The Pattern, Development and Changes of Migrants` Identity: Evidence from China

Throughout the world, factors such as globalization, dramatic social changes, increasing urbanization and poverty have all triggered expanding migration both within and between countries over the past decades, significantly resulting in complex intercultural contexts and challenges related to multiculturalism and social cohesion. In many developing countries, including China, large numbers of internal migrants are deemed to consider the integration of new identifications and further deal with deep intraindividual changes and conflicts because the need to integrate these new identities into their self is vital for social adaptation, a sense of trust in others, getting involved in the local community, and long-term well-being. However, few studies have carefully examined the internal cognitive mechanisms of identity integration within migrants, and even barely researches focus on how to manage multiple identities within a cohesive self-concept.

Past research heavily relied on assimilation as a default strategy for most newcomers and theorized that identity transformation was the result of shedding the heritage culture (deculturation) and adopting the host culture (acculturation). However, acculturation theorists advanced alternative adaptation strategies to explain other ways in which newcomers can adapt and their identities can be changed. For example, Berry's (1997) acculturation theory offers the integration strategy that has been associated with the retention of heritage culture and adoption of the host culture. Social psychologists have found that immigrants who employ the integration strategy can develop a bi/multicultural identity as a result of their acculturation experiences.

Moreover, Amiot et al. (2007) proposed a four-stage model of social identity development and integration in the self which addresses the issue of how multiple social identities develop and become integrated into individuals` self-concepts over time and to specify the processes through which these intraindividual changes take place. Based on this framework, together with classic theories such as identity theory, social identity theory, we construct a bidirectional and multidimensional framework to understand the patterns and developmental trajectory of changes in identities under intercultural

contexts by these migrants (Figure 1). As can be seen from Figure1, migrants` identification may be comprised of the overall identification labeled as “hybrid identity” and two sub-type identification labeled as “self-identity” and “social identity” (see figure 1). These three dimensions of identification are conceptually and empirically interrelated but not interchangeable. The processes in figure1 are hypothesized to apply to internal rural-urban migrants` identities in China and will be verified and discussed through quantitative and qualitative data in the following sections.

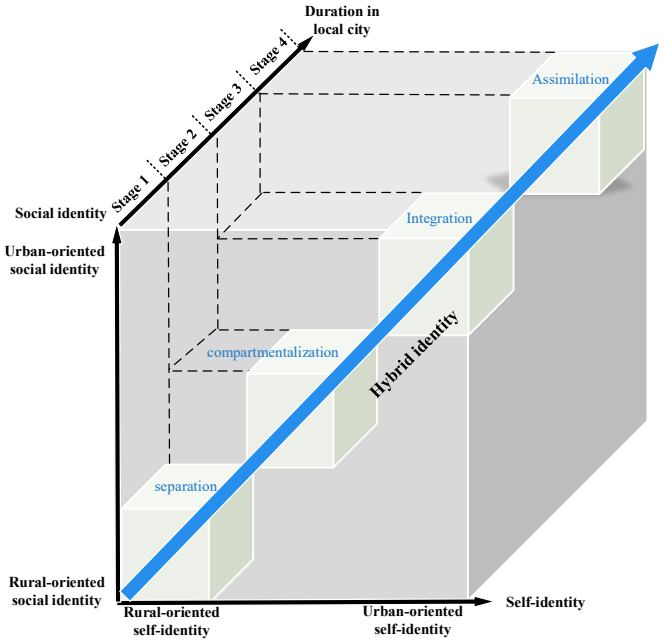

Figure 1. A bidirectional and multidimensional model of understanding stages of immigrants` identity development in multicultural contexts

In this study, we employed both quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative data for this study come from a survey of rural-urban migrants conducted by Xi`an Jiatong University, Shaanxi Normal University, and Sun Yat-sen University in 2016 in Guangzhou, China. Qualitative Data for this study come from a semi-structured in-depth interview of rural-urban migrants conducted by Xi`an Jiatong University from December 2022 to February 2023. Migrants` bidirectional identifications are operationalized by “urban identity” and “rural identity”. In each direction, the multidimensional identifications include “self-identity”, “social identity”, and “hybrid identity”. All analyses were conducted using Latent Class Analysis (LCA) in Mplus7.4. We used indicators such as AIC, ABIC, Entropy, LMR, and BLRT to identify the most

appropriate pattern of migrants in China (see Table1/1a/1b).

