

The politics and construction of identity and childhood: Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand

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Angel Chan

University of Auckland, New Zealand

Paul Spoonley

Massey University, New Zealand

Abstract

Diverse immigrants have significantly transformed the ethnic make-up of New Zealand, and they have brought with them diverse identities to this country. Findings from a doctoral research project which involved exploring Chinese immigrant parents' identity choices for themselves and their children highlight the complex politics of identity. Within the field of education, children's acquisition of a positive identity is closely related to valued self-worth, and a sense of shared identity is further believed to promote beneficial relationships, sense of belonging and social cohesion. Identity theories, nonetheless, argue that contemporary individual identities are fluid and hybrid, and an over-emphasis on collective identity creates boundaries, exclusion and tension. This article applies some of these theoretical frames to critically examine the identity choices of Chinese immigrant parent participants and argues for the need to re-examine the notion of identity. The implications of these identity choices on their children's childhood and social and education practices are also analysed.

Keywords

Belonging, childhood, exclusion, identity

Introduction

New Zealand has a large population of immigrants. According to the latest census statistics, one in four people were born overseas, and there are more than 200 ethnic groups living in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). It has been contended that Auckland is the most important

Corresponding author:

Angel Chan, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland, Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave, Auckland 1023, New Zealand.

Email: angel.chan@auckland.ac.nz

immigrant destination in New Zealand and operates as a gateway, and 40% of its residents have been born in another country (Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). The census further shows that 23.1% of Aucklanders identified with an 'Asian' ethnic group, and Chinese is the largest Asian group in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The term 'superdiverse' is now used to describe the ethnic make-up of New Zealand (Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi, 2013; Spoonley, 2015), and these diverse immigrants have brought with them complex and wide-ranging identities.

This article presents findings from a doctoral research project¹ (Chan, 2014), which involved a sample of Chinese immigrant parents, to illustrate the politics of identity. It applies identity theories (e.g. Davis, 2009; Goldberg and Solomos, 2002; Hall, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2000) to critically analyse the implications of Chinese immigrant families' identity choices. These choices revealed the participants' sense of (non)belonging and in/exclusion, as well as their aspirations for children's identities and cultural heritages. Cultural identity is recognised in the New Zealand curriculum documents as a key contributor to the well-being of children because it provides a sense of belonging and inclusion to social networks (Ministry of Education (MoE), 1996, 2007). The findings discussed in this article highlight Chinese immigrant children's complex, fluid and hybrid identities and childhood while growing up in New Zealand, and they present significant implications for social and education practices.

Chinese immigrants and the notion of identity in New Zealand education

Many Chinese immigrants say that they came to live in New Zealand for their children's education (Ip, 2002; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). This means that the education settings in New Zealand, specifically in Auckland, are increasingly ethnically diverse. For example, according to statistics provided by the Education Counts (2013), 'Asian' is one of the largest ethnic groups enrolled in licensed New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) centres, and since 2004, the enrolment of this group has increased by 90%. This represents the largest increase compared to other groups of European/Pākehā, Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) and Pasifika (peoples originally from the various Pacific Islands). The 2013 New Zealand census (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) further indicates that immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) are the second largest immigrant group and the largest Asian group in New Zealand. When all the spoken Chinese languages are added together, the census (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) shows that the Chinese language has become the third largest language spoken in New Zealand, behind English and te reo Māori (Māori language). PRC immigrants are attracted particularly to Auckland, and according to Spoonley and Bedford (2012), 'their numbers and impact [are] on a scale that [is] unprecedented in New Zealand's history of immigration' (p. 109).

Chinese immigrants have a long history in New Zealand. Those who came a century ago mainly provided the adopted country with a source of labour, from early gold-miners to later market gardeners. They endured considerable hardship and discrimination (Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). Contemporary Chinese immigrants came from varied countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and China. Those who arrived in New Zealand under the skills-based recruitment system introduced in the late 1980s are highly educated professionals and sought-after by different countries, and they frequently engage in cross-border activities (Bartley and Spoonley, 2008; Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012; Spoonley and Macpherson, 2004). Although PRC immigrants are likely to settle and commit to New Zealand long term, they also maintain relations and ties with family, friends and business networks in their homeland (Ip, 2002).

