

Brief Report: Reconsideration of Acculturative Experiences Among Chinese Immigrants

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Although adolescent immigrants often acculturate into the mainstream culture at a faster rate and to a greater extent than adult immigrants, studies of first generation immigrants have overlooked the experiences of the “1.5-generation,” those who immigrate before or during their teen years. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between generation level and acculturation among Chinese immigrants. The sample consisted of 112 Chinese American adults who were recruited from the local Chinese community in Los Angeles County. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and the Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale. The result from a one-way analysis of variance indicated that 1.5-generation Chinese Americans reported a significantly higher level of acculturation towards the European-American culture than first-generation Chinese Americans. The linear multiple regression results indicated that the two independent variables—age of the immigrants and their acculturation towards European-American culture—collectively and significantly explained more than 40% of the variance of acculturation towards the European-American culture. This study demonstrated that 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants reported critical differences in their acculturative experiences compared with first-generation Chinese immigrants. Taken together, these results highlight the importance of considering 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants or their age at their time of immigration in the measures of acculturation in future studies. Limitations of this research are also discussed.

An increasing number of studies in the past decade have shown that “first-generation American” is an oversimplified category for capturing the acculturative experiences of all immigrants (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Hao & Woo, 2012; Kim & Sakamoto, 2010). Young immigrants often acculturate to the mainstream culture at a faster rate and a higher level of immersion than adult immigrants because of their exposure to school settings and the media in American society (Wu & Chao, 2005). However, many studies have overlooked the experiences of the 1.5-generation (Huer, Saenz, & Doan, 2001; Hurh, 1990; Kim, Brenner, Liang, & Asay, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 1998) by grouping the 1.5-generation with first-generation immigrants (Chan, Hamamura, & Janschewitz, 2013; Kennedy, Parhar, Samra, & Gorzalka, 2005). This overgeneralization of generational status can potentially minimize or distort the experiences of the 1.5-generation group, and hence disaggregated data by specific generation groups are critical to shed light on their unique experiences of acculturation.

Acculturation

Acculturation is commonly defined as the process by which new immigrants attain the cultural characteristics of the dominant cultural group (Hwang & Wood, 2008). Acculturation was initially assumed to be a

straight-line and linear process whereby individuals surrendered their cultures of origin as they acculturated to new cultures (Gordon, 1964). This assumption is referred to as a unidimensional model in which higher acculturation represents an increased adherence and adjustment to the mainstream culture while endorsement of native culture is either a rejection or less acceptance of the new culture (Shen, & Takeuchi, 2001).

Later researchers found this assumption of linearity problematic and suggested that acculturation models should allow for the existence of individuals who are immersed in their culture of origin as well as in mainstream culture. Discussing Asian American populations in particular, for example, Berry (1980) conceptualized acculturation in four forms: (a) *assimilation*, which involves abandoning one’s culture of origin in order to adhere to the majority culture; (b) *integration*, which involves a bicultural process of maintaining one’s native culture and adapting to the mainstream culture; (c) *rejection*, which may result from segregation and which involves isolation from the mainstream culture; and (d) *deculturation*, which involves a loss of identity ties to either cultural group. This bidimensional model hypothesizes an independent relationship between acculturation and enculturation. Indeed, recent studies have consistently suggested that acculturation is not a linear process and that there are multidimensional components to the acculturation process (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Multidimensional models reveal the process of ac-

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culturation as a complex practice in which cultural identities can coexist with the mainstream culture.

Immigrants, unavoidably exposed to two or more cultures, must adapt to cultural differences in terms of language, traditions, values, and other culturally related domains (Berry, 1997), and Asian immigrants may enculturate to their culture of origin, to mainstream U.S. culture, and to Asian American culture simultaneously (Chung, Kim, & Abreu, 2004). Given the diversity of behavioral and attitudinal directions between different cultures regarding the process of acculturation, proponents of multidimensional models argue that acculturation should be viewed as a multifaceted and dynamic process that cannot be captured linearly. In a literature review of quantitative empirical research on acculturation and enculturation published over the past 22 years, Yoon, Langrehr, and Ong (2011) found that the unidimensional conceptualization has been the most commonly used model for understanding acculturation, regardless of its limitations, but that an increasing number of researchers have used dimensional or multidimensional models since 2005, suggesting that the trend is shifting away from unidimensional models.

