

Ethnic Chinese of Vietnam: Perceptions of belonging in the context of growing anti-China sentiment

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Abstract:

This thesis investigated the perceptions of the identity of the ethnic Chinese minority in Vietnam. During the 2010s, tensions were high in the South China Sea between Vietnam and China, and Vietnamese citizens were taking to the street to express their disapproval of China. This thesis explored the possible repercussion of these geopolitical tensions and aimed to determine whether there is a change in ethnic Chinese's feelings of belonging in Vietnamese society since the riots of 2014. The thesis intended to lessen the gap in the English-speaking academic research on the ethnic Chinese community of Vietnam and their feelings of acceptance.

Drawing on qualitative expert interviews, the thesis argues that ethnic Chinese's perception of their own identity is associated with their degree of affectation to the events of 2014. The stronger individuals relate to their ethnic Chinese identity, the stronger they will react to the anti-China riots and vice-versa. The thesis also discovered that other Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese have opposite perceptions of the concept of ethnic Chinese identity in Vietnam, explaining the divergence of point of view from both communities regarding the anti-China sentiment in Vietnam as well as perceptions of belonging in Vietnamese society for ethnic Chinese individuals.

Keywords: Vietnam, ethnic Chinese, Hoa, anti-China sentiment, Identity, social identity complexity

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Abbreviations:

SCS South China Sea

EEZ Exclusive Economic Zone

PRC People's Republic of China

VCP Vietnamese Communist Party

2 Introduction

2.1 Research Background

Vietnam and China have had a tumultuous relationship for centuries. Sharing a land border as well as economic ties, Vietnam has long been dependent on China. Vietnam was under Chinese rule for one thousand years (111BC to AC 938). China has since invaded the country several times, notably in 1979 which led to a massive exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam (Boat People Crisis 1978-1979) due to discriminative policies against them (Kahn 1993, 13). Approximately 450 000 ethnic Chinese fled from Vietnam at that time. Some call this geographical interdependence the ‘tyranny of geography’ (Le 2011): due to Vietnam’s close proximity to China, the country has no choice but to engage in trade and relation with its neighbour, in a relationship that many consider ‘asymmetrical’ due to the size and power of China over Vietnam.

The South China Sea (SCS) has been a point of contention between Vietnam and China for decades. China’s perceived expansionism within the sea is viewed by Vietnam as defying the country’s sovereignty rights. China and its so-called nine-dashed line claim up to 80% of the sea’s maritime territory which overlaps with Vietnam’s territorial claims in the SCS. The tension between the two countries has increased over continuous disagreement on mutual claims over the sea for the last 50 years. Vietnam has been condemning China’s assertiveness in the claim of their alleged historically rightful territory within the SCS. On numerous occasions, China has been reported to harass foreign vessels and fishers entering their claimed exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and territorial waters. This assertive attitude from China was criticised by the other SCS claimants, including Vietnam.

Tensions between Vietnam and China reached an all-time high in 2014, when a Chinese-owned oil rig was deployed in Vietnam’s claimed EEZ which overlaps with China’s. Vietnam denounced the operation as illegitimate and a grave overstepping of the country’s national sovereignty. To showcase their anger over China’s expansionism and violation of Vietnam’s sovereignty rights, Vietnamese people took to the street to protest against China.

Violent anti-China riots ensued, ultimately leading to the death of Chinese nationals and the destruction of multiple Chinese-owned businesses. Not only, it seems like the protesters targeted anything remotely Chinese, and Taiwanese companies were also targeted. After 2014, other anti-China protests would periodically emerge as a response to China's assertiveness in the SCS.

While there isn't a consensus on the true size of the ethnic Chinese population in Vietnam as of today, it is estimated that the number of Hoa in Vietnam range from 0.82 million to up to 2 million (Minority Rights Group International 2018). The community is primarily located in South Vietnam, mainly concentrated in Ho Chi Minh City. In the South, the group has a long-standing position in the commercial sector and many Hoa possess family-owned businesses. The ethnic Chinese of Vietnam are mainly considered upper class due to their well-established businesses and even experience a lower poverty level than the ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) majority (Minority Rights Group International 2018). Of all the 53 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam, the Hoa is considered the largest in terms of size. While this minority group used to be persecuted economically due to their apparent 'capitalist' activities, since the economic liberalisation of Vietnam in the late 1990s, Hoa's situation drastically improved and on the institutional level, face no discrimination. However, in an attempt to preserve their Chinese heritage and culture, ethnic Chinese children are often put into Chinese private schools instead of "Vietnamese-medium state schools" (Minority Rights Group International 2018), which isolate young ethnic Chinese from Vietnamese people and culture.

In a context of animosity and distrust regarding China, the thesis focuses on the perceptions of belonging of the ethnic Chinese population of Vietnam (Hoa¹) in this dispute. Indeed, ethnic Chinese diasporas often have a strong cultural linkage with China and honour Chinese rites and customs. It is an identity they hold dear and are reluctant to let go of through the preservation of their language and intermarriage with the Chinese community as well as the creation of Chinese districts (e.g., Chinatown) in their host country. It is a community that showed reluctance in getting assimilated into other countries' cultures, which

¹ Hoa is a Vietnamese term used to denominate the ethnic Chinese community or Vietnamese Chinese in the country

brings the question of their perception of the conflict, as well as how Vietnamese² perceive the Hoa as belonging to. It is a question of the complex identity structure of the ethnic Chinese which might affect their sense of belonging in Vietnam. While their home is Vietnam and they are now considered Vietnamese by law through decree no. 501 of 1996, they have deeply embedded cultural roots in China; The increasing anti-China sentiment in Vietnam might put them in the middle of a dilemma between two conflictual identities.

2.2 Research Problem, Aim & Purpose

The Hoa possesses a complex sense of identity, with two divergent social identities as both Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese, which raises the question of their perception of belonging in Vietnamese society, which is rejecting China and overseas Chinese.

The area of concern is the ethnic Chinese sense of identity between their cultural Chinese roots and their host country Vietnam where some have been living for generations.

The thesis aims to discover how the self-identification of the Hoa is affected by growing anti-China sentiment, but also the perception of Vietnamese people on ethnic Chinese identity. As such, the concept of identity will be used to better understand Hoa's place in Vietnamese society and its subsequent perception of belonging.

The purpose of the research is to understand Hoa's contemporary place in society and their perceived acceptance in Vietnam as a minority group that used to be subject to discrimination when Vietnam maintained a seemingly adverse relationship with China.

2.3 Research Questions

The research questions focus on perceptions of belonging:

- How has rising anti-China sentiment in Vietnam since 2014 changed ethnic Chinese perceptions of their position in the Vietnamese national community, according to experts?

² Throughout the thesis, 'Vietnamese' will be used to describe Vietnamese citizens of all ethnicities, excluding the Hoa for the sake of comparison.

- How has rising anti-China sentiment in Vietnam since 2014 changed other Vietnamese perceptions of the position of ethnic Chinese in the national community, according to experts?

2.4 Significance and Academic Contribution

The ethnic Chinese minorities' sense of identity has been widely researched in many Southeast Asian countries, but less in Vietnam. The literature on ethnic Chinese in Vietnam used to be extensive in the 1990s, due to the Boat People exodus of 1978-1979 during which the ethnic Chinese of Vietnam were targeted by the Vietnamese government through discriminatory economic policies and land expropriation. Little research exists, however, on Hoa's contemporary place within Vietnamese society since the 2000s. There is no research study at all which addresses the perceptions of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam on the rising anti-China sentiment in the country, nor on the perceptions of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam of their national belonging, in the context of rising anti-China sentiment in the country. This thesis will contribute to the scholarly understanding of ethnic Chinese minorities' identity by shedding light on ethnic Chinese's current place within Vietnamese society as experienced by themselves, and from the point of view of other Vietnamese individuals.

3 Literature Review

The literature review of the thesis is necessary to understand the history surrounding Hoa's place in society. History is an important factor regarding identity as it enables us to understand how the present was shaped. Then, the literature review discusses Hoa's identity in Vietnam and suspicions from others on their loyalty, considering their link with China. Finally, the literature review explores the recent events of 2014, which prompted a rise of anti-China sentiment in Vietnam.

3.1 Historical Position of the Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam

The relationship between Vietnam and China as well as the settlement of the Chinese in Vietnam dates as far back as two thousand years. Before the invasion of Vietnam in the 2nd century BC, the Chinese would periodically come to settle in Vietnam due to more favourable environmental and economic circumstances. During the one thousand years of occupation by China (111 BC to AC 938), many Chinese peasants and soldiers were sent to Vietnam to settle in both the north and the south. Among various stages of migration during the occupation, many were Chinese scholars and government officials. After Vietnam gained back its independence in 938 AC, as many as 87 000 Chinese were sent back to China, while some requested the Vietnamese government to stay and were permitted to be naturalised Vietnamese. (Kahn 1993, 14). In the following centuries, new waves of Chinese immigration took place during periodical wars between China and neighboring countries.

By the end of the 17th century, the Chinese congregated in the south, creating schools and institutions to regulate their businesses and districts according to their dialect, kinship, or clans. In the first half of the 19th century, it was estimated that between 10 000 and 100, 000 Chinese were settled in Vietnam (Kahn 1993, 16).

Throughout the 20th century, ethnic Chinese (the Hoa)³ have been subject to coercive assimilation policies in South Vietnam. During the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem (1955-63), a known anti-communist, restrictions towards ethnic Chinese heightened. They were forced to take Vietnamese classes in an effort to “localise the Chinese” (Chan 2018, 169). By, the mid-1950s, the regime started imposing assimilation policies that forced Vietnamese citizenship upon all Chinese born in Vietnam also retroactively, including children from Vietnamese Chinese families (Tong 2010, 180-181; Chan 2018, 165). Those who were not conforming to the citizenship enforcement or refused to become Vietnamese were banned from eleven occupations, which included many Chinese-dominant businesses (Chan 2018, 165). Many Chinese were forced to adopt Vietnamese nationality to avoid losing their livelihood.