The notion of identity is emphasised in New Zealand education. National curricula acknowledge the important role of identity to children's well-being and are committed to supporting

children's positive identity development. The ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa* (MoE, 1996), recognises that 'there are many migrants in New Zealand, and, as in any country with a multicultural heritage, there is a diversity of beliefs about childrearing practices ... The early childhood curriculum supports the cultural identity of all children ...' (p. 18). It seeks to promote children's 'growing sense of self-identity' (p. 21) and 'self-worth' (p. 46), and that 'children's confidence in, and identity with, the cultures of both their country of origin and of New Zealand should be fostered' (p. 55). The notion of identity also features frequently in *The New Zealand Curriculum: For English-Medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1–13*, and it is particularly emphasised in the curriculum area of social sciences (MoE, 2007). Among others, the curriculum document highlights 'New Zealand's identity in the world' (p. 14), 'students' developing sense of identity' (p. 18), 'personal identity and sense of self-worth' (p. 23), 'diverse cultures and identities' (p. 30) and New Zealand's unique bicultural (Māori and Pākehā) identity. Yet, the notion of identity within a 'superdiverse' New Zealand is not straightforward.

Problematising and theorising the politics of identity

Identity theories highlight the relationship between identities and in/exclusion. Identity is constructed through the recognition of commonalities and differences among groups. For example, traditions and culture can be used to create a collective identity for members of a community as a form of closure and boundary, and thus determine who is included and excluded (Davis, 2009; Goldberg and Solomos, 2002; Hall, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2000). While a collective identity acknowledges common experiences, social norms and togetherness, it can also contribute to forms of exclusion and in a policy sense, fails to recognise both intra- and inter-group heterogeneity (Banks, 2010). Any broad and taken-for-granted categorised identity, such as ethnicity, can be problematic (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). To illustrate, as noted earlier, contemporary Chinese immigrants who have arrived in New Zealand in the last 30 years are a diverse group who come from varied countries with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Using a singular and collective identity, such as 'Chinese' or 'Asian', to categorise all Chinese immigrant groups fails to acknowledge this heterogeneity in various ways. Instead, dual and hyphenated identities, such as Singaporean-Chinese or even New Zealand-Singaporean-Chinese, are common among Chinese immigrants who have 'variously settled in and oriented towards their new countries of residence' (Ang, 2004: 187).

Collective identity is politically and culturally constructed to serve certain purposes (Hall, 1992). Constructing a collective identity not only normalises the practices of those who belong and share this similar identity, but also assists the identification of the 'others' who are dissimilar (Farquhar, 2010). It creates cultural boundaries to exclude the 'alien' cultures of the 'other' (Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Goldberg and Solomos, 2002; Hall, 1991, 2000), and members of the dominant group can – and do – homogenise and 'other' any group that is different (Davis, 2009; Hall, 1991, 1992). A single and homogeneous view of identity, thereby, creates a binary division between one group and the defined 'other'. Nonetheless, those subordinated can also politically and strategically retreat into exclusive identities to protect their native languages and cultural practices, proclaim their sense of non-belonging and demonstrate their resistance against assimilation and racism (Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Hall, 1991, 2000).

A person's individual identity representation, however, is fluid and hybrid because it is a result of interplay between class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and it is a reflection of cultural, historical, contextual, local and situational factors at a particular space and time (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1991, 1992). The construction of self-identity is a continuous process during which a person's identity can be altered, shifted and used strategically to highlight commonalities and differences,

to move boundaries and to position (non)belongingness (Hall, 1996; Ong, 1999). Under the impact of global human migration, new, plural and diverse identities are being constructed, thereby disturbing a pre-existing sense of collective national identity (Hall, 1991, 2000). These hybrid and fluid identities can be considered by some as a threat to social cohesion because social cohesion discourses stress collective identity, uniformity and feelings of belonging and togetherness (Holtug and Mason, 2010). Yet, excessive sentiments towards a particular collective identity can lead to intolerance and exclusion of 'other' identities and cultural practices.

Immigrant families from the PRC in New Zealand are likely to engage in a process of identity negotiation as a result of their positioning and repositioning consequent to migration. Their choice of identity may shift over time as their sentiments towards the sending and receiving countries evolve and change. Choices of identity are also influenced by wider social factors, such as the public perception towards an ethnic group (Bartley, 2003) or socio-economic constraints/options. Findings presented in this article, in terms of ethnicity affiliation(s) or identity representation(s) adopted by the PRC participants, reflected their sense of (non)belonging and in/exclusion in New Zealand, and these findings carry important social and educational implications, which will be examined later in this article.