Using the data and latent class analysis, our study identified four categories for hybrid identity, together with five subtypes for self-identity and four subtypes for social identity, which provides partial support for Phinney`s four-category identification model. In this regard, we found a new category of hybrid identity, named "compartmentalized hybrid identity", which occurred between separation phase and integration phase. Besides, the marginalization category was not found in hybrid identity, but existent in self-identity. Although many researchers have used bivariate correlation to simultaneously assess individuals` multiple identities, the methodological strategy in our study could be particularly useful to identify simultaneous intraindividual identification with multiple groups.

Further, based on in-depth interviews, we proposed several developmental trajectories between new identity and the old one, and also found that the main reason leading to the similarities and differences between migrants` hybrid identity and its two sub-dimensional identities is that migrants have different views on self-identity change and social identity change. First, we found that as interviewees had different understandings of self-identity and social identity, the pattern and transformation of their hybrid identity largely varied.

"The transformation of self-identity is much easier than social identity. I moved here with my family, and have been here for a long time. I already regard myself as the local person, but I cannot be accustomed to local culture and values." (CSJ-SZ-02)

Second, we found that the transformation of migrants` self-identity lagged behind that of their social identity. Specifically, most migrants in our interviews expressed that they still considered themselves to be rural individuals instead of urban ones. Take some examples here:

"I always considered myself as a rural person and never to change my self-identity. It (my rural self-identity) is good, there is nothing bad about it." (ZSJ-SZ-02)

In conclusion, although internal migrants are quite different from international immigrants, a few studies had proposed that internal migrants were encountered with both original society and the host local society, leading to their acculturation being

bicultural. Drawing on a four-stage model of social identity development and integration in the self which is based on social identity perspective and development models, we construct a bidirectional and multidimensional framework for investigating migrants` identification.

Overall, our study has provided new insights and supported evidence to extend theories and methods from international immigrants to internal migrants. In addition, our framework and findings may be helpful to widely explore the pattern and its development of internal migrants` identification in other developing countries.

Table 1. Model fit statistics for the optimal number of hybrid identity classes (N = 1,454)

Model	AIC	ABIC	Entropy	LMR LRT p-value	ALMR LRT p-value	Class Probability/ %
1	39619.69	39687.06	/	/	/	/
2	37345.85	37482.70	0.874	0.000	0.000	.60/.40
3	35993.83	36200.16	0.859	0.000	0.000	.34/.32/.35
4	35370.35	35646.15	0.873	0.000	0.000	.31/.30/.26/.13
5	34854.37	35199.65	0.857	0.523	0.523	.24/.24/.16/.22/.14

Source: 2016 Survey of Rural-urban Migrants in Guangzhou, China.

Table 1a. Model fit statistics for the optimal number of self-identity classes (N = 1,454)

Model	AIC	ABIC	Entropy	LMR-LRT P-value	ALMR LRT p-value	Class Probability / %
1	19060.80	19094.49	/	/	/	/
2	16868.51	16937.99	0.87	0.000	0.000	.61/.39
3	16035.17	16140.44	0.87	0.000	0.000	.46/.36/.18
4	15429.22	15570.28	0.85	0.000	0.000	.24/.17/.35/.24
5	15171.75	15348.60	0.86	0.000	0.000	.23/.26/.13/.33/.06
6	15016.86	15229.51	0.87	0.001	0.001	.11/.23/.25/.03/.04/.32
7	14955.33	15203.77	0.86	0.760	0.760	.24/.03/.12/.24/.21/.04/.11

Source: 2016 Survey of Rural-urban Migrants in Guangzhou, China.

Table 1b. Model fit statistics for the optimal number of social identity classes (N = 1,454)

Model	AIC	ABIC	Entropy	LMR LRT p-value	ALMR LRT p-value	Class Probability / %
1	20985.89	21019.88	/	/	/	/
2	19669.20	19739.39	0.84	0.000	0.000	.63/.37
3	19240.01	19346.23	0.86	0.000	0.000	.11/.63/.27
4	19204.36	19346.70	0.73	0.039	0.040	.52/.11/.26/.11
5	19176.28	19354.73	0.75	0.555	0.559	.23/.05/.09/.52/.11

Source: 2016 Survey of Rural-urban Migrants in Guangzhou, China.