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**THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF CHINESE AUSTRALIAN
ADOLESCENTS IN CANBERRA**

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the cultural identity of Chinese Australian adolescents in Canberra between the ages of 18 and 21.

Adolescence is a developmental stage in which young people feel a need to define their cultural identity. According to social identity theory, being a member of the group provides individuals with a sense of belonging that contributes to a positive self-concept. In particular, young people belonging to ethnic minority groups need a firm sense of group identification in order to maintain a sense of wellbeing (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The purpose and significance of this study is to update our understanding of how adolescents from a specific ethnic minority group (Chinese Australian) adjust to the mainstream Australian culture. The information gathered will be significant to the wellbeing of these individuals in helping them to come to terms with their own identity. It will also provide useful information for effective cross-cultural interaction for a range of services such as education, law, health and social services.

The quantitative and qualitative approaches employed in this study include a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview complements the questionnaire in confirming the adjustments of these adolescents within an analytical framework that is a replica of Phinney's framework (1994). In her research on bicultural identity orientations of African American and Mexican American adolescents, Phinney categorised these adolescents under four distinct types of interaction with the mainstream culture. These are namely: separation (focus only on the ethnic culture), assimilation (identifying solely with the dominant culture), integration (relating well to both cultures) and marginality (relating to neither culture). In this dissertation the researcher also aims to

determine the cultural identity of Chinese Australian adolescents in Canberra in the study using these four categories.

The results of this study demonstrate that this framework is an appropriate analytical tool for the study of the cultural identity of Chinese Australian adolescents, most of whom classified themselves as integrated. Overall, Chinese Australian adolescents between the ages of 18 and 21 in the Canberra region were well adjusted and showed little tension or stress in relating to their ethnic culture or to the mainstream Australian culture.

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