Data collection and an insider-researcher

A qualitative and narrative research approach, life story methodology (Atkinson, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001), was used to investigate the involvement and experiences of PRC immigrant parents in New Zealand ECE, as well as their perspectives of early years learning. Two phases of individual and semi-structured interviews, each guided by an interview schedule with open-ended questions, were carried out in this study. The interviews were conducted in a relaxing and conversational manner, during which many spontaneous questions and responses emerged. A wide range of topics were explored, such as the participants' involvement in their children's ECE, their parenting strategies, their communication with ECE teachers, their perspectives of heritages and ethnic identities and their sense of (non)belonging in New Zealand and ECE communities. For the purpose of this article, mainly findings related to identity choices are presented. Ethics approval of this study was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC).

Ten immigrant parents, recruited from the three Auckland ECE centres that their children attended, participated in two phases of individual interviews. Although the invitation to partake in this research was extended to parents and grandparents, only the mothers agreed to participate. The researcher responsible for data collection (Chan) has a similar ethnic, cultural and language background to the participants. This similarity and experience as an immigrant all contributed to developing rapport and trusting relationships with the participants. Chan was thus an insider-researcher (Gregory and Ruby, 2011) who was able to engage with the participants in open communication during the data collection process.

An insider-researcher from the participants' community is more able to understand and appreciate the participants' cultures, histories, worldviews, values and practices, and so is in a better position to analyse the narratives in detail and to construct in-depth meanings of the stories provided (Cortazzi and Jin, 2006; Trawick-Smith, 2003). Previous research indicates that Chinese participants tend to only express their real feelings and thoughts to insiders who share something similar with them (Liu, 2009). It is acknowledged that a researcher cannot be an insider on all occasions (Gregory and Ruby, 2011) because there will inevitably be dimensions of cultural, social and educational backgrounds that differ between the researcher and the participants. Nevertheless, without the language barrier, the participants in this research project were at least able to share their thoughts in ways and a depth that could not have otherwise been accomplished with English-speaking interviewers.

Key findings

This section reports and analyses the identities chosen by the participants for themselves and their children. It provides some of the findings that emerged from the interviews, specifically in relation to the participants' identity construction, maintenance and challenges, followed by similar questions in terms of their children's identity. While the participants unanimously opted for the same identity for themselves, identity choices selected for their children were varied. The contrasting and nuanced narratives highlight the complexity, messiness and politics of identity.

Immigrant parents' identity: singular and consistent

When asked about their identities, none of the participants claimed to be a New Zealander or 'Kiwi',² despite the fact that over half of them had been living in New Zealand for more than 10 years. All of them identified themselves as Chinese – without hesitation. Most justified their choice of identity label as based upon their birthplace. They believed that since they were born in China, they were naturally Chinese, no matter how many years they had resided in New Zealand. Some further argued that since they looked Chinese, there was no reason to say otherwise, and that others would not believe them if they claimed to be New Zealanders.

What's wrong with telling people that we are Chinese? Our face naturally tells people who we are. (Jan)³

Even if I don't tell people I am Chinese, they can tell I am Chinese ... I am used to telling people I am Chinese. There is nothing bad about being Chinese. (Katie)

But we have a Chinese face ... how can we say we are 'Kiwi',⁴ not Chinese? This is impossible. It is nothing embarrassing to tell people you are Chinese. (Mei)

You don't have to tell. People look at your face, they know straight away ... I am a Chinese. Why would I tell people that I am a New Zealander? There is nothing to be ashamed of being Chinese. (Lian)

They won't think that you are a New Zealander as your look and accent tell people that you are not a 'Kiwi'. (Sonia)

The participants did not claim to be 'Kiwis' because their 'Chinese' phenotypical characteristics made them the visible 'others' in New Zealand. Furthermore, while the narratives (at a surface level) seemed to express a sense of Chinese pride, they also revealed a lack of agency and fluidity because the participants believed that identity was innately determined and constrained – in a static manner – by how their recognisable characteristics were perceived. The participants' identity 'choices' are not free choices after all; instead, they reflected their perceptions of 'subjective reality' (Atkinson, 2007: 239) and/or constraint as an 'other', and proclaimed their sense of non-belonging. One participant, Vicky, further constructed a new identity for herself, *边缘人*/bian yuen ren, which means a person sitting on the edge of two boundaries who was, she said, 'neither Kiwi nor Chinese'. This demonstrates that she struggled to position her belongingness.

