

# FRONTIER OF AMBIGUITY: EXPLORING IDENTITY AND RECOGNITION AMONG HOKLO SETTLERS IN QING TAIWAN

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**Abstract.** This study adopts "marginalization" as a theoretical perspective to explore the historical circumstances and social behavior of Minnan (Hoklo or Southern Fujian) immigrants in Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty. The research context lies in the Qing court's passive governance of Taiwan under the principle of "administering Taiwan to guard against Taiwan," which led to an "institutional vacuum" and "fragmentation of authority," trapping immigrants in a state of "dual alienation" regarding their identity. The research motivation stems from the fact that existing studies have failed to effectively link macro-structural factors with micro-psychological aspects while lacking a systematic explanation of the logic behind marginalized experiences. To address this, this study aims to reconstruct the generative logic of Minnan immigrants' identity formation and social behavior, incorporating theories of "uncertainty" and anxiety to deepen the analysis. The research methodology employs a qualitative approach that combines historical document analysis with theoretical construction, establishing an analytical framework of "structure–psychology–action" and examining case studies such as the Zhu Yigui and Lin Shuangwen uprisings. The findings reveal that the marginalized situation in Qing-era Taiwan resulted from the mutual reinforcement of institutional exclusion and social contradictions. The behavior of Minnan immigrants exhibited a progressive spectrum from "passive adaptation" to "passive resistance" and ultimately to "active rebellion." Their uprisings represented extreme attempts by marginalized groups to break through "passive uncertainty" in their quest for recognition and dignity.

**Keywords:** *marginalization, minnan immigrants, Qing Taiwan, uncertainty, identity*

## Introduction

### *Research background*

The historical formation of Taiwan is, in essence, a dynamic process woven from the contexts of multiple colonizations and immigration. Beginning with the economic colonization by the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) in the 17th century, through the governance of the Zheng regime, and culminating in over two hundred years of Qing Dynasty rule (1683-1895), Taiwan was consistently positioned as a "frontier maritime territory" within the spatial politics of the Qing Empire (Fang, 2025). This geographically and politically peripheral location, coupled with its unique immigrant social structure, collectively fostered a profound "dual marginality." This "dual marginality" manifests in two interrelated aspects: Externally, the Qing court viewed Taiwan as a potential security threat and adhered to a passive governance policy of "administering Taiwan to guard against Taiwan." This was concretely reflected in the severe insufficiency of allocated administrative resources, the implementation of restrictions on cross-strait migration, the frequent rotation of officials, and indirect governance methods relying on petty officials (grassroots administrative personnel) due to language barriers (Hsu, 1993; Shepherd, 1993). Internally, the immigrant society, predominantly composed of Minnan (Hoklo or Southern Fujian) people, replicated social conflicts from their homeland based on

locality and lineage, intensifying crises of identity at both individual and collective levels amidst resource competition and cultural adaptation (Chen, 1994).

The failure of Qing governance and the internal fragmentation of immigrant society mutually reinforced each other, leading to the characteristics of "institutional vacuum" and "fragmentation of authority" in Qing Taiwan society. Under this structural pressure, immigrant groups found themselves caught between the cultural ties of their "homeland" and the survival realities of the "new land," experiencing profound "dual alienation" (Chen, 1994; Shepherd, 1993). Therefore, analyzing the dynamic processes of their survival strategies and identity construction is crucial for interpreting the social unrest and political-cultural characteristics of Qing Taiwan.

### ***Research motivation***

While previous research on the history of Qing Taiwan has yielded substantial results, it has predominantly focused on chronicling political events, tracing economic development, or examining single dimensions of ethnic relations, exhibiting three main limitations: First, there is a disjunction between macro-structural analysis and micro-psychological motivations, failing to organically integrate societal constraints with individual agency (Giddens, 1984). Second, there has been a failure to systematically elucidate the generative logic of "marginality" as a specific historical experience, often treating it as an a priori condition rather than a product dynamically constructed by power and discourse (Said, 1978). Third, effective theoretical models are lacking to explain the mechanisms through which marginal conditions are internalized by actors and translated into concrete social actions (Bourdieu, 2013). Based on this, the questions this study intends to explore are: How did the specific governance structure of Qing-era Taiwan and the characteristics of immigrant society collectively shape a structural "marginal situation"? Furthermore, how was this marginal situation internalized by the Minnan immigrant community into specific psychological traits (marginal personality), thereby influencing their collective behavior patterns and the formation of their long-term identity?

To address these questions, this study introduces the "marginal man" theory from sociology and psychology. The concepts proposed by Stonequist (1937) and Park (1928) provide insights for understanding the sense of alienation and identity anxiety experienced by Minnan immigrants in a culturally hybrid situation. However, the explanatory power of this theory regarding the transformation mechanism from "situation" to "personality," and then to "action," remains insufficient. To overcome the theoretical limitations of existing research, this study incorporates postcolonial theory's exploration of identity "hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994), attempting to analyze the dynamic process of Minnan immigrants in the Qing Dynasty transitioning from enduring structural exclusion to initiating agentive responses. Drawing on Bhabha's arguments, this study views immigrant society as a "third space" of cultural contact and negotiation. In this space, immigrants were not merely passive recipients of marginal status; rather, by integrating their native culture with the realities of the new land, they created new, agentive hybrid identities and survival strategies. This analysis will also reference relevant discussions of subaltern agency (Scott, 1985) to more comprehensively capture the diverse ways in which immigrants responded to their marginal situations.