The integration of ethnic Chinese into Vietnamese society and their treatment has always been highly correlated with geopolitical dynamics between China and Vietnam (Bui 2017, 173; Tong 2010, 184). In the mid-1970s, multiple points of contentions arose between Vietnam and China, including Vietnam’s alliance with the Soviet Union which led to the retreat of Chinese aid, disputed claims over the Paracel and Spratly islands, the invasion of

³ Hoa is a Vietnamese term used to denominate the ethnic Chinese community or Vietnamese Chinese in the country

Cambodia by Vietnam as well as Vietnam's mistreatment of ethnic Chinese (Tong 2010, 184). Through the 1970s, the Vietnamese government-enforced policies against the ethnic Chinese, such as enforcing Vietnamese citizenship, forbidding them from some specific occupations, discrimination at employment, and dispossession of Chinese-owned businesses to the State (Tong 2010, 183; Trang 2015, 68). In 1979, China invaded Vietnam as retaliation for intervening in Cambodia against the genocidal Khmer rouge regime. The war had disastrous consequences for the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and discrimination against the Hoa was used to retaliate against China's invasion of the country (Tong 2010, 186). The two countries provided two opposite versions of what triggered the mass exodus (or boat people refugee crisis) of 1978-1979. China claimed it was due to Vietnam's mistreatment and discriminating policies against the ethnic Chinese, Vietnam argued that it was due to China spreading rumours of a war between the two countries (Amer 2014, 23; Amer 1996, 83-85). Ultimately, and regardless, the underlining issue of the deteriorating relations between Vietnam and China prompted ethnic Chinese to leave. The literature shows a clear link between control and restrictions from the Vietnamese government on the Hoa and Sino-Vietnamese diplomatic tensions.

The events mentioned above, followed North Vietnam's victory, the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the subsequent reunification into one Vietnam, which translated to a need for national unity, one expression of which was the incorporation of the country's ethnic minorities into the Vietnamese majority. As such, after reunification, Chinese language schools were forbidden and replaced by Vietnamese schools. This led to many ethnic Chinese children dropping out of school to be home-schooled by private Chinese tutors, in order not to lose their Chinese heritage and language (Chan 2018, 170). Socialist policies were implemented in order to destroy the "Comprador Bourgeoisie" which, in the Southern party of reunified Vietnam, meant ethnic Chinese businesses as, they had expansive control and power of Ho Chi Minh City's sectors (Tong 2010, 183; Chan 2018, 165; Amer 2014, 16). Furthermore, the Hoa were often the target of the new government's policies due to their "anti-socialist activities" (Tong 2010, 183).

In the late 1980s, the normalisation of relations between Vietnam and China helped ease the restrictions set on the ethnic Chinese. Chinese schools were allowed to reopen, and many young Chinese were able to return or go to Chinese language class for the first time (Chan 2018, 171; Amer 2014, 33). With the so-called Doi Moi economic reform, businesses were

allowed to bloom and ethnic Chinese re-engaged in trade. In the late 1990s, the Chinese in Vietnam started to acknowledge the economic growth of Vietnam and began attending Vietnamese classes on their own initiative, which allowed them to gain a stronger position within Vietnamese society (Chan 2018, 171).

It emerged that a key tool for the control and forced assimilation of the ethnic Chinese has been forbidding their use of the Chinese language. This is similar to other Southeast Asian countries, where restrictions on language learning facilities have been used as a political tool to repress Chinese identity (Bolt 2000, 112)

3.2 Ethnic Chinese Identity in Vietnam

3.2.1 Chinese or Vietnamese?

Ethnic Chinese identity has been extensively studied by researchers on ethnicity in Southeast Asia.

Due to the ambiguous relationship between the overseas Chinese and their motherland, post-independence, Southeast Asian governments have often wondered where the loyalty of the ethnic Chinese population in their respective countries lies (Bolt 2000, 7). This question did not escape the Vietnamese government after national independence from French colonial rule in 1954. South Vietnam's government launched several policies targeting the ethnic Chinese to forcefully enforce Vietnamese citizenship on them (Tong 2010, 180). This led 90% of the Chinese population into being naturalised Vietnamese. This unclenched the process of the Vietnamisation of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. But ethnic identity is something more complicated than just a concept of citizenship.

Existing literature highlights a strong sense of Chinese identity within the ethnic Chinese population of Vietnam. It is argued that ethnic Chinese in Vietnam consider their identity to be fixed and “unchangeable” as their identity as Chinese comes from their bloodline and one cannot change such kinship (*Jus Sanguinis*, right of the blood). Chineseness is for them most strongly based on biology and common racial roots (Bolt 2000, 19). There is a common understanding within the community that Chinese ethnicity is a birth acquisition, and that, if their ancestors were Chinese, they are subsequently Chinese too

(Tong 2010, 191). There is an ongoing debate between scholars on the primordialist or instrumentalist⁴ approach to identity. But we can assess through the literature that ethnic Chinese in Vietnam identify the most with the former (Tong 2010, 190). Ethnic Chinese identify as Chinese, regardless of their citizenship (Amer 1996, 77).

Nonetheless, according to theory on social identity employed in this thesis, people can have multiple identities. Individuals can maintain their dual identities (e.g. nationality and ethnicity) or create new forms of social identification based on their dual identities, such as being bicultural (Deaux 2001, 1061). One's identity does not mean the annihilation of the other in an increasingly globalised world. The merge between Nationality and Ethnicity translates especially well with the younger population of ethnic Chinese, who consider themselves to be Vietnamese Chinese at a difference from the older generation who only refer themselves as Chinese (Tong 2010, 195).

This voluntary self-distinction and identification of the ethnic Chinese of Vietnam from the Vietnamese population as 'Chinese above all' raises questions over whether they are currently at the receiving end of the growing anti-China sentiment and nationalism in Vietnam.

3.2.2 Vietnamese suspicion and fear of ethnic Chinese

Due to the ethnic Chinese perceived primary allegiance to China, across Southeast Asia, many countries in Southeast Asia are wary of the extent of the relationship between the two. The question of where the loyalty of the ethnic Chinese lies has been a point of contention throughout the decades (Bolt 2000, 7; Bolt 2000, 107). Furthermore, ethnic Chinese's refusal to assimilate, and their keenness to keep their language and Chinese heritage, has been viewed suspiciously by the countries in which they settled. This cultural pride in their Chinese roots as China rises made many Southeast Asian governments uncomfortable (Bolt 2000, 113). Even so, scholars agree that ethnic Chinese pride is rooted in "cultural rather than political China" (Chan 2018, 166). Ethnic Chinese economic powers in their adoptive countries have been viewed with distrust and jealousy by the indigenous, even more due to their constant trade with China, which was perceived by many as a threat (Bolt 2000, 109). As previously stated, one of Vietnam's first policies after reunification was to

⁴ The primordialist approach refers to ethnicity as being "historically given" while instrumentalists consider it to be "fluid and a social construct" (Bolt 2000, 19).

seize every ethnic Chinese business while forbidding them to work in certain sectors due to their alleged subversive nature (Tong 2010, 185).

During the political tension in the 1970s between Vietnam and China, it was this distrust and suspicion over the loyalty of the Hoa which led to repressive policies against them (Nguyen 2017, 20). During the reunification of Vietnam by the Vietnamese Communist Party, the ethnic Chinese were regarded as subversive elements due to their bourgeois status and were viewed as a fifth column (Tong 2010, 183-186; Nguyen 2017, 20). Remaining ethnic Chinese after the exodus of 1978 were viewed with even more suspicion and this aversion only grew stronger after the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (Tong 2010, 186). Later, in the mid-1990s, with the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations, ethnic Chinese regained a space within Vietnamese society. In 1982, while a decree reallocated to do business and trade, they were still not accepted within all spheres of society. Notably, the decree stated that the Hoa were forbidden from accessing security and military-related employment (Amer 2014, 32), indicating lingering mistrust and suspicions over their loyalty.

However, in later years, the ethnic Chinese population seem to have gained trust somewhat by being model citizens through their participation in the Vietnamese economy and proving to be contributing to the society (Chan 2018, 167).

Importantly, suspicion and mistrust were coming from both sides as ethnic Chinese also feared the government (Bolt 2000, 113). Throughout the years, the repetitive hounding of discriminatory policies against them made them wary of the Vietnamese government.

3.2.3 Ethnic Chinese's contemporary position within the Vietnamese society

Since the late 1990s, the position of the Hoa within Vietnamese society is legally regulated. The formal decree no. 501 of 1996 acknowledges the ethnic community as Vietnamese citizens with equal rights and duties to all other citizens (Amer 2014, 32). With this decree, ethnic Chinese are reallocated within all strata of society. They are now allowed to join the VCP as well as other mass organisations. The discrimination in employment, mentioned earlier in the decree of 1982, is now removed and ethnic Chinese can enjoy education, economic participation, and cultural rights freely (Amer 2014, 33-34).

Because of this decree, the ethnic Chinese are now, in practice, integrated into Vietnamese society, they are not assimilated. Though assimilation is an essentially contested

concept, it can denote the destruction and forgetting of one's ethnic minority identity (language, rituals, etc..) in favor of the ethnic majority's (Bolt 2000, 115). According to the literature, ethnic Chinese are not remotely close to losing their identity in favor of the Vietnamese (Bolt 2000, 116; Tong 2010, 192). Interestingly however, according to Tong's interviews conducted in the late 2000s, not much difference exists between Vietnamese and Chinese culture due to "a high degree of acculturation"⁵ which translates into no real need to adapt themselves to Vietnamese society and exchange their identity (Tong 2010, 195).

As stated before, ethnic Chinese in the South of Vietnam were traditionally involved in the business and trade sector, playing a significant part in Vietnam's economy (Amer 1996, 76). Ethnic Chinese were re-allowed to exercise their occupations in the business sector, as they used to decades before, and youngsters tend to go to further their education at the universities to better help their family-owned businesses (Trang 2015, 62, 81). Research on Vietnamese living standards tends to group the Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese) and Hoa together, due to high education enrollment and wealth compared to the other 52 ethnic groups in Vietnam (Baulch et al 2002, 1) which denotes a good integration of the ethnic Chinese within Vietnamese society in economic and developmental terms. The paper showed that the Hoa community is the richest ethnic group in Vietnam (Baulch et al 2002, 4). But the grouping of the Kinh with the Hoa obscures considerable variables. If it is true that the group Kinh/Hoa has the highest rate of education enrolment, it is not specified whether the ethnic Chinese are enrolled in Vietnamese or Chinese schools, which might affect their integration into Vietnamese society. Finally, the predominance of ethnic Chinese in the sector of business and trade, which is widely known by the ethnic Vietnamese population, raises questions about the specific targeting of Chinese-owned businesses during the anti-China riots in Vietnam since 2014 (Guo et al 2014, 2). Did the riots only targeted overseas Chinese⁶, or did it include the Vietnamese Chinese population?

