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ANALYZING FACTORS THAT IMPACT ACCULTURATION PROCESSES OF IMMIGRANT RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Existing literature suggests that immigrant residents' acculturation process is affected by both internal and external factors that are in conflict with those of the host culture. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that affect the acculturation of immigrant population living in transnational communities in China. Data collection included more than 80H of community participatory observation and 50 interviews in total. Respondents were 50 immigrant residents living in transnational communities in Yiwu, China. The analysis finds that the individual factors including gender, culture identity, and timing of their immigration, Chinese language proficiency, personal goals and expectations have a significant impact on the acculturation of immigrant residents. Meanwhile, social factors such as community support, social support, values of residents also have a significant impact on the acculturation of immigrants. The findings represent an in-depth consideration of the acculturation process of the immigrant residents and can therefore be seen as an important step in developing an understanding of the influencing factors that characterize the acculturation of immigrant population in China.

KEYWORDS: transnational community, immigrants, acculturation, influencing factors

INTRODUCTION

Immigration is the result of global flow and internationalization. When the immigrants arrive in a new country, they encounter totally different cultural environment and may face various acculturation problems. Factors that influence acculturation outcomes may differ according to immigrants' social relations and their antecedent variables¹². Antecedent variables, such as gender, age, language proficiency, religion, cross-cultural experience, length of residence and cultural identity play an

1 Cappellini, B., Yen, D.A., 2013. Little emperors in the UK: acculturation and food over time. *J. Bus. Res.* 66, 968–974.

2 Cleveland, M., Chang, W., 2009. Migration and materialism: the roles of ethnic identity, religiosity, and generation. *J. Bus. Res.* 62, 963–971

important role in influencing the acculturation process³. Social relations such as friends, relatives, colleagues are strong influencing factors affecting acculturation process.

These factors include individual differences such as gender, age, and cross-cultural experience, as well as external factors such as cultural differences, living habits, environmental changes and changes in social support networks. However, due to the complexity of the issue of acculturation, the current academic research on its influencing factors has not been concluded. Therefore, reviewing the factors that influence the acculturation of immigrants and find out the influencing factors and the mechanism of acculturation can help immigrants to accelerate their acculturation process and promote the harmony and stability of the transnational community.

1. CONCEPT DEFINITION

1.1 Transnational Community

Transnational community refers to a community within a certain geographical scope, based on a certain number of foreigners in the community, at the same time, the organization system, supporting facilities, public service system, working and living environment in the community tends to international standards, inclusive of different cultures, beliefs, and different lifestyles. The elements of transnational community mainly include population, region, environment, system, and culture. At present, in most cities of China, communities with more than 20% foreigners are identified as "transnational communities"⁴

1.2 Immigrants

The History of Chinese Immigration defines immigrants as "migrants with certain distance who have lived in their destination for a certain period of time"⁵. Some scholars define immigrant as foreign resident living in China for three months or more (including stateless persons), but does not include travel, tourism or short-term stay foreigners in Chinese territory, or visiting friends or relatives, transit, religious worship, businessmen for short-term business activities without the personnel of residence purpose"⁶. According to the definition of immigrants in China's sixth census, it refers to foreigners who come to live or work in the local area for more than 3 months (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan). Therefore, immigrants are defined as foreigners who have resided in China for more than three months (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan regions), and those who have no residence purpose, such as visiting relatives and friends, transit farming, religious worship, and conducting short-term business activities.

³ Penaloza, L., 1994b. Border crossings: a critical ethnographic exploration of the consumer acculturation of Mexican immigrants. *J. Consum. Res.* 21, 32–54.

⁴ Niu Zhongjun. The Construction of International Communities in Beijing from the Cultural Perspective -- Taking the Development of Maizidian and Wangjing Communities as an Example [A]. Capital University of Economics and Business, Beijing Federation of Social Sciences. 2011(09).

⁵ Ge Jianxiong, et al. *History of Chinese Immigration (Volume 1)*. Fuzhou: Fujian People's Publishing House, 1997:10.

