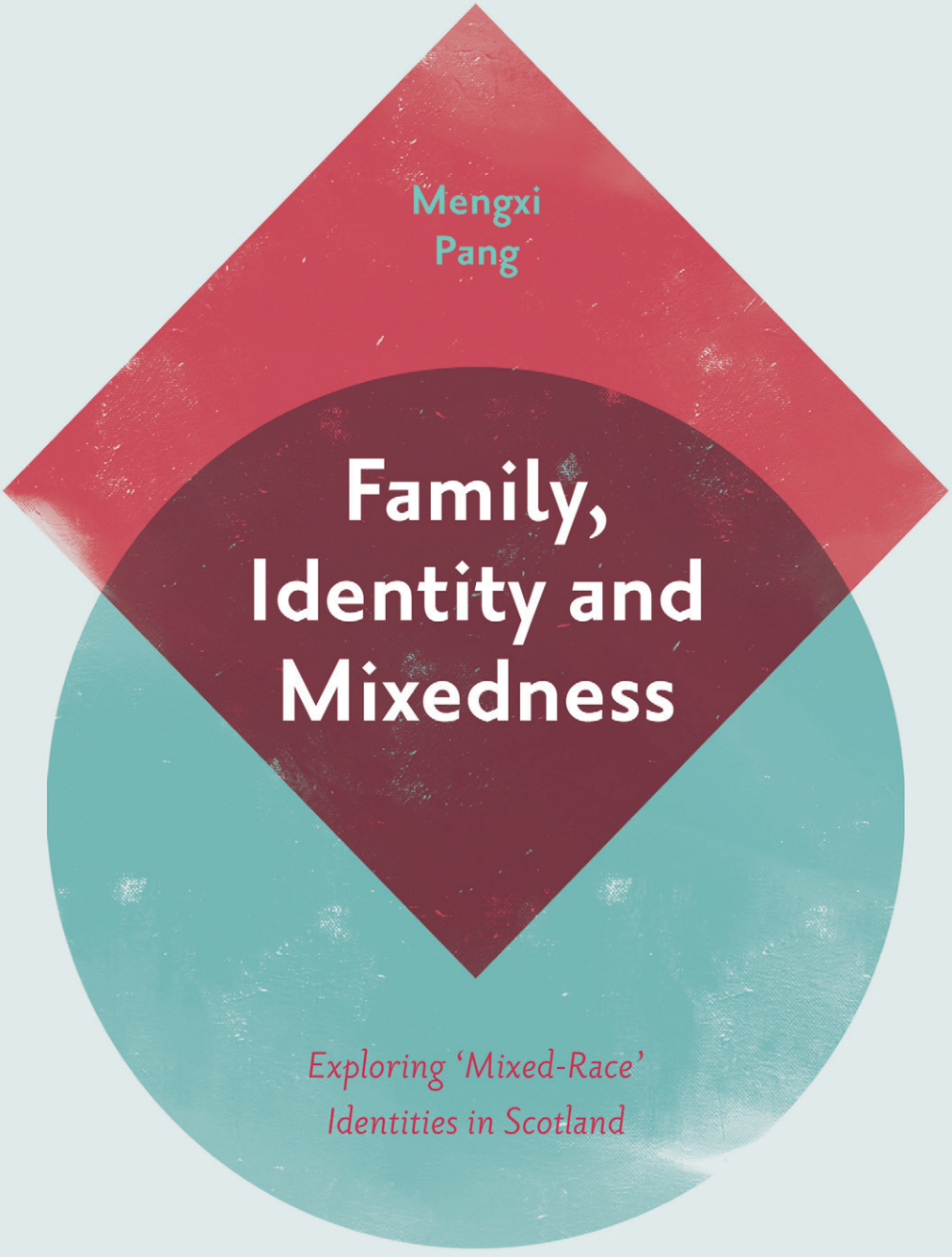

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Family, Identity and Mixedness: Exploring 'Mixed-Race' Identities in Scotland

BY

MENGXI PANG
Independent Researcher, UK

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my parents, Cao Ying and Pang Jinli

