



Resisting Stigma: Migrant Mothers and the Identity Empowerment of Mixed-Ethnic Children

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-04-09	Vietnamese marriage migrant mothers in Taiwan face stigma, often seen as economically dependent and culturally inferior. This study explores how these women resist such stigma and empower their mixed-ethnic children through practical everyday strategies, including verbal affirmation, cultural transmission, and self-development. Based on interviews with 36 Vietnamese marriage migrant mothers and analyzed using thematic analysis, the findings show they boost their mixed-ethnic children's self-esteem, preserve heritage through language and cultural practices, and actively pursue education and community participation to challenge stereotypes. Despite policy efforts under Taiwan's New Southbound Policy to promote multicultural inclusion, structural discrimination continues to hinder the social integration of Southeast Asian families. The study highlights the need for policies that enhance migrant mothers' social mobility, support bilingual education, and promote inclusive narratives of Southeast Asian heritage in Taiwan's multicultural discourse.
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Introduction

Research on marriage migrant mothers (MMM) in Taiwan, particularly those from Southeast Asia (SEA), has consistently highlighted the intersection of stigma, marginalization, and cultural exclusion in their lived experiences (Hsia, 2007; Lan, 2008). The historical use of terms such as “**ㄅ**(foreign bride)” to describe these women reflects deep-rooted anxieties about ethnic and cultural difference in a society that values homogeneity. Such labels often carry negative connotations, framing these women as “alien wombs”, “unfit mothers”, or “runaway brides” who opportunistically seek financial gain through marriage (Hsia, 2007; Lan, 2008). These stigmas not only hinder the social integration of MMM but also pose challenges to the identity development of their mixed-ethnic children (MEC) (Hsia, 2004). Recent studies have further shown that these stigmas are reproduced in institutional contexts such as schools and local communities, contributing to intergenerational disadvantages and emotional burdens for the New Second Generation (Yang et al., 2014; Lee & Zhou, 2015).

However, in recent years, the Taiwanese government and media have gradually shifted to a more inclusive narrative. The introduction of terms such as “**ㄅ**(new immigrants)” and “**ㄅ**(new



residents) reflects a broader recognition of the multicultural contributions of MMM (Huang, 2021). Policies such as the New Southbound Policy (NSP), implemented in 2016, have further emphasized the value of SEA cultures in Taiwanese society, creating a platform for cultural exchange and empowerment (Lan, 2019). Despite these changes, MMM, especially Vietnamese marriage migrant mothers (VMMM), continue to navigate a complex landscape of social expectations and discrimination, requiring active strategies to combat stigma and foster pride in their cultural identities. Scholars have pointed out that while policy discourse may appear inclusive, everyday encounters often remain exclusionary, as migrant mothers struggle with marginalization in both the domestic and public spheres (Lan, 2019; Gaviria et al., 2020).

By examining the evolving narrative frameworks and institutional policies concerning SEA MMM and their MEC. This article examines how VMMM in Taiwan navigate and contest stigma through strategies aimed at reshaping their social image and empowering their MEC. Within the broader context of persistent social anxieties about ethnic differences and cultural integration, VMMM are often perceived as the racialized and classed "other", posing challenges to the imagined cultural homogeneity of Taiwanese society. However, their actions, rooted in both personal agency and structural engagement, reveal the complexities of identity negotiation in multicultural families. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Cultural Capital Theory (CCT), this study explores how VMMM strive to counter discrimination, foster positive self-identity, and symbolically contribute to the evolving imagination of a multicultural Taiwanese future, while also filling a critical research gap by centering the voices and agency of migrant mothers, subjects who are frequently positioned as passive recipients of policy rather than active agents in shaping identity and resistance

Reframing identity: marriage migrant mothers, stigma, and theoretical pathways

According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior National Immigration Agency (11/2024), there are currently 605,111 transnational marriage couples in Taiwan, of which 64.28% (388,940 couples) are from mainland China and 35.72% (216,171 couples) are from the SEA region. Notably, Vietnamese women account for 116,782 people, becoming the second largest group of SEA immigrant women, after brides from mainland China, and significantly higher than the group from Indonesia (31,502 people). These figures reflect the increasingly important role of Vietnamese women in the picture of transnational marriage migration in Taiwan, while highlighting issues related to identity, discrimination, and social integration in a multicultural context.

Looking back over three decades, marriage migrant women (MMW) in Taiwan often faced stigma and discrimination, because they were viewed as "purchased" goods from less developed countries. Their images often appeared on billboards as "goods" being "sold" on the streets of Taiwan (Hsia, 2007), accompanied by negative terms. The consequences of these stereotypes not only damaged the image of MMW, but also created stereotypes about their cultural background, hindered their social integration, and affected their child-rearing. MEC born from transnational marriages were also not spared from social criticism and were labeled

“New Taiwanese Children” (NTC) to refer to children of mixed blood (Hsia, 2004; Hsieh & Wang, 2008).