⁶ Luo Gang. Investigation and Research on Illegal Immigration in Ethnic Border Areas in Yunnan and Its Governance -- A Case Study of Hekou Yao Autonomous County in China-Vietnam Border [D]. Yunnan: Yunnan University, 2011

2. METHOD

Data collection included more than 80H of community participatory observation and 50 interviews aged 16-57 years in total. Participants were 50 immigrant residents living in transnational communities in Yiwu, China. Participants' acculturation process led to an altered developmental path, including their beliefs about gender, cultural identities, and how they balanced and integrated Chinese culture into their existing understandings and cultural awareness. Conditions that impacted the acculturation process include length of residence in China, Chinese language proficiency, personal goals and expectations, the contexts of reception, education, the residential Community, the perceived value of original cultural maintenance vs. the value of adopting certain Chinese traits, and experiences of prejudice and discrimination vs. new future opportunities.

3. Personal Factors Impacting on the Acculturation of Immigrants in Transnational Communities

Acculturation is greatly influenced by a series of individual factors relevant to immigration and factors related to the culture of origin and the host culture, as well as the interaction of these factors. Successful acculturation requires multiculturalism, inclusive group identification, no established inter-group conflicts, and low level of prejudice, that is, a seemingly ideal culture that welcomes immigrant residents and accept harmonious members of the host country.

3.1 Influence of Gender, Age and Language Proficiency on Acculturation

In the case of gender, it was found that acculturation of male immigrants is better than that of female immigrants. Age has no direct effect on the acculturation of immigrants. Regarding language proficiency, our results showed that Chinese language proficiency has a certain influence on the acculturation of immigrants, but it is not as significant as we thought. Chinese proficiency is directly associated with immigrants' capacity to interact with locals. This result is consistent with the prior acculturation research, suggesting that language proficiency is a key in acculturation outcomes⁷⁸⁹¹⁰. In particular, in a sample of expatriates from Asian countries, those who were fluent in Chinese did even better than those who could read and write Chinese. The acculturation of immigrants who can only communicate in daily Chinese is slightly worse than that of immigrants who can communicate

7 Berry, J. W. Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2005,29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>

8 Lou, N. M., & Noels, K. A. Breaking the vicious cycle of language anxiety: Growth language mindsets improve lower-competence ESL students' intercultural interactions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 2020, 61, Article 101847. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101847>

9 Swami, V., Arteché, A., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Furnham, A. Sociocultural adjustment among sojourning Malaysian students in Britain: A replication and path analytic extension. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 2010, 45, 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-009-0042-4>

10 Van Niejenhuis, C., Otten, S., & Flache, A. Sojourners' second language learning and integration. The moderating effect of multicultural personality traits. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2018, 63, 68–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.01.001>

fluently in Chinese. Some immigrant residents face problems in forming interpersonal relationships and assimilating to the community since they are good at neither Chinese nor English language.

3.2 Influence of National Identity on Acculturation

Regarding national identity, it was found to be positively linked to acculturation to Chinese culture. In prior research, national identity is considered a predictor of acculturation¹¹¹².

National identity is also a predictor of acculturation outcomes and is important in understanding the intercultural experiences of immigrant residents in China. National identity refers to the sense of belonging as a member to a particular country as well as feeling a bond with its common lifestyle or characteristics¹³¹⁴. By comparing the acculturation of different cultural groups, we find that the degree of acculturation of immigrants from European and American countries is better than that of immigrants from Arab and African countries. As can be seen from the results of the satisfaction evaluation of immigrants on the social and cultural environment of their communities, among all the surveyed groups, immigrants from European and American countries have the highest satisfaction on various indicators. This again proves that the acculturation of European and American countries of immigrants in the international community in better condition.

3.3 Influence of Length of Residence in China on Acculturation

Our study found that the duration of stay in China can significantly predict acculturation of immigrant residents. The acculturation level of immigrant residents varies with the length of their stay in China. The acculturation status of immigrant residents living in China for 1-3 years is worse than that of immigrant residents living in China for less than one year. The results of this study partially validate the U curve theory of acculturation. Some researchers believe that immigrant residents are faced with enormous work and life challenges including language problems, daily life problems and interpersonal problems. These complicated affairs aggravate the psychological pressure and insecurity of immigrant residents when they first arrive in the host country, making this period of living in China for 1-3 years (inclusive) the most serious stage of adaptation problems. However, the acculturation level of immigrant residents will be gradually improved when their life is properly arranged, and stable communication relationships are established.