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This book is dedicated to Cao Feng and Cao Guangbin, whom I miss dearly, every day.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the early 2000s, my mother started working for a Danish FDI (foreign direct investment) company in China. The senior management team of this company was solely comprised of Danes who were sent directly from head office. Mostly male and single, these Danes were in China for only a few years as part of a process of job rotation. When they returned to Denmark, most of them were no longer single: often accompanied by their Chinese wives, some of them even had 'mixed-race' children. These Chinese-Danish families and their 'blond Chinese' babies frequently became topics of private conversations among Chinese staff. Rumours quickly spread about how local female staff 'strategically' become Danish wives to achieve upward mobility, and how 'cute and beautiful' mixed babies were as they were 'blended' with Chinese and Danish genes. Embodying an exotification of western culture and stereotypes of Chinese women who married out, these interracial families never failed to escape from office kitchen gossips. As the young Danes continued to arrive, so did the stories about Chinese brides marrying Danish grooms.

As I looked back at this 'micro' phenomenon in a Chinese seaside city, such obsession with mixedness is culturally embedded and reflects a wider interpretation of whiteness and its relations with power, advanced lifestyles and wealth. It reveals how 'non-Chinese races' was perceived by the host society where the overwhelming majority of populations were of the same monoracial background. I have been in the UK since 2010, during which time I met a few people who were born to a Chinese parent. Contrasting with what I witnessed back home, these mixed individuals did not seem to experience the same level of attention for their mixed heritage, nor were they aware of the fascination attached to 'mixed-race' in the Far East. In fact, one of them told me that she did not like to be called 'Chinese' because she could not relate to it.

Amazed by the different receptions of mixedness in different cultures and social contexts, I became intrigued about why mixedness should be desirable in one place yet not in the other. I was also curious about the multiple layers of meanings and perceived racial hierarchy played out during discussions about 'mixed-race'. I could not help thinking: Why do mixed families, as a contested site for public and private imaginations, continue to occupy a special space in society? Why do people from different societies hold different opinions about mixed-race people and their families? After all, if children and marriages are common practice in modern societies, why do people raise their eyebrows when 'race' comes into play?

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As someone who had grown up in a racially homogenous nation in the first 20 years of life and subsequently lived in the UK for almost a decade, I entered the study with a set of predisposed knowledge and beliefs of 'race'. Wary that 'our understanding of the racial order will forever remain unsatisfactory so long as we fail to turn our analytic gaze back upon ourselves' (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2011, p. 574), I noticed how my underlying presuppositions were constantly contested and renewed during the process of researching mixedness, at least through engaging with 'mixed-race' participants. Working with this fascinating yet lesser-known group opened up new doors to review my own position within the racial order, as well as the realisation that writing about 'race' is also a profoundly personal matter.

Whether it is in China, the UK or Scotland which is the focus of this book, how people react to mixed people is illuminative of how 'mixed-race' is perceived through the lens of national racial paradigms. The social, political and economic context of each locale yields a specific set of meanings and a hierarchy of mixedness that reflect underlying racial ideologies and normative assessment about boundaries. Following in the footsteps of many other Critical Mixed Race scholarly efforts, this book engages in the subject matter of 'mixed-race' by exploring 'mixed-race' identity against the unique social, political and cultural process, rather than simply seeing it as a category of analysis (Daniel, Kina, Dariotis, & Fojas, 2014). It probes multiple forces that inform mixed Scots experiences and seeks to illustrate how interracial families become a site of mitigating and transmitting ideological, cultural and social values. The focus of analysis is on the ways identities are lived out and practices by members who are, or associated with, mixed Scots.