However, over the past decade, perceptions of MMM and MEC in Taiwan have changed positively. Media portrayals began to shift in a more positive direction from 2002, and by 2010, articles began to use more supportive and respectful language (Lee & Chueh, 2018). Terms such as “new immigrants” or “new residents” began to replace the previously stigmatizing term “foreign bride” (Huang, 2021). At the same time, MEC formerly known as NTC were also given a new label, “New Second Generation” (NSG) (Lan, 2019). This change was further promoted by the Taiwanese government’s NSP policy in 2016, which encouraged the celebration of SEA cultural heritage within the NSG community. However, despite these improvements, negative impacts persist, affecting today’s NSG generation. Past stigma not only shapes MMM parenting practices but also affects NSG’s self-perceptions (Lan, 2019). Many NSG do not speak their native language due to social stigma (Yang et al., 2014), leading to feelings of guilt and low self-esteem, which hinder their identification as children of MMM (Chin & Yu, 2008; Le Anh Huynh & Quoc Huynh, 2020). Family members often discourage SEA language learning from MMM, further reinforces these negative perceptions. As a result, SEA MMM are forced to actively overcome these challenges to secure a positive identity for themselves and their MEC. This is consistent with research by Le Anh Huynh & Quoc Huynh (2020), which found that SEA MMM in Taiwan still face negative stereotypes, and employ various strategies to prove themselves as worthy and competent mothers.

To better understand the strategies used by these MMM, this study draws on SIT and CCT as an analytical framework. SIT, as proposed by Tajfel (1979), emphasizes how individuals derive self-esteem and identity from their membership in social groups. In stigmatized contexts, individuals or groups may use strategies such as reframing their identity, emphasizing positive attributes, or actively challenging dominant social norms. In a qualitative study of the racial and ethnic identities of White mothers married to Blacks and raising biracial children, O’Donoghue (2004) found that through raising biracial children, mothers gained a better understanding of their own racial identity and recognized their White privilege. Meanwhile, the study by Childs et al. (2021) on young adults with parents from different races in the United States, shows that these individuals develop flexible identity strategies, leveraging cultural diversity to create positive identities.

On the other hand, CCT focuses on how individuals acquire, mobilize, and transform cultural knowledge and skills to improve their social status (Bourdieu, 2018). Phenice and Griffore (2000) applied SIT to explain how perspectives commonly used in contemporary sociological research influence the social identity of ethnic minority families. In Seider et al.’s (2023) study, the authors explored how parents in multiethnic families help their children access and benefit from diverse cultural assets. The transmission and integration of values and traditions from both cultures helps children develop positive identities. Similarly, Harris (2019) showed how English-speaking immigrant parents in Sweden use transnational cultural capital and

language in their parenting strategies. The results show that they value transmitting their language and culture to their children, and leverage this cultural capital to support their children's development and social integration in multicultural environments.

While existing research has richly discussed the broader category of SEA MMM, this study specifically centers on VMMM and their nuanced practices of cultural resistance in a Taiwanese context, an area that has been underexplored in past literature. By applying SIT and CCT in tandem, this study offers an integrative lens through which to analyze how stigma negotiation and identity formation operate not only at the individual or family level, but also within Taiwan's broader socio-political structures.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger research project on VMMM in Taiwan, conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation from late 2021 to mid-2024. A qualitative research design was used to explore how VMMM combat stigma and nurture their MEC's ethnic identity. Given the study's focus on lived experiences, semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow participants to articulate their perspectives while ensuring thematic consistency (Maxwell, 2013).

A total of 36 VMMM participated, with ages ranging from 32 to 60 years and residence in Taiwan ranging from 6 to 28 years. Participants' educational backgrounds ranged from elementary school to university level, and their socioeconomic status varied from low-income households to financially stable working-class families. Participants were recruited from both Eastern and Western Taiwan using purposive and snowball sampling (Patton, 2014). Selection criteria required respondents to be women born in Vietnam married to Taiwanese citizens and actively involved in raising mixed-race children. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to enhance depth of expression and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Discussion focused on stigma, cultural transmission, language usage, and self-development, topics previously identified as important to migrant identity negotiation (Lan, 2019; Hsia, 2007).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were read multiple times to identify key ideas, which were then coded into subthemes and organized into broader themes consistent with SIT (Tajfel, 1979) and CCT (Bourdieu, 2018). The process followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, including familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and final write-up. This process highlighted patterns in how VMMM actively shape their MEC's identities while challenging social stigma. To ensure rigor, both data triangulation (cross-checking patterns across different participants) and member checking (sharing thematic summaries with five participants for feedback and clarification) were conducted. Interpretations were continually refined to maintain consistency in analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and provided written consent. They were assured that

their participation was voluntary, their identities would remain anonymous through pseudonyms, and all data would be kept confidential and securely stored. This methodological approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the ways VMMM negotiate stigma and empower their MEC's dual identities in Taiwan.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the data obtained from qualitative interviews with the participants were analyzed, and the findings were interpreted and discussed in light of the current literature.