11 Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>

12 Vedder, P., & Virta, E. (2005). Language, ethnic identity, and the adaptation of Turkish immigrant youth in the Netherlands and Sweden. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(3), 317–337. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.05.006>

13 Kim, H. S. Cultural identity, acculturation, and mental health of immigrant youths--review study for Canada's immigrant youth population. *Journal of Korean Academy of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 2006, 15(4), 384–391.

14 Lee, H. J., & Kang, H. A. A study on the cultural identity, acculturation patterns and psychological adjustment of children in international marriage families. *Korean Journal of Child Studies*, 2011, 32(4), 147–166.

3.4 Influence of Individual Goals and Expectations on Acculturation

In our survey, we found that immigrants who come to China with a clear purpose can participate in the local social and cultural life with a positive attitude, and their community acculturation level is high. Many of the immigrants came to China to do business, experience Chinese culture and learn the Chinese language. For them, they hope to learn and experience Chinese culture as much as possible, make local friends, and expand their international vision. Immigrants who choose to come to China for this purpose usually have high acculturation level. In daily life, they tend to take a positive attitude to get used to Chinese food, weather, public environment, and so on. In terms of interpersonal communication, they will actively make local friends and conduct cross-cultural contact and communication with local friends. In this process, their acculturation capacity has been greatly improved.

3.5 Influence of Individual Perception of China on Acculturation

Some immigrants knew little or nothing about China before their arrival. They get to know China through various media, which has a great impact on their expectations before they come to China. Some immigrants have learned Chinese culture in their home countries and come into contact with some information about China, so they have high expectations of Chinese society. After they come to China, they face the reality but have a great loss, which will affect their acculturation in the transnational community. Western media's negative perception of China makes those immigrants to have very low expectations of life and work in China. However, when they come to China, they find that the living conditions in China are far beyond their expectations; hence their acculturation level is relatively high.

To sum up, the acculturation level of immigrants in transnational communities presents great differences. Individual factors, such as gender, cultural group, residence time in China, Chinese language level, personal purpose, and expectation, have significant impact on the acculturation of immigrant residents.

4. Influence of Social Factors on the Acculturation of Immigrants in Transnational Communities

4.1 Influence of the Transnational Community on acculturation

It is clear from the study that the group that feels the best acculturation in the cultural environment of the international community is not the immigrants from the Asian countries closest to China, but the immigrants from the European and American countries with far cultural distance. Social and environmental factors, especially community support, play an important role.

This paper studies the relationship between the degree of local immigrants' acceptance of immigrants and the acculturation of immigrants by using the Bogdaas social distance index. The results show that immigrants from countries where local immigrants feel good and stereotypes are positive have the highest degree of acculturation in the community, receive the most social support, and have the highest enthusiasm to participate in the cultural life of the community. Immigrants from African countries that

are unfamiliar with local immigrants and have bad stereotypes have poor acculturation in their communities. Some immigrants even feel discriminated against and lack community support. Therefore, they adopt avoidance strategies and have low enthusiasm to participate in the social and cultural life of the community.

4.2 Influence of Social Support on Acculturation

Social support factors related to the acculturation of immigrant residents are family support, friend support, and neighbor support, which constitute a vital driving force for the acculturation of the immigrant residents. These prior studies suggest that the social support from family, friends, and neighbors is a predictor of acculturation outcomes¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷. The three groups of friends provide different kinds of social support for immigrant residents. Previous studies have documented that social support from local residents is conducive to acculturation since it provides resources necessary for integrating into the new environment and interacting with residents of the host community [18][19]. Sim, Lee, and Park²⁰ analyzed the influence of social support such as family support, friend support, and neighbourhood support of multicultural families. Consequently, it was identified that the higher the level of social support, the higher the degree of acculturation among multicultural immigrants²¹²². Although the social networks from compatriots play an important role, close interaction with compatriots can hinder their contact with the local residents. The survey shows that the social circle of most immigrants is relatively narrow and more concentrated in the circle of compatriots in their own country, foreign friends, and friends with common interests. Many ex-pats say it is easy to get to know local residents but hard to become true friends. Most of the communication between immigrants and local residents is mainly for work reasons, and there is not much communication outside work. In addition, most of the daily communication involves life-related topics, and few of them can become

¹⁵ Kashima, E. S., & Loh, E. International students' acculturation: Effects of international, conational, and local ties and need for closure. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, **2006**, 30, 471–485.