### ***Research objectives***

Based on the questions outlined above, this study aims to employ "marginalization" as its theoretical lens to investigate the historical situation of Minnan immigrants in Qing Taiwan and to reconstruct the generative logic behind their identity formation and social actions. To achieve this overarching goal, the study, centering on the core perspective of "marginalization," sets forth the following specific objectives: (1) First, drawing on historical analysis, it seeks to elucidate how Qing governance policies, such as the cross-strait migration restrictions, the official rotation system, and the policy of sealing off mountainous regions, structurally reinforced the marginal status of Minnan immigrants. (2) Secondly, by integrating the historical perspective of "localization" with the postcolonial theory of "hybridity," it aims to analyze the complexity and contradictions inherent in the identity formation of Minnan immigrants, who experienced "dual alienation" between their "ancestral homeland" and the "new land of Taiwan." (3) Next, utilizing theories of crowd psychology and taking popular uprisings (such as those led by Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun) as case studies, it intends to demonstrate how the "marginal personality" drove social unrest and acts of rebellion. (4) Finally, by introducing the concepts of "uncertainty" and "anxiety theory," the study will deconstruct and reconstruct the preceding analyses. It will conclude by engaging in dialogue with fields such as postcolonial studies and modern migration research, thereby exploring the contemporary relevance and interdisciplinary application potential of this research.

## **Materials and Methods**

To achieve the aforementioned research objectives, this study primarily adopts a qualitative research approach that integrates historical document analysis with theoretical construction. It examines four categories of literature: (1) the socio-economic history of Qing-era Taiwan; (2) studies on the history of Minnan immigration and their native societies; (3) marginal man theory and related social psychology research; and (4) postcolonial theory and identity studies. This review establishes the foundational arguments for the present research. The theoretical framework constructs an interdisciplinary "structure-psychology-action" analysis based on perspectives from history, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. This framework aims to connect macro governance structures with micro marginal psychology and collective social unrest, forming a complete causal explanation chain. The study focuses on representative popular uprisings and organized violent incidents in the history of Qing Dynasty Taiwan, such as those led by Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun, to both examine the explanatory power of the theoretical framework and to extract insights from concrete historical experiences to refine the theory. Building on historical analysis, the study introduces "uncertainty" and "anxiety theory" as core analytical concepts, reconstructing the generative logic of marginal personalities. The revised model is then contextualized within contemporary sociocultural settings for further deduction and reflection, demonstrating its ongoing theoretical vitality. This research aims not only to "restore the historical scene" but also to achieve the goal of "theoretical dialogue and reconstruction," thereby offering a novel and powerful interpretation of the dynamic nature of Qing Dynasty Taiwanese society.

### ***The origins of marginality: The dilemmas and motivations of Minnan immigrants***

This section aims to clarify the historical roots and contextual genesis of the "marginality" of Minnan immigrants during the Qing Dynasty. The core argument is that the marginalized situation of Taiwanese Minnan immigrants did not originate solely after their arrival in Taiwan; rather, it is a continuation and deepening of the structural position they had occupied for a long time in their original homeland—the Minnan region. This section first analyzes the challenges of "marginalization" faced by the Minnan area during the Ming and Qing dynasties, explores how this predicament shaped a group characterized by a "marginal personality," and ultimately discusses how, under the strong influence of "push-pull factors," this marginalized group came to view Taiwan as their preferred destination in search of a way out.

### ***Structural marginality: The dilemmas of Minnan in the context of the Ming and Qing Empires***

The marginality of the Minnan region primarily stems from its geographical, political, and cultural structural position relative to the imperial center. Geographically and politically, the Qing Dynasty (Manchu) established control over the Central Plains, with its focus of power and military tradition based in the North, neglecting maritime affairs along the southeastern coast. In the imperial vision that self-identified as the "Celestial Empire," Confucian ethics and Central Plains culture were regarded as the core of civilization. In contrast, the coastal regions of Minnan and Guangdong, far from the political center, along with newly annexed Taiwan, were often seen as "barbaric lands outside civilization." This narrative reinforced the peripheral status of the Minnan-Taiwan region within the imperial order. Economically and socially, during the late Ming and early Qing periods, the region suffered from wars, political corruption, the "maritime prohibition" policy, natural disasters, and frequent famines. Scholar Tang Weiqiang, in his work "The Great Disorder: Collective Violence in the Ming Dynasty," reveals through official Ming documents that from the late Ming period (1582–1644), the province of Guangdong accounted for 38% of rebellions and disturbances nationwide, while Fujian (Min) accounted for 17%. Combined, these two provinces represented a staggering 55%, confirming that the Fujian-Guangdong region was at the core of social upheaval during the late Ming (Tong, 1992). These disturbances took various forms, including intense confrontations such as "raising banners and proclaiming kingship," "attacking and killing government offices," and "gathering crowds for plunder," which occurred frequently. Furthermore, when incorporating unrecorded activities of pirates and bandits, the level of chaos becomes even more alarming; disputes between villages over water sources, tillage, and clan interests created a vicious cycle of localized violence (Zheng, 2024).

