

## Rational Choices in Language Maintenance: The Teochew Community in Soc Trang Province, Vietnam

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### Abstract

For more than three centuries, the Teochew community has built a culturally vibrant and enduring presence in Vinh Chau, Soc Trang province. They have maintained their ancestral heritage while continuously adapting to the changing social environment. This study explores the core factors that influence their language choices, using rational choice theory to analyze how individuals and groups make decisions about language use. It also investigates the close relationship between language and culture, emphasizing how linguistic practices contribute to cultural transformation through acculturation. Drawing on qualitative research methods, the study includes in-depth interviews, detailed analysis of historical and contemporary documents, and a review of relevant academic literature. These approaches help uncover how the Teochew people manage their linguistic preferences in response to shifting cultural and social conditions. The research examines the role of government language policies, educational systems, and intercultural interactions in shaping patterns of language maintenance and change. By taking a multidimensional perspective, the article reveals both personal and collective motivations behind language behavior. It also raises important questions about the future of the Teochew language in the context of Vietnam's modernization and increasing global integration. The findings offer meaningful insights into how language and cultural identity are deeply interconnected, and how linguistic decisions reflect and influence broader social realities.

**Keywords:** *Bilingual; Cultural Contact; Linguistic Contact; Multicultural Society; Teochew*

### Introduction

Language and writing represent the embodiment of a nation's cultural identity. Through language, cultural elements are conveyed and, in the future, cultural evolution will similarly depend on linguistic frameworks<sup>[13]</sup>. The evolution and advancement of language are invariably correlated with the transformation and progression of culture. Language emerges as a product of communicative interactions, encapsulating the traits, psychological attributes, and cognitive styles of a particular community. Consequently, language constitutes an integral and inseparable component of culture, serving as the paramount element of cultural identity, while culture embodies the essence of language (Sapir 1949). Engels posited that "After labor and at the same time with labor comes language" <sup>[24]</sup>. Language not only serves as the foundation for the emergence of humanity but also acts as a precursor to cultural development, primarily facilitating the creation of "humans." Absent the initial language that engenders the capacity for human thought, the artistic attributes inherent in humanity cannot be cultivated, thereby limiting the potential for diverse artistic expressions that transcend the original linguistic form<sup>[28]</sup>. "In national culture, language is a distinct element. If language, in conjunction with labor, fosters humanity, then language, alongside labor, constitutes the genesis of all cultures"<sup>[47]</sup>. Cultural exchange represents an intrinsic law of contemporary society, granting ethnic groups the opportunity to collaborate and progress collectively. In all cultural engagements, our Party and State consistently uphold the dialectical principle: preserving the commendable traditions of the nation while assimilating the refined aspects of global culture. In analogous communicative contexts, distinct ethnic groups exhibit varying behavioral standards. Hence, from the resolution of the 4th Central Conference addressing policies for ethnic minorities, the Party and State have asserted: "Expand the establishment of primary schools. Employ Latin script for ethnic minorities." The Politburo's resolution regarding the Party's policies on ethnic minorities further encompasses the directive of "acknowledging the languages

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and scripts of ethnic groups. Ethnic minorities possessing their own scripts should utilize them for educational purposes in classes below the primary school level. For ethnic groups lacking their own scripts, the national language shall be employed to transcribe their local languages for instructional purposes. However, regardless of the educational level, whether in primary schools, popular education classes, or supplementary education classes, instruction in the common language and the national language remains imperative." The documentation from the 7th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam also underscored: "Honor the cultural traditions, languages, customs, and beliefs of ethnic groups. Uphold the languages and implement appropriate policies regarding writing for ethnic groups." The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam asserts: "Ethnic groups possess the right to utilize their own language and writing, safeguard their national identity, and promote their admirable customs, practices, traditions, and culture. The State enacts a policy of comprehensive development, progressively enhancing the material and spiritual well-being of ethnic minorities. The State prioritizes initiatives to ensure the advancement of education in ethnic minority and particularly disadvantaged regions."

