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## Development and preliminary validation of an acculturation scale for China's rural to urban migrant children

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## ABSTRACT

The large-scale internal migration in China has provided an unparalleled scientific opportunity to study the conceptualization and measurement of adaptation processes among Chinese migrant youth. The present study aims to develop an acculturation instrument for Chinese children participating in the rural to urban migration. The newly developed acculturation scale was tested in a two-wave cross-sectional survey ( $N=301$  for phase 1 and  $N=1773$  for phase 2). The results suggested that the acculturation scale possessed adequate content and face validity as evaluated by expert panel and participants. Through exploratory factor analysis, the 20-item scale identified four theoretically supported factors: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. The internal consistency of the four subscales was found to be adequate. The criterion-related validity estimates using the life satisfaction scale and depressive symptoms supported the use and continued development of the acculturation scale.

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### Introduction

With the dual impacts of globalization and urbanization, internal migration from rural to urban regions has become a prominent phenomenon in developing countries across Asia, Africa, and South America (Gui, Berry, & Zheng, 2012; Jordan & Graham, 2012). China presents one of the most dramatic examples of economic growth and massive labor migration in human history (Roberts, 1997; Pong, 2015; Yoshikawa, Way, & Chen, 2012). In recent years, there have been approximately 227 million migrant workers relocated from central and western agricultural inland to eastern coastal processing centers for contract jobs in construction sites, factories, and service sectors. Children of migrant workers have reached close to 30 million, and represent a substantial segment of the urban population in China (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

In linking the large-scale migration to individual lives, social scientists have generally focused on the significance of migration on employment pattern and family income among adults. What has been less explored, however, is how such migratory experience is shaping youth development (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). Research has been particularly lacking on the conceptualization and measurement of Chinese migrant children's acculturation experience. Given the worrying trend of psychological wellbeing for children from migrant backgrounds, more research is urgently needed to understand their acculturation experience as well as strategies that are adopted to allow a successful integration into the society.

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The aim of the present study was to develop a culturally competent scale to measure the acculturation experience of Chinese migrant children. In specific, building upon Berry (1980; 1997; 2003)'s bi-dimensional acculturation theory, the study firstly constructed a scale that assesses four possible acculturation orientations. Second, it aimed to establish the reliability and validity of the acculturation scale for use with Chinese migrant children. It established the criterion-related validity by conducting regression analysis with four acculturation orientations predicting the subjective and mental health outcomes above and beyond the effects of socio-demographic variables.

### *Conceptualization of acculturation*

Migration is not simply a geographical relocation of people but encompasses a complex ecological transition that involves changes in various cultural, social and psychological perspectives of family and children (Aksel, Gün, Irmak, & Çengelci, 2007). At the individual level, psychological acculturation is often regarded as a multi-faceted construct that refers to the process by which individuals from one culture acquire, over time and through prolonged contact, the culture, and codes of behavior of another culture (Berry, 1980).

Psychological acculturation not only occurs when individuals or groups move from one country to another foreign country, but also within a single country when a group of people with different socio-cultural beliefs, identities and behaviors relocate to a new area. Increasing amount of research has noted that rural to urban migration induces acculturative change for people participating in the process (Gui et al., 2012; Ozer & Schwartz, 2016). As the experience of acculturation is culturally based, understanding the cultural context of migration is a pre-requisite to understanding the ways in which migrants acculturate into mainstream society (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Jibeen & Khalid, 2010). The large-scale internal migration in China offers an ideal context to investigate the acculturation experience of children participating in this process.

Regarding the theoretical formation of acculturation, one theoretical model of acculturation regards it to be one-dimensional and assumes that 'new' individuals will gradually assimilate into host culture and give up their adherence to their culture of origin (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). The conceptualization of acculturation in this model narrowly refers to the acquisition of dominant culture. However, this model fails to account for individuals who maintain loyalty to their own cultural background while actively adapt to the host culture.

### *Bi-dimensional conceptualization of acculturation*

The bi-dimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1980, 2010) is widely accepted because it recognizes that maintenance or rejection of one's original culture can coexist with adoption or rejection of the new culture. The combination of these two influences results in four possible orientations of acculturation. One orientation is that of *integration*, with which individuals show great interest in maintaining the original culture while also embracing the new host cultural identity. A second orientation is *assimilation*, with which individuals do not wish to maintain their original culture identity, and instead fully endorse the host culture. *Separation* is the third possible orientation and relates to individuals who hold firmly to their original culture and are unconcerned about adapting to the new culture. The fourth orientation is *marginalization*. This occurs when individuals hold a passive attitude and keep themselves apart from the host and original culture. The marginalized individuals often feel rejected or even being looked down upon by the host community and experience social isolation in the host culture (Kwong, 2011). It is important to note that some scholars raised concerns over the measurement validity of the "four-fold" paradigm. In particular, there are difficulties in conceptualizing 'marginalization,' as separate from 'cultural alienation', which results in poor psychological adjustment (e.g. Birman, Simon, Chan, & Tran, 2014; Birman & Simon, 2013; Rudmin, 2003, 2006).

Across the literature, the four acculturation orientations are found to have concurrent and prospective associations with multiple psychosocial and mental health indicators including self-esteem, hopefulness, life satisfaction, and depressive symptoms (Edwards & Lopez, 2006; López, Ehly, & García-Vázquez, 2002; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Suinn, 2010). For example, integration has been regarded as the most adaptive mode of acculturation by migrants and is positively associated with self-esteem (Lo, 2010; Rojas-Cifredo, 2011). Marginalization is found to be associated with the highest levels of depression and the lowest levels of self-esteem (Berry et al., 2006; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Gui et al., 2012). Assimilated individuals tend to report high levels of hope and resilience (Luna, 2013). In a recent meta-analysis with the immigrant sample in the U.S.A., the authors suggest that assimilation exhibits a more favorable relationship with mental health indicators (e.g. self-esteem and life satisfaction) than does separation (Yoon et al., 2013).

Acculturation is not a static process, but a process that takes place over time (Berry, 2003). The length of stay was found to be closely associated with acculturation (Shen & Takeuch, 2001). In the case of the second-generation immigrant children in 13 countries, it has been found that increased years of residence was positively associated with successful integration and psychosocial adaptation (Berry et al., 2006).

### *Domains of acculturation*

In addition to different dimensionalities, recent studies have suggested the importance of considering different life domains of acculturation. According to Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2004) and Birman et al. (2014), acculturation can be conceptualized as in public (education and employment) and private (social-emotional and value related) domain. The

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