¹⁶ Wilson, J., Ward, C., & Fischer, R. Beyond culture learning theory: What can personal tell us about cultural competence? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, **2013**, 44, 900–927.

¹⁷ Bochner, S., McLeod, B. M., & Lin, A. Friendship patterns of overseas students: A functional model. *International Journal of Psychology*, **1977**, 12, 277–294.

[18] Bochner, S., McLeod, B. M., & Lin, A. (1977). Friendship patterns of overseas students: A functional model. *International Journal of Psychology*, 12, 277–294.

[19] Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 281–295

²⁰ Sim, M. Y., Lee, D. N., & Park, J. O. (2013). A study of the effect of social support on school adaptation among children from multicultural families: Focused on mediating of bicultural adaptation. *Journal of School Social Work*, 25, 233–254

²¹ Ng, T. K., Rochelle, T. L., Shardlow, S. M., & Ng, S. H. (2014). A transnational bicultural place model of cultural selves and psychological citizenship: The case of Chinese immigrants in Britain. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 40, 440–450.

²² Adelman, M. B., Parks, M. R., & Albrecht, T. L. (1987). Beyond close relationships: Support in weak ties. In T. L. Albrecht, & M. B. Adelman (Eds.), *Communicating social support* (pp. 126–147). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

friends. In addition, some friendship between immigrants and the natives break up due to cultural dispute and misunderstanding.

4.3 Influence of Values on Acculturation

China has an ancient civilization with a long history and culture of five thousand years. In its long history, it has accumulated stable cultural regulations and social systems. These common codes of conduct and values of Chinese people form the traditional cultural values of China. China is a country with high collectivism and masculinity. In Chinese culture, collectivism, tradition, affection, authority, and restraint are emphasized. For most immigrants, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about China and its cities or communities before their arrival. Further, they usually have little social knowledge of China's history, politics, economy, and culture. They have not received relevant cross-cultural training when they first arrived in China. Their understanding of Chinese society and culture depends on their contacts and feelings, which, to some extent, deepens the difficulty of their acculturation.

The differences in cultural values further affect their intercultural communication ability in China, leading to their intercultural communication barriers. In the process of communicating with local immigrants, some confusion or misunderstanding will occur, forming certain fixed views or stereotypes, which easily leads to misunderstanding. When immigrant residents think that local residents in the community seldom initiate conversation with them, they may think that local residents keep distance because they don't like them; when local residents are used to euphemistically expressing their ideas, immigrants tend to speak too directly and cause misunderstanding between the two sides. This difference also causes obstacles to the communication between immigrants and local residents.

4.4 Influence of Other Factors on Acculturation

The current study also found that the political and economic status, economic and trade relations with China, historical relations, and culture of origin all affect the acculturation level of immigrant residents. Acculturation can also be influenced by self-esteem. According to a study on Mexican immigrants, the negative impact of discrimination was very rare when ethnic self-identity, sense of belonging to the host culture, and self-esteem were strong²³. In addition, adolescents with higher self-concept, more active in interpersonal relationships, and more open to other cultures seem to accept Korean culture better than their counterpart. In the survey, some immigrant residents reflected that local resident in the community "lack of public morality" or no "public awareness".

To sum up, social factors such as community support, ways of social networks, differences in values, economic and political status of home countries, and cultural quality of local immigrants have a significant impact on the acculturation of immigrants.

²³ Brown, C. S., & Chu, H. (2012). Discrimination, ethnic identity, and academic outcomes of Mexican immigrant children: The importance of school context. *Child Development*, 83(5), 1477–1485.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Acculturation of immigrants is influenced by different factors. In terms of individual factors, Chinese language level, immigration purpose and expectation have an important impact on the acculturation of immigrant residents. In terms of social factors, immigrant residents can get support and help from the community. Moreover, the scope of social networks and the difference between the traditional values of local immigrants and those of foreigners exert a great constraint on acculturation. Therefore, it is more conducive to acculturation to guide the mutual communication and help between foreigners and local immigrants and to build a social network of both sides.

In conclusion, among these factors, Chinese proficiency, the establishment and development of social networks, and the difference of values are the most important ones, which are also the main factors that can be adjusted and improved. In addition, this study has certain limitations. Future studies can consider whether the occupation of foreigners and local social customs and taboos are also significant factors affecting the acculturation of immigrant residents, which is worth exploring and pursuing.

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