In terms of their nationality, 7 out of 10 participants were still PRC passport holders at the time of the interviews. They explained that since China does not allow dual citizenship, and they had to return to China periodically or even long term in the future, it is important to retain their Chinese nationality. This is mainly because for non-citizens, there is a restriction on the length of their visits. However, those who had opted for a New Zealand passport claimed it was because PRC passports were less well received internationally when travelling. Ong (1999) considers contemporary Chinese who cross borders frequently as flexible citizens who have passports for

convenience, and their choice of identity and citizenship is strategic and instrumental. This appeared to be the case here.

The growing power of China on the world stage and the participants' sense of patriotism might have also contributed to their pride in identifying themselves as Chinese. First, overseas Chinese are now seen in China as patriots who are still connected closely with their ancestral homeland (Nyíri, 2004). Second, as China's economy prospers and its international status grows, contemporary Chinese immigrants are more prepared than the previous sojourner generations to identify themselves with their home country even though they continue to reside in the receiving countries (Benton and Gomez, 2003).

Claiming oneself to be Chinese, nonetheless, may also mean distancing from – or dissociating with – a 'Kiwi' identity. For example, one participant, Anita, said her husband, who immigrated to Auckland as a teenager with his family and returned to his home country after completing his university qualification, despises any Chinese who artificially pretend and identify themselves to be New Zealanders. Anita told me, 'He feels that when you tell people you are a New Zealander, you are trying to increase your social status'. This binary perception of being Chinese or New Zealander seems to suggest to this respondent and her husband that Kiwi and Chinese identities are mutually exclusive. When the notion of belonging was spontaneously mentioned, Anita further admitted that she felt she had no sense of belonging in New Zealand. When the notion was extended to ECE centres, some participants were bemused because they had not thought of the need to develop a sense of belonging and to be included in the ECE communities.

Immigrant children's identities: Plural and inconsistent

In terms of the ethnic identity of their children who were mostly born in New Zealand, the participants' responses were varied and nuanced. The previous phenotypical and birthplace criteria were not applied to children in the same consistent manner:

The children, they will probably identify themselves more as 'Kiwi'. This is not very good, but they need to understand Chinese cultures first. (Jean)

At the moment, I tell them [her daughters] they are Chinese, and they feel the same. No matter how good her [daughter's] English is, but at school, she knows she is different from the 'Kiwis'. She knows she is Chinese ... Even though one day they do not speak Chinese anymore, they still know they are different. (Katie)

My children will say they are New Zealanders ... I think they are still little. It doesn't matter who they think they are, as long as they are happy ... I haven't thought much about this. I have never told them what their ethnicity is. I only told them that their parents are Chinese, and they were born in New Zealand. (Lian)

I am Chinese because I am a first generation immigrant, my children may call themselves 'Kiwi' because they were born here. (Vicky)

They [the children] were born here, but they are Chinese. Their look is Chinese. (Jan)

There are many criteria used for determining one's identity (Callister, 2008). The contrasting narratives presented above demonstrate the politics, complexity and messiness of identity choices, and highlight variations and irregularities in how the participants selected identities for themselves and their children. Different criteria, in particular, phenotypical differences and

birthplace, were inconsistently adopted by the participants to suit different contexts and personal preferences.

Finally, the earlier discussion regarding the notion of dissociation was also applied to children's identities, but in a reverse manner. A participant, Jean, highlighted her main concerns with how her children's identity was influenced by the negative images of China projected in mainstream (New Zealand) society and the possible adverse comments made about China and Chinese in education settings.

I don't know where they get this idea from. Sometimes, when we mentioned about China, they would say China is very messy, children are kidnapped ... a lot of negative things about China. I don't know where they get these ideas from, from the teachers or from their schoolmates. At home, I won't say these things to the children. But I feel that they talk about mostly negative things of China. (Jean)

This excerpt echoes Canadian research which shows that Chinese immigrant adolescents in Canada felt disconnected from the school curriculum because Chinese culture or information about China were portrayed negatively in class (Li, 2010).

In summary, findings from this study reveal that Chinese individuals and families express a variety of identity choices as they reflect upon personal connections to both China as an origin society and 'Chineseness'. These identity choices also reflect instrumental affiliations and a perceived sense of difference to 'other' New Zealanders, and they have significant social and educational implications.

Implications: Chinese immigrant families' identities, childhood and teaching practices

Since identity is connected with belonging and in/exclusion (Davis, 2009; Goldberg and Solomos, 2002; Hall, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2000), the participants' identity choices and mainstream perspectives of identity impact strongly on immigrant children's childhood, and have vital social and education implications. This final section analyses the findings presented in light of identity theories, highlighting the complex implications of the participants' identity choices on their sense of (non)belonging to New Zealand, parental expectations and aspirations, and teaching practices.