The 1.5-generation Asian Americans

The term 1.5-generation refers to individuals who immigrated to the destination country before adolescence. This term has been used to specifically describe Asian Americans who immigrated to the United States before age 13 (Kim et al., 2003; Lee, 2001; Shin & Alba, 2009). Compared to the first-generation who immigrated as adults and second-generation who were born in the United States, 1.5-generation Asian Americans were born outside of the United States but immigrate before 12 years of age and spend a significant period of developmental years in the host society.

Because of their exposure to U.S. culture at an earlier age compared to adult immigrants, 1.5-generation individuals potentially encounter distinct adjustment and acculturative experiences in comparison to other generations (Hurh, 1990). In particular, 1.5-generation individuals may have a higher level of immersion to the mainstream culture compared to the first-generation and/or higher immersion to their cultures of origin compared to the second-generation. For exam-

ple, Huer, Saenz, and Doan (2001) studied a group of Vietnamese American immigrants and found that 1.5-generation participants had significantly higher level of acculturation than the first-generations. Kim, Brenner, Liang, and Asay (2003) conducted a focus group with 10 1.5-generation Asian American participants and found that the participants reported feeling identified with both the U.S. and Asian cultures, that some participants reported experiences of racism, and that the English language barrier was a significant challenge for them when they first immigrated. Park (1999), for example, in his qualitative interview study of 1.5-generation Korean Americans, found that the study's participants from this generation experienced frustration and anger owing to feeling rejected by their family members and discriminated against by mainstream society. Simultaneously, the same participants reported that, since they are familiar with both Korean and mainstream cultures, they can connect with people from either culture. In comparison to 1.5 generation Korean Americans, first-generation Korean Americans operate more proficiently in Korean culture, and second-generation Korean Americans function better in U.S. culture. Consistent with these findings, Hurh (1990) found that 1.5-generation individuals possess a high level of socialization both to mainstream U.S. culture and their culture of origin.

While some 1.5-generation Chinese Americans are able to adjust to the mainstream society and maintain connection with their home culture, others may experience different emotional disturbances from the friction between the two cultures and historical traumas. Lee (2001) conducted a qualitative study comparing 1.5-generation and second-generation of Hmong Americans. The findings indicated that 1.5-generation Hmong Americans experience more feelings of isolation and discrimination, language barriers, acculturative stress from the new mainstream culture, and the stress from their parents' efforts to restrain them from being "American." Furthermore, 1.5-generation Hmong Americans may suffer from intergenerational traumas from the Laotian Civil War (Secret War in Laos), which result in secondary traumatic stress disorder symptoms and exclusion from the mainstream society (Lee & Clarke, 2013). 1.5-generation Asian Americans can also expe-

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rience a sense of a loss of their families and friends, and they find themselves caught in a tension between preserving their bond to their country of origin and maneuvering under the pressure to adjust to the new country. Moreover, 1.5-generation Asian Americans tend to suffer from stress-related difficulties, trouble communicating with their parents, and the added social pressure of managing racial discrimination (Sunmin et al., 2009). Their specific acculturative stressors can result in depressive symptoms, poor mental health, and substance use (Mossakowski, 2003).