“Your Family Protects You”: Encouragement, Heritage, and Bonding in Transnational Identity Formation

Despite structural constraints and social stigma, VMMM in Taiwan actively shape their MEC's identities through daily interactions, countering stereotypes and nurturing resilience. Rather than being passive victims of discrimination (Lan, 2019; Wang & Bélanger, 2011), they use verbal encouragement, heritage affirmation and quality time to strengthen their MEC's sense of self. SIT (Tajfel, 1979) suggests that self-esteem is tied to group identity, and for MEC, their dual heritage can be both empowering and challenging. To help their MEC navigate this complexity, VMMM reinforce family support, creating a safe space where dual identity is accepted rather than questioned. By emphasizing Vietnamese heritage, they also challenge the stigma of SEA origins (Hsia, 2007), ensuring that their MEC see their background as a source of pride. Additionally, engaging activities such as storytelling and traditional games make cultural transmission engaging and meaningful. Through these everyday strategies, VMMM actively reshape MEC's social status, equipping them with the confidence and cultural resources necessary to adapt to a multicultural society and to see their identity as a strength rather than a disadvantage.

Verbal Encouragement: Strengthening Confidence and Self-Worth

One of the main ways that VMMM empower their MEC is through verbal encouragement, reassuring them of the protection of their family and instilling confidence in their dual heritage. Affirmations not only serve as emotional support but also serve as a mechanism for strengthening resilience against the risk of discrimination. Since MEC in Taiwan may experience social stigma due to their SEA heritage (Lan, 2019; Hsia, 2007), maternal encouragement plays an important role in shaping how they perceive themselves within both Taiwanese and Vietnamese cultural frameworks. Such discourse is not merely affective; it also acts as a vehicle of cultural transmission, embedding pride and emotional security into everyday talk. By proactively addressing concerns about identity and self-esteem, VMMM attempt to prevent their MEC from internalizing negative stereotypes.

The importance of verbal encouragement can be understood through the lens of SIT (Tajfel, 1979), which states that individuals derive self-esteem from their group relationships. For MEC with VMMM, their dual heritage is both a source of pride and a weakness. Encouragement from mothers helps reinforce the idea that their Vietnamese background is

an asset rather than a deficiency, shaping a positive ethnic identity despite prevailing social stereotypes. Furthermore, CTT (Bourdieu, 2018) suggests that parental discourse serves as a specific form of cultural capital, equipping children with the linguistic and emotional resources to navigate their social environment. In this context, verbal encouragement serves as an important tool to convey values, strengthen resilience, and legitimize Vietnamese heritage in Taiwanese society.

For many VMMM, fostering a strong sense of security within the family is essential to ensuring their MEC feel supported. For example, Mrs. Tam emphasizes the importance of building MEC's self-esteem by reinforcing the idea of family stability and protection:

What matters is whether we give our children confidence. Does our life provide them with stability? If so, they won't feel disadvantaged. My family and I instill trust in them, letting them know that at home, they have their parents, aunts, and grandparents to protect them. No one is allowed to bully them.

This strategy is consistent with research that highlights the role of family support in protecting MEC from the negative effects of discrimination. Research has shown that children who receive strong family support report higher self-esteem and are better able to cope with social stigma (Yip, 2018; Qin et al., 2008). By framing the home as a safe and supportive environment, Mrs. Tam ensures that her MEC do not perceive their dual background as a disadvantage. Instead, this family solidarity acts as a psychological buffer against external prejudice, allowing MEC to be more confident in their social world.

Similarly, other VMMM proactively equip their MEC with rhetorical tools to counter potential discrimination. For example, Mrs. Chin deliberately instills pride in her MEC by emphasizing her own resilience and adaptability:

I also told my children *"There is a possibility that your friends will look down on you because your mother is Vietnamese... However, you should be proud of your mother, because your mother is also good at both Vietnamese and Chinese, and from a life in Vietnam, jumped over here and adapted and did a lot of work. So you have to be proud, if anyone looks down on you, you have to know how to protect yourself and your family"* (Mrs. Chin)

This form of verbal affirmation directly challenges the stigma against VMMM in Taiwan, which has long been viewed as socially and economically inferior (Wang & Bélanger, 2011; Hsia, 2007). By redefining her own story and emphasizing her perseverance, Mrs. Chin reframes her context as a source of strength rather than shame. Research suggests that when parents actively challenge negative stereotypes through discourse, they provide their children with a cognitive framework to counteract internalized self-doubt (Deaux & Ethier, 1998; Kim, 2014). Furthermore, this practice aligns with SIT, reinforcing the idea that children's self-esteem is linked to their identification with a positively valued group. For MEC, having a VMMM who actively affirms the worth of their Vietnamese heritage counteracts the societal devaluation of

SEA backgrounds in Taiwan. As studies on transnational identity formation indicate, verbal affirmation strengthens a child's attachment to their heritage, making them more likely to embrace bilingualism and cultural hybridity as sources of strength (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Yeh et al., 2015).