Identity, heritage and a sense of (non)belonging

The single unanimous identity of being 'Chinese' chosen by the participants implied that they perceived themselves as different from 'New Zealanders' or from the dominant cultural group (European/Pākehā) in New Zealand. This 'Chinese' identity reflected their subjective identity constraints and reality, a sense of displacement and self-exclusion. Identifying themselves as Chinese provided the participants with a sense of belonging in the Chinese community where individuals shared similar understandings of cultural practices, social meanings and rules (Banks, 2010; Hall, 1991), even though Anderson (1991) argues that communities are often simply imagined. Yet, by doing so, the participants also constructed boundaries with other cultural groups and communities.

During the interviews, the participants often used 'we' and 'they' to position Chinese and 洋人/yang ren⁵ in binary opposition, as if there was a predetermined and immovable barrier which inhibited them from becoming 'New Zealanders'. In addition, identity theories can be applied here to argue that the participants used this singular Chinese identity choice strategically to protect and uphold their cultural and language heritage, at least in private spaces, as well as to proclaim their sense of non-belonging to New Zealand (Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Hall, 1991, 2000). To

illustrate, all the participants continued to use Chinese as the main language at home and to practise traditional Chinese customs, such as celebrating different Chinese festivals. These participants are different from their 'model minority' predecessors who were prepared to give up their Chinese heritage and assimilate to become 'New Zealanders' (Ip, 2003). Furthermore, retaining their Chinese citizenship, culture and language heritage provided these contemporary immigrants with a practical sense of security: they could return to and settle back into their home country if the life in the new land was not as desirable as originally anticipated. After all, a decision to leave friends and extended families behind and migrate to a foreign country is a risky undertaking.

While phenotypical and birthplace criteria were used consistently by the participants when they selected their own identity, varied determinants such as cultural and linguistic characteristics, birthplace and other rationales were irregularly applied, sometimes in a confusing and contradictory manner, to their children's identities. This implies a sense of uncertainty and preparedness for their children to have fluid identities. More importantly, when the participants added the 'Kiwi' option to their children's identity repertoire, it suggested that they aspired for their children to develop a sense of belonging to New Zealand and to integrate while maintaining their Chinese identity. With hybrid and fluid identities, these children were expected to develop at least dual heritages, and this expectation has strong influences on the constructions of childhood.

Immigrants' parenting practices and their children's childhood

The criteria used by the participants to select identities for themselves and their children demonstrated that their identity choices are multi-layered and that they are determined by a complex mix of physical, cultural or recognisable characteristics (Callister, 2008; Lyons et al., 2010), as well as personal preferences and aspirations. Fluid and hybrid identity choices for their children also imply fluid parenting strategies. Due to their 'in-between' (New Zealand and Chinese) identities and cultures, the participants often displayed ambivalent attitudes towards teaching, learning and parenting practices of the host and home country. For example, while the participants recognised the strengths of the autonomous, independent and child-centred learning approach promoted in New Zealand education settings, they would also like to see more teacher-directed and structured learning activities, such as defined reading and writing activities, because they were used to a teacher-led approach of learning. Inconsistent and/or contrasting logic was used by the participants to justify their parental aspirations, demonstrating ambivalent attitudes and constant search for 'in-between' practices that are common within immigrants (Bartley and Spoonley, 2008).

Due to their dual or multiple identities, the childhoods of the participants' children are highly complex and mobile. To illustrate, since all the participants aspired for their children to be at least bilingual (in Chinese and English language) and bicultural (in Chinese and New Zealand culture), these children continuously negotiated and navigated between at least two language and cultural heritages. In addition, most of their extended families were in the PRC, and they often went back for family reunions. Most parents also planned for their children to return to the PRC for an extended period of time to learn Chinese language and culture in what was described as an authentic manner. The participants also did not exclude the possibility of their children working in the PRC or other countries in the future. These children are likely to become global citizens, and their identity choices are likely to remain fluid and continue to evolve, depending on their future experience in New Zealand and elsewhere. A positive experience of a non-biased New Zealand which embraces diversity is more likely to create a sense of belonging and motivate the participants' children to become 'New Zealanders' in some sense. In contrast, negative experiences of discrimination and unjust treatments due to their Chinese identity will contribute towards developing a sense of non-belonging and (self)exclusion.