Baulch et al (2002, 8) argued that the degree of intermarriage between a minority and the majority ethnic groups is a useful way to judge one's integration into society. However, according to existing literature, intermarriage is negatively perceived by ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. Many in the community believes that marrying into a Vietnamese family has a risk

⁵ Due to centuries of Chinese occupation of Vietnam and the influence Chinese's culture had on Vietnam during those years, according to Tong's interviewees (2010, 195)

⁶ Here, we refer to people of Chinese nationality coming to Vietnam to do business, such as foreign investors.

of eradicating their Chinese identity. It is viewed as one of the main ways of losing one's 'chineseness' or identity (Tong 2010, 192). Due to cultural values, marriage between a Chinese man and a Vietnamese woman is not as frowned upon as the contrary. In accordance to their belief system and the patriarchal nature of Chinese culture, women should care for their husband's families, as their "predominant identity is that of a daughter-in-law" (Tong 2010, 193). Therefore, when a Chinese woman marries a Vietnamese family, she is forced to evolve into a family structure that uses Vietnamese as their main language, consumes Vietnamese food, etc... which results in a loss of Chineseness. As such, their children will grow in the same environment which erodes the ethnic identity of both the woman and her off-springs (Tong 2010, 193).

The Chinese language is one of the main indicators of Chinese identity, and Chinese women in intermarriage try to preserve it through identity negotiations (Trang 2015, 57). However, younger generations of both genders from both Trang (2015) and Tong's (2010) literature seem to denote a higher level of integration, and assimilation even, into Vietnamese society. Both show a seemingly gradual loss of the use of the Chinese language, further integration with Vietnamese friends outside of the Chinese-speaking and community which heightens their use and competence in the Vietnamese language. Therefore, we can conclude that according to the existing literature, younger generations, while still referring to themselves as Chinese, are more integrated into Vietnamese society through means of better socialisation with Vietnamese peers and the heightened use of the Vietnamese language (Chan 2018, 172; Trang 2015, 79; Tong 2010, 194).

3.3 Rising Anti-Chinese Nationalism and Sinophobia

Vietnam is a country that has sustained foreign invasion for a long time. From the occupation by China (111BC to AC 938), French colonial rule (late 1800s to 1954), imperial Japanese presence to the American invasion, Vietnamese leaders have used national sentiment to inspire resistance (Nguyen 2017, 18-19). After France's withdrawal from Indochina, the Geneva Conference of 1954 took place which resulted in the division of the country in two (Do 2016, 27). Shortly after, the Americans invaded Vietnam under the alleged motive of stopping the spread of communism from the North to the South. During the division of the country, the southern government played upon nationalism against

communism and China to rally soldiers into the fight for reunification (Vu & Le 2022, 4). After pushing back the foreign invasions, the country finally reunited in 1976 after the victory of the Northern socialist government over the South. Since then, the government of Vietnam engaged in large-scale attempts of legitimating itself by playing on the narrative of unity against common enemies and the ethnic Kinh as heroic fighters to create a cohesive national identity (Nguyen 20017, 19).

While many definitions of nationalism exist, one which arguably fits the Vietnamese context particularly well is that of nationalism as “a set of attitudes that shape the perceptions and behaviours of ordinary people as [...] they engage in social interaction (e.g. with ethnic minorities)” (Vu & Le 2022, 5). Vietnamese nationalism is based on past victories and resistance to foreign aggressors (Bui 2017, 172; Nguyen 2017, 4; Vu & Le 2022, 19). Vietnamese nationalism, and the anti-China sentiment emerging from it, are a reminder of the country’s glorious past in sustaining foreign invasion and in today’s case, Chinese expansionism (Womack 2006, 63; Nguyen 2017, 4).

Since the early 2000s, a popular tendency toward anti-Chinese nationalism has been identified in Vietnam (Vu 2014, 33; Bui 2017, 172; Nguyen 2017, 18-28). Arguably, we can call this a ‘shift’ due to the widespread showcase, through protests, of anti-China sentiment which increased at that time (Dien Nguyen 2020, 3; Vu 2014, 33; Bui 2017, 174; Wang & Womack 2019, 717). Anti-China sentiment has deep historical roots in the mindset of the Vietnamese people due to the 1000 years of Chinese occupation and the border war resulting in the Boat people crisis (1978-79). However, the fear of China’s growing power and influence in the region is the principal fuel of this newfound sense of nationalism in Vietnamese people (Bui 2017, 173).

Experts use the terms ‘rise’ of nationalism and Sinophobia, mainly due to the show of force from the Vietnamese people against the Chinese and China in recent years. This is manifest in mass mobilisation and protests organised by the Vietnamese population against Chinese establishments in the two last decades (Bui 2017, 174. Nguyen 2017, 2; Wang & Womack 2019, 717). What were initially peaceful protests took a turn in 2014, when mass mobilisation turned deadly for 23 Chinese nationals in South Vietnam (Wang & Womack 2019, 717; Dien Nguyen 2020, 3; Bui 2017, 178; Guo et al 2015, 3). Furthermore, the Vietnamese hatred for the Chinese during that specific time wasn’t only targeted at China but also at overseas chinese or anything seemingly Chinese (Guo et al 2015, 2). Thus, in the violent riots of 2014, many Taiwanese businesses and factories were destroyed resulting in

the repatriation of Taiwanese nationals by Taiwan from fear of further violence (Bui 2017, 178; Nguyen 2017, 2). Subsequently, foreign nationals in Vietnam such as Singaporeans, South Koreans, Malaysian and Taiwanese grew fearful of being mistaken as Chinese and getting their businesses destroyed (Nguyen 2017, 2; Wang & Womack 2019, 725-726). Chinese businesses had to take off every symbol appealing as being Chinese from their factory to avoid being targeted during the riots such as Chinese characters and the Chinese flag (Guo et al 2014, 2).

Interestingly, one of Nguyen's interviewees emphasised that he did not refer to ethnic Chinese in Vietnam when he expressed his dislike for China and Chinese people (2017, 10). However, the violent events of the 2014 riots targeted anything remotely Chinese and foreign which the ethnic Chinese of Vietnam could have been a part of considering their identity as ethnic Chinese. Subsequently, these protests demonstrate a rise of Sinophobia, which in such a context, raises the question of Hoa's integration into Vietnamese society.

The Vietnamese government's stance on anti-China sentiment

Many were surprised when the Vietnamese government seemingly allowed anti-China protests to take place in 2014 since, in the 2000s, it used to repress any kind of popular protests (Vu 2014, 33; Bui 2017, 174) Vietnam is an autocracy where civil rights are restrained by the government (Bui 2017, 172; Cotillon 2017, 52). Indeed, Vietnam has been ambiguous in its policy and stance on anti-China nationalism. While the government sometimes seems to encourage anti-China sentiment, it also discourages it with a well-balanced combination of repression, tolerance, and responsiveness (Dien Nguyen 2020, 2). This 'push-and-pull' method regarding popular nationalism is questionable to many due to the VCP's (Vietnamese Communist Party) symbolisation of the country's patriotism against foreign aggressors (Vu 2014, 33). Luo describes Vietnam's nationalistic stance regarding China as a "double-edged sword" (2022, 47)

The VCP has been controlling the national discourse of anti-Chinese sentiment through state channels and broadcasts (Luo 2022, 50; Bui 2017, 170). According to Bui, while the government indulges in the rhetoric of blaming China for its actions in the SCS (South China Sea), the goal isn't to exacerbate popular nationalism and violence but to channel the population's animosity toward China into a new form of "pro-government nationalism" as a mean to strengthen the VCP's legitimacy (2017, 179). Wang & Womack assessed that the surge of anti-China sentiment dates back to 2007. They argue that it was initiated and staged by the VCP in an effort to deter the CCP (Chinese Communist Party)

from upgrading Sansha, still claimed by Vietnam to this day, as Chinese administrated county (Wang & Wolmack 2019, 717; Tong 2010, 188; Luo 2022, 50). But this strategy had the effect of a double-edged sword as popular nationalism in Vietnam transformed into violent anti-china demonstrations (Luo 2022, 48). Vietnamese government representatives have encouraged and even incited citizens to demonstrate against China since the late 2000s (Luo 2022, 50). However, the protests quickly morphed into displays of violence against China and the Chinese people which prompted the government to intervene to avoid acerbating diplomatic tensions with China (Dien Nguyen 2020, 3; Guo et al 2015, 3; Bui 2017, 178; Wang & Womack 2019, 717; Nguyen 2017, 30).

The Vietnamese government's ambiguous stance is reflected in how the literature on the subject offers divergent interpretations of it. Some affirm that the protests since 2007 were quickly repressed and never allowed by the government (Dien Nguyen 2020, 3; Vu 2014, 43) while some view them as being allowed and encouraged before the riots degenerated (Luo 2022, 50).

The relationship between Vietnam and China is marked by a high level of historical consciousness, which has a significant impact on nationalistic manifestations (Cotillon 2017, 53). As such to increase intra-group solidarity, the state tries to intensify animosity toward outsiders by focusing on the adversary's (China's) shortcomings and bad behaviour (Bui 2017, 171). The VCP has been utilising those concepts through its heavily censored media to portray China and the Chinese government as a "bad brother" and criticises China's moves in the SCS (Nguyen 2017, 32). Furthermore, it has been using common myths from Vietnam to address the situation in the SCS further exacerbating anti-china sentiment in the population. Indeed, Truong Tan Sang⁷ quoted *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*⁸: "How can we easily give up our motherland? If you let an inch of your ancestors' land fall into the hands of the invaders, you will be beheaded!". The use of myths is commonly used in propaganda as an effort to "illuminate the key value of the society" (Bui 2017, 171).

Nonetheless, according to the literature, there is a rift between the population's view of China and the VCP's hedging strategy which lead the Vietnamese people to view the government as a traitor who fraternises with the enemy (Nguyen 2017, 32). Because, while the government sometimes utilise anti-China sentiment and re-implemented the idea of China

⁷ President of Vietnam from 2011 until 2016.