"The Chaozhou people, commonly known as the Teochew people, are members of the Han ethnic group who live in Chaozhou County, Guangdong Province, China"<sup>[25]</sup>. Vinh Chau Town's population is 166,728. More than 29,587 people belong to the Chinese ethnic group<sup>[53]</sup>. In the early years of national renewal, the Government issued Directive No. 256-CP on October 11, 1986, issued by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, referring to educational initiatives for the Chinese community, stating that "Chinese children are educated and trained according to the common principles and goals for children of all ethnic groups." Chinese students learn alongside students from other ethnic groups at general schools, professional secondary schools, vocational schools, and universities"<sup>[3]</sup>.

## Literature Review

Scholars who have carefully studied the Chinese population in Vietnam, such as Chau Thi Hai and Phan An, must contribute to research on them. Currently, there are extremely few theses and dissertations in academic institutions, as well as scientific articles, dedicated to the study of Chinese culture. For today's Chinese community members, deciding whether to conserve or modify various parts of social existence is a big challenge. This is especially true in the sphere of language, where cultural changes present considerable challenges to the preservation of linguistic legacy. The scientific work titled "Teaching Chinese to the Teochew people in the Mekong Delta - a case study of Vinh Hai commune, Vinh Chau district, Soc Trang province" by Truong Anh Tien focuses on the acquisition of Chinese language skills in the Chinese community in Vinh Hai commune, elucidating the fundamental factors and causes that have a decisive influence on the current educational situation in the Teochew Chinese community (in Vinh Hai) from the desire to maintain national

Truong Thuan Loi's dissertation, entitled "Cultural Perceptions through Language Choices of the Teochew People in Soc Trang," offers numerous profound insights into the Teochew community. Leveraging the author's personal heritage as a member of the Teochew ethnic group, in conjunction with a profound reverence for the cultural traditions of his people, this scholarly work elucidates the historical antecedents of the Teochew people and their subsequent migration to the southern region. The Teochew community residing in Soc Trang is presently acknowledged for having retained the most critical elements of their cultural identity in comparison to Teochew groups situated in other geographical locales. Nonetheless, the Teochew population has encountered considerable cultural exchanges and assimilation with indigenous ethnic groups<sup>[52]</sup>.

Concerning the Teochew people, language, and culture, the endogenous database at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, houses two journal articles authored by Nguyen Thi Hoa Xinh<sup>[31]</sup> and Le Hai Dang<sup>[21]</sup>, a book chapter contributed by Nguyen Cam Thuy<sup>[26]</sup>, a scientific research endeavor led by Pham Nguyen Trong Nhan<sup>[33]</sup>, a doctoral dissertation by Nguyen Cong Hoan<sup>[27]</sup>, and five master's theses by Lam Hoang Vien<sup>[19]</sup>, Truong Anh Tien<sup>[50]</sup>, Thai Tin Liet<sup>[44]</sup>, Tang Hong Ngu<sup>[41]</sup>, and Nguyen Thanh Nguyen<sup>[30]</sup>. The Vietnamese national science and technology information system contains articles pertaining to the Teochew language authored by Hoang Quoc<sup>[14, 15]</sup>, and Truong Thuan Loi<sup>[51]</sup>, as well as socio-cultural discussions by Duong Thi Ngoc Minh<sup>[8,9,10]</sup>, Nguyen Truong Giang<sup>[32]</sup>, Pham Van Bua<sup>[34]</sup>, Pham Van Ngot, Quach Van Toan Em, and Thach Thi Domres<sup>[35]</sup>, in addition to Tran Thi My Yen<sup>[48]</sup>. Moreover, there exists an excess of twenty journal articles associated with the natural, ecological, and environmental conditions of Vinh Chau town.