The geographical conditions of Minnan, characterized as "eight parts mountain, one part water, one part field," exacerbated the severe shortage of arable land, further intensifying the survival pressures on the lower classes. This peripheral status led to neglect and governance incapacity. Under this multifaceted pressure, residents of Southern Minnan, especially the lower classes and political dissidents, found themselves in a prolonged state of deprivation of political, economic, and cultural resources. They were not only economically disadvantaged but also culturally labeled as "heterogeneous" due to their distance from the mainstream of the Central Plains, becoming a "forgotten group" within the imperial system. For these marginalized groups facing survival pressures in their homeland, Taiwan, just waters away, was imagined as a "virgin land of ample land and sparse population, fertile fields, and

abundant harvests" (Chen, 1990). This stark contrast formed between the "push" of their homeland and the "pull" of the new land (Lee, 1966), which continually drove them to risk their lives to cross the "Black Water Ditch" (the Taiwan Strait), rushing to Taiwan in search of survival and development opportunities, beginning the process of shaping the space and constructing society in this new land (Shih, 2001).

### ***The nurturing of marginal personality: Survival strategies and psychological traits in a turbulent homeland***

The long-term structural marginality profoundly shaped the psychological traits and behavioral patterns of lower-class groups in Minnan, embodying the "marginal personality" as defined by Stonequist (1937). In an environment marked by resource scarcity and disrupted order, these individuals developed a high level of adaptability and agency that transcended conventional social norms, as described by Scott (1985). Those who emigrated from this region generally bore a deep imprint of a "marginalized personality," characterized by feelings of alienation from the state apparatus, a sense of inferiority fostered by mainstream society, a mindset of disadvantage due to resource scarcity, and a dual isolation both geographically and psychologically. This personality trait not only represents a psychological adaptation to a harsh survival environment (Stonequist, 1937) but also reflects the internalization of their everyday coping strategies (Scott, 1985), laying the groundwork for later engagement in mass movements seeking meaning in life (Hoffer, 2002). This psychological behavioral pattern was clearly reflected in the immigrant society of Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty and in its civil unrest events (Chen, 1994). They were both "deviants" from mainstream values and order and "agents" fiercely striving for survival. Some harbored dreams of assimilating into the mainstream, while many created their distinct identities in marginality, forming a spiritual structure that was at once humble and resilient yet filled with internal contradictions (Hsu, 1993). These psychological traits, predicated on the dilemmas faced in their homeland, foreshadowed their subsequent social behaviors in Taiwan.

### ***The continuation across the sea: From Minnan marginality to Taiwanese immigration***

Historical records indicate that since the establishment of a colony in Taiwan by the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) in 1624, the labor shortages faced in their efforts to develop Taiwan naturally made lower-class Minnan individuals, with their already existing "marginal personality" traits, the targets for recruitment. Their migration was not just a physical movement but also a continuation of their marginalized status and survival strategies across the sea. The VOC, unable to effectively persuade the local indigenous population to transition to settled agriculture and finding it challenging to import sufficient labor from Europe, turned to recruit Han Chinese immigrants primarily from the southeastern coastal area of China, focusing on the Minnan region, with a smaller number of Hakka immigrants also participating (Nakamura, 2002). For these immigrants, the decision to migrate to Taiwan was shaped by strong "push-pull factors." The "push" factors included intolerable conditions in their homeland, social turmoil, and a bleak future. In contrast, Taiwan was envisioned as a "virgin land of ample land, sparse population, fertile fields, and abundant harvests," representing a final hope for escaping their plight and seeking

development. The poem "Songs of Crossing Taiwan," written during the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty (1796–1820), contains the lines: "I urge you not to cross to Taiwan, for it is like the gates of hell; a thousand people go, but none returns, and who knows if life or death is hard to tell." This line, while describing the tragic crossing of the sea, indirectly affirms that, had it not been for the desperation in their homeland, who would willingly risk their lives to venture into the "gates of hell"? Minnan immigrants faced not only the dangers of crossing the sea, but upon arrival, they also frequently encountered malevolent miasma (such as malaria), rampant banditry, corrupt officials, and conflicts over land and resources with the Pingpu and Highland indigenous populations.

Thus, from the period of Dutch colonization to the Qing administration, the vast majority of immigrants from Minnan were members of marginalized groups in their homeland. They not only brought labor and agricultural techniques but also transplanted their entrenched "homeland behavioral patterns" including communal traditions based on geographic and blood ties, as well as violent habits of conflict resolution, onto the new land of Taiwan (Chen, 1994). This ensured that Taiwanese society inherited the genetic marginality of Minnan from the very beginning, setting the stage for continuous social conflicts and struggles for identity in the new environment.