Through these verbal affirmations, VMMM challenge the broader social structures that marginalize their MEC's identities. Rather than allowing their MEC to passively endure exclusionary narratives, they equip them with the confidence to actively reclaim and assert their dual heritage. This emphasis on verbal encouragement sets the foundation for other maternal strategies, such as heritage affirmation through cultural practices, which further solidify the MEC's connection to their Vietnamese roots.

Highlighting Heritage: Reinforcing Cultural Belonging

In addition to verbal encouragement, VMMM emphasizes the beauty and significance of Vietnamese heritage, reinforcing its value as a source of pride rather than a disadvantage. While their MEC are integrated into a social environment that often prioritizes Taiwanese cultural norms, these mothers work to ensure that their Vietnamese heritage is not only recognized but also celebrated. They strategically emphasize the importance of language, traditions, and cultural knowledge as integral components of their MEC's identities, positioning Vietnamese heritage as an asset rather than a burden.

According to SIT (Tajfel, 1979), a strong attachment to one's ethnic background contributes to a positive sense of self. For MEC in Taiwan, this attachment is shaped by the narratives that MMM construct around heritage. When VMMM affirm that being part of the Vietnamese people is meaningful and valuable, they help their MEC build a sense of belonging that counteracts the social stigmatization of SEA cultures. In addition, CCT (Bourdieu, 2018) argues that cultural knowledge, including language proficiency and awareness of traditions, enhances an individual's ability to integrate into multiple social environments. Heritage language use, especially in daily conversation or storytelling, becomes a strategy to preserve identity and assert cultural legitimacy within both home and society. By emphasizing their MEC's dual cultural background, VMMM equips them with transnational competencies that go beyond the constraints of a single national identity.

For example, Mrs. Hanh illustrates how she communicates the need to learn Vietnamese to her son by viewing it as an inherent responsibility tied to his dual identity:

I also told my son that if he were only Taiwanese, he wouldn't need to learn [Vietnamese]...But because I'm Vietnamese, and he has Vietnamese blood, he's half Vietnamese, so he must know how to speak Vietnamese. If people say he's half Vietnamese but he doesn't know the language, it would clearly not be right, and he would already feel disadvantaged. Others would look at him and wonder why he's half Vietnamese but doesn't know anything about it.

By positioning language as a marker of legitimacy in both Vietnamese and Taiwanese social spaces, Mrs.Hanh highlights the risks of cultural alienation. This reflects broader concerns in migration studies, where children of migrant parents often face pressure to assimilate while simultaneously being judged as ignorant of their ethnic heritage (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010; Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2018). In Taiwan, where SEA identity has historically been stigmatized (Hsia, 2007), VMMM like Mrs.Hanh seek to counter this marginalization by ensuring their MEC actively engage with their Vietnamese heritage rather than passively inherit it.

However, passing on heritage is not always easy, as MEC may resist learning Vietnamese due to perceived difficulties or lack of direct relevance to their daily lives. Mrs.Tien recounted that her son initially resisted learning languages, but with constant reinforcement from both parents, he gradually developed an interest:

Even Huan's dad said the same thing—that because he's half Vietnamese, he has to understand Vietnamese people and know Vietnamese culture. So, starting with that thought, he began learning. At first, he wasn't receptive because, honestly, I don't think he's good with foreign languages. But I believe persistence pays off; I just kept sending him to class. My husband and I kept talking to him about it over and over, and now he's willing to learn.

This persistence is consistent with research on cultural transmission in migrant families, which emphasizes that parental reinforcement, through both explicit discussion and structured learning environments, plays a critical role in maintaining heritage identity across generations (Zhou,1998; Park et al., 2020). While some MEC may initially view heritage education as more of a duty than a hobby, continued parental encouragement and structured exposure, such as language classes, contribute to long-term cultural maintenance.

Furthermore, Mrs.Tien's approach emphasizes the tension between MEC's agency and parents' insistence on cultural learning. She notes that while MEC may initially resist structured cultural education in favor of leisure activities, consistent parental guidance is needed:

I introduced Voi, the son of my friend, to the Vietnamese class. After attending for one or two days, he found it too tiring and told his mom he didn't want to go anymore. Kids love to play and prefer staying home to play on their phones. Naturally, he begged his mom to let him stay home, as expected. But now, you just have to be firm and encourage him one more time, and then another time after that. That's how I approach it.