## **Methods**

The majority of the aforementioned studies have failed to situate the preservation of the Teochew language within the cultural framework of the community, thus neglecting to connect its significant role in safeguarding the ethnic cultural identity of the community. Consequently, the author employs qualitative research methodologies, qualitative data analysis techniques, secondary data analysis, and synthesis of extant literature from prior scholars to refer to supplementary research regarding the interrelationship between language and culture, complemented by comprehensive surveys and interviews aimed at comprehending the alterations and adaptations within the language and culture of the new environment. This approach aims to elucidate the characteristics of this particularly efficacious cultural identity preservation strategy, thereby facilitating the dissemination and development of a cultural identity preservation framework through the safeguarding of the mother tongue for other ethnic minority communities in Vietnam to emulate, implement, and contribute to the construction of a cohesive Vietnamese cultural milieu that embraces diversity. Furthermore, the article examines the challenges encountered in the preservation and sustenance of language amidst the phenomenon of globalization, thereby contributing to the minimization of the cultural chasm in communication between the Teochew people and the surrounding ethnic communities in their endeavor to preserve their ethnic cultural identity while integrating into Vietnamese society, thus enriching Vietnamese culture, which remains unified in diversity while concurrently reflecting its distinctive identity.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Overview of the Ethnic Cultural Identity of the Trieu Chau people in Vinh Chau (Soc Trang)**

Cultural researchers have a diverse range of perspectives on culture. As a result, the concept of national cultural identity is likewise diverse. The concept of identity dates back to 1932: "identity: like the word 'true image', original picture, nature of a person or an object - the true state of something or someone, also denotes content"<sup>[4]</sup>. Dao Duy Anh<sup>[5]</sup>, drawing from the Chinese national language dictionary, the Vuong Van language dictionary, and the Bach Thoai dictionary, identified seven core values of Vietnamese cultural identity. Cultural identity, according to Luong Kim Dinh, is a universal and particular feature of a culture, as well as a hierarchical one. However, it was not until 1975 that a number of definitions of cultural identity began to develop. Hoai Minh<sup>[12]</sup> defines identity as a culture's underlying principles that are profoundly ingrained in all aspects of a nation's history. According to Ha Van Tan<sup>[11]</sup>, national cultural identity refers to a set of distinct cultural values acknowledged by the entire nation and implemented to meet the nation's development needs within a specific historical context. Ha Van Tan argues that national cultural identity encompasses principles shared by the entire nation and deemed appropriate. Ha Van Tan's contribution summarizes core cultural values based on historical circumstances, natural environment, and social environment, as well as linguistic and archaeological research on the formation of cultural values before ethnic separation.

Tran Ngoc Them examined the mutual interaction between cultural identity and natural and social environmental conditions, drawing on and developing the authors' perspectives in the direction of a cultural-historical approach combined with a value approach. Tran Ngoc Them also made arguments for the value approach to cultural identification: "The difference in identity between ethnic groups does not reside solely in the list of attributes, but rather in their structure. This difference is the result of performance under the impact of the natural and social environment."<sup>[47]</sup>. This might be interpreted as an attempt to address the conflict in Ha Van Tan's paper, in which he recognized cultural identity as the core, fundamental, and typical cultural value system accepted by the nation while also citing evidence of ao dai, nem chua, and dan day as Vietnamese cultural identity. According to the definition of cultural identity as a cluster of characteristics, national cultural identity, or national identity of Vietnamese culture, is a cluster of characteristics that distinguish this community's culture from other communities, demonstrating that community's creative ability in the process of adapting to living conditions<sup>[36]</sup>.

Cultural identity encompasses both the nation's spiritual beliefs and its unique cultural aspects. The two components of cultural identity are also considered distinct but harmoniously integrated into a whole through an organic relationship that is inextricably linked<sup>[45]</sup>. This comprehensive and synthetic approach has overcome a contradiction in the axiology approach, which is whether the Vietnamese national cultural identity includes neutral values as mentioned in Ha Van Tan's article, or includes both values and non-values derived according to circumstances as Tran Ngoc Them suggests. According to Huynh Cong Ba<sup>[17]</sup>, the tension between axiology and cultural history approaches derives from the fact that values are temporary judgments, whereas national cultural identity persists throughout time.