Finally, the discourse of ‘residential fixity and domestication’ considers a stable home environment as essential to children’s well-being, and hence, it constructs a negative image of those immigrant families who engage in frequent border crossing and fail to provide stability and security to the growing child (Ni Laoire et al., 2010: 156). When a deficit identity is socially constructed for immigrant families as unsettled and uninterested in children’s well-being, it may demotivate teachers to engage with these families, thereby impacting negatively on immigrant children’s educational experiences.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Notions of cultural identity, catering for diversity, a sense of belonging and inclusive practices are emphasised in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007). The promotion of cultural identity in education programmes, however, has to be implemented sensitively as it can create both cohesion and tension. Too much emphasis on togetherness and a particular collective identity may generate boundaries and run the risk of discrimination and exclusion. It is the role of the teachers to help all children to explore their identities while encouraging them to respect those of others.

Both national curricula also encourage ECE and school settings to connect with families and wider communities (MoE, 1996, 2007). It is pivotal, therefore, for teachers to initiate discussion with immigrant parents to find out parental aspirations in terms of identity and language choices. Children’s home cultures and languages also need to be positively included in the education programme, so that families can feel a sense of pride in their cultural identity. Teachers and school personnel should assure diverse immigrant families that there is neither the need to leave their cultural heritage behind at home nor the necessity to place one’s ethnicity and New Zealand identity in binary opposition. Teachers who are prepared to understand and engage sensitively with identities of their own and immigrant families, to embrace plural and fluid identities and to accept diverse parenting practices and parental aspirations are more likely to create an environment that is respectful, non-threatening and inclusive for immigrant families in education settings.

Countries, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with a high immigrant population mostly consider immigration as ‘a contribution to the national good, with benefits from the banal (food) through to national imageries’ (Spoonley, 2015: 5). This vision is a key contributor to moving beyond the traditional assimilation model which expects immigrants to give up their heritage identity and to overcoming the fear of the unknown that is associated with ‘difference’ and imagined solidarity. Rather, it is important to recognise the funds of knowledge (González, 2005) that immigrants contribute, and adopt a curriculum and pedagogy that encourage diverse identities, heritages and practices to co-exist. Sensitivity to the complex contextual factors that shape families’ actions and decisions, open-mindedness and deliberative and intentional inclusion can ensure that all voices are heard (Holtug and Mason, 2010), so that immigrant families develop a sense of belonging and are confident to identify with the host country. For immigrants to be accepted in New Zealand, it depends on at least three conditions: residency granted by the immigration agency, recognition of the fluid and hybrid nature of identity and inclusive practices of local institutions, including education settings.

Conclusion

This article has presented aspects of findings from a research project which examined the relationship between the identities of Chinese immigrant families and their sense of (non)belonging and in/exclusion, highlighting the politics of identity. As countries, such as New Zealand, are becoming

increasingly ‘superdiverse’ due to large immigrant inflows, it is timely to re-examine the notions of identity. Contemporary identities are fluid and hybrid, and it is common for immigrants, and the children of immigrants in particular, to have dual or multiple identities. This article argues that social and educational practices that are underpinned by a singular and collective identity are inadequate for the task of reflecting the diverse identities of immigrants. Immigrant parents have made a significant voluntary decision to raise their children in New Zealand, and the findings presented in this article suggest that Chinese immigrant parents aspired for their children to develop a sense of belonging to the adopted country, and wished that they would include a ‘Kiwi’ identity in their identity repertoire. Nonetheless, intentional intervention, such as active and open dialogue between parents and teachers, is required to understanding the heterogeneous expectations of each other, and developing respectful relationships, inclusive practices and cohesiveness.

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Notes

1. Some of the contents of this article are drawn from a doctoral thesis, Chan (2014).
2. This is a colloquial term to describe a New Zealander. It is often broadly used by the participants to refer to any ‘white’ people with European descent. The two terms, ‘New Zealander’ and ‘Kiwi’, were used interchangeably by the participants.
3. Pseudonyms are used in this article.
4. Within the Chinese-translated-into-English narratives, speech marks are used to quote the exact English words used by the participants.
5. This literally means Westerners. It was broadly used by the participants to describe any ‘white’ people with European descent.

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Author biographies

Angel Chan is a lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland. Her research interests include early childhood education, culture and identity, diversity, sociology of childhood, immigrant families in education settings, transnational parenting and teaching and learning in Chinese contexts.

Paul Spoonley is Pro Vice-Chancellor of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Massey University. His research interests include the sociology of ethnic groups, immigration policy and immigrant settlement outcomes and the nature of work.