Despite the numerous studies that have examined the 1.5-generation in various Asian subgroups, there is virtually no literature investigating the unique experiences of 1.5-generation Chinese Americans. Chinese culture and the mainstream American culture possess notable cultural differences (Fang & Wark, 1998). Within traditional Chinese culture, people ascribe high value to collective identity, family obligation, harmony, and group interdependence (Fang & Wark, 1998). These values stand in contrast to western individualistic cultural values of autonomy, competition, primacy of personal goals over group goals, and emotional independence (Fang & Wark, 1998; Triandis, 1995). Family conflict often arises because members of different generations expect conformity to their norms despite discrepancies in the cultural values among generations (Wu & Chao, 2005). Due to these differences, acculturation theorists propose that Chinese immigrants tend to experience acculturative stress and identity struggles because of these clashing cultural values (Juang & Cookston, 2009).

For adult immigrants to the U.S., there is the option to stay in local Chinese communities and retain their connections with their culture of origin. Suarez-Orozco and Qin (2006) point out that many Chinese immigrant parents are often more removed from American culture than their children, particularly if they work in Chinese cultural settings. Further, adult immigrants have more resources to travel to their country of origin, maintain connections with family and friends abroad, and immerse themselves in the culture of their first country through mass media.

In contrast, it is inevitable for adolescent immigrants to have regular contact with teachers and peers at school and to become immersed in the mainstream

culture in terms of language, food, values, and other domains, while mass media and friends further prompt them to adapt to a new social environment by adopting the values of the mainstream culture (Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2009). In this way, adolescent immigrants tend to assimilate or acculturate in a more rapid and consistent manner and adhere to the values of the new culture more closely than adult immigrants, who have more opportunities to retain their traditional cultural values and practices (Uba, 1994), especially when they live in areas populated with Chinese residents, such as Los Angeles and New York. Although young Chinese immigrants are more likely to adopt norms of mainstream American culture than those of their culture of origin, they are simultaneously and continually exposed to and learn Chinese cultural values through interactions with their family members (Wu & Chao, 2005). These adolescent immigrants are likely to understand and appreciate both mainstream and Chinese cultural norms and continuously immerse themselves in both cultures.

Although discrepancies of experiences between generations indicate the possibility of intergroup variability of acculturation within this “first-generation” group, no study to date has focused on Chinese Americans using a community sample. Due to this very reason, the main objective of our study is to answer a research question: are there significant differences in the level of acculturation between 1.5-generation and first-generation immigrants. Specifically, our study focuses on acculturation towards the mainstream European American culture and enculturation, which is defined as the level of immersion to the Chinese culture of origin. Moreover, most studies of acculturation among Chinese Americans have relied on online surveys. Therefore, this project involves the collection of data from a community sample in order to gather information from Chinese Americans who use the internet infrequently or do not have Internet access. Our general hypothesis was that first-generation immigrants would report a higher level of enculturation towards the Chinese culture of their origin and 1.5-generation immigrants would report a higher level of acculturation towards the mainstream European American culture. Method

Method

Participants

The participants were 112 Chinese American immigrants (M age = 37.9, age range: 18–66; 42.9% males and 57.1% females) who agreed to take part in the study. Participants immigrated after 13 years of age were classified as first-generation and participants who immigrated before 13 years of age were classified as 1.5-generation. Of the participants, 60.7% were first-generation immigrants with an average age of 25.82 years (SD = 10.09, range: 13–40) and 39.3% were 1.5-generation immigrants with an average age of 9.02 years (SD = 3.34, range: 1–12). All participants self-identified as Chinese Americans who were born outside of the United States. Approximately 61.6% of participants were born in the People's Republic of China, 24.1% were from Hong Kong, and 14.3% were from Taiwan. All measurements were translated in traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese using back translation. For living situations prior to immigration, there were 22 participants who reportedly resided in a country other than their country of origin before immigrating to the United States. A bivariate correlation was run between their years of residing in that country and each of the AAMAS scores, and none of the correlations were significant.