A subject's identity creation process is influenced by a variety of factors, including other subjects and the social environment. Identity formation processes are influenced by confrontation processes that include difficulty, incompatibility, inconsistency, or even conflict, followed by synthesis and resolution. The global context of the 1980s and 1990s of the twentieth century fostered and cultivated a new understanding of humans' place in society. As a result, each individual is regarded a global citizen; yet, borders will no longer exist, and all nations and ethnicities will coexist in a "global village"<sup>[11]</sup>.

Culture is distinctive, whereas civilization is global. Each ethnic group is associated with a distinct ethnic cultural base, hence there is no progressive or backward culture, only developed and backward civilization. Cultural identity evolves through engagement, exchange, trade, and assimilation with other communities, adapting to the lifestyle of one's own ethnic group. As a result, ethnic cultural identity always includes the cultural essence of the ethnic group, which is the result of cultural interchange and assimilation. The ideal multicultural society promotes not only multiculturalism but also dialogue between cultures. This includes respecting the rights of individuals to practice their own language, religion, and beliefs, not criticizing or condemning moral values that differ from the reference system of ethical standards of behavior, and living together in peace and respect.

The Chaozhou people account for more than 80% of the total Chinese population in Soc Trang<sup>[43]</sup>, and the Chinese people migrated from Southern China to the land west of the Hau River around the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century and lasted until 1955, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, which was also when the policies of naturalisation. Because of the tremendous immigration that occurred immediately following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the residential area swiftly grew, and Soc Trang became a place with a high concentration of Chinese immigrants, resulting in its rapid prosperity<sup>[37]</sup>.

The My Thanh River estuary in Soc Trang attracted early Chinese immigrants to the Southern region because it was located between two significant Chinese settlement sites in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, My Tho and Ha Tien. Following the My Thanh River, the Chinese settled at My Xuyen and Vinh Thanh. Bai Xau established itself as a commerce harbor early on, allowing a Chaozhou settlement to settle and develop streets<sup>[16]</sup>.

Bai Xau commercial port was a truly "international" trading port, as evidenced by the presence of foreign merchant ships as well as merchant ships delivering products for sale in adjacent countries such as Cambodia<sup>[40]</sup>. Bai Xau was Soc Trang's most important town, with a distillery, square houses, a post office, many clean streets, countless Chinese shops, a chief temple, and an important port that received seagoing ships of all classes from China, Singapore, Siam, and Cambodia, exchanging rice, silk, fabric, fish sauce, pottery, bowls, buffalo horns, ivory, and honey<sup>[18]</sup>. Chaozhou merchants at Bai Xau port contributed both finances and manpower to the port's construction as the Western rice route's hub<sup>[29]</sup>. Vinh Chau town has more than half of the coastal mangrove forest area in Soc Trang province, but its population is primarily coastal with poor education, low income, and unconcerned living<sup>[35]</sup>.

Vinh Chau has over 30,000 Chinese residents, the majority of whom are Teochew. Vinh Chau town had 52 aquaculture farms in 2020, but no crop or livestock farms<sup>[1]</sup>. However, local aquaculture employment is an unsustainable solution because it is dependent on market prices, seasonality, and production, all of which require ability, tenacity, and care. This is a high-paying industry, but the environment fluctuates unpredictably, and prices fall owing to saturated market demand. Many households require long-term investments as well as scientific and technical support to mitigate hazards and restore aquaculture caused by climate change. Finally, women who are compelled to leave their family to work far away are the most vulnerable category in society<sup>[32]</sup>. Chinese immigrants in the Mekong Delta are largely of Teochew ancestry, who speak Vietnamese, can communicate in Vietnamese, and have a strong desire to assimilate into Vietnamese society. Chinese cultural life in the Mekong Delta retains cultural traits brought from Southern China, with a stress on virtues such as diligence, patience, and hard work<sup>[34]</sup>. Because of their diligence, patience, and hard labor, Chinese immigrants in Soc Trang contributed cultural characteristics from their native country to remind their descendants of human morals, filial piety, harmony, and mutual affection<sup>[9]</sup>. They live in cooperation and unity with the other ethnic minorities who live in Soc Trang. From then, ethnic communities help to create and nurture a multicultural and multi-ethnic atmosphere in Soc Trang<sup>[8]</sup>. Culture unites ethnic groups, preserves ethnic identity and languages, and enriches and beautifies Vietnamese cultural heritage in Soc Trang<sup>[19]</sup>. Furthermore, they always hope for a prosperous nation in which to live, aspirations to rise, and a calm, unhurried, stable, and good living in all aspects so that people can be optimistic, cheerful, and have long-term attachments to other ethnic groups<sup>[48]</sup>.