### ***Marginal solidification: The structural exclusion of the Qing Dynasty's governance in Taiwan***

This section argues that the "marginality" of Minnan migrants during the Qing Dynasty is not a static characteristic but a dynamic process further solidified under the Qing court's specific governance structure. The argument posits that the Qing court's passive governance model of "administering Taiwan to guard against Taiwan" created a structurally deficient environment marked by "institutional vacuum" and "fragmentation of authority." This environment not only failed to resolve internal differences and conflicts within Minnan migrant society but also deprived them of political recognition and economic security, deepening their pre-existing marginal psychological traits into a stable "marginal personality" and ultimately leading to large-scale social unrest.

### ***The principle of "Non-Intervention" under passive governance***

From the beginning, the Qing court adopted a passive approach of "prevention is better than construction" in its governance of Taiwan. Throughout its nearly two-hundred-year rule (1683–1895), the Qing viewed Taiwan as a potential threat to the southeastern frontier of the empire rather than a core territory deserving of active management. This positioning resulted in a series of structural marginalization policies, among which the most critical included: Restrictions on Crossing to Taiwan and Mountain Sealing Policies: Stringent limitations were imposed on mainland residents traveling to Taiwan, accompanied by isolation measures such as "sealing mountains to foster indigenous development," which physically and socially restricted Taiwan's development due to fears that it would become a base for anti-Qing sentiment or a governance burden (Hsu, 1993). Rotation of Officials and Language Barriers: A strict three-year rotation system was implemented to prevent officials and soldiers from becoming entrenched threats, resulting in a prevalent short-term mentality among officials dispatched to Taiwan, who had little intention of long-term planning. Additionally, the custom of not selecting officials from the Minnan led to most officials

from other provinces being unfamiliar with the Minnan dialect, creating severe communication barriers (Zheng, 2016).

**Indirect Rule Relying on Petty Officials:** The language and cultural barriers forced the government to depend on clerks and interpreters familiar with local affairs. These grassroots personnel often engaged in corruption, abused power, and misinterpreted laws due to their monopolistic information position, creating a detrimental issue of "bureaucratic parasites" that fundamentally distorted the relationship between the government and the people. This administrative system further weakened the Qing court's governance capabilities in Taiwan. Additionally, the discipline of stationed troops was lax, serving merely as a monitoring force rather than a protective one (Hsu, 1993; Shepherd, 1993); tax policies prioritized revenue collection and were often accompanied by extortion and exorbitant charges (Wang, 1994). As a result, the Minnan migrant community generally felt a loss of voice and deprivation of basic rights in their interactions with the authorities. This political sense of powerlessness and abandonment, stemming from institutional exclusion, accumulated over time and ultimately became a critical catalyst for large-scale social conflict (Zheng, 2016).

### ***Structural consequences: Institutional vacuum and fragmentation of authority***

The passive governance of the Qing court led to two interrelated disastrous outcomes at the social level in Taiwan: "institutional vacuum" and "fragmentation of authority." The former refers to the dysfunction and hollowing out of formal legal systems and official authority within grassroots society. Due to governance failures, the state was unable to effectively provide public safety, judicial arbitration, or resource allocation. When disputes or conflicts arose in the community, there were no reliable institutional channels for resolution. The latter describes a scenario in which, in the absence of national authority, social power became dispersed among countless grassroots organizations tied by geography and kinship, such as the Zhangzhou gang, Quanzhou gang, and Hakka gang. Based on their "classification consciousness," these groups often resorted to violent means (i.e., "factional conflicts") to defend their own interests in resource competitions (Zheng, 2024; Zhao, 2015). As Shepherd (1993) argues, the Qing court's passive governance policies created an institutional vacuum in Taiwan. The absence of official authority forced society to rely on private relief, leading to self-organization and competition based on geographical and blood ties, which inevitably exacerbated factional conflicts (Chen, 1994). Furthermore, the increasing fragmentation of informal authority eroded the state's ability to establish a unified order, making the institutional vacuum a structural norm. In this vicious cycle, the Qing court's governance incapacity compounded with the primal contradictions of Minnan migrant society, collectively plunging Taiwan into a state of "disordered competition," which was marked by large-scale civil upheaval and social unrest.

### ***From structure to psychology: The solidification of marginal personality and social unrest***

Under the structural pressures of "institutional vacuum" and "fragmentation of authority," the "marginal personality" traits that had initially formed among Minnan migrants in their homeland were not alleviated by migration; rather, they were further solidified and intensified in their new land. A lethal connection was established here between what Stonequist (1937) distinguishes as "structural marginality" and

"psychological marginality." Prolonged exposure to a social structure marked by deprivation of rights and uncertainty about the future led to the internalization of feelings of alienation, anxiety, and insecurity among the migrants, creating a stable, anxiety-laden psychological structure, as noted by Kerckhoff and McCormick (1955). This psychological state drove their behavioral patterns along a clear trajectory, transitioning from initial passive endurance to what Scott (1985) defines as passive resistance (such as tax evasion and avoidance of government authority), ultimately escalating into active and vehement resistance when conditions permitted.