⁸ Annal of historical events from *Đại Việt* (Vietnam) commissioned in 1479, covering over 4 000 years of Vietnamese history and myths.

as an enemy of the nation into the Vietnamese consciousness, the VCP also established close ties and keeps developing trade partnerships with China (Nguyen 2017, 31). Indeed, violent Sinophobia is not beneficial for the government as it might jeopardise its relationship. China is Vietnam's biggest trading partner and is largely dependent on China, thus, alienating China is not the solution for the country as it might result in disastrous economical cuts from China (Wang & Womack 2019, 718). Vietnam's hedging policy and adaptability towards China is best described by Ho Chi Minh's quote: "Firm in objectives, Flexible in strategies and tactics" (đĩ bất biến, ứng vạn biến) (Do 2016, 25) which illustrates Vietnam's 'multifaced' strategy in containing China (Hoang 2019, 21)

Geopolitics and the rise of anti-China nationalism

The rise of Sinophobia and anti-China nationalism since the late 2000s did not emerge out of thin air and are a demonstration of the shifting geopolitical context in Vietnam (Cotillon 2017, 52; Dien Nguyen 2020, 7). The South China Sea dispute, over overlapping maritime claims, has been a significant concern in the Southeast Asian region and is a point of major tension between Vietnam and China (Wang & Womack 2019, 712). As such, territorial disputes such as the SCS is a melting point of the expression of national pride and nationalism (Dien Nguyen 2020, 4; Cotillon 2017, 52). China justifies its territorial claim by mentioning historical factors, however, it was proved that China had no preexisting historical document to back up its claim while Vietnam had documents dating back from the Qing dynasty (Storey & Cheng-yi 2015, 185). Therefore, we can argue that the 9 dashed claims of China⁹ over the South China Sea further trigger Vietnam's nationalism, as it is contesting both historical and modern sovereignty claims of the country.

China's growing assertiveness within the SCS has been an effective trigger of public outcry in Vietnam (Cotillon 2017, 56; Dien Nguyen 2020, 2; Wang & Womack 2019, 717), which was illustrated by the numerous protests in Vietnam throughout the 2000s and 2010s as previously mentioned. Each protest was triggered by specific Chinese actions within the highly contested dispute. The 2007 protests were organised after China's intention to formally administrate Sansha City which is established on the Spratly and Paracel archipelagos (Wang & Womack 2019, 717; Luo 2022, 50). In 2011, China's aggressive treatment of Vietnamese seismic exploration vessels by severing the cable of the ship angered

⁹ The nine-dashed line is China's maritime claim over the SCS which accounts for 80% of the sea including the highly disputed Spratly and Paracel islands.

citizens. Anti-china rallies went on for two months every Sunday in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Wang & Womack 2019, 717; Nguyen 2017, 14; Bui 2017, 174; Dien Nguyen 2020, 4). In 2014, the placement of a Chinese-owned oil rig in Vietnam's EEZ¹⁰ sparked the worst diplomatic tensions between Hanoi and Beijing in the 21st century. Popular anti-china riots turned deadly for Chinese nationals and Taiwanese in Vietnam with an estimated twenty-one deaths (Vu 2014, 56; Dien Nguyen 2020, 3; Bui 2017, 174; Nguyen 2017, 2; Guo et al 2015, 4; Do 2016, 25). In sum, the literature demonstrates how anti-China sentiment and geopolitical tensions between Vietnam and China are intimately linked.

3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the literature review outlines the forced assimilation of the ethnic Chinese in the mid 20th century as well as discrimination periodically manifesting towards the Hoa in times of Vietnamese conflicts with China. Recent literature shows renewed tensions between Vietnam and its population against China, building into a wave of anti-China sentiment in Vietnam which resulted in deadly riots in a country where freedom of manifestation is usually heavily restricted. It also highlights the ethnic Chinese confusion of their place inside Vietnam as both Chinese and Vietnamese, and their problematic relationship with both identities. Hoa have used different strategies to secure their Chineseness onto the next generations. However, we come to wonder about their position as Vietnamese citizens as the literature does not address this issue in contemporary Vietnam.

The thesis attempts to narrow the research gap on ethnic Chinese in Vietnam regarding the lack of recent data on ethnic Chinese integration since anti-China nationalism and ethnic Chinese long-term acceptance.

4 Theoretical framework

This thesis uses social identity theory and its adjacent situational identity concept as well as social identity complexity, to investigate ethnic Chinese in Vietnam's sense of belonging within Vietnamese society, amidst rising anti-China sentiment. The chapter is structured as follows: First I will discuss the basic foundations of the social identity theory which will be

¹⁰ Economic exclusive zones delimited according to the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) which delimits a country's sovereignty over sea waters

the backbone to understand the concept of identity categorisation. Then, I will discuss situational identity, which helps us situate how ethnic Chinese perceptions of their identity change depending on their environment. Finally, I will introduce social identity complexity and how it theorises that people can navigate between multiple social identities.

4.1 Social Identity Theory

In a highly globalised world, it is now increasingly recognised that individuals can assume different identities as well as history and traditions (Seidler 2010, 18). Some social identities can be chosen by the individual, such as vocational identities (e.g. artists, doctors, etc...) and political affiliation (feminists, socialists, etc..). Other social identities – such as ethnicity¹¹ – are assigned at birth (Deaux 2001, 1060). Social categorisation allows the segmentation, classification of one's social environment, enabling the individual to act in it. Additionally, it offers a framework for self-reference, defining the individual's position in society. Social categorisation derives from the individual's self-image (Tajfel & Turner 2004, 59).

Social identity, which emphasises the process of self-categorisation, is regarded as a fundamental theory for conceptualizing “the relationship between the individual and society” which is necessary to answer the thesis research question (Verkuyten 2021, 312). The friends we choose, the holidays we observe, the languages or dialects we feel at ease using, and the nonverbal communication methods we feel at ease using are all influenced by the cultural and ethnic identities we developed during our childhood and adolescence years, thus shaping our place in society (Ting-Toomey 2005, 214).

Because it is the individual itself who assesses their degree of adherence to a social group, social identity is often viewed as a subjective rather than an objective state (Deaux 2001, 1064). In the thesis, I reject the idea that social identities can be defined as “objectively definable entities” and commonalities following Brubaker et al (2004, 31). I highlight the subjectivity of identity “in terms of the participants' beliefs, perceptions, understandings, and identifications” (Brubaker et al 2004, 31). It is the subjective mindset of individuals that evaluates their degree of belonging in a certain group, depending on their personal evaluation

¹¹ Ethnic identity is defined by Chandra (2012, 52) as “a subset of categories in which descent-based attributes are necessary to determinate eligibility. Here, descent-based attributes are either considered to be a genetic, cultural, or historical inheritance

of common characteristics with other members of the group (Deaux 2001, 1060). Subsequently, in accordance with their degree of subjective belonging to the said group, events that are significant to the group as a whole are, to some extent, significant to each individual member. As such, it is fair to ponder on the reaction of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, when people of the same ethnicity as them (e.g. overseas Chinese), are at the end of anti-China demonstrations such as in 2014. Indeed, to forecast how much an identity will affect a person's beliefs, emotions, and actions, one must understand how significant and vital the identity is to that individual (Deaux 2001, 1064).

Any behaviour that one or more actors exhibit towards other individuals that is based on their identification of themselves and others as members of different social groups is referred to as out-group behaviour (Tajfel & Turner 2004, 59). Because group identification fundamentally alters and modifies people's psychology and behaviour, it is group identity that enables group behaviour. People think, feel, and act not just as individuals but also as members of groups with similar views, comprehensions, and objectives (Verkuyten 2021, 312).

It is possible to assume multiple identities at the same time, without giving up one in favour of the other. Alternatively, when nationality (cultural identity) and ethnic identity intersect, it may also serve as a single means of self-identification (Deaux 2001, 1061). Cultural identity and ethnicity are closely linked in mono-cultural societies such as Japan or Korea. But in multicultural societies, such as Vietnam which possess 53 ethnic minorities in addition to the majority Kinh ethnicity, ethnic identity is set apart from cultural identity. Therefore, “These two bases of identification [cultural identity and ethnicity] can have quite different meanings for friendship networks, social and cultural activities, and even marriage and family” (Deaux 2001, 1061). Increasingly, on the global level, people choose to keep their dual identity or may it into a single, newly emerging type of social identification, such as being bicultural (Deaux 2001, 1061)

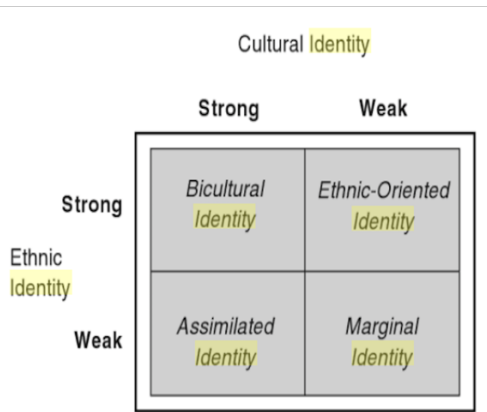


Figure 1: A Cultural-Ethnic Identity Typology Model (Berry, Kim and Boski, 1987 see Ting-Toomey 2004, 221)

4.2 Situational Identity

Changes or shifts in identity can operate at either an intrapsychic (within the self) or extrapsychic (outside factors) level. An example of an intrapsychic shift in identity could be a change of sex, gender, or sexuality that is psychologically motivated. However, the social identity of an individual is also subject to change depending on the environment the individual evolves in (Deaux 2001, 1066; Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90). Should one’s social and physical (extrapsychic level) environment change; their identity's significance may change too, becoming more or less important for self-definition as a means of self-preservation (Deaux 2001, 1066).

Our multifaceted identity is shaped and constructed in large part by structural and historical restrictions and practices (Ting-Toomey 2004, 214). An individual is more inclined to adhere to old, comfortable identity behaviours the more identity risks or disappointments they face (such as identity exclusion, disconnecting from others, and prolonged identity disarray) (Ting-Toomey 2004, 221). These external factors of a change of social identity are central to this thesis given the social context of Vietnam, where anti-China sentiment could be perceived by Hoa as a threat in their social environment., facing possible identity risks. Therefore, the research takes on a circumstantial approach¹² rather than a primordial one as it is our understanding that, in the context of the Hoa, identity can be an “instrumental adaptation of shifting economic and political circumstance” (Brubaker et al 2004, 49). According to our theory, ethnic identity is not just given or deeply rooted in blood ties or shared language and religion but is subject to the subjective meaning and interpretation

¹² Identity depends on the circumstances in which it is enacted.

individuals put on them. As Brubaker et al (2004, 49) suggest, “it is the participants, not the analysts, who are the real primordialists, treating ethnicity as naturally given and immutable” which denotes a subjective mindset of the individuals’ perception of their identity.