### **Language use Strategies of the Teochew People in Vinh Chau (Soc Trang) According to Communication Space from the Perspective Of Rational Choice Theory**

Rational choice theory underscores the imperative for individuals to deliberate upon their actions, consistently with purpose and cognition, to judiciously allocate resources in pursuit of optimal outcomes while minimizing associated costs. This decision-making process is influenced not solely by external variables but also by intrinsic personal values that significantly shape and guide the individual's selections<sup>[22]</sup>. While individual decisions are also molded by the characteristics and regulations inherent in the social milieu, rational choice theory primarily focuses on the degree of individual agency and the ramifications of these decisions on the broader societal framework<sup>[23]</sup>. Rational choice theory accentuates the necessity of evaluation and computation to ascertain the most effective means and methodologies among available options to fulfill objectives amid conditions characterized by limited material and spiritual resources. Culture constitutes a dynamic segment of society that is perpetually evolving and adapting to contemporary trends. A uniform cultural framework cannot exist within a society that is in constant flux. As a consequence, cultural members frequently engage in cultural exchanges, compelling individuals to make choices. Thus, rational choice theory is employed in the analytical exploration of the attributes and transformations concerning the preservation and promotion of language in alignment with contemporary trends and the processes of cultural evolution<sup>[39]</sup>.

The significance of language education within the familial unit is paramount to the Chinese community, as a predominant rationale underpinning this endeavor is the directive from ancestors to safeguard cultural heritage following their migration to evade conflict. "My family has limited conditions; Therefore, children are compelled to acquire the language of their forebears, which necessitated my uncle's insistence that my children learn Teochew" (Uncle LVT, born in 1965, farmer, Vinh Chau). When grandparents and relatives engage in discourse in Teochew, children are likely to adopt this linguistic practice and utilize their ethnic language. Conversely, if familial interactions are conducted in Vietnamese, such a linguistic inclination is unlikely to manifest. "In my view, if I initially utilize Teochew to respond or engage in conversation, I will fundamentally adhere to that practice. However, if I commence communication in Vietnamese, transitioning to Teochew will prove exceedingly challenging" (Mr. LDC, born in 1993, salesman, Vinh Chau). Presently, Teochew-speaking Chinese predominantly communicate in Vietnamese, regarding it as the principal language in quotidian life. "Their proficiency in Vietnamese and usage of the language surpasses that of any other tongue"<sup>[6]</sup>.

The intricate residential intermingling of the Kinh, Khmer, Hoa, and Cham ethnic groups has engendered conducive circumstances for these communities to engage in linguistic and cultural exchanges, thereby fostering the advancement of multilingualism. Nevertheless, the limited number of language users coupled with the dispersed distribution of ethnic groups within the region has adversely impacted the social functions, continuity, and evolution of the Chinese mother tongue. Contrarily, the Chinese community demonstrates a markedly superior proficiency in three languages—Vietnamese, Chinese, and Khmer—compared to the Kinh, Khmer, and Cham communities. The Chinese populace possesses a distinct advantage in commercial activities, necessitating their acquisition of the languages of the ethnic groups residing alongside them, regardless of their preferences. Acknowledging the significance of the Vietnamese language, the Chinese community not only exhibits fluency in Vietnamese but also places considerable emphasis on the educational attainment of their offspring. For this demographic, achieving proficiency in Vietnamese serves a dual purpose: facilitating integration within the local community and enhancing business opportunities. Consequently, despite the prevalence of their mother tongue in familial and communal interactions, the Vietnamese language proficiency among the Chinese in Soc Trang surpasses that of their native language. Approximately 60.0% of the Chinese population retains the ability to communicate in their mother tongue, with those adept in all four language competencies—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—typically being individuals over the age of 60<sup>[14]</sup>. In Vinh Chau district, which houses a significant Teochew population, the utilization of their native language occurs more frequently in everyday situations than that of Vietnamese or Khmer, although the majority of the Chinese community in this locale is also proficient in both Vietnamese and Khmer. Overall, the capability to comprehend and articulate their mother tongue among the Chinese in Vinh Chau is notably elevated, exceeding that of Chinese individuals in other provinces and municipalities, attributable to the substantial and relatively concentrated Teochew population residing in the area. This demographic characteristic serves as a considerable asset for the preservation and promotion of the Teochew language within familial and communal contexts. "I am motivated to learn my ethnic language along with Vietnamese to preserve my cultural heritage. All members of my family communicate in Teochew; my grandmother does not know Vietnamese at all" (LTHH, grade 10 student).