Drawing on 31 in-depth interviews, this book stands as an attempt to explore the extent to which mixed Scots have the freedom in articulating their identities in ways they wish to. For mixed Scots, enacting a sense of self entails an active process of selecting and deploying language that is 'fit for purpose', which is limited by the extent to which Scottishness is truly an encompassing identity. It also involves an assessment of what symbolic and material resources are on offer and of what tactics are available to resist racial stigmas that underpin Scottish imaginations of otherness. Due to the unequal accesses and exposures to one's mixed heritage, there is a relative centrality of mixedness in one's construction of ethnic identity. This points to the formation of mixed identities as an embedded endeavour in a web of social relations, and the nature and strength of these connections inform one's racialised knowledge and beliefs that one uses to explain decisions concerning identity and belonging. Despite the relative centrality of mixedness, a high degree of racial consciousness and a range of techniques to manage identity have been identified. There is also a universal engagement to forge culturally embedded connections, whether it is by developing tactics of resistance or identifying a new community where they can 'tap in to and find belonging'. Set itself a goal that 'analyses, portrayals, and renderings of the racial consciousness and agency among racially mixed people' (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 18), this book unpacks how individual agency is exercised and constrained within racial boundaries and hierarchies.

As a whole, this book considers different strategies by mixed Scots to manage mixed identities and the shaping forces behind these divergent mixed identifications at two levels. Firstly, the book examines the accounts of mixed Scots and parents to explore how they talk about their identities, and how they activate, and are constrained by, what mixedness might mean in the Scottish context. Particular attention is paid to local interpretations of Scottishness to accommodate different interpretations of mixedness, as well as what techniques are used to draw out boundaries between 'us' from 'them'. Secondly, the book attends to the wider discursive schema surrounding 'race' and mixedness, exploring the ways different strands of raced discourses are featured in the construction of mixedness. Analysis at both levels enables linkage between the personal and the public, as well as between structural constraints and micro resistant tactics that one uses to resist and contest the negative connotations attached to racialised differences.

Accounting for 0.4% of total Scottish populations, only under 20,000 Scottish residents self-identified as 'multi-or mixed ethnicity' in the 2011 Scottish census. This number was far less than the 1.2 million mixed populations in England and Wales captured in the 2011 Census.[1] Meanwhile, there are no public statistics on interracial marriage in Scotland, whilst from the 2011 Census we know that 1 in 10 people living in England and Wales were in an interethnic relationship. The small number of self-identified mixed Scots and the largely invisible interracial families raise questions about the lived experience of mixed individuals and mixed family members, how they locate a sense of belonging and constitute a sense of self through 'relational, symbolic and material dimensions' (May, 2010), and how they navigate the racialisation process within the socio-cultural specificities of Scotland.

Setting the Scene

While the phenomenon of 'mixed-race' is not new, the concept nonetheless brings out 'the worst in people' (Parker & Song, 2001, p. 1), not least because of its colonial bearing and the disruption to the existing racial orders. A close examination of early images of 'mixed-race' people reveals that emerged from the broader context of colonialism and imperialism, mixed populations had long embodied the 'imperial sexual conquest and enslavement' (Parker & Song, 2001, p. 13). Seen as the offspring of intimate unions between members of different races, mixed populations provoke anxieties and resentments regarding the breaching of racial purity (Brah & Coombes, 2005), as well as bringing out fears over racial dilutions and a loss of white privilege (Furedi, 2001).

More recently, there has been a noticeable change of tone in describing mixed populations. Featuring a celebratory yet problematic tone, the new public discourse about mixedness uncritically praises a sense of hybridity (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). Perhaps more worryingly, this interpretation of mixedness indicates a sense

[1]A comprehensive discussion on 'mixed-race' in Scotland and socio-political specificities surrounding Scottishness can be found in Chapter 2.

of contemporary progressiveness, which ignores the unequal power relations and complex racial hierarchies within the 'mixing' of intimate relationships (Brah & Coombes, 2005). The very existence of mixed people becomes the embodiment of transgressive power and boundary-crossing (Parker & Song, 2001), celebrated as a bridge between cultural, ethnic and racial boundaries. Situated in the broader discursive context, such popular imaginations are perpetuated by the media and neoliberal political agendas, through which a multicultural, even post-racial, society that celebrates colour-blindness is projected for imagination.