Subsequently, where and around whom identity is enacted matters (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90; Deaux 2001, 1066; Li 2020, 1020). Therefore, Li has suggested that identity has “a strong situational component”, in other words, identity depends on the context in which it is enacted (Li 2020, 1020). Sometimes circumstances result in a particular identity becoming problematic or stigmatised. Hence, challenges to identity may exist for a person whose social identity is somewhat stigmatised, which in turn necessitates strategies to deal with those challenges. This could occasionally entail rejecting a particular identity or temporarily downplaying its significance (Deaux 2001, 1067). The enactment and salience of a given identity depending on the context are crucial to the thesis as it allows us to understand a possible shift of behaviours of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam towards the Vietnamese majority in the context of societal tensions in Vietnam. This is necessary to assess intergroup conflicts based on how individuals “see themselves and how others attribute identity motivations to them” which plays a central role “in perceived intergroup conflict escalation and de-escalation” (Dorjee & Ting-Toomey 2020, 245).

It is assumed in this thesis, should the anti-China riots situation pose a threat to the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, they could engage in identity negotiations by downplaying their belonging as Chinese and reinforcing their identity as Vietnamese by different means (such as speaking primarily Vietnamese in public settings).

4.3 Social Identity Complexity

While social identity theory is useful to establish the fundamentals of the concept of identity, it lacks the understanding of more complex senses of identification. Individuals are not identified only by themselves but also by others, which is essential in understanding the ethnic Chinese contemporary position within Vietnamese society. While the ethnic Chinese might feel somewhat targeted by the anti-China protests due to their Chinese ethnic membership, it does not mean that the ethnic Vietnamese (of the Kinh ethnic group) perceive it the same way. According to Roccas & Brewer (2002, 88), perceivers occasionally judge

others based on a prevailing category, ignoring or even suppressing alternative classifications embraced by the others themselves.

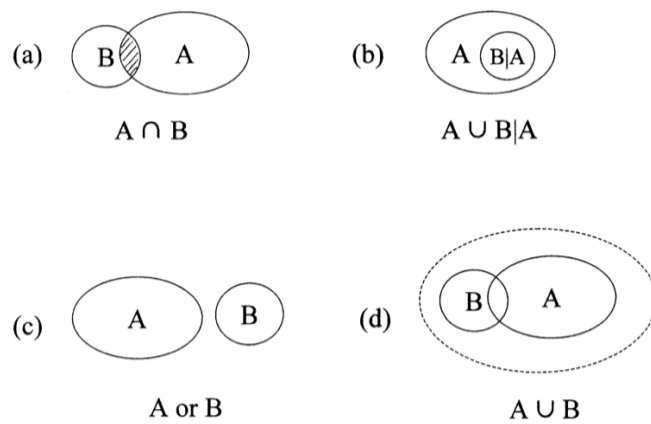


Figure 2: Alternative structures of multiple ingroup representations (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90)

When two group identities do not converge, there are different forms of representation that individuals may use to organise how they perceive the ingroups “to reconcile the potentially competing implications for defining the social self” (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 89). This perception of the self and others according to one of these four models (Figure 2) is important for this research as it conceptualises the degree of inclusion and/or exclusion of individuals, based on the subjective perception of others and oneself, as members of a subjective ingroup (e.g. Vietnamese or Chinese). Subsequently, it helps us understand ethnic Chinese’s perception of their place within Vietnamese society, but also Vietnamese’s perception of ethnic Chinese integration inside Vietnamese society.

Figure 2a represents the concept of *Intersection*. Within this structure of ingroup identity, the conjunction of two distinct group identities creates the individual’s primary social identity. The other group memberships outside of the defined primary social identity are considered as outgroups, as a consequence, the individual will consider the compound as a single and unique social identity (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90). As such, this representation of social identity is exclusive in essence towards divergent group memberships. To illustrate this, I can use the example of an ethnic Chinese Vietnamese individual who creates his primary identity using the compound combination of ethnicity and profession. This excludes ethnic Chinese who are not working, and Vietnamese who are not of Chinese ethnicity (out-group).

Figure 2b represents the concept of *Dominance*. This structure of ingroup representation is used by individuals to “cope with competing social identities” (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90). They will define themselves through a primary group identity and other identities will be subordinated to that primary group. Roccas & Brewer (2002, 90) further explain this subordination as “intragroup variation” which is “embedded within the primary group identification” as another aspect of the self. When someone identifies themselves with the dominant structure, they will subjectively categorise others according to their primary identity. As such, people who are a part of that category will be viewed exclusively as ingroup members, whatever the other individuals’ social identities. Those who are not part of the dominant identity are considered outgroups (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90). For instance, the Vietnamese Chinese could define his ethnicity as his primary social identity and will regard all other ethnic Chinese as fellow ingroup members. Being Vietnamese is a characteristic/ aspect of the self that further describes his identity but is less important than being ethnic Chinese. Therefore, he will not consider other Vietnamese as ingroup members. As such, the structure of Dominance is characterized by a low level of complexity as inconsistencies within a single ingroup-outgroup dichotomy are suppressed (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 91).

Figure 2c represents the concept of *Compartmentalisation*. It describes the process of the salience of specific identities depending on the context the individual is situated in. The differentiation and isolation of the individual multiple’s social identities are context-specific or situation-specific (e.g. workplace, at home, at school, etc..). Roccas & Brewer (2002, 91) explain that, at home, “cultural membership may become the most important basis for a shared identity and the social self”. As opposed to Figures 2a and 2b, the compartmentalization structure is not exclusive of oneself “multiple nonconvergent identities” which are maintained. However, those multiple social identities are not simultaneously activated (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 91). Compartmentalisation is considered to be of a higher degree of complexity than Dominance because the structure acknowledges and differentiate separate identities but “without any attempt at reconciliation” (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 91

Figure 2d represents the concept of *Merger*. This model represents the incorporation of an individual’s multiple social identities to become one sole primary form of social identity. For the ethnic Chinese businessman, both identities of ethnicity and profession become “important and salient across situations”. This structure is the most inclusive form of social

identity where no ingroup/outgroup distinctions are made the more social identities the individual possesses (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 91). Because of the inclusive nature of the Merger structure, this ingroup representation is on the highest continuum of complexity (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 92)

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the thesis will explore the perception of ethnic Chinese identity in Vietnam as well as the perception held by Vietnamese people toward them. This theory will help us understand both perceptions of identity towards the ethnic Chinese social identity in Vietnam which correlates with the subjective positioning of this ethnic group inside Vietnamese society. While social identity theory set the grounds for a basic understanding of the concept of identity; situational identity and the social identity model by Roccas & Brewer (2002) will be used to analyse the data of the respondents to understand the strategies ethnic Chinese in Vietnam put in place in order to better integrate themselves in the society.

5 Methodology and Ethical Considerations

5.1 Research Design

Researching perceptions, feeling, and identity require a qualitative design rather than a quantitative form as individual feelings cannot be measured in numbers.

The study will follow the epistemological philosophy of social constructivism. Social constructivism holds that knowledge “is discursively produced and therefore contingent” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 196). This concept was important in understanding the ethnic Vietnamese and Ethnic Chinese’s position regarding the rising anti-Chinese sentiment it triggered since this is contingent on the ethnic Chinese sense of belonging in Vietnamese society. Indeed, “knowledge is historically and socially embedded” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 196), therefore, perceptions of external events and of history, creates the basis of their knowledge of the other.

5.2 Data collection and analysis

Expert interviews were carried out to understand feelings and perceptions as implied by the “sense of belonging” to the research question. Expert interviews were chosen because of the experts’ deep contextual knowledge the research topic (Bogner et al 2009, 100). While experts can, depending on the topic of the research, sometimes refer to people with executives’ functions such as “top-level managers [...] or teachers”, for this thesis, only academics, experts in a field of research, were interviewed (Bogner et al 2009, 99). Experts can be anyone who “has privileged access to the knowledge of a specific group of people” (Bogner et al 2009, 100). In the context of the thesis, researchers on ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and related issues such as anti-China sentiment and nationalism were approached. Indeed, in an authoritarian country such as Vietnam, it can be hard for researchers to obtain the right to conduct fieldwork in the country. I originally planned on conducting the research in Vietnam and gather first-hand experiences from ethnic Chinese. However, it assessed that such a method would be unfeasible due to ethical concerns towards the participants due to the authoritarian nature of the Vietnamese government as well as the sensitivity of the research. Therefore, I instead relied on interviewing academics who were in direct contact with the ethnic Chinese of Vietnam was essential to the thesis to assess the current feelings and perceptions of the Hoa in their current environment. Researchers on Vietnam as having privileged connections and knowledge regarding a phenomenon that only a few were allowed to observe which is why this interview method was considered suitable for the research. The downside of expert interviews which is like elite interviews is the limited accessibility of those potential participants. Sometimes, I could not find a way to contact academics which I had planned to approach, which made the already small pool of potential suitable candidates even smaller.

Interviewees were found by “cold” emails to researchers focusing on Vietnam. However, as mentioned above, a few still focus specifically on ethnic Chinese. Consequently, I decide to also contact experts on Vietnam who might have valuable insight regarding related phenomena of nationalism, anti-china sentiment, as well as previous research on ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. These participants were found by reviewing academic literature. From then, through the snowball effects of previous interviewees, I was able to find other participants.

Most of the researchers preferred written answers over physical or Zoom interviews, because of the precision of self-written answers and risk to have their words misunderstood or taken out of context by notes takings in physical interviews.

Interviews were originally planned as semi-structured interviews to let the participant goes in the direction, they see fit, based on their experiences and singular perceptions of events (Brinkmann 2023, 18). However, a common thread has to be followed to be able to compare to other interviewees on the same topics. Semi-structured interviews were judged to be suitable in the context of the research as it serves to explore, exemplify, and identification of new angles of phenomena such as the perceptions of belonging of ethnic Chinese in Vietnamese Society. Considering the wide gap in the literature regarding ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, semi-structured interviews were chosen instead of structured interviews to better explore views and experiences which allowed us to come up with new knowledge based on the insights of the interviewee. However, due to the participants' preference for written answers, we changed the style of the interviews to in-depth email interviews which were on the structured side. In-depth email interviews have many advantages such as the lack of transcription, as all answers are written by the respondent themselves, and meaning is assured not to get lost as it could possibly be in a face-to-face interview with a transcript written by the interviewer who has to both listen and take notes of the answers provided by the respondent. The fact the answers were already written as the interviewee saw fit made the process of analysing the data easier. Additionally, because there is less unnecessary data, it is simpler to discover the data that directly addresses the study issue (Fritz & Vandermause 2018, 1642). Furthermore, it is good to add that due to the open-ended forms of questioning in in-depth emails, many participants brought up additional pieces of information from the previously established questions; as mentioned by Fritz and Vandermause (2018, 1642), the "depth of the response may increase due to the participant's ability to respond at a later time, when thoughts are well formed" which generate "clear, concise and rich data". However, a considerable disadvantage of in-depth email interviews is the time and effort it requires to type an email as opposed to speaking, which made me lose contact with two possible respondents for this thesis.