Measurement

Acculturation: In this study, I measured acculturation using the Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AAMAS). Chung, Kim, and Abreu (2004) have conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to validate the AAMAS and found that acculturation can be measured in the domains of cultural identity (i.e., values and attitudes), language (e.g., preference for a particular language), cultural knowledge (i.e., knowledge of history and customs), and food preference (i.e., preference for food). In addition to taking into consideration these four domains, the AAMAS has three unique characteristics. First, it measures the orthogonality of cultural dimensions, which is defined as the individual's independent immersion in different cultures and which indicates the level of cultural adherence to both the culture of origin and the mainstream

culture. Second, the AAMAS includes a pan-ethnic dimension to measure cultural adherence to Asian ethnic groups other than the group of origin. Third, it is applicable across multiple ethnicities because it uses the phrase "culture of origin" instead of listing particular countries or using a generic term, which makes it appropriate for many Asian ethnic groups.

The AAMAS scale consists of 15 items, one of which is worded in a reverse direction, that measure four domains of acculturation—cultural identity, language, cultural knowledge, and food preference—using a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from not very much to very much (Chung et al., 2004). In terms of the construct domains of acculturation measured by the 15 items, 10 items measure cultural behavior, three items measure cultural identity, and two items measure cultural knowledge. The AAMAS consists of three scales: (a) AAMAS culture of origin (AAMAS-CO), (b) AAMAS Asian American (AAMAS-AA), and (c) AAMAS European American (AAMAS-EA). The current Chinese version of this instrument has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, indicating that it is reliable. The AAMAS consists of three scales: (a) AAMAS culture of origin (AAMAS-CO), (b) AAMAS Asian American (AAMAS-AA), and (c) AAMAS European American (AAMAS-EA). Cronbach's alpha coefficients, or the reliability of each subscale are found to be 0.90 for the AAMAS-CO scale, 0.90 for the AAMAS-AA scale, and 0.92 for the AAMAS-EA scale.

Procedure

The author recruited participants in person in community settings including local restaurants and community centers in the cities of Alhambra and San Gabriel in Los Angeles County. These cities were chosen because they contained large populations of first-generation Chinese American residents, which helped to maximize sample size. After the author introduced the study, participants received a printout of the survey and a pen upon agreement to participate. The completed surveys were put in an envelope that was then sealed. Participants were given a chance to draw a lottery for a \$100 Target gift card as an incentive at the end of the study.

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Results

The general hypothesis was that first-generation immigrants would report a higher level of enculturation towards Chinese culture of their origin compared with 1.5 generation immigrants and that 1.5-generation immigrants would report a higher level of acculturation towards the mainstream European American culture compared with first-generation immigrants (See table 1). Results showed that there were statistically significant differences between generation levels and level of acculturation as measured by the mean of the AAMAS-EA as determined by one-way analysis of variance, $F(1, 17.17) = 18.22, p < .001$. In particular, 1.5-generation Chinese Americans ($M = 4.33, SD = 0.82$) reported a significantly higher level of acculturation towards the European American culture than first-generation Chinese Americans ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.05$). With a one-way ANOVA to examine the differences in enculturation towards the Chinese culture of origin among generation levels as measured by the mean of the AAMAS-CO, there was also a statistically significant difference. The first-generation Chinese Americans ($M = 5.02, SD = .75$) reported a significantly higher level of enculturation towards their Chinese culture of origin than 1.5-generation Chinese Americans ($M = 4.43, SD = .89$) at $p < 0.01$. Therefore, the main hypothesis was supported.

Several post hoc analyses also revealed significant results. Pearson correlations of the measured variables were obtained, and the results showed negative correlation between the age of immigration and level of acculturation as measured by the average composite score on the AAMAS ($r = -.459, p < .01$). Moreover, the age of immigration negatively

correlated with the subscale of acculturation toward Asian Americans ($r = -.369, p < .01$) and the subscale of acculturation toward European Americans ($r = -.542, p < .01$). In addition to the findings for the subscales, the level of enculturation toward Chinese cultures was found to be positively correlated with acculturation toward the generic Asian American culture ($r = .381, p < .01$). Additionally, level of acculturation toward the generic Asian American culture was found to be positively correlated with acculturation toward European American culture ($r = .527, p < .01$).