A socially constructed idea invented to divide human populations to ensure social control (Solomos & Back, 1996), 'race' has become an ever more divisive force in society. In the spring of 2020, the global Coronavirus pandemic brought this systemic racism and structural inequalities to the fore by exposing the long-standing racial prejudice and the devastating impact of racial ideologies. As a book about identity and 'mixed-race' in a culturally complex and interconnected world, this work asks difficult questions about the importance of mixedness, colourism and stigma, examining how the thorny topic of 'race' is handled in the very intimate surrounding of family. It sets out to address two issues central to understanding 'mixed-race' identities: How do mixed people generate meanings for identities within normative discourses? How can we make sense of various types of identity claims, and use them to better understand the working of 'race'?

The Global Debate and the Scottish Story

Across national contexts, multiple strands of understanding and interpretations of 'race' and ethnicity pose challenges to produce a holistic summary of 'mixed-race' experiences or to carry out direct comparisons. Whilst intermarriage has become increasingly common, mixed partnerships and their offspring are still perceived with stereotypes as a result of historical, political, demographic and cultural variations in some nations or regions (Osanami Törngren et al., 2019). During this process, the perception of meanings and significance of mixedness is conditioned by racial ideologies and norms. Unequal lived experiences of mixed populations are interwoven with histories of classification, representations of mixedness and changing policy frameworks in diverse nation-states (Rocha, Fozdar, Acedera, & Yeoh, 2019). As Childs (2018) puts it, 'in every context, there is a hierarchy of mixedness, both in terms of intimacy and identity' (p. 380).

Globally, King-O'Riain et al. (2014) compare nations of long-established and publicly visible groups of mixed populations, such as South Africa, Brazil and the Caribbean, with countries with newer populations of mixedness, such as Britain, the US and Canada. It is observed that due to the countries' colonial histories, mixed people in the former countries tend to highlight their heritage and carve themselves a distinctive social position with privileges over non-white people; on the contrary, mixing commonly found in 'younger' countries tend to involve more voluntary, cosmopolitan unions (King-O'Riain et al., 2014). The power relations operated in each context are intertwined with colonialism,

colourism and different ways of racialisation. Complementing the global 'mixed-race' map by studying mixed populations in Asia and Australasia, Rocha et al. (2019) observe that narratives and understandings of mixedness have developed in different ways depending on state frameworks and cultural formations, varying from established named identities such as Eurasians in Singapore to forbidden mixes such as mixed Aboriginal/white children in Australia. Their research highlights the role of historical circumstances that account for diverse experiences of mixedness, foregrounding the interplay between 'national stories of migration, indigeneity, diaspora, colonialism and nation-building' (Rocha et al., 2019, p. 290).

In developing a conceptual framework of mixedness, Osanami Törngren, Irastorza and Rodríguez-Garcí (2019) contend that both individual circumstances (such as place of birth, visible differences, religious affiliations, transnational ties and socio-economic status) and contextual circumstance (such as ethnoracial composition, history of migration, political structure and societal attitudes) should be taken into account when interpreting mixed experiences across different contexts and nations. In assessing factors affecting the formation of mixed identities, these individual and contextual circumstances, as well as the ongoing racialisation process under socio-political specificities, continue to shape interpretations of the hierarchy of 'race' and culture in different word settings.

Some of the earliest sociological studies on mixed populations were conducted by American sociologists. Orientated by the race relations paradigm, the 'marginal man' theory by Robert Park (1928) viewed mixed people as a consequence of human migrations. These 'marginal men' were considered to be on the margin of two cultures and two worlds, facing all challenges with this marginal status. Stonequist (1935) continued this theme of enquiry and argued that the mixed populations were simultaneously placed between two racial groups, leaving them in an ambivalent and often conflicting state of a divided self as they were unlikely to be accepted as white. The 'marginal man' thesis, which considered mixed people to be culturally unfit, worked hand in hand with the historical 'one-drop' rule of hypodescent, which requires a person of any degree of minority background to identify as a member of that minority (Davis, 1991), in order to prevent multiracial Americans from identifying as white and from having access to the same privileges and rights as the white populations (Burke & Kao, 2013; Osanami Törngren et al., 2019). Defining the scopes of contemporary 'mixed-race' studies, American multiracial literature mirrors a context-specific interest in how historically constructed racialised groups articulate identification-determining factors reflected from censuses and surveys (Brunsma, 2005). Associated features include a quantitatively driven tendency and a focus on the patterns and outcomes of multiracial identifications, as well as being constrained by methodological challenges concerning the definition and measurement of studied populations (Harris & Sim, 2002).