In contemporary society, the predominant number of adolescents and children exhibit minimal or no proficiency in Teochew, primarily due to the geographical distance of educational institutions that provide a curriculum in Teochew, resulting in children being enrolled in state-run kindergartens, which are predominantly staffed by Vietnamese or Khmer educators. Private establishments that offer Teochew educational programs typically limit their curriculum to the completion of primary education. At present, only Canh Thanh and Boi Thanh private schools provide a curriculum that spans all educational levels. However, the associated tuition fees are relatively elevated due to the implementation of bilingual programs. The absence of secondary educational institutions in the vicinity compels students to commute to urban areas to participate in Chinese language courses<sup>[7]</sup>. Following the completion of primary education, students predominantly engage with their Vietnamese and Khmer peers. Consequently, numerous children acquire the language but gradually cease its use, severing their cultural ties. "Consequently, within the contemporary context, even those individuals born in the 1990s exhibit a lack of utilization of the Teochew language in educational environments. In the Vinh Hai commune, the trajectory of language transition seems to occur at a markedly slower rate, as children born in 2009 continue to report the usage of Teochew within academic contexts"<sup>[52]</sup>. The prevalent rationale articulated by the families was encapsulated in the following statement: "Our objective is for the children to acquire proficiency in Teochew; upon the completion of their secondary education, we shall facilitate opportunities for them to pursue studies in Taiwan. Consequently, they will not require ongoing instruction in Teochew, as whether they opt to remain in Taiwan for employment or return to Vietnam to engage with Taiwanese enterprises is equally viable" (Ms. TMA, born in 1979, housewife, Vinh Chau). The widespread educational initiatives directed towards the Chinese demographic as a collective have instigated a gradual forsaking of the Teochew language, resulting in a diminished presence and written representation. Indeed, it is imperative for the state to enact policies that promote the preservation of cultural identity among ethnic minorities and augment their cultural capital, rather than exclusively emphasizing education in Vietnamese. Students are compelled to seek accommodation in proximity to educational institutions due to the substantial distances from their residences, which engenders considerable logistical difficulties for both families and learners. Only households situated in urban locales possess the capacity to facilitate bilingual educational opportunities. In contrast, families residing in remote regions encounter formidable obstacles. While monolingual language acquisition is feasible, the lack of access to higher education may yield a scenario in which individuals possess linguistic knowledge without practical application, thereby precipitating the erosion of their linguistic proficiency. This predicament perpetuates a disadvantage in the pursuit of foreign languages. Conversely, the foreign language that members of the Teochew community typically acquire in private or non-public educational settings is Teochew, while the majority of their interactions occur with individuals proficient in Cantonese. It is the dynamic methodologies of Chinese language instruction and acquisition within locales inhabited by Chinese individuals that catalyze the intensification of language contact between Mandarin and indigenous dialects. Educational activities across diverse formats generally address the imperative of sustaining and conserving ethnic cultural heritage while simultaneously assimilating knowledge, information technology, and scientific understanding, thus preserving cultural identity and advancing human knowledge. Nevertheless, the establishment of a comprehensive system of educational activities utilizing the mother tongue of the Chinese populace also poses significant impediments to the integration processes within Vietnamese society for women over the age of 60 who are not engaged in formal employment or business settings and lack regular interaction with Vietnamese, Khmer, and Cham communities<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **Language use Strategies of the Teochew People in Vinh Chau (Soc Trang) According to the Communication Object from the Perspective of Rational Choice Theory**