This illustrates a larger challenge in transnational identity formation—balancing cultural preservation with children's autonomy. While some scholars argue that imposing heritage education can create resistance (Nguyen, 2015), others emphasize that structured parental involvement leads to long-term cultural competence (Park & Sarkar, 2007). By continually reinforcing cultural engagement, even if reluctant, VMMM ensures that their MEC are not passively disconnected from their heritage.

Spending Quality Time: Creating Shared Memories

Beyond words, VMMM cultivate their MEC's connection to their heritage through shared experiences. Rather than relying solely on verbal encouragement or structured lessons, they embed cultural knowledge into their daily lives, making the transmission of heritage an organic and memorable process. According to SIT (Tajfel, 1979), children develop a sense of self through group membership. By listening to their VMMM's stories or participating in traditional activities, they internalize cultural symbols that reinforce their Vietnamese identity. These experiences serve as a means of group identification, helping them construct a transnational self that incorporates both Taiwanese and Vietnamese cultural elements.

One of the most intimate ways that VMMM share their heritage is through storytelling, especially about their own childhoods in Vietnam. Mrs. Bong illustrates this through bedtime stories with her MEC:

Sometimes, we lie down together before bed, and I tell them about what my life was like in Vietnam when I was young. I want them to understand how hard life was back then so they'll appreciate things and put more effort into their studies. I tell them how, when I was little, I craved good food but we were so poor that we couldn't afford anything. We had to wait until Tết to have delicious food or to get treats like candies and cakes, and that was also the only time I'd get a new outfit that my mom bought for me... Even something as simple as a small biscuit tasted amazing back then. They always ask me to tell them more stories about my childhood in Vietnam.

Through these stories, Mrs. Bong transmits cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2018) by providing her MEC with historical and social knowledge about Vietnam. The contrast between her childhood hardships and their current privileges serves as an implicit lesson in resilience and gratitude, reinforcing values that transcend culture and shape their everyday outlook.

In addition to storytelling, some VMMM introduce their MEC to traditional Vietnamese games, turning heritage preservation into an interactive experience. Ms. Nhung describes how she engages her MEC in the simple yet imaginative games of her own childhood:

I often teach them to play the games from my childhood, like jump rope, stone tossing, bamboo pop gun, etc...I also show them how to make toys from banana leaves, creating popping sounds and whistles. My children love it...That's why now, when we go somewhere and see banana leaves, my children ask me to stop the car so they can pick the leaves and play with them. Oh, I do everything I can to give my children those memories. I even secretly take pictures of them while they're playing, so I can keep those memories, both for them and me.

These activities function as embodied cultural capital, equipping MEC with skills and references that connect them to their Vietnamese heritage. Even if these games have no formal

educational or economic value in Taiwanese society, they become lived experiences that shape MEC's sense of identity. Such practices also reinforce a tactile and sensorial form of belonging, where banana leaves are no longer "just leaves" but symbolic artifacts of family continuity. The excitement the MEC feel when they discover banana leaves, not only as plants but also as symbols of their VMMM's past, demonstrates the power of cultural memory. From a social identity perspective, these games reinforce a sense of belonging. Unlike the school environment, where Vietnamese culture may be less known, the home becomes a private cultural space where their Vietnamese identity is affirmed.

In addition to transmitting knowledge, these shared activities also strengthen the emotional bond between VMMM and MEC. Unlike formal schooling, where cultural heritage is often marginalized, these moments of storytelling and play create a safe and meaningful space for MEC to internalize their heritage. The time and effort that these VMMM invest in cultural transmission, whether through bedtime stories or play, should be understood as an investment in their MEC's cultural resources. These experiences lay the foundation for future cultural engagement and transnational identity formation. Furthermore, these moments are not just for MEC; they are deeply meaningful for the MMM as well. The act of secretly recording her MEC's play suggests that Ms.Nhung is also preserving these moments as part of her own transnational journey. For VMMM living far from home, these interactions serve as a way to reconnect with their own childhoods, bridging the physical and emotional gap between Taiwan and Vietnam.

