A Review on Integration of Bicultural Identity

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Abstract: *In the context of globalization, population mobility has surged, leading to more frequent interactions and collaborations among diverse cultural groups. This trend has facilitated the emergence of biculturalism, a phenomenon where an increasing number of individuals embody characteristics of two distinct cultures concurrently. Navigating the complex interplay between one's parental or heritage culture and the newly acquired culture poses significant challenges for bi-cultural individuals, necessitating a nuanced understanding and integration of their dual cultural identities. Bi-cultural identity integration represents a novel research paradigm within the field of identity studies. It is a trait-oriented concept that captures individual variations in how people perceive the relationship between their multiple identities. The concept of identity integration has been extensively applied in research on culture, demonstrating its positive impact on acculturation processes, mental health outcomes, and creative potential. By fostering an inclusive understanding of bicultural identity integration, researchers can contribute to the development of more culturally sensitive and inclusive societies.*

Keywords: Bi-cultural, Identification integration, Bi-cultural Identity Scale, Cross-cultural adaptation.

1. The Connotation of the Integration of Bicultural Identity

Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) represents a manner in which bicultural individuals organize and comprehend two cultures (e.g., mainstream and ethnic cultures) (Benet, 2003). Currently, scholars regard bicultural identity as one of the four strategies of cultural adaptation (namely, integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization). Traditional views on cultural adaptation posit that the process involves the assimilation of the initial home culture by a new or mainstream culture (Benet, 2003). In other words, cultural adaptation was perceived as a one-dimensional, unilateral, and irreversible transition from one's original ethnic culture to a new mainstream culture (Trimble, 2003). Since the mid-1980s, abundant research findings on cultural adaptation have increasingly supported the notion that cultural adaptation is a complex process characterized by two dimensions, bidirectionality, and multiple pathways, with assimilation not being the sole pathway. Berry's proposed two-dimensional model of cultural adaptation, which is now widely accepted, is grounded on two core issues that immigrants or ethnic minorities need to address when adapting to a new culture (Trimble, 2003): (1) the extent to which they actively identify with and maintain their original culture (or home culture); and (2) the extent to which they actively identify with the mainstream or dominant culture. The coordination of these two core issues leads to four distinct cultural adaptation strategies: assimilation (involvement and identification solely with the mainstream culture), integration (involvement and identification with both cultures, i.e., bicultural identity integration), separation (involvement and identification solely with one's own ethnic culture), and marginalization (lack of involvement and identification with both cultures). Empirical research has demonstrated that, at least at the individual level, the bicultural integration strategy is the most frequently used cultural adaptation strategy among immigrants and ethnic minorities, followed by separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Berry, 2006). There is now sufficient evidence supporting the psychometric properties of the two-dimensional, bidirectional model of cultural adaptation, which outperforms one-dimensional models in predicting a wide range of cultural adaptation outcomes at the individual level (Berry, 2006). Cultural frame switching further supports the perspective of the two-dimensional model of cultural adaptation, suggesting that individuals can simultaneously hold two or more cultural orientations and flexibly switch between them when responding to different cultural cues (Berry, 2006). Numerous studies have shown considerable variability in individuals' handling of bicultural identities and experiences. These studies support and advance the concept of bicultural identity integration but also identify crucial shortcomings. For instance, Berry's concept of cultural integration (i.e., identifying with both cultures) does not delineate how individuals integrate and maintain the two cultures, nor does it specify the individual and societal outcomes of integration. It fails to explain why individuals' bicultural experiences are "dichotomous or contradictory" or what makes them feel "special or confused." Due to these deficiencies in bicultural research, Benet et al. proposed the theory of Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) as a framework for studying individual differences in bicultural identity integration. BII is not a unidimensional concept but instead comprises two independent psychometric components (Berry, 2005): (1) cultural mixing and differentiation—reflecting the degree to which bicultural individuals perceive overlap and separation between the two cultures.

Cultural mixing and harmony are independent psychometric components significantly correlated with important social and personality variables. Specifically, a lower perception of cultural mixing is associated with personality and performance traits (such as lower openness to new cultures, more language barriers, and living in isolated cultural environments). A lower sense of harmony also stems from individual personality traits and interpersonal stressors (e.g., higher neuroticism, perceived discrimination, and more interpersonal stress). Bicultural individuals can have any combination of high or low mixing and harmony between the two cultures (Berry, 2010), producing varied impacts on multiple aspects of their lives.

Foreign scholars have conducted extensive and insightful explorations into the origins, developmental trajectories, and underlying mechanisms of bicultural identity integration. Benet and his colleagues in 2002 introduced the concept of Bicultural Identity Integration (BII), marking a significant advancement in the understanding of how individuals

navigate multiple cultural identities. Benet and Haritatos (2005) further elaborated on BII, defining it as the manner in which bicultural individuals organize and perceive their dual cultural identities. Specifically, they focused on how biculturalists view the individual differences between their ethnic culture and the mainstream culture, assessing whether these identities are perceived as harmonious and unified, opposed and separated, or conflicting.