Interviews were analysed through Roccas & Brewer's (2002) concept of social identity complexity and their model of the four multiple ingroup representations. To do so, the

inductive strategy of data analysis was used. The inductive strategy refers to “the systematic examination of similarities within and across cases to develop concepts, ideas or theories” (Pascale 2011 in Brinkmann 2023, 75). Induction, in the context of this thesis, was concept driven using the 4 concepts of identity complexity of Roccas & Brewer (2002) to code and analyse the data (Brinkmann 2023, 75). Each interview was coded according to four concepts: Situational identity, Hoa’s perception of their identity, Vietnamese’ perceptions of Hoa’s identity, and correlations with the 2014 riots. Each discourse was compartmentalised according to their similarity to these concepts. This method of coding allowed me to decipher trends in perceptions of Hoa identity and the context in which it was enacted.

Through the analysis of the participant’s understanding of both ethnic Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese’s perception of the Hoa identity in Vietnam, I was able to assess the sense of belonging from two points of view, outlining differentiated perceptions of belonging and subsequent divergent narratives on the conditions of ethnic Chinese as Vietnamese citizens amidst rising anti-China nationalism. Furthermore, strategies, the interviewees perceived the ethnic Chinese as using to deal with their change of environment (anti-China sentiment) were also coded and analysed using the concept of situational identity; as these strategies highlight the perceptions of belonging of the ethnic Chinese community.

5.3 Challenges, risks, and limitations of the research

- Challenges

Finding appropriate researchers to participate in this study was challenging as there very few academics who work on ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. Furthermore, challenges arose regarding their availability as many are professors and researchers who had demanding and extensive schedules, and sometimes were on field trip.

Confirmation bias was also a challenge in this research. Indeed, it was necessary for us during the interview process to set aside pre-conceived knowledge and presumptions of the situation in order to encourage openness, sensitivity, and curiosity about what was said and unsaid by the interviewees in order to have an interview where the participants were not caged by premade categorisation and interpretation of the interviewer (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 16). It is sometimes natural for people to dismiss information that goes against their

ready-made idea of the situation, which is something we had to be careful not to create in order to assure the validity of the present study. As such, the data collected was read multiple times from multiple points of view to avoid any biased perception of the data.

- Limitations

Due to the scarcity of studies on ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, finding experts on the subjects was complicated. Furthermore, every human has different feelings and perceptions depending on social constructs, beliefs, and circumstances. Not one participant will think the same depending on their life encounter on the subject. As mentioned by Littig (Bogner et al 2009, 101), “the sampling is not representative, the statements made by the interviewees can be distorted by gaps in their memories, different interviewees can give different information on the same topic, and so on”. Furthermore, the participants are not all exclusively focusing on ethnic identity as a main area of study and their perception of the situation which, as one of the researchers interviewed mentioned, is a secondary or tertiary source of information that shaped their personal understanding of the situation and therefore must be used carefully.

Furthermore, most experts preferred to respond to my questions through emails which changed the semi-structured interview format of this thesis into structured interviews. Indeed, through exchanges of emails and due to the busy schedules of researchers, it was hard to ask follow-up questions to the pre-made questions they had answered. Writing answers to questions tend to be longer than doing a one-hour Zoom call where the semi-structured format of the interview process can be more freely exploited. However, due to the participants being used to research, do interviews, and exploit data, they were understanding and extensively elaborated their answers during the initial structured questions of the interview to allow few further questions on the subject. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny the limitations it produced as structured interviews “do not take advantage of the dialogical potential for knowledge production that are inherent in human conversations” (Brinkmann 2023, 17).

- Risks

Going into a country such as Vietnam where freedom of expression and other rights are restricted by an authoritarian Party-State, I must be careful to respect their codes, laws, and unwritten rules like you would have to everywhere in the world. However, I won't let this

interference “jeopardize [my] independence in the research process [nor make me] report results so as to introduce or promulgate bias” (The European Code of Conduct for research integrity 2017, 8).

Due to the sensitivity of the topic, interviewing ethnic Chinese in Vietnam might have been a risk for both the interviewee and the interviewer which is why interviewing experts who are most of the time based elsewhere than in Vietnam contributed to limiting potential risks on the research. Furthermore, none of the experts’ answers were critical of Vietnam and its government which further limit the risks for the participants.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The process of interviews is tricky for both participants and the interviewer. Fundamentally, when it comes to the interview process, informed consent both before and after the interview is crucial (Brickmann 2023, 63). We informed the participants on how the data collected from them will be used and shared on Lund University’s website then asked for their consent to collect and analyse the data both at the beginning of the interview (written on top of the Word Document with the questions sent by mail) and in the follow-up emails by asking for their consent to collect and analyse the data. The anonymity of the participants has to be assured, should they request it. This is even more important due to the authoritarian nature of the state (Morgenbesser & Weiss 2018, 386). I also believe that a follow-up after the interview is adequate to assure that the participants are still on board for the research. After the interview, a deadline was set to let the interviewee a choice to retract. The nature of the research can be considered sensitive in Vietnam which is why I had to make sure that all participants were aware of the nature of the research and given anonymity if demanded. Thus, after the collection of the data and in the follow-up emails, I assured the participants of their ability to retract from the research until May 13th.

During the interview process, the participants were informed, in the interview sheet sent by email, of their ability to retract from the interview process until a given time, the choice of anonymity, as well as the purpose of the research and how their interview was going to be used (e.g. published on the Lund University data, etc ...). This informed communication was the principle of building trust with the interviewees as well as the possibility to be sent the thesis before publication to ensure their words were not twisted through the research in any meaningful ways. Two participants in this study asked for anonymity, among them, one

allowed the use of their research field as a means of distinction while still not wanting to be named which is something I have respected for both. Other participants allowed the use of their names but also other indications such as their research field or university affiliation.

To ensure the security of the participants, considering part of the writing process of the thesis and interviews were done in Vietnam, a VPN located in Sweden was used. Indeed, while writing the thesis, and looking for information online, I noticed that the results from the Google search were mainly biased by the state media of Vietnam. Which gave rise to questions over the overall security of the research and by extension, of the interviewees. This prompted the decision to always use of VPN, even when not interviewing participants to ensure steady security. In the following weeks, cookies were systematically declined while using the internet.

One of the interviewees was in an authoritarian state during the interview which might be a security issue for them if the wrong audience found out what they said. However, their answers to the interviews were assessed by me as posing no threat to them. For precautionary measures, interviews on Zoom were not recorded nor saved but notes were taken on a Word document. Furthermore, Word documents were used over google docs to store any kind of data regarding the thesis due to google docs' accessibility through the internet.

6 Findings and Analysis

6.1 Vietnamese Perceptions of Hoa

6.1.1 Hoa's identity according to the Vietnamese

According to all the interviewees, Hoa is regarded by all Vietnamese¹³ as Vietnamese with Chinese origins.

“I would tend to say that the Hoa are considered Vietnamese of Chinese descent”
(Gédéon)

¹³ Here, and throughout the analysis, Vietnamese are defined as all Vietnamese citizens, Kinh and other minorities, Hoa excluded.

“Vietnamese people haven’t called them Chinese people or referred to them as Chinese for the past many decades; we have called them Hoa people instead, which has reminded all the Vietnamese population that they are Vietnamese citizens and distinguished them from the Chinese mainland in China or other Chinese communities overseas” (Trang)

According to Roccas & Brewer’s theory of social identity complexity, one’s identity is both subject to self-assessment as well as external perceptions (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 88). Subsequently, the way Vietnamese perceive the Hoa will have an impact on their behaviour towards the Hoa which in turn will affect Hoa’s sense of identity. According to most of the respondent’s answers, it looks like the Hoa are commonly viewed by the Vietnamese population as Vietnamese first with their Chinese ancestry being secondary to their primary identity as Vietnamese people.

“I think Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam are collectively viewed as Vietnamese Citizens of Chinese origin” (Respondent 1)

As explained in the theoretical framework, Vietnamese’s perceptions of ethnic Chinese identity correspond to the concept of *Dominance* (Figure 2b). The concept of Dominance suggests that if someone identifies themselves with one primary identity, they will subjectively form an in-group with others according to it. Consequently, Vietnamese people, because they view themselves as primarily Vietnamese, will form an in-group with Hoa due to their shared identity as Vietnamese citizens. By doing so, the Vietnamese are dismissing Hoa’s possible complex and conflictual ethnic and national identities. Those who view identity using the Dominance concept (here the Vietnamese) show a low level of understanding regarding identity complexity “as inconsistencies within a single ingroup-outgroup dichotomy are suppressed” (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 91). As such, the experts did not find that other Vietnamese believed that the Hoa had been particularly affected by the anti-China riots. This can be attributed to how they consider Hoa as primarily Vietnamese.

6.1.2 Vietnamese Government’s stance

While the Vietnamese government, as mentioned in the literature review, has been the main threat of the ethnic Chinese back in the 1970s; experts now acknowledge the government's efforts in the integration of the minorities of the country into the Vietnamese society.

“The Vietnamese government has done nothing to associate the ethnic group of Hoa people with China; they have sought to strengthen and involve Hoa people in various social, cultural, and political activities of the country instead” (Trang)

We know from the literature that the Hoa have often been at the receiving end of tensions between the Governments of Vietnam and China during political turmoil between the two countries. Hence, we originally assumed, there could be a possibility for it to happen again in the context of the South China Sea dispute. However, according to the experts, the Vietnamese government has made it clear that the Hoa were not affiliated with overseas Chinese and mainland China in the context of the dispute and are Vietnamese citizens.

“The Vietnamese government needed to emphasise that its anti-China propaganda was separated from ethnic minorities and reconfirmed their place in the Vietnamese society” (Respondent 3)

“The Vietnamese government sometimes attempts to emphasise the distinction between ethnic Chinese and overseas Chinese” (Respondent 3)

“At this stage, the Vietnamese government has never, to my knowledge, issued a speech aimed at the Chinese minority in the country. Official criticism is always aimed at the People's Republic of China and concerns China's regional maritime ambitions” (Gédéon)

Therefore, we can interpret this data as an effort from the government to clarify their stance as well as reiterate Hoa's belonging within the Vietnamese society, declaring them insiders as opposed to outsiders such as overseas Chinese who were at the receiving end of the anti-China demonstrations. The data suggest that not only Vietnamese people but also the government, consider the Hoa as in-group members due to them being Vietnamese while the Chinese nationals and China are out-groups as they do not have Vietnamese nationality. As

such, the Vietnamese government promotes a view of the Hoa as primarily Vietnamese, which aligns with the perceptions outlined in the previous section.