Although Soc Trang Television broadcasts programs in ethnic languages, funding for such programming is limited, particularly in the field of news reporting. Furthermore, more than half of Soc Trang's population is Khmer, followed by Vietnamese and then Chinese. Chinese people are clearly an ethnic minority within this social context, which explains why Vietnamese and Khmer dominate everyday speech. "Ethnic minorities are well-represented in the area. The overall population of the area is 164,622 people. The Kinh people make up 50,898 people, or 28.93% of the overall population; the Khmer make up 86,204 people, or 54.43%; and the Chinese make up 27,520 people, or 16.76%<sup>[43]</sup>. Because of their poor mother tongue skills, Chinese people only speak Chinese to converse privately with persons from their own ethnic group in community meetings (community councils, mutual assistance societies, religious associations) when they are middle-aged or older. Languages serve distinct societal purposes in the Mekong Delta. Vietnamese is the national language and the common language of communication among ethnic groups, therefore ethnic minorities use it in formal

communication settings. Khmer is spoken in the family, in the community, and in religious activities. It is also a widely spoken language, known as a "regional language" in several Mekong Delta communities.

Cham is utilized in family, community, and religious/belief activities. Chinese is used sparingly in pure ethnic households and small community groupings. As a result, as the national language, Vietnamese holds a unique place in the linguistic lives of all members of the many ethnic minority groups here. The Khmer community makes up 30% of Soc Trang province's population, which is eight times higher than the Chaozhou community<sup>[42]</sup>. Because of its enormous population, second only to the Kinh, the Khmer have a stronger linguistic position than the Cham and Chinese people, particularly the Chaozhou people. In present Chinese language communication, the multilingual status of Vietnamese - Chinese - Khmer has gained popularity in areas where the three ethnic groups live. This means that, in addition to Vietnamese, Khmer is an essential language in Chinese people's daily communication, particularly when buying and selling in the market. Vietnamese is the national language, an official language that is extensively used and required in schools, administrative organizations, and the media across the country. Thus, for ethnic minorities in the Mekong Delta, acquiring and mastering Vietnamese is both a right and a responsibility for each individual. The phenomenon of unintentionally adopting Vietnamese vocabulary when talking in Teochew can be explained utilizing the rational choice theory<sup>[51]</sup>. According to data, Teochew people make up 1.4% of the province's ethnic minority population and just 4% of the province's overall population<sup>[42]</sup>. Because the Teochew group is not the majority, neither the Khmer nor the Vietnamese feel compelled to speak exclusively in Teochew. Furthermore, the Teochew people feel compelled to integrate and establish a bilingual environment in order to retain consumers and please the majority of teachers, supervisors, and leaders at work, as well as small business partners who speak Vietnamese and Khmer.

## Conclusion

The Teochew community in Vinh Chau, Soc Trang is gradually declining in the use of their mother tongue, evidenced by the young generation's lack of interest in learning their mother tongue for many reasons. Therefore, the preservation of the Teochew language has become an increasingly urgent concern. The widespread use of Vietnamese by the people is due to the fact that Vietnamese is the language of instruction and is used in official documents. Chinese and Khmer speakers understand Vietnamese, and in government agencies, there seems to be little participation of ethnic minorities, leading to little attention being paid to policies affecting these communities. The processes of cultural exchange and integration are contributing to the gradual erosion and transformation of languages, requiring support from the government to ensure equitable development for ethnic minority groups. It is important to promote the unique identity of each ethnic group, thereby enhancing the common identity of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. Finally, the article finds that rationality and multivocality in the process of preserving language and culture are also major factors influencing the effectiveness of language and culture preservation strategies in multicultural environments.

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