To further understand the relationships between the subscales and age of immigration, a multiple regression analysis was carried out to predict the values of acculturation towards European American culture by different independent variables. AAMAS-EA scores were regressed on acculturation scores towards Asian American culture and age of immigration. These two predictors accounted for more than 40% of the variance in test scores, $R^2 = .41$, which was significant, $F(2, 48.3) = 35.74, p < .001$. Particularly, acculturation towards Asian American culture ($\beta = .34, p < .001$) and age of immigration ($\beta = -.49, p < .001$) demonstrated significant effects on acculturation towards European American culture, respectively.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants reported critical differences in their acculturative experiences compared to first-generation Chinese immigrants. In contrast to the first-generation who immigrated as adults, the 1.5-generation immigrated at a young age, which

Table 1. *Analysis of Covariance by Generation on AAMAS Composite Scores (n = 112)*

Generation	Mean	SD	n	F	p value
1.0	3.53	1.05	68	17.7	<.001
1.5	4.33	0.82	44		

gave them greater exposure to American culture by attending school in the United States, interacting with peers from different cultural groups, and speaking English as a their primary language in daily life. Therefore, after spending their pre-teen years in Chi-

nese countries and then immigrating to the United States as adolescents, the 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants may share characteristics with both immigrants and the second-generation (Oh & Min, 2011).

Table 2. *Summary of Intercorrelations for Age of Immigration: Main Score and Scores on the Subscales of AAMAS*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. AAMAS	—				
2. AAMAS-CO	.50*	—			
3. AAMAS-EA	.62*	-.20	—		
4. AAMAS-AA	.82**	.38**	-.527**	—	
5. Age of immigration	-.46**	.28	-.542**	-.37**	—

Note. — = not applicable; AAMAS = Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale;

AAMAS-CO = Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale, Culture of Origin subscale; AAMAS-EA = Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale, European American subscale; AAMAS-AA = Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale, Asian American subscale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development may shed some light on explaining why the 1.5 generation is more similar to the second-generation than first-generation Chinese Americans. As one of the most widely used approaches to explain identity development, Erik Erikson's model views development as a lifelong process and describes specific experiences in each developmental stage. Although the original model was criticized for using mostly Caucasian males in the theory deduction (Josselson, 1989), a number of contemporary researchers and practitioners found that Erikson's model could be applied with diverse populations (e.g. Kropf & Greene, 2009; Yoon, 2011). According to Erikson's (1966) enculturation model, adolescents undergo enculturation by first entering the *identity versus role confusion* stage, in which they explore, experiment with, and develop their new values and identity through their relationships with peers and role models (Erikson, 1966). For minority adolescents, ethnic identity includes this subjective, choice-driven sense of belonging to a group or culture (Phinney, 1990). Particularly for 1.5-generation Asian Americans, the developmental task of acculturation may encompass a struggle between maintaining one's loyalty to the culture of origin and finding a sense of belonging within the host culture (Le & Stockdale, 2008). In other words, the adolescent period is a particularly crucial time for developing one's cultural identity by experimenting with and choosing from available cultural values.

After growing up in their native countries, the 1.5 generation starts their *identity vs. role* confusion stage in America. American culture provides them with a multifaceted level of experiences in which they may experiment with different identities, such as those of Chinese Americans, Asian Americans, and/or European Americans. The 1.5-generation may (a) have to adopt American values and beliefs, learn to speak English, and become accustomed to the American life style in order to manage school and interpersonal relationships; (b) maintain ties with their culture of origin through the local Chinese subculture (e.g., Chinatown, Chinese restaurants), their first-generation parents, and their family and friends in homeland; (c) be exposed to a new and unique Asian American identity, which encompasses a generic identity

of various Asian American subgroups. As a result, 1.5-generation individuals may enculturate and/or acculturate to any one of these identities simultaneously. Our project only illustrated that the 1.5 generation is more similar to the second generation than the first generation in terms of acculturation, but future research can examine the unique identity development of 1.5-generation Chinese Americans.