The cultural adaptation journey of bicultural individuals, particularly after experiencing shifts between different cultural contexts, unfolds along two critical dimensions: conflict versus harmony, and blendedness versus compartmentalization (Huynh, 2009). The blendedness-compartmentalization dimension is particularly illuminating, as it measures the degree of separation or overlap between an individual's ethnic culture and mainstream culture. A higher degree of blending indicates that bicultural individuals frequently integrate the new cultural influences with their original cultural background in the adopted environment, fostering a more fluid and integrated cultural identity. Conversely, a lower degree of blending suggests a greater tendency to maintain a distinct separation between the two cultures (Benet-Martínez, 2002; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Research has consistently shown that a higher level of BII is associated with positive outcomes such as enhanced self-esteem, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness during the process of bidirectional acculturation (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Smith & Bond, 2006). This underscores the importance of BII in facilitating smooth cultural transitions and promoting psychological well-being among bicultural individuals.

The concept of BII builds upon the traditional theory of acculturation, which identifies four strategies: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Berry, 1990). Traditional theories often depict the acculturation process as linear, one-dimensional, and irreversible, moving from ethnic culture to mainstream culture (Chun & Organista, 2003). However, contemporary research challenges this view, revealing the complexity, multipath nature, and bidirectionality of the acculturation process. In response to these complexities, the concept of BII emerged, offering a more nuanced framework to address the limitations of traditional bicultural studies (Benet & Haritatos, 2005).

The scope of foreign scholars' research on BII has continued to broaden, with deepening discussions on its influence mechanisms (Benet & Haritatos, 2015; Berry, 2015). By enriching the theory of cross-cultural adaptation, the concept of BII has paved a new research pathway, enhancing our understanding and support for bicultural individuals in their cultural adaptation endeavors.

2. Current Research Review on Bicultural Identity Integration

At present, the international research objects of bicultural identity integration (BII) mainly focus on sojourners, overseas students, immigrants, refugees, etc. (Stapel & Blanton, & Benet-Martínez, Brewer, M. B., & Gaertner, etc.). Domestic scholars' research on bicultural identity integration (BII)

mainly focuses on mainland minority students and overseas professional managers. In recent years, they have gradually paid attention to international students (Andy, Xue Jing, 2019; Xiao Tong, 2022; Zhou, Aibao, Hou, Ling, 2016; Yang, Xiaoli, Liu, Li, and Zhang, Xiaoxiao, 2010; Wang, W. C., Zhao, Y. F., Chen, B., 2018). At the same time, regarding the integration of bicultural identity, the main research methods used at present include questionnaire survey and in-depth interview. Domestic scholars also sort out and summarize the theory of bicultural identity integration. Bicultural identity integration is a way for bicultural individuals to organize and understand the relationship between mainstream culture and ethnic culture (Zhou Aibao, Hou Ling, 2016)). When cultural individuals are exposed to cultures different from their own ethnic groups, there may be opposition or conflict between their original identity and the identity that needs to be adapted to in terms of behavior, communication, emotional expression, values, etc., while self-identity As an important part of self-concept, It will have an impact on individuals' mental health and adaptability (Cao Hui, Zhang Miaoqing, 2010; Yang Xiaoli, Liu Li, Zhang Xiaoxiao, 2010). Or explore and analyze the influence mechanism of two-way cultural identity integration (Andy, Xue Jing, 2019; Xiao Tong, 2022; Zhou Aibao, Hou Ling, 2016; Yang Xiaoli, Liu Li, Zhang Xiaoxiao, 2010; Wang Weichao, Zhao Yufang, Chen Bing, 2018). At the same time, the research on two-way cultural identity integration has been deepened in some disciplines, but it is less deeply integrated, the scope of research objects is narrow, and the related applied research is scarce, which also makes the theoretical research lack the expansion of breadth (Andy, Xue Jing, 2019; Cao Hui, Zhang Miaoqing).

2.1 The Formation Process of Bicultural Identity Integration

How do individuals transition into members of a new cultural group? When accepting a new culture, how can we perceive the intersection and overlap between the new culture and the original culture? How to identify with the values and behavioral norms of the new culture? This involves how individuals integrate bicultural identity (Amiot, 2010), or the process of bicultural identity integration. Psychological research shows that the process of bicultural identity integration involves four stages (Outten, 2001), the first phase of integration occurs when individuals prepare to enter a new social and cultural group. In this pre-classification phase, the process of self-anchoring is activated, and the individual projects his own personal characteristics onto the new social group (Benet, 2001), i.e. thinks that the members of the new social group also have some characteristics of their own. The essence of this projection process is that the individual seeks a kind of consistency (Benet, 2003) and the need to establish cognitive connections between different cultural identities. In this stage, it is integrated by looking for the similarities between the original identity characteristics of individuals and the new cultural identity. The second stage of development and integration is categorization or classification. At this stage, individuals live in a new cultural group, face some real changes, and realize that there are many differences between the new culture and the original culture (Outten, 2001). At this time, they see that different cultures have different values and behavioral norms, and their cultural identity becomes highly prominent. This phenomenon is similar to cultural collision in

