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Acculturation, self-efficacy and social support among Chinese immigrants in Northern Ireland

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ABSTRACT

An opportunity sample of 108 Chinese participants ($n_{\text{male}} = 51$ and $n_{\text{female}} = 57$; $M_{\text{age}} = 29.34$) was compared to a second opportunity sample of 98 Northern Irish participants ($n_{\text{male}} = 45$ and $n_{\text{female}} = 53$; $M_{\text{age}} = 23.67$) on levels of acculturation, self-efficacy and social support. The administered questionnaire contained three scales to measure the aforementioned constructs. The first was the AMAS-NIC, a version of the Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale [Zea, M. C., Asner-Self, K. K., Birman, D., & Buki, L. P. (2003). The Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale: Empirical validation with two Latino/Latina samples. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 9, 107–126] modified to apply to a population of Chinese immigrants in Northern Ireland. The second measure was Mary Wegner's 1992 English version of the General Self-Efficacy Scale [Wright, S., Johnston, M., & Weinman, J. (1995). *Measures in health psychology portfolio*. UK: Windsor]. The third was the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) whose items emerged through a semi-structured interview and was designed to measure levels of received and sought social support. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the extent to which previous findings concerning acculturation can be generalised to a Chinese immigrant population in Northern Ireland, a country characterised by segregation. *T*-tests, correlation analyses and a hierarchical regression initially provided support for the generalisability of previous studies on the health benefits of integration as a preferred acculturation strategy [Berry, J. W. (2008). Globalisation and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, 328–336], but further interpretation of the results brought to light the shortcomings of this model in the context of a segregated society and the inapplicability of the GSES measure within a collectivistic immigrant population. The limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research are made.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Previous research

Acculturation is the process whereby an individual or group undergoes behavioural and psychological changes as a consequence of extended contact with another culture (Matsudaira, 2006; Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003). Berry (2005, 2008) identifies four different strategies for acculturation, each associated with characteristic psychological and

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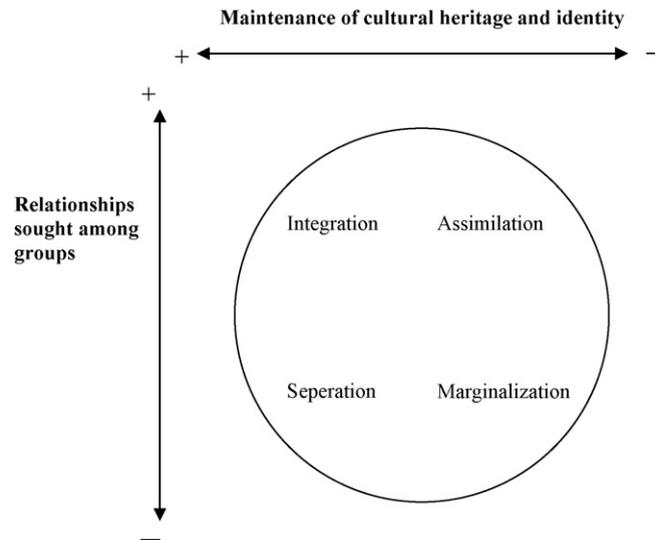


Fig. 1. Diagram of Berry's (2008) four acculturation strategies.

behavioural processes and consequences. The strategies are marginalisation, separation, assimilation and integration. The orthogonal dimensions defining these acculturation strategies are, as depicted in Fig. 1, attitudes toward contact with the native society, and maintenance of the original culture and identity (Berry, 2008). Marginalisation is the consequence of an individual or group forsaking their cultural heritage but also failing to partake in the native society. Illiterate refugees are prone to this strategy as they become sceptical after experiencing the failures of both their old and new countries, and lack the benefits of literature which could help them both to retain their original culture and to learn of the new one (Elmeroth, 2003). Separation is the strategy utilised by those who wish to preserve their cultural heritage and avoid interaction with the dominant cultural group. This is prevalent for example among adult immigrants in Sweden where a poor knowledge of Swedish after a seven-year residency in the country has been identified as an indicator of separation behaviour correlating with low mental health (Bayard-Burfield, Sundquist, & Johansson, 2001). Assimilation is the strategy of replacing one's original customs and culture with those of the mainstream society. This is often evident among youth who have been found to show low support for family engagements and a preference for native peers (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Ghuman, 2002). The final strategy, integration, is characterised by the maintenance of an ethnic cultural heritage coupled with a desire for regular interaction with the larger social network. A current example of integration is offered by the Vietnamese in Ireland. A recent ethnographic article described how their cultural heritage of building shrines has been incorporated into the Western tradition of valuing scholastic achievement. Photos of graduations and award ceremonies, adjacent to the more traditional alters for their ancestors, resemble modern shrines in the homes of the Vietnamese-Irish (Maguire & Saris, 2007). According to Berry et al. (2006), integration as an acculturation strategy is correlated with the best sociocultural and psychological adaptation outcomes. Contrarily, marginalisation is associated with the highest levels of psychological distress. Both separation and assimilation correlate with moderate levels of stress and adaptation.

According to the most recent census, taken in 2001, the Chinese constitute the largest ethnic minority in Northern Ireland representing 0.25% of the total population which at the time constituted 1 689 300 inhabitants (NISRA, 2001, 2007). Despite this, research into the well-being and acculturation of Chinese in Northern Irish society is negligible. Extensive research has been conducted by Ghuman (1994, 2003) concerning the acculturation of South-Asian youth in Britain and Canada. The generalisability of these studies to this current research, however, should not be taken for granted. South Asians differ considerably from Chinese Asians in numerous respects such as history, religion and culture. A second factor to consider is that due to the limited age range of the participants, the acculturation preferences of the general immigrant population are not represented. Finally, Northern Ireland provides an idiosyncratic context due to its unique conflict history. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants actively maintain distinct identities through, for example, separate housing and education schemes (Campbell, Cairns & Mallett, 2004). Previous studies of acculturation have not been conducted in a country where intercultural conflict and segregation as a functional coping mechanism have been so prevalent among the host population.

The purpose of this study is therefore to test the applicability of previous research concerning acculturation and integration on a sample of Chinese immigrants living in Northern Ireland, a country characterised by segregation and intergroup conflict.

1.2. Hypotheses

Samers (1998) describes acculturation processes as bilinear and multifactorial, drawing attention to the fact that they are evident in a diversity of cultural and social experiences. In accord with this description, Zea et al. (2003) acculturation scale

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