The cycle of civil unrest in Qing-era Taiwan, characterized by "small uprisings every three years and major revolts every five years" (e.g., the events of Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun), reflects the collective explosion of this psychological mechanism. These events were not merely about resource competition; they represented desperate attempts by marginalized groups to break through structural constraints with violent means to gain social recognition and identity dignity (Chen, 1994). Many resisters deliberately emphasized their ethnic or ancestral identity during the process, illustrating how marginal situations intensified and politicized the boundaries of group identity. The governance model of the Qing court was not a neutral background but rather an active mechanism of structural exclusion. Through the principle of "non-intervention," it deprived Minnan migrants of the possibility of achieving "positive uncertainty" (such as safety, justice, and opportunities for development), leaving them mired in "passive uncertainty" for an extended period. This state ultimately solidified their marginal personalities and guided the entire society toward a historical fate marked by continuous turmoil.

### ***Internalization and response to marginality: Identity dilemmas and the logic of resistance***

This section aims to delve into a micro-level exploration of how Minnan immigrants in the Qing Dynasty internalized their macro-structural marginal positions, transforming them into specific psychological traits and identity patterns. These transformations ultimately manifested as a range of social behaviors, from passive adaptation to active resistance. This forms a complete chain that progresses from "structure" through "psychology" to "action," with the core motivation being the fundamental pursuit of "certainty" and "recognition" by individuals.

### ***The struggle for identity: Dual alienation and the generation of hybridity***

Migration places Minnan immigrants in a precarious position regarding their identity, leading to profound experiences of "dual alienation." On one hand, their geographical and cultural ties to their native Minnan weaken due to migration, rendering them "detached." On the other hand, in their new land of Taiwan, they are often regarded as "outsiders" due to institutional exclusion and cultural differences, making it challenging to attain a complete sense of belonging and acknowledgment of their rights (Wang, 2003). This situation of "falling through the cracks" prevents them from establishing a stable identity anchor from either side, creating continuous identity anxiety rooted in threats to their existential value and sense of identity, as described by Rollo May (May, 2015). This psychological state emblematic of the "marginal man" experience is portrayed by Stonequist (1937).

Postcolonial theory offers another perspective on this identity dilemma. As Hall (1990) points out, identity is not an essential existence but is instead in a perpetually unfinished state of "becoming." For Minnan immigrants in the Qing Dynasty, their identity is continually reshaped through ongoing dialogue and negotiation between their memories of their "hometown" and the realities of their "new land." This process also gives rise to the cultural hybridity described by Bhabha (1994). Simultaneously, Gilroy (1993) articulates a "double consciousness" that precisely describes this inner sense of tearing: they are both subjects within Han cultural discourse and marginalized "displaced people" outside the imperial center, simultaneously carrying two irreconcilable cultural perspectives and self-understandings. The outcome of this process is not merely a simple return to native identity or assimilation into the new environment; instead, it results in the formation of what Bhabha (1994) refers to as a "hybrid" identity. This identity is mixed and impure, shaped through struggles and negotiations in the cultural contact "borderlands." In Qing Dynasty Taiwan, this manifests concretely in immigrants rebuilding kinship organizations and religious practices from their hometowns while simultaneously developing social networks and behavioral norms that adapt to local survival (Chen, 1994). This hybrid identity is not only a product of structural pressures but also showcases the cultural agency of the Minnanese immigrant group, which creatively establishes spaces of belonging within the interstitial.

### ***Psychological mechanisms: Marginal personality and the internalization of uncertainty***

The long-term "dual alienation" and structural exclusion have been deeply internalized by the Minnanese immigrant community, resulting in a specific social-psychological trait referred to as "marginal personality." According to Stonequist (1937), this encompasses two interrelated aspects: "social structural marginality," which signifies their disadvantage in terms of objective social status, roles, and rights; and "psychological structural marginality," which reflects the internalized states of alienation, anxiety, and identity confusion stemming from these objective conditions. Kerckhoff and McCormick (1955) further validated this internalization mechanism linking marginal status to marginal personality. As defined by Mann (1958), "marginal personality essentially signifies a longing for something that cannot be attained." This assertion accurately captures the psychological reality of Minnan immigrants in the Qing Dynasty: they yearn for belonging, security, dignity, and development opportunities in both their home region and the new land. However, these basic needs remain unattainable due to institutional exclusion, rendering them typical "marginal men," as described by Stonequist (1937). This prevalent yet unfulfilled longing creates structural psychological pressures that, as noted by Hoffer (2002), provide a potential psychological foundation for large-scale social tumult (such as civil unrest).