"If I don't have anything, they won't listen to me": Maternal Self-Development and Transnational Identity Formation in Mixed-Ethnic Children

In addition to directly shaping their MEC's cultural identities, VMMM in Taiwan found that self-actualization influenced how their MEC perceived both their heritage and their VMMM's social status. Rather than passively accepting stigma, many actively pursued education, expanded their social networks, and developed skills to enhance their status. This is consistent with Bourdieu's (2018) concept of cultural capital, in which knowledge and recognition help navigate structural inequalities and shape the identities of the next generation. Research suggests that migrant mothers who gain professional qualifications and social integration challenge stereotypes and create a more empowering environment for their children (Louie, 2012; Lee & Zhou, 2015). Similarly, studies on transnational motherhood (Parreñas, 2005) highlight how migrant mothers function as cultural mediators and role models. By striving for self-fulfillment, VMMM lays the foundation for MEC's transnational identities, fostering resilience, competence, and pride.

Pursuing Education: Learning as Empowerment and Inspiration

For many VMMM in Taiwan, education is not only a path to self-advancement but also a means to reshape their MEC's perceptions of their heritage. By actively engaging in lifelong learning, these VMMM challenge the stigma associated with being a migrant and demonstrate that Vietnamese identity is not a sign of deficiency but of perseverance and competence. As

Bourdieu (2018) argues, education functions as a form of cultural capital that enhances social mobility and legitimacy, allowing individuals to overcome structural barriers. In the case of VMMM, obtaining educational qualifications is a strategic effort to enhance their authority within their families and provide a solid foundation for their MEC's transnational identities. Previous studies on the education of migrant women have also found that when mothers pursue education, they not only enhance their own social status but also convey educational aspirations to their children, reinforcing intergenerational mobility (Gaviria et al., 2020; Portes, & Zhou, 2012).

Mrs.Dai shares that her decision to pursue education was deeply tied to her desire to ensure that her MEC never felt ashamed of having a Vietnamese mother:

I try not to let my child not dare to say that his mother is Vietnamese when he is born. That's why I dare to go to school, that's why I choose to be a teacher... If I were only working to make money, it would be a issue, and my children wouldn't have proper discipline... That's why I put in the effort to study and earn a degree.

Rather than focusing solely on financial stability, she prioritized her education and became a teacher, which despite the lower salary, allowed her to balance work and parenting responsibilities. However, the decision was not without its financial challenges, as she recalls struggling with the low salary and considering alternative career paths:

I can work [other job] in the mornings, because my teaching salary is low, between 10,000 to 15,000 NT for 9 hours, and there's no pay in the summer. I considered opening a bakery, but when I realized it was neglecting my child, I stopped, especially after he was hospitalized. (Mrs.Dai)

Similarly, Mrs.Kieu emphasized that her academic achievements became a source of pride for her MEC, reinforcing her authority as a MMM and role model:

I do to make them proud of their mother, because if I don't have anything, they won't listen to me...I always received a prize at the end of the term, and the provincial president will give it to me. Besides, I passed any exam in one time only...I even received a scholarship. I have many awards, but they don't have any, so they are very proud of me.

By excelling in the Taiwanese educational system, Mrs.Kieu not only demonstrated her own capabilities but also instilled in her MEC a sense of admiration and respect for their VMMM's resilience. Her achievements challenged stereotypes of migrant women as passive or lacking in ambition, instead positioning Vietnamese mothers as models of strength and perseverance. Research on migrant mothers in various contexts has shown that their pursuit of education and qualifications plays an important role in changing social perceptions and improving their integration into society (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Furthermore, Pineau and Waters (2016) argue that when migrant women actively engage in educational activities, they disrupt dominant

narratives of marginalization and reposition themselves as key agents in shaping their families' social capital.

These cases illustrate how VMMM strategically invest in education as a means of empowerment, using their achievements to reshape social perceptions and instill confidence in their MEC. Their pursuit of knowledge is not only about self-improvement but also a deliberate effort to position themselves as respected and competent individuals within both their families and society. Studies have found that education serves as a form of resistance to discrimination and a tool of empowerment, allowing migrant women to navigate intersecting racial and class inequalities while securing better futures for their children (Ming, 2013; Kabeer, 2005). By investing in their own education, VMMM not only contribute to their MEC's identity formation but also contribute to broader discussions about the changing roles of migrant mothers in Taiwan's multicultural context.

Participating in Social Activities: Visibility, Respect, and Identity Transmission

For VMMM in Taiwan, social participation is not only a way to engage with the community but also a strategic means to foster social respect, strengthen family ties, and shape their MEC's perceptions of their heritage. By actively volunteering, participating in cultural events, and participating in public activities, these VMMM demonstrate their capacity to act, challenge negative stereotypes, and build a positive, visible presence in Taiwanese society. Scholars have emphasized the role of social participation in migrant identity formation, noting that participation in community activities not only helps migrants integrate but also enhances their social status and provides cultural capital for their children (Gaviria et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2022).

Mrs.Tho illustrates this connection between parental involvement, social recognition, and identity transmission:

For me, I teach my children through my actions, not just by words. I don't teach them by simply telling them what to do but by showing them through my behavior. That's how I see it. For example, I volunteer at their school, right? And sometimes I work at the New Immigrant Center, helping others, so my children see that their mom is a good person, and they feel proud.