In comparison, the British 'mixed-race' scholarship places greater emphasis on the temporal and spatial specificities. Characterised by uneven social distances between white and minority groups, British society has seen different

modes of interaction between ethnicities in which connections are forged (Back, 1996). In particular, the British preoccupation with 'mixed-race' is imbued with a colonial legacy, where ethnic minority populations have been subject to various forms of racialisation usually from the perspective of the colonisers. Wilson (1984) notes that both popular and private languages of ethnicity employ a range of ethnic labels, such as skin colour (e.g. 'brown'), territory (e.g. 'West Indies'), culture and nationality (e.g. 'Indian') to describe the non-white populations migrating to Britain from the former British Empire. Marked by a perceptible apprehension about directly employing 'race' as an analytical category, the British approach reflects the ambiguity and complexity of racialised classifications. Over recent decades, the new patterns of immigration, for instance, the arrival of EU migrants following EU accession, and the increase in international students, contribute to the ever-evolving ethnic landscapes and more diverse pattern of interracial partnering as a result (Aspinall & Song, 2013).

When I started exploring literature on 'mixed-race', it struck me how little was known about the 'mixed-race' populations in Scotland. Compared with England, especially the Midlands and the Greater London area where most existing studies were conducted, Scotland remains a less-well-known site of sociological interests in terms of 'mixed-race' experiences. As to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Scotland with its relatively monolithic ethnic makeup offers a unique case study. Despite sharing a colonial history as part of the United Kingdom and its one-time British Empire, Scotland's demographic structure and history of migration are distinct from other parts of the UK (Bond, 2020). It has not experienced a large wave of migration and settlement of non-white migrants occurred within a wider historical context of net emigration that characterises Scotland before the twenty-first century, which contributes to a less racialised social and political structure, and an idea that immigration is necessary for the future social and economic health of Scotland (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008).

Related to the historical context is a set of political discourses surrounding Scottishness which are characterised by progressiveness and fairness, that everyone who arrives and lives in Scotland can be Scottish (The Scottish Government, 2019). This civic nationalism, however, has been criticised as being political rhetoric for celebrating an inclusive belonging, whereas the real complexities of racialisation and its relationship to belonging in Scotland remains an under-acknowledged subject (Hunter & Meer, 2018; Meer, 2015). This is true as the book is about to reveal that there is a clear gap between the elite political discourse and the everyday imagination of Scottishness.

Researching mixed experiences problematises routes into Scottishness and challenges the 'openness' of the national identity in practice. The nation's ethnoracial composition and the popular imagination of discernible characteristics condition how authenticity, identifications and misidentifications are interpreted and resisted in the context of identity construction. Putting the spotlight on Scotland acknowledges the ever-changing sociodemographic pattern in Scotland, but it also helps obtain a more comprehensive picture about differences of

being 'mixed-race' in different nations within the British Isles, showing the working of national racial ideologies and paradigms on the lived experiences of mixed people.

The Terminology

Terminological choices for mixedness have always been part of ongoing debates in the field, not least because of their implications on the existence of a 'pure race'. Based on a guideline on the use of language in writing about race and ethnicity published by the British Sociological Association (BSA), using quotation marks help explain the mixing of cultures defined by racial difference, as well as acknowledging the racial discourse that privileges the notion of essential races (BSA, n.d.). Indeed, the term 'mixed-race' mirrors a stronger emphasis on 'race' and power struggles. It evokes the historical legacy of interracial unions and domination, inviting thinking on unequal power relations and hierarchy produced in the history of colonial encounters (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