Thus, this study introduces "uncertainty" and "anxiety theory" for deeper understanding. We interpret this prolonged state of "unattainable desires" within the fluidity described by Bauman (2006) as a form of "negative uncertainty" concerning an individual's fundamental existence. The Minnan immigrants, facing survival crises in their homeland, crossed the sea with the "Taiwan Dream" (a form of positive uncertainty), only to find themselves immersed in institutional exclusion, resource competition, and identity dilemmas in Taiwan, leading to a state of "negative uncertainty." When this negative expectation, involving survival, security, and dignity,

remains unresolved over the long term, it triggers enduring mental anxiety rooted in threats to existential value, as articulated by May (2015), ultimately solidifying into the marginal personality defined by Mann (1958). This personality trait then becomes a deep psychological engine driving their subsequent social behaviors.

### ***Genealogy of behavior: The display of agency from passive adaptation to active resistance***

Marginal personality does not solely lead to passive compliance; rather, it spurs diverse agency responses under structural pressures. Their behavioral patterns exhibit a clear "progressive genealogy," reflecting individuals' dynamic processes as they seek pathways out of despair (Kerckhoff and McCormick, 1955). In the early stages, or when the pressure is bearable, Minnan immigrants often adopt endurance strategies, engaging in low-level labor to sustain their livelihoods. Simultaneously, they develop what Scott (1985) refers to as "weapons of the weak," such as passive work resistance, tax evasion, and avoidance of governmental jurisdiction as everyday forms of resistance. More importantly, they reconstruct kinship networks, temples, and other civil organizations to create their own "small centers" outside official authority. This process serves as an expression of their quest for "indigenization" in Taiwanese society, as proposed, facilitating the attainment of urgently needed psychological security and social belonging.

As structural contradictions intensify and "negative uncertainty" peaks, the anxiety and despair inherent in the marginal personality, as described by Stonequist (1937), seek extreme release channels, driving individuals to engage in mass movements analyzed by Hoffer (2002). At this point, the behavioral patterns of "violent disputes" originating from their Minnan homeland are activated and magnified in an environment of "institutional vacuum." Thus, factional riots and large-scale uprisings (such as the Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun events) erupt. Though these behaviors may superficially appear as struggles for resources, they are fundamentally rooted in deep psychological mechanisms, whereby marginalized groups, driven by their "moral economy" (Scott, 1985) being trampled upon, attempt to break the shackles of long-standing "negative uncertainty" through the most extreme means, seeking political recognition, social dignity, and the certainty of identity (Hoffer, 2002). The historical cycles of "small rebellions every three years and large unrest every five years" manifest the periodic eruption of this social-psychological mechanism.

### **Conclusion**

This study employs "marginalization" as a theoretical lens to explore the historical experiences of Minnan immigrants who journeyed from their homeland to Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty. Through the examination of historical documents and the reconstruction of theoretical frameworks, it argues that the social turmoil in Taiwan during the Qing era was not merely a collection of sporadic events but rather a governance structure rooted in the empire's margins. This structure, through the internalization of the psychological marginalization of immigrants, ultimately manifests as a logical process of active social resistance. The findings of this study can be summarized in three interrelated aspects: (1) Dual Production and Cycle of Structural Marginalization. The marginalized situation of Minnan immigrants in the Qing Dynasty is a dynamic process that is continually "produced" and "reproduced." This process

arises from the dual effects of external institutional exclusion and internal social differentiation, creating a vicious cycle.

Externally, the Qing court's passive governance model of "administering Taiwan to guard against Taiwan" (e.g., the prohibition on crossing to Taiwan and the rotation system) solidified Taiwan as an administrative periphery of the empire. This institutional neglect led directly to a "vacuum of governance" at the grassroots level and bureaucratic corruption, causing the state apparatus not only to fail to provide order and justice but also to become a source of rights deprivation and injustice for Minnan immigrants. Internally, the social consciousness and conflict practices (e.g., armed conflicts between Zhangzhou and Quanzhou) based on geographical and kinship classifications from their homeland were transplanted to Taiwan. In this new competitive resource environment, these internal contradictions were not alleviated; rather, due to the absence of official authority, they were further exacerbated, leading to a "fragmentation of authority" within society. The interplay of these internal and external forces created an insurmountable structural dilemma in Qing Dynasty Taiwanese society, making "marginality" its most prominent social characteristic.

(2) From Context to Persona: Agency within Identity Dilemmas. This study finds that marginalization is by no means merely a passive fate. In the interstices of structural pressures, the Minnan immigrant community exhibited rich agency, responding in a clear "gradual" manner. The starting point of this agency process is the profound "dual alienation" experienced by immigrants between their "homeland society" and the "new land of Taiwan." They were unable to return to the social context of their homeland or attain a complete sense of belonging and recognition of rights in the new environment, resulting in persistent identity anxiety. To cope with this dilemma, their behavioral patterns evolved along the trajectory of "passive adaptation—passive resistance—active resistance." Passive adaptation manifested in enduring hardships and engaging in menial labor for survival. Passive resistance emerged in tax evasion, avoidance of government authorities, and the creation of psychological "small centers" that provided a sense of belonging through the reconstruction of clan organizations and folk beliefs. Active resistance culminated in joining secret societies, instigating uprisings, and engaging in violent group clashes. Thus, the uprisings involving Zhu Yigui, Lin Shuangwen, and Dai Chaochun were not merely about resource competition but represent collective actions by marginalized groups attempting to renegotiate their social positions and identity boundaries through violent means.