Her involvement in immigrant support activities and schooling served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it helped her integrate into Taiwanese society, helping her navigate social networks and gain recognition beyond the family circle. On the other hand, it inspired pride in her MEC, reinforcing VMMM's value in both the family and community contexts. Research has found that when immigrant mothers engage in community work, they actively reshape their social image, countering existing stereotypes of immigrant women as dependent or socially isolated (Gaviria et al., 2020; Hamari et al., 2022). This sense of pride and respect is further reinforced through children's direct observation of their mother's efforts. Mrs.Tho recounts how her eldest daughter internalized this lesson:

I study hard—I've received awards from elementary school all the way to university. That's why my eldest daughter says "I want to be like Mom". She has been receiving awards all through high school too. Because of that, she feels proud to introduce her mom to others and never feels embarrassed.

This reflects broader findings that MMM's participation in education and public activities elevates their social status while fostering a sense of dignity and aspiration in their children (Louie, 2012; Lee & Zhou, 2015). In doing so, they actively challenge social narratives that often marginalize migrant women and their families.

Similarly, Mrs. Chau emphasizes the emotional dimension of parental involvement in school and community events, highlighting how MEC interpret love and care through actions rather than words:

Let me tell you, while your kids are still young and you have the time, you should spend it with them. Later, when they grow up, even if you want to go with them, they won't let you. That's why, if you can manage your time flexibly, you should take every chance to spend time with your kids... I go so that my child can feel that I care about them and know that they are loved. Words alone don't mean much, kids will see through actions who loves them and who doesn't.

Her perspective highlights the emotional labor that VMMM invest in raising their MEC, an aspect that is often overlooked in discussions of migrant integration. Research shows that migrant parents' involvement in school activities not only supports their children's education but also establishes a sense of belonging and social legitimacy (Zhou et al., 2022).

In addition to school activities, some VMMM are increasingly involved in cultural events, using performances and community engagement as a way to reinforce their presence in society. Mrs. La describes how she includes her MEC in such activities to reinforce their connection to their heritage:

I often take my children to the activities that I participate in. Just like the activity organized for immigrants in the park where we met each other, I want them [children] to know that their mothers are also actively involved in such social activities. I also dance [Vietnamese songs] to bring joy to everyone.

By bringing their MEC to these events, VMMM like Mrs. La proactively expose their MEC to positive images of Vietnamese culture, counteracting the feelings of cultural inferiority that MEC may face in predominantly Taiwanese environments. Studies on cultural transmission in migrant families show that such activities play an important role in promoting transnational identity and minimizing experiences of cultural dissonance (Choi et al., 2008; Portes & Zhou, 2012).

Through their participation in social activities, VMMM demonstrate their ability to make meaningful contributions to Taiwanese society while fostering pride in their MEC's heritage.

Their participation serves as a form of resistance to social stigma and marginalization, affirming their presence and value in both the public and private spheres. This underscores the broader argument that MMM are not passive objects of discrimination but active agents in shaping their families' transnational identities and social mobility.

Sharing Success Stories: Fostering Heritage Pride and Aspirations

One effective way that VMMM encourages their MEC to embrace their transnational identities is by sharing stories of other successful Vietnamese individuals. These stories help MEC develop a positive perception of their heritage and become a source of inspiration for their own achievements. Mrs.Nuoc, a participant in this study, often highlights the achievements of her Vietnamese friends to both her children and her Taiwanese colleagues. Her purpose is very clear, which is to affirm the great contributions of Vietnamese individuals to local society. She explains:

I have a phrase that means “contagious pride”. Whenever I hear that any Vietnamese person has achieved something, I often brag about it to my friends and my children. Every time I tell my children, “That’s my friend”, I feel very happy and proud. I may not be able to do it, but my Vietnamese friends can... Wherever I go, I say, “Do you know Binh Tran? She’s my friend”. In Vietnam, what do we do to have the fate to have these things happen, right?

This storytelling practice demonstrates what sociologists describe as “vicarious achievement” which is the ability to derive a sense of pride and self-esteem from the success of others, especially within one’s ethnic community (Sue & Okazaki, 2022). By highlighting the achievements of other Vietnamese migrants, VMMM like Mrs.Nuoc reinforce their MEC’s confidence in their cultural identity, counteracting any potential stigma associated with being part of an ethnic minority group.

Academic literature supports the importance of these success stories. According to Le Espiritu (2001) research, stories of successful role models in migrant communities not only help reinforce a sense of national pride but also motivate younger generations to achieve similar success. By framing these stories as examples of resilience and achievement, VMMM actively reshape their MEC’s perceptions of their Vietnamese heritage as a strength and potential.

