Oh no. On the contrary, we’ll have to do English – all our assignments are written in English and you use English in school all the time. For me, I just think Chinese is a more beautiful language. My mother was so pleased to hear me say that she bought me the complete collection by Jin Yong [the most respected writer of martial arts novels] and I am reading it everyday.
However, the importance of cultural differences should not be underestimated. Han (a pseudonym), a Masters student in biotechnology, confessed that at times it was hard for him to fathom the “Australian way of thinking”:

... While I was studying at the university, in biotech, there was no Asian in the class. Out of 70 people I was the only one... One of my [Australian] friends was very good at work, uni work, with high GPA and all that. I asked him, “Why don’t you continue studying since you’re this good, you know, continue to do Honours and PhD. You could earn more money later on, especially in this field when you have a PhD. You’ll be worth a lot more than an average graduate student”. He then told me that he didn’t want the stress and responsibility. Instead, he just wanted to earn a bit of money, like being a school teacher, with a bit of income to spend... He said, “Life’s not that bad without a PhD”. And he went on to say he would get to travel around Australia and things like that... Whereas for most Asians, they would say, they want to... well, if they don’t have a higher degree, they would still want to earn a lot of money, buy good stuff. Having a nice car is important. I think we do think a bit differently.

In short, he concluded that Asian young men were interested in things related to consumption – getting a secure job and earning money so that they could spend it on cars, the latest electronic gadgets or going to karaoke – while Australians were more interested in “going to beaches, swimming, surfing and all that”.

Indeed, to Ms B20 in the OCAC study, the issue of sports in Australian culture has been frequently overlooked in developing friendships between Taiwanese and Australian men. In her view:

I don’t think there is much difference in making friends with Australians or Taiwanese. The process is not that different although I think it’s easier for females to make friends with anyone simply because we [females] have a broader range of topics to talk about. We have common interests in beauty and shopping, and that helps to remove many barriers in breaking the ice. However for men things are different. Australian men are usually sports fixated. In Taiwan, the popular sport is baseball; it is cricket in Australia. You can imagine there’s nothing in common for Taiwanese men and Australian men to bond. The interests are so different.

Her view would have pleased Han, who shared this sentiment:

I told people I play cricket, especially Asians. They think it’s a stupid sport – all you do is run and run in a big field and they’ll say to you, “you must be crazy” or stuff like that.

Alan, however, thought the main issues related to popular culture. He became quite serious when he made the following comments:

[The reason why] Asians hang around with Asians was because there are more for them to talk about. We just don’t know what’s there to talk about with Australians... I am more comfortable with Asian popular culture and pop music.
You can download the music from the Internet, and you can read all about the latest popular stuff on the Net. I also have satellite TV at home that gives me all the Asian TV programs and I enjoy watching them. I hardly watch any Australian television.

According to informants in both studies, ethnicity was normally a non-issue for parents when it came to making friends and social activities. However, when friendship began to escalate into affection, parents had different attitudes towards their children according to gender.

Interviews in the OCAC study showed that when it came to marriage, parents generally preferred their children to select someone who was of Taiwanese origin, or who at least spoke Mandarin and had a similar cultural background. The male respondents also indicated that their main concern was how their prospective spouses would be received by their families. As Mr B12 reflected:

Of course I’d prefer a Taiwanese wife, mainly for language reasons. She would understand the way I think and feel much easier than an Australian woman, unless she has an active interest in the Chinese culture. Otherwise it’ll be too difficult for an Australian to conform to these Confucian values and norms.

Mr B14 further emphasised the important point about marriage for a Taiwanese man – it is not only about his preference for a Taiwanese woman, but also about the practicality of having a spouse able to communicate effectively with his parents. The female respondents in the OCAC group seemed to be less concerned about the ethnicity or cultural attributes of their future spouses. Most seemed to have a more relaxed attitude and were open to the idea of marrying someone who was not of Taiwanese background. Ms B8, for example, made it clear that,

Although my parents prefer I marry an Asian man, especially one who is a Mandarin speaker, I’m not specific about what ethnicity my husband should be. What matters is whether his values and personality are compatible with my own.