(3) Theoretical Reconstruction: A Dynamic Model from the Perspective of "Uncertainty". This study introduces the concept of "uncertainty" to deconstruct and reconstruct the notion of the "marginal man." We deconstruct the relatively static concept of "marginal personality" into a form of existential anxiety arising from an individual's prolonged state of "negative uncertainty." "Negative uncertainty" indicates that individuals have negative expectations regarding their fundamental existence (survival, safety, belonging, dignity), and this condition cannot be escaped in the long term. The "luohan jiao" (Buddhist foot) and participants in the rebellion in Qing Dynasty Taiwan exemplify this condition, as their "positive uncertainty," linked to their survival and dignity, was completely stripped away, entrenching them in long-term "negative uncertainty" and forming a historical example of a resistant marginal personality. This theoretical model provides a more dynamic and explanatory tool for understanding marginal experiences from historical to contemporary contexts.

### *Theoretical contributions and dialogue*

(1) Critique and Inheritance of Marginal Man Theory. The theory of the "marginal man," founded by sociologist Robert E. Park, aims to describe the psychological alienation and identity crisis of individuals in cultural hybrid zones. Park pointed out that a characteristic of marginal individuals is their "prolonged crisis period," which solidifies them into a stable personality type. Everett V. Stonequist further developed this concept, distinguishing between the dual aspects of "social structural marginality" and "psychological structural marginality," thereby providing a foundational framework for analyzing the objective and subjective dimensions of marginal situations.

While this framework offers initial tools for understanding the "dual alienation" of Qing Dynasty Minnan immigrants, its explanatory power has three fundamental limitations. First, it overly emphasizes cultural conflict as the sole source of marginality, neglecting non-cultural structural oppression and political-economic factors. Second, it lacks clarity in explaining how "marginal situations" specifically translate into the psychological intermediary mechanisms of "marginal personalities." Third, the theoretical presumptions regarding the experiences of marginal individuals being inevitably accompanied by high levels of disorderly behavior are challenged by subsequent empirical research. These limitations render the theory insufficient for addressing the complex historical contexts of Qing Dynasty Taiwan.

(2) Core Psychological Theory Contribution: Theoretical Reconstruction Centered on "Uncertainty". To overcome the aforementioned limitations, this study introduces the concept of "uncertainty" along with Rollo May's anxiety theory for critical reconstruction. From an existential perspective, uncertainty entails questioning elements regarding an individual's fundamental existence and is accompanied by anxiety. Rollo May differentiates anxiety into "normal anxiety" and "psychic anxiety," the latter stemming from prolonged, unresolved internal conflicts. Accordingly, this study redefines Robert E. Park's depiction of the "marginal personality" in a "long-term crisis" state as an individual experiencing a form of psychic anxiety due to prolonged exposure to "negative uncertainty." In this context, "negative uncertainty" refers to the sustained high likelihood of adverse outcomes related to fundamental aspects of existence (survival, safety, belonging, dignity) from which individuals cannot escape. For Qing Dynasty Minnan immigrants, the crisis of survival in their homeland and institutional exclusion upon arriving in Taiwan formed a continuous state of "negative uncertainty," ultimately solidifying their resistant marginal personality. A key theoretical advancement is the clear reconstruction of the conditional relationship between "marginal situations" and "marginal personalities." Kerckhoff and McCormick noted long ago that these two are not simply corresponding phenomena (Kerckhoff and McCormick, 1955). This study deconstructs "marginal situations" as scenarios in which individuals cannot obtain the "positive uncertainty" (hope and opportunities for the future) that a critical group can provide, whereas others within that group can access such conditions.

However, whether a marginal situation translates into a marginal personality depends on two key conditions: (1) whether the "positive uncertainty" that individuals cannot obtain is related to their fundamental existence; and (2) whether the state of "negative uncertainty" caused by this deficit remains unresolved over the long term. For instance, Lieutenant Dunbar in the film "Dances with Wolves" successfully managed uncertainty by shifting his identity object, thereby avoiding a marginal personality. In contrast, the "barefoot vagabonds" (luo han jiao) in Qing Dynasty Taiwan found themselves unable

to fulfill their fundamental needs for survival and dignity, becoming deeply entrenched in "negative uncertainty" and developing a typical resistant marginal personality. This model transforms static personality type descriptions into dynamic psychological processes based on "uncertainty management."