Furthermore, storytelling serves as a powerful educational tool, promoting important conversations about cultural values and contributions to society. Through retelling stories, MEC are reminded of the diversity and possibilities of their heritage, encouraging them to incorporate these positive connections into their identity formation. As Mrs.Nuoc demonstrates, these success stories become a source of “contagious pride” that motivates MEC to take a proactive stance toward both their heritage and their future aspirations.

In addition to personal pride, these stories serve as social proof in a multicultural context, reinforcing the idea that Vietnamese contributions are recognized and respected in Taiwanese

society at large. This approach is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the importance of positive interactions between the micro-level environment (such as the family) and macro-level social cognition.

In short, sharing VMMM success stories serves as an essential strategy for fostering positive transnational identities among MEC. Through vicarious pride, VMMM like Mrs. Nuoc not only challenge social stereotypes but also empower their MEC to see their Vietnamese heritage as a valuable asset in their multicultural lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how VMMM in Taiwan navigate and resist stigma while promoting identity empowerment for their MEC. Drawing on SIT (Tajfel, 1979) and CCT (Bourdieu, 2018), these findings challenge previous studies that have primarily viewed VMMM as passive victims of discrimination (Hsia, 2007; Wang & Bélanger, 2011). Instead, this study highlights their role in reconstructing their identities and actively shaping their MEC's self-perceptions. These maternal strategies not only function as personal acts of care and resistance, but also carry broader cultural significance in contesting dominant narratives of national identity and belonging in Taiwan.

An important contribution of this study is the focus on maternal strategies to counteract stigma. Previous studies have documented the negative impact of discrimination on MEC in Taiwan (Hsia, 2004; Hsieh & Wang, 2008), suggesting that they often struggle with low self-esteem due to societal stigmatization of their SEA heritage (Lan, 2019). This study builds on these findings by demonstrating how VMMM strategically use verbal affirmations to promote resilience and self-esteem in MEC, consistent with research on ethnic-racial socialization (Park et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Additionally, cultural transmission through forms such as language, storytelling, and participation in community activities, emerged as important mechanisms for identity empowerment. This supports previous studies indicating that immigrant mothers play an important role in preserving ethnic heritage despite assimilation pressures (Gaviria et al., 2020; Park & Sarkar, 2007). These findings suggest that everyday maternal practices are not only intimate forms of resistance, but also tools for intergenerational cultural continuity that challenge the cultural hierarchy embedded in Taiwanese society.

Furthermore, this study highlights MMM's self-development as an overlooked but essential element in combating stigma. While previous literature has focused primarily on the structural barriers faced by MMM (Hsia, 2007; Lan, 2019), this study extends recent scholarship (Lee & Zhou, 2015; Louie, 2012) by demonstrating how VMMM strategically pursue education, social engagement, and career opportunities to redefine their social status. By improving their own visibility and prestige, these VMMM not only empower themselves but also enhance their MEC's perception of their Vietnamese identity as a source of pride rather than disadvantage.

Despite policy shifts to a more inclusive narrative of “new residents” (Huang, 2021), racial discrimination and cultural hierarchies persist. While government initiatives such as the NSP (Lan, 2019) have encouraged greater recognition of SEA cultures, practical barriers such as limited bilingual education and persistent prejudices continue to impact VMMM and their MEC. This reflects the gap between symbolic inclusion and material equity, a divide that MMM must constantly navigate in their efforts to transmit culture and protect identity. This study suggests that future policies should focus on expanding multilingual education programs and creating more platforms for cultural representation, ensuring that MEC can integrate without erasing their maternal heritage. Policy design should also recognize the emotional labor and identity work performed by MMM, offering institutional support not only for MEC but for MMM themselves as cultural transmitters.

However, there are some limitations to this study that should be noted. First, the study focuses solely on the perspectives of VMMM and does not include the voices of MEC themselves. As a result, the study captures the intentions and practices of VMMM but cannot fully assess how these strategies are received or internalized by their MEC. Second, the sample is predominantly comprised of VMMM with strong commitments to cultural transmission, potentially leaving out those with other priorities or fewer resources. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the agency and strategies of VMMM in promoting transnational identities in contexts shaped by structural inequality and cultural stigma.

Future research should explore the perspectives of MEC to gain a deeper understanding of transnational identity formation. While this study focused on the strategies of MMM, further research could examine how MEC internalize or resist these identity negotiations. Comparative studies across migrant groups in Taiwan and East Asia could also provide deeper insights into ethnicity, migration, and identity. By focusing on the voices of VMMM, this study highlights their agency in shaping both their own and their MEC’s identities, challenging the notion that MMM are a minority. As Taiwan becomes increasingly multicultural, recognition of VMMM’s contributions to social and cultural diversity remains essential.

Conflict of interest

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