Ms B3 also highlighted her ideal partner:

Traditionally a Chinese family values more male than female. I may not be able to challenge such a tradition but I certainly would like to find a partner who values women more.

In general, Taiwanese parents were more willing to accept having an Australian son-in-law because traditionally daughters are married out. According to Ms B11, however, there was a more important reason for parents to accept a marriage proposal from an Australian man for their daughter: an intercultural marriage involving a Western son-in-law was, for many, regarded as an indication of their successful integration into the mainstream society and therefore it was something they would be proud to show off. Interestingly they were also led to believe that an Australian man who had an interest in having a Taiwanese wife would most likely be someone who was culturally sensitive and accepting of Chinese values and social customs; in particular, he would have a strong respect for his parents-in-law. Furthermore, many Taiwanese parents seemed to hold the view that
Western men generally were more respectful of women. In any case, many believed that, given that their daughter and son-in-law would not live with them under the same roof, they would not have to experience the difficulties of dealing with cultural conflicts within their own household.

On the other hand, when it came to the marriage of the adult male children in the family, many Taiwanese parents, and the adult male children, became most concerned about the socio-cultural consequences of the presence of an Australian daughter-in-law. As observed by Ms B12, they felt less comfortable with the notion of having grandchildren of mixed parentage, as it was considered less than acceptable in traditional practice not to keep the family bloodline ethnically exclusive. Similarly, both parents and Taiwanese men perceived that Australian women held greater power both socially and within the household. They also felt apprehensive about the problems that could arise in the future, thinking particularly that their ties with their son would be displaced by a powerful Western daughter-in-law.

For these reasons, it was a common view within the Taiwanese community that marrying off a Taiwanese woman to an Australian man was something natural, while the opposite situation would be a problem.

**Conclusion**

This paper sets out to explore the identities of what is frequently referred to as the 1.5 generation of the Taiwanese communities in Brisbane. Two sets of data from two empirical studies have been examined, and both show that transnationalism plays an important role in shaping the asserted identities of the 1.5 generation. Although many of the informants had spent a lengthy period in Australia and had received an Australian education, the asserted identities of the majority of this generation were unambiguously “Taiwanese”, with only a few seeing themselves as holding a hyphenated identity and even fewer considering themselves “Australian”. Their primordial claim for a Taiwanese identity at first glance seems to suggest that their asserted identities were far from being transnational. However, on closer examination, their preferences for using the Chinese or Taiwanese language in forming friendships, their affinity with Chinese and Asian cultural values and norms, and their assertion of a taste for Asian rather than Australian popular culture and lifestyle have ironically demonstrated that they are capable of engaging in transnational ways of being in, but not belonging to, the host society (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004).

The simultaneity of being in Australia while claiming a Taiwanese identity was further embedded in the ways they engaged with education, occupation, friendship, and marriage. This was also where their identities began to diverge along gender lines. The male 1.5 generation still identified strongly with traditional Taiwanese gender values in choosing fields of study and occupational trajectories, and additional pressures from their parents encouraged them to conform. However, although the gender identity of the female 1.5 generation still remained traditionally patriarchal, they were under less pressure to conform to traditional expectations in selecting their marital partners than their male counterparts.

The middling transnationalism (Smith and Bakker, 2005; Smith, 2005; Rogers, 2005) of the parental generation of Taiwanese migrants in Australia seems to have played a significant role in reinforcing the gendered ethnic identities and selective acculturation of the 1.5
generation. The phenomenon of downward assimilation seems to remain an unacceptable and alien possibility for this generation.

Notes

1. The quantitative component of the study is a questionnaire survey of 1,028 Taiwanese migrants who settled in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The research was carried out by Professor Nora L-H Chiang of National Taiwan University and Associate Professor Richard Hsu of Taipei Municipal University of Education. Their generosity in sharing their research data is deeply appreciated.

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