(3) Dialogue with Postcolonial Theory: From Cultural Conflict to Struggles for Recognition. The reconstructed theory of the marginal man resonates profoundly with postcolonial studies concerning identity recognition. Postcolonial theorists critique cultural purity and emphasize the fluidity and constructiveness of identity. Stuart Hall posits that identity is an ever-evolving state of "becoming" (Hall, 1990), accurately interpreting the dynamic identity formation of Minnan immigrants between their "homeland" and "new land." Paul Gilroy's concept of "double consciousness" sharply describes their inner sense of division between being imperial subjects and marginalized "displaced people." Homi K. Bhabha further reveals that identity is completed through power negotiations and struggles in cultural "boundary" zones. The "uncertainty" framework introduced in this study provides profound psychological motivation for the identity struggles occurring in these boundary areas. The uprisings and violent clashes in Qing Dynasty Taiwan were not merely cultural conflicts but extreme manifestations of marginalized groups seeking to overcome "recognition uncertainty" and fight for identity dignity. This reinforces the macro-critical perspectives on power and discourse in postcolonial theories, supported by micro-level psychological mechanisms.

In summary, this study has successfully performed a critical reconstruction of the classical marginal man theory by introducing the core concept of "uncertainty." This reconstruction elevates the theory from one that describes specific personality types in cultural hybrid zones to an integrative framework capable of dynamically analyzing "structural conditions-psychological mechanisms-social actions." This theoretical innovation provides a more precise interpretation of historical experiences and, through in-depth dialogue with contemporary theories, breaks down disciplinary barriers in historical research, demonstrating its continued relevance and interpretive vitality in understanding contemporary issues such as immigrant identity, digital identity, and cultural politics.

### ***Research limitations***

While this study elucidates the marginal experiences of Qing Dynasty Minnan immigrants through theoretical reconstruction and historical analysis, it remains subject to several methodological and empirical limitations due to research constraints and nature, necessitating further exploration and deepening in future studies:

First, there is a singular perspective and narrative bias in historical materials. This study primarily relies on official historical records, local gazetteers, and contemporary scholars' secondary literature, which inherently carry narratives reflecting imperial governance and Han-centric perspectives, resulting in structural biases in historical representation. Due to insufficient resources and space, the interactions of indigenous peoples and Hakka communities in forming their own marginal experiences and response strategies in relation to Minnan immigrants have not been adequately explored. Future research integrating these perspectives could help construct a more interactive and diverse historical landscape.

Second, while this study applies the "marginal man" theory, which originates from Western individual psychology and sociology, to the collective immigrant phenomenon in traditional Chinese society, it bridges theoretical gaps through the concept of

"uncertainty." However, the applicability of these concepts in Han social and cultural contexts, which emphasize family and communal ties, still faces interpretive tensions. The subtle differences between indigenous concepts such as "displaced people" and "sojourners" and the idea of "marginality" require further clarification and localization of theory.

Third, although this study focuses on the uprisings of Zhu Yigui and Lin Shuangwen as the central axis of analysis, effectively highlighting the behavioral consequences of marginal personalities in extreme situations, it may overemphasize "resistance" while neglecting marginalized groups that primarily adopt survival strategies of "silent compliance," "community cohesion," or "cultural adaptation." A comparative analysis of different response modes and their underlying psychological mechanisms requires supplementation and validation with a broader range of case studies.

Fourth, while this research notes the potential impact of Qing Dynasty marginal experiences on subsequent social psychology and identity politics, this conclusion is largely based on theoretical inference and macro-level observation, lacking robust empirical connections. Understanding how historical memory is transmitted and transformed across generations and how it concretely shapes contemporary Taiwan's ethnic relationships and identity discourse requires more detailed generational tracking and process analysis through historical sociology and political psychology approaches.

While this study achieves breakthroughs in theoretical construction, the aforementioned limitations also suggest that understanding historical marginal experiences remains an unfinished task, necessitating continued advancement in historical materials, methods, and perspectives.

### ***Suggestions***

Future research should transcend the Han-centered narrative by integrating diverse historical materials, such as indigenous contracts, Hakka documents, and church archives. Additionally, cross-ethnic comparisons should be conducted to parallel the pathways of marginalization and response logics of Minnan, Hakka, and indigenous groups, unveiling the overall fabric of Qing Dynasty society. Next, dialogue between the "marginal man" theory and local concepts like "displaced people" and "sojourners" should be encouraged to build a more contextually relevant analytical framework or to apply the historical model of "uncertainty" to contemporary online identity research. Furthermore, attention should be directed towards "atypical marginalized individuals" who achieve mobility through non-violent means such as commerce and education.

In terms of policy and practical implications: First, governance philosophy must shift from the Qing Dynasty's "passive prevention and control" logic to "inclusive integration." The core should involve recognizing the cultural identities and political participation rights of marginalized communities through institutional design, fundamentally eliminating the structural roots of their "uncertainty." Second, the logic of conflict resolution must recognize the psychological essence of "lack of recognition" underlying conflicts. Solutions should combine interest coordination with cultural restoration, utilizing symbolic rituals and social engineering to alleviate collective anxiety and rebuild social trust. Third, cultural education should move away from singular identity narratives, guiding students to confront the dynamic and hybrid historical identities shaped by marginal experiences. This transformation should cultivate resources for fostering social empathy and critical citizenship awareness, constructing a more inclusive civil society.

This research aims not only to elucidate history but also to provide profound historical insights and theoretical tools for understanding contemporary structural issues in Taiwan while exploring more inclusive future developmental pathways.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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