In this book, 'mixed-race' is chosen as the main term to describe individuals who are born to parents from two socially distinctive racial groups. The term is used interchangeably with the words mixedness and mixed. Surrounded by inverted commas, this terminological choice reflects this book's effort to problematise the idea of racial mixture and essentialise races, as well as rejecting the taken-for-granted usage when employed without quotations marks. Perhaps more crucially, 'mixed-race' captures how the notion bears and reflects the significance of 'race' and the process of racialisation in given contexts when compared with 'neutral' alternatives such as 'mixed parentage' or 'dual heritage'. Moreover, 'mixed-race' is reported to be one of the most widely used terms by mixed communities as a self-descriptor (Parker & Song, 2001; Aspinall, 2009). Being mindful of the tension between theory and practice, the terminological choices acknowledge contextual interpretations of 'race' in both private and public realms.

Under the Same Roof: Family, 'Race' and Inequalities

Family relationships hold a central position in understanding identity (Lawler, 2014). Studying family is crucial because it is a primary site where early social interactions take place. Children come to learn about the self and the world through interactions with parents and families. For many, there is a sense of belonging, of being related, and of being protected associated with the notion of family. Sociologists of family relationships conceive the connections between family and identity to be embedded in everyday family activities: identity is revealed through 'the doing of family relationship and the understanding of kin groups and one's place within them' (Finch & Mason, 2000, p. 5). Family relationships form feelings of relatedness through the ideas of biology and inheritance, such as kinship ties and ancestry, which mixed individuals can use to configure their narratives and feelings towards their positions across the colour lines (Tyler, 2005).

The emphasis on everyday family activities draws attention to the notion of family practice. According to Morgan (1999), the concept concerns how family members actively interpret and organise family lives as informed by social, cultural and individual/personal biographies. He further defines key features of family practices, which include

> …an emphasis on the active or "doing", a sense of the everyday, a sense of the regular, a sense of fluidity or fuzziness and a linking of history and biography.
>
> (Morgan, 2011, p. 175)

This concept serves as a useful tool to analyse the connection between 'race' and family relationships, as it reveals how family members come to reach certain decisions as to whether and how the topics of 'race' and mixedness are handled at home. The focus on the ideas of fluidity, process and the doing of a family requires attention to the situational and contextual nature of parenting, as well as parents' biographies, including how they came to enter a mixed relationship and others' reactions towards such a decision. The role of social actors in making sense of their social world and producing meanings for what they understand as 'family' should also be a focus of analysis (Chambers, 2012; Finch, 2007). Telling family stories is part of 'doing' family, as it reveals how individuals employ agency in making sense of being a member of mixed families, analysing the rationales and motives behind these activities.

In addition to a primary site for individuals to develop self-understanding, the family is also a major conduit for reproducing race, class and gender inequalities (Collins, 1998; Solomos & Collins, 2010). Qualitative sociologists have long been exploring the role of structural constraints in shaping family dynamics, especially social class (see, e.g. Gillies, 2005; Perrier, 2013; Vincent & Ball, 2007). From a quantitative perspective, research across both sides of the Atlantic shows that for mixed individuals, racial identification is correlated with family socioeconomic status, social context and gender (see Burke & Kao, 2001; Panico & Nazroo, 2011). While the stratifications based on assumed racial differences continue to shape family resources and to structure how family activities are organised, family members develop strategies to reconfigure and resist these constraints (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & HordgeFreeman, 2010; Solomos & Collins, 2010). 'Mixed-race' families become an interesting case for study, as the racial boundaries and hierarchy are contested, reproduced and transformed in this family setting (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006).

In a society where racial divisions are becoming ever more pervasive a better understanding is needed in order to explore how 'race' is communicated and lived out in everyday family practices. Existing scholarship that attends to the intersection of 'race' and family relationships has been largely centred on white families, and among the few that has not there is a preoccupation of kinship networks and social capital by migrants (see Chamberlain, 1999; Goulbourne & Solomos, 2003; Reynolds & Zontini, 2006). While there have been increasingly more studies looking at the intersection of family and 'race' (see Byrne, 2006;