6.1.3 Vietnamese Perceptions of the 2014 Protests

Some experts denoted Vietnamese's acknowledgment of Hoa's aptitude and skills for business and highlighted their use in boosting the Vietnamese economy.

“In general, Hoa is perceived as the commercial people living in the city who are talented in doing business” (Respondent 2)

“They are hardworking and pragmatic. They are successful businesspeople and reliable business partners. They contribute to Vietnam's economy” (Respondent 1)

As the literature review previously indicated, Hoa are mainly viewed as the business people who live in secluded communities in the big cities such as Cho Lon in Ho Chi Minh City. As in the 1990s and with the liberation of the economy and the end of discriminatory policies against the minority, the Hoa were able to prosper and thrive again in the Vietnamese economy and boosted it significantly. According to the experts, this is clear in the mind of Vietnamese people.

While this thesis questioned the possible connection between Hoa's business occupation and the targeting of Chinese-owned companies during the riots of 2014, the respondents were unanimous in their thoughts that they were no correlation between the two.

“Chinese companies have been targeted as a symbol of PRC (or Taiwan associated with China) presence and was attacked as such” (Gédéon)

“This violence mainly concerned the Chinese of mainland China and Taiwan but not the Hoa [...] therefore I tend to think that [...] the attention of the Vietnamese is essentially directed towards the People's Republic of China and the threat it poses on its environment, and not by the Sino-Vietnamese” (Gédéon)

“I think the protestors tried to target businesses with mainland Chinese capital investment. That’s why they did not target the China town or ethnic Chinese living in Vietnamese communities” (Respondent 1)

According to experts, there were no intentions of targeting the Hoa during the demonstrations of 2014 and forward. This again suggests a specific view of Hoa’s identity as part of the Vietnamese community and as not belonging to China according to the Vietnamese population which conforms to Roccas & Brewers’ theory of social identity complexity Figure 2b were Vietnamese subjectively categorise the Hoa as Vietnamese first and disregards in part their appurtenance to the ethnic Chinese group. By assuming that the Hoa are Vietnamese above all, they disregarded the possibility of a complex identity for the Hoa.

6.2 Hoa Perception of Their Identity

6.2.1 Downplaying Chinese Identity

Due to past discrimination towards the ethnic Chinese communities, most participants acknowledged the wariness of the Hoa regarding exposing their ethnic identity. Indeed, according to experts, many Hoa resort to situational identity when in contact with Vietnamese people to hide or cancel their Chinese identity to avoid possible discrimination.

As mentioned above in the findings and earlier in the literature review, language is one of the main means of differentiation between Vietnamese and Hoa. This explains the Hoa negotiation of their use of the Chinese language depending on the situation as a protective strategy. As one of the participants said:

*“They have tended to perform as a Vietnamese people in almost all official forums”
(Trang)*

Furthermore, “multifaceted identity is shaped and constructed in large part by structural and historical restrictions and practices” (Ting-Toomey 2004, 214). This explains the behaviour of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and their inclination to hide their Chinese heritage when interacting with Vietnamese people. Historical violence and discrimination shaped their view of their identity and make them engage in situational identity where their Chinese identity is canceled in favour of their Vietnamese identity. Additionally, the community has been

subject to restrictive practices towards their use of language in the past, as mentioned in the literature review, which also explains the

“Sino-Vietnamese, still remembering the disaster of the late 1970s, show great caution and avoid standing out in the eyes of their compatriots” (Gédéon)

“Today, many Chinese people speak only Vietnamese and Khmer in the Soc Trang province when their parents do speak Chinese. It is because they had to cancel their identity due to persecutions in the 70s” (Respondent 3)

“Chinese people tend to conceal their identity. In open spaces, they stick to Vietnamese. This is because of historical events” (Respondent 3)

The salience of ethnic Chinese’s Chinese identity, therefore, seems to depend on which situation and context it is enacted; around Vietnamese or within the Hoa community.

6.2.2 Hoa’s identity salience and changes

The theory of social identity holds that it is the individual themselves who chooses their degree of belonging to a social category (Deaux 2001, 1064). As previously analysed in the findings, the Vietnamese people typically appear to view the identity of Hoa with the *Dominant* structure of ingroup representation. This makes them view Hoa as Vietnamese before all and see their Chinese heritage as a subordinate identity.

Interestingly, the two Vietnamese participants of this research confirm the theory of the *Dominant* structure of ingroup representation as both were adamant on the representation of Hoa as first Vietnamese or highly Vietnamised over their Chinese identity as seen in the following quotes:

“The Chinese people whom I know consider themselves first as Vietnamese. They think their ancestors are Chinese, not themselves” (Respondent 1)

“Despite their awareness of being Chinese passed down from generation to generation, contemporary Hoa people, especially young generations of Hoa people have been heavily ‘Vietnamised’ or become more Vietnamese than Chinese” (Trang)

However, they could have also personally encountered Hoa who felt more Vietnamese than Chinese which fuelled their own perception of Hoa’s identity. But as mentioned before, identity is fluid and can adapt to one’s environment. While our two Vietnamese expert respondents claimed to have encountered only Hoa who identified as Vietnamese first, the other experts were more nuanced in their views of Hoa’s identity:

“During my fieldwork, I identified a broad spectrum ranging from people defining themselves as totally Vietnamese with only Chinese ancestry, to others whose reference was almost exclusively the Chinese diaspora of Southeast Asia. Evidently, this wide range of self-representation has an impact on the identification of individuals with their host country and, therefore, on the way in which Vietnamese can apprehend them, individually or collectively” (Gédéon)

“The concept of identity depends on people, in Soc Trang, many ethnic Chinese who identify themselves as ethnic Chinese, old generations still speak Cantonese and probably never identified themselves as Vietnamese” (Respondent 3)

With this information and the previous sub-section of these findings (6.2.1) we can theorise that Hoa’s identity can be likened to the concept of *Compartmentalisation* (Figure 2c) where “the differentiation and isolation of the individual multiple’s social identities are context-specific or situation-specific” (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 91). Subsequently, Hoa’s identity is fluid depending on contexts such as workplace, home, rural or urban cities, etc.... In the concept of *Compartmentalisation*, ‘home’ is the place where ethnic identity is the most salient, which is a place that most Vietnamese do not get to witness Hoa in. Outside of their community, as the literature review suggested, Hoa only speak Vietnamese and conform to the norms of the Vietnamese society. This concept, where no identity is completely disregarded in favour of the other, but rather not activated at the same time; implies a high degree of identity complexity which makes no effort at reconciliation of the two divergent social identities (Vietnamese ‘Cultural identity’/ Chinese ‘Ethnic Identity’). Hence, the lack of reconciliation between the two identities makes it hard for the Hoa to express both

identities at the same time. Therefore, it is assumed that even though the Hoa are not specifically targeted by anti-China sentiment, they might have conflicting thoughts on it due to the compartmentalisation of both identities.

6.3 Hoa's attitudes and perception of the events of 2014

The views on Hoa's perception of the events of 2014 differ largely from expert to expert. We can identify two trends: first, there are the experts who express a nuanced view of the Hoa's feelings but emphasis fear, and second, the experts who deny any fear from the Hoa during the demonstration due to their belonging within Vietnamese society. However, it is necessary to note that all experts considered the riots as not being targeted towards ethnic Chinese whether what the perception of the Hoa is on the subject.

One of the respondents admitted that, while he did not outrightly hear any Hoa voice out their fear during the riots, he still felt the tension in the community while he was doing his fieldwork in 2014 while visiting a rural community in Soc Trang, the village official who was ethnic Chinese deliberately spoke highly of the Vietnamese government for their support in helping ethnic minorities in Vietnam. The respondent felt as if the village official had to affirm his loyalty to Vietnam. Another respondent similarly noted:

“The reaction of the Hoa, or at least the ones I heard from, was characterized by caution and the reiteration of the affirmation of loyalty to Vietnam” (Gédéon)

This shows Hoa's historical consciousness of the government's previous discrimination towards them in the late 70s as well as the discriminatory policies on Hoa's access to different strata of society in the decree of 1982 as noted in the literature review. According to the findings, while the literature on the subject was outdated to contemporary perceptions, it looks like these feelings of distrust of Hoa towards the government are still alive even so after the riots of 2014:

“Many of the ethnic Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City do not like the Vietnamese communist government and feel anxiety of their status and wealth in the Vietnamese state before and after 2014” (Respondent 2)

“As it stands, that is not the case. However, the Hoa have already been the collateral victims of a geopolitical conflict between Vietnam and China [...] Therefore, the Hoa cannot ignore the fragility of their position in the event of rising geopolitical tensions between the two countries. Which is what is currently happening in the South China Sea. Consequently, I think they remain very vigilant regarding regional developments” (Gédéon)

“I think they might have been concerned, but as far as I know, nothing happened in Chinatown” (Respondent 1)

While we assessed before in the findings that the riots were not targeted at the Hoa, Hoa’s perception of past historical events left them cautious of the Vietnamese government. This made them be careful during these events and so forth as to not be assimilated with China in fear to suffer repercussions.

“They do not want to be involved in political issues which will be likely to do harm in their life and business. Thus, they have seemed to try their best to be outsiders towards the political issues related to China and Vietnam” (Trang)

According to the findings, the Hoa while engaging in situational identity with Vietnamese people by refraining from talking in Chinese in front of them, do not fear the Vietnamese people but the government as it is from them, they have been suffering from in the last 50 decades.

“Today, ethnic Chinese can show their identity, but still they are afraid, when I interviewed them, they were still afraid of the possibility of the Vietnamese government, not locals, might persecute them” (Respondent 3)

According to those experts’ point of view, while there were no outright attacks on Hoa during the riots of 2014, past historical events made the community wary of possible repercussions due to the geopolitical tensions between China and Vietnam which, as we highlighted in the literature review, tensions between the two countries have tended to generate repercussions on the Hoa community. Furthermore, according to our findings, while the government and

the Vietnamese people are now viewing Hoa as a fully integrated part of society, these feelings are different from Hoa's perception.