A question this study raised is whether the definition of first-generation Chinese American is an overgeneralized category that may overlook the distinct acculturative experiences within this subgroup. Some researchers may aggregate the 1.5 and the first generations together for methodological convenience (e.g., increasing their sample size in the analysis). However, this method does not warrant any theoretical or empirical reason (Oh & Min, 2011). This overgeneralization can minimize the differences on the degree of linguistic attainment, cultural adaptation, and other characteristics between the first generation and the 1.5-generation. Furthermore, categorizing the 1.5-generation as a distinct analytic category may also test the hypotheses from the assimilation theory (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). For example, several multicultural studies on adolescent immigrants have suggested that students who have a high level of acculturation tend to have higher levels of academic motivation and schooling compared to their counterparts (as cited in Oh & Min, 2011). As the 1.5 generation is likely to have bilingual and bicultural advantages compared to the first and second generations, these advantages may facilitate their academic achievements and even career development (Oh & Min, 2011). At the same time, other studies have suggested that the 1.5-generation experiences more acculturative stress than the first and second generations because they are in the middle of the conflicting values between two cultures and may feel rejected by both sides (Sunmin et al., 2009). Therefore, further studies should consider identifying the 1.5 generation as a distinct group in order to provide disaggregated data in order to demystify experiences of this particular subgroup.

Our findings also support the integrative idea that acculturation to the mainstream society is mutually exclusive to the endorsement of the native culture (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). The findings of this

study confirmed the multidimensional nature of acculturation in Chinese Americans that 1.5-generation Chinese Americans can simultaneously acculturate to mainstream U.S. culture and enculturate to their Chinese culture of origin. However, this study has several limitations. With regard to its external validity, a community sample recruited from several community settings may not be representative of all Chinese American adults of different ages, educational backgrounds, or geographic regions. There was also a sampling bias in that data was collected in Los Angeles, California, which is highly populated with Chinese Americans. Chinese Americans living in cities with different ethnic makeup may have a very different acculturative experience. For these reasons, applications of the findings to other Chinese American individuals warrant great caution. The small sample size ($N = 112$) further limits the generalizability of the findings.

Clinical Implications

As the main finding of this study indicates that 1.5- and first-generation Chinese Americans have different acculturative experiences, clinicians should not overgeneralize the identities and characteristics of each generation. Level of acculturation is an important factor in therapy because it can impact clients' values, beliefs, protective factors, family relationships, and many other important aspects in life. When working with Chinese immigrants, therapists can assess and raise their awareness of level of acculturation using the domains in AAMAS (cultural identity, language, cultural knowledge, and food preference). For example, some processing questions could be: How much do you identify with Chinese Americans? How proud do you feel about being Chinese American? How often do you hang out with friends who are Chinese Americans? Moreover, this study also suggests that age of immigration may be an estimation for level of acculturation.

From their experiences growing up in the United States, 1.5-generation Chinese Americans are exposed to many different cultures such as U.S. mainstream culture, Chinese American culture, Asian American cultures, and other subcultures. This immersion to multiple cultures during a developmental period may result in role confusion, identifica-

tion of one primary identity, or development of a multicultural identity. For example, a 1.5-generation Chinese American client may identify himself as "Asian American" instead of "Chinese" or "Chinese American." Therapists need to empathize with clients' possible identity struggles and the related role responsibilities in Chinese culture such as the familial expectations to take care of family members. Therapists can explore a client's sense of self from experiencing various cultures. Therapists may also need to provide psychoeducation on the process of acculturation and acculturation conflicts in order to normalize clients' feelings. Additionally, narrative therapy may be an effective tool in addressing acculturation and identity issues (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2000). In particular, therapists can use strength-based interventions to help clients understand the uniqueness of their cultural heritage, externalize the problem by naming and telling their story, and raise their awareness of their own identity development and confusion, thereby re-authoring conversations to help Chinese immigrants resolve their identity struggles.

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