While some experts expressed a nuanced view of Hoa's perception of the 2014 events as seen above, many others noted that Hoa did not feel either scared or targeted by these riots.

“One of my informants did not consider the events of riots as a serious one in 2014”
(Respondent 2)

“Hoa people felt quite safe like other ethnic groups of Vietnam” (Trang)

This differentiation in point of view from the experts on the matter of Hoa's perception of the events might be highly correlated with their informants' sense of identity as both ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese. Indeed, in Figure 1 of the theoretical framework of the thesis, when there is a contrast between someone's ethnic identity and cultural identity (nationality), they develop either a strong attachment to their cultural identity and have a weak sense of ethnic identity which make them 'assimilated' into their host country. However, others can have a stronger connection to their ethnic identity and a weak one with their cultural one which makes them 'ethnic-oriented' (Ting-Toomey 2004, 221). This differentiation of salience between ethnic and cultural identity could explain the differences in answers between the interviewees as their informant possibly identify more or less as being Vietnamese or ethnic Chinese. As one of the informants put it:

“It is important to keep in mind that the perception of Chineseness varies from individual to individual, and probably also, during the life of the individual” (Gédéon)

7 Discussion

According to the findings, both Vietnamese and Hoa's perception of Hoa's identity diverges greatly. Vietnamese people use the concept of *Dominance* to determine the identity of the Hoa as Vietnamese above all while the Hoa have a more nuanced and complex perception of their identity. Identity for the Hoa is *Compartmentalised* where their identity as either Vietnamese or Chinese is more or less salient depending on the situation and context, they are

in. The theory (Roccas & Brewer 2002, 90), applied to the findings, shows a differentiation in perceptions of belonging depending on external observers (Vietnamese) and the self (Hoa). While the Vietnamese people viewed the Hoa as integrated into Vietnam due to the concept of *Dominance*, Hoa's view is more nuanced due to the higher degree of identity complexity they deal with.

The findings highlight a clear distinction between past governmental discrimination towards Hoa and contemporary efforts to their integration by the government. While the literature review was extensive on the bigoted policy toward the ethnic minority in the 20th century (Chan 2018, 165; Tong 2010, 180-181), nothing was mentioned about the government's stance on the Hoa people since the late 1990s. Therefore, we highlight the change of institutional integration of the Hoa and their reinforcement through discourse as an integral part of the Vietnamese community according to the government. Furthermore, the findings also strengthened the previous conclusions of the literature review by reinforcing the image of Hoa as a business and commercial-oriented community in the mindset of Vietnamese people (Amer 1996, 76; Trang 2015, 68; Amer 2014, 16).

Finally, we analysed the findings with the theory to understand Hoa's perceptions of the event of 2014, the difference of the level of attachment of the Hoa regarding their cultural and ethnic identity might explain the differentiated reactions of the community regarding the anti-China riots. An Hoa who considers itself as assimilated (strong attachment to cultural identity, low attachment to ethnicity) would be more likely to not feel targeted by the riots and dismiss it. However, someone with a stronger sense of ethnic identity, due to their cultural attachment to China, might feel uneasy regarding the violence and Sinophobia directed at China and to some extent, feel targeted. However, as the literature suggests, there is a higher level of Vietnamisation towards the younger generation of Hoa which might also explain this differentiation of perspective regarding the riots of 2014. Therefore, the research is lacking an age component on the Hoa population which would have helped us have a better understanding of the perception of belonging and identity depending on the generation they belong to. Therefore, the assumptions and conclusions reached in this thesis set the ground for further in-depth and nuanced research on the subject.

8 Conclusion

While the Hoa now have a place of their own within the Vietnamese community, as well as qualities assigned to them as good businesspeople, due to their dual ethnic and national identity, the Hoa feel at a loss regarding the SCS dispute and fear becoming at the receiving end of the tensions between China and Vietnam as they have been in the past, especially from the Vietnamese government.

The findings assessed that there were no malicious intents from the Vietnamese government towards the ethnic Chinese and pointed out the government's reassurance of Hoa's place in Vietnamese society. It was also pointed out that Vietnamese people harbored no anti-Hoa sentiments towards the ethnic Chinese and the riots of 2014 were only targeted at the symbols of power of the PRC. Accordingly, Vietnamese people have shown, through their perception of Hoa's identity, that they regarded the Hoa as an integral and legitimate part of Vietnamese society as they are viewed as Vietnamese first. Hence, according to the Vietnamese stance on the Hoa, there has been no change in Hoa's place in Vietnamese society since 2014 as the riots were not directed at the Hoa but at mainland China and Chinese nationals which Hoa are excluded from. The Hoa are still viewed by the Vietnamese and the government, since the 1990s, as a symbol of economic strength and growth for the country and are still, to this day, considered valuable aspects and part of Vietnamese society.

However, the research showed that Hoa's perceptions are slightly different from the Vietnamese. Indeed, past discrimination towards the ethnic Chinese seems to still have an impact on Hoa's trust in the government. This mistrust made them wary of their situation after the events of 2014 and kept engaging in situational identity to conceal their Chineseness when in contact with Vietnamese, as well as reiteration of their allegiance to the Vietnamese government to avoid possible repercussions or discrimination. However, participants noted that this general aspect of cautiousness from the Hoa was not new and was already existing before 2014. In general, Hoa are careful of geopolitical developments between China and Vietnam. The strategy of situational identity that Hoa use today was still used before the rise of anti-China sentiment we witnessed in the 2010s. Hence, we can argue that Hoa's perception of their position within Vietnamese society has not changed since 2014.

However, it is important to note the differences in perceptions between the answers to both research questions. Vietnamese people assert Hoa's position in Vietnam as secure and unchanged in the 21st century due to the government's efforts in integration, policies in place, and the thriving of the ethnic Chinese community's businesses in Vietnam. Accordingly, Vietnamese people as well as the Vietnamese government acknowledge the Hoa as an ethnic minority who are an integral part of Vietnam and are thus Vietnamese. Nevertheless, Hoa's

perception of their identity and subsequent belonging in society differs. According to their subjectively embedded perceptions, the Hoa are still acting very cautiously within the society and try their best not to cause waves. Due to their divergent Vietnamese and Chinese identity, it is hard for them to truly belong inside Vietnam and often employ situational strategies such as enacting one of their given identities depending on their environment.

To conclude, the research showed that Vietnamese people consider Hoa as well implanted and in a stable position within the Vietnamese national community, the Hoa are still overly cautious of their environment and the enactment of their Chineseness in Vietnamese spaces and thus, unsure of their place of belonging. Both conclusions of the Hoa's place in the national community show no change in perceptions before or after the events of 2014. The theory allowed us to understand better the concept of identity for the Hoa in contemporary Vietnam, which was something that was missing in the literature due to the lack of literature on the subject and therefore, contributed to the research on ethnic Chinese identity in Vietnam

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10 Appendix

I. Data Chart of the Respondents

Anonymity	Nationality	Research Field	Research Focus
Respondent 1	Vietnamese	/	/
Respondent 2	Japanese	Anthropologist	Ethnic Chinese since 1990s
Respondent 3	/	Anthropologist	Ethnic Minorities Mekong Delta
Laurent Gedeon	French	Geopolitics (SCS)	SCS (Vietnam/China) Ethnic Chinese
Ton Trang	Vietnamese	Anthropologist	Mekong

II. Interview Guide

Participation in an interview must be consensual, the interviewee gets to decide whether they will be cited anonymously, by name, research field, or university affiliation.

A reminder of the aim of the thesis:

Possible change in ethnic Chinese's perception of their position within the Vietnamese national community amidst rising Sinophobia and nationalism since 2014

Expert's perception

Would you say that ethnic Chinese in Vietnam are collectively viewed as Vietnamese or as Chinese? Can you be both at the same time? Depending on your answer, explain why.

What defines Chinese ethnicity in Vietnamese society according to you? What makes someone Chinese? (ex: language, culture, festivities celebration, bloodline, etc...)

Has mainstream Vietnamese perceptions of Chinese identity changed with rising nationalism and Sinophobia? How so, give some example?

Would you think Vietnamese people or/and the Vietnamese government associates ethnic Chinese with China?

Does Vietnamese society hold certain views, stereotypes, or common perceptions toward Hoa? Positive or negative.

Subsequently, do you feel a shift in this perception during the last decade? Relating to rising Sinophobia?

Have you ever witnessed or heard any kind of discrimination toward ethnic Chinese in Vietnam? Since 2014? (it could be any kind of discrimination, from institutions to every day interactions)

What are the things most commonly said regarding ethnic Chinese in Vietnam? Has the discourse changed recently?

What were the reactions of Kinh Vietnamese or/or ethnic Chinese regarding the deadly anti-china riots of 2014?

Did you ever felt like anti-china riots, peaceful demonstrations or criticism towards China were also more or less directed at ethnic Chinese in Vietnam to a certain extent?

Do you think Vietnamese people make a distinction between ethnic Chinese and Chinese from mainland china who come to work in Vietnam?

Business and commerce are the most prominent activity of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. Would you say there is a correlation between this common knowledge and the targeting of Chinese-owned businesses during the 2014 riots? Or was it unrelated and a symbol for something else?

In the past, mistreatment towards the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam have been closely related to geopolitical tensions between China and Vietnam. Would you say it is happening again regarding the South China Sea dispute?

What is the Vietnamese's government approach regarding China's assertiveness in the SCS dispute? (Ex. Strong nationalist discourse, appeasement, etc..)

Expert's thoughts on the ethnic Chinese perception:

Has the ethnic Chinese discourse regarding Vietnam changed since the 2014 riots?

Have you noticed a shift in ethnic Chinese's behaviour since 2014? (Ex of possible shifts: do not speak Chinese in front of others, keep more to themselves, etc..)

How does the Chinese identity relate to the Vietnamese identity?

Does ethnic Chinese consider themselves Vietnamese first or Chinese? Do you think this plays a role in their integration into Vietnamese society?

What is the ethnic Chinese discourse regarding the reoccurrence of anti-china demonstrations in the country?

Do ethnic Chinese feel targeted by these demonstrations, regarding their identity?

Are ethnic Chinese supporting these demonstrations?

Do you think they felt safe in Vietnam after the deadly riots of 2014? How has this perception changed these last few years?

Do the ethnic Chinese feel supported by the government or let down?

Have the ethnic Chinese sensed a shift of behaviour from Vietnamese people in their regard after the rise of anti-china sentiment in the country

Do you think ethnic Chinese perceive themselves to be accepted as part of the Vietnamese community? Has this perception changed since the anti-china riots?