theories related to acculturation, and individuals are often in a dilemma and at a loss when faced with different cultural needs (Amiot, 2001). In the classification stage, individuals perceive more differences and differences, but have not perceived the similarities between different cultural groups and the cognitive connection between two cultural identities. Therefore, individuals have not regarded themselves as a member of a new cultural group, nor have they regarded the new cultural identity as part of their self-concept. The third stage is differentiation. With the passage of time, individuals have more and more contact with new cultures and members of cultural groups, and people become more and more identified with the new culture, and at the same time, they will realize that they are part of the new cultural group, and this identity gradually becomes part of themselves (Rocas, 2002). However, at this time, different identities still maintain obvious distinctions in the self. The similarities and connections between these identities have not been firmly established. Their bicultural identities are situational, and the activation of identities depends on changes in social environment (Rocas, 2002). The fourth stage is identity integration, which is also a crucial stage. It involves individuals who have realized that there are conflicts between different cultural identities, and must find strategies to solve these conflicts. Finally, it is found that these contradictions and conflicts can be mediated by seeking cultural similarity and establishing cognitive connections between different cultural identities. Individuals can find common norms, consensus and values in the two cultures, and at the same time cherish their different cultural backgrounds. This not only enables people to find the cognitive connections and similarities between different cultures, but also makes people feel the coherence and consistency of the environment. The ultimate result of this phase of integration is the recognition that different cultural identities are components of the self, no longer determined by the environment alone, and that different cultural identities can become the overall self-concept of the individual in a positive and distinct way (Benet, 2005).

3. Measurement of Bicultural Identity Integration

Bicultural identity integration is a variable used by psychologists to measure the individual differences between bicultural individuals integrating two cultural identities, and it needs to be operationalized in empirical research (Benet, 2003). In related research (relative to causal research), researchers usually use questionnaire measurement (Zhou Aibao, 2016), and at the same time, in specific experiments, bicultural identity integration is used as an independent variable to explore the impact of bicultural identity integration on other dependent variables. We also call this method culture priming (Benet, 2003). (1) Measurement of Bicultural Identity Integration Early researchers used bipolar and single-dimensional scales to measure bicultural identity. Their theoretical basis is also the early view of acculturation, that is, a one-way assimilation process. Low scale scores reflect cultural separation, while high scale scores reflect assimilation. While the intermediate score or the midpoint of the scale indicates bicultural integration (Benet, 2001). However, this measurement method is gradually regarded as ineffective, because it is equivalent to measuring only one

culture, but lacks the measurement of involvement and identity with the other culture. Furthermore, this one-dimensional scale also confuses marginalization with bicultural integration. With the increasing recognition and use of the two-dimensional model of acculturation, the scale has also added multiple items in two dimensions, which include both the measurement of the original culture and the measurement of the mainstream dominant culture. Using this method, two cultural orientations of bicultural individuals can be measured. Individuals with high level of bicultural identity integration scored higher in both cultural orientations. Later, with the development of the concept of bicultural identity integration, in 2003, Benet-Martinez V et al. developed a new tool to measure bicultural identity integration based on their earlier trial version (BIIS-P)-Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 1 (BIIS-1) (Benet, Martinez, 2003). In this version, bicultural identity integration includes two possible dimensions: cultural conflict (e.g., perceiving whether two cultural identities are compatible or fragmented) and cultural distance (e.g., perceiving whether two cultural identities are separate or connected) (Benet, Martinez, 2003). Subjects answered each question in a 5-rating subscale (1 for "strongly disagree" and 5 for "strongly agree"). It is found that although both cultural conflict and cultural distance scales have high internal consistency coefficients, the correlation between the two subscales is almost zero, which indicates that the orientation of bicultural individuals perceiving the original culture and the mainstream culture is relatively separate rather than conflicting with each other. This shows that bicultural individuals can realize that they have an integrated identity, but do not perceive that the two cultural identities are in conflict with each other. As a result of the independence of cultural distance and cultural conflict, researchers have further revised the original concept of bicultural identity integration, and the measurement tools are constantly developing and improving. After a series of confirmatory studies, Huynh improved the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale, that is, produced the second version of the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 2 (BIIS-2). The scale compilation process is firstly by using qualitative data, that is, those college students who self-identify as bicultural individuals write open essays, and generate questions from them. Then, experts and testers evaluate them, and screen the test items. Finally, the second version of the bicultural identity integration scale includes 19 items. The subjects evaluated 19 topics in a 5-point scale (1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree"). The reliability of these items is very high, and the consistency coefficients of subscales are all above 0.8. The structure of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis also shows that BII-2 contains two independent dimensions of "mixing" and "harmony", It also has good stability in different cultural backgrounds (Benet, 2005).

4. Experimental Manipulation of Bicultural Identity Integration

Experimental operation of bicultural identity integration In experimental research, cultural priming is the most commonly used method to study bicultural identity integration. Usually, bicultural identity is used as an independent variable, and bicultural individuals are presented with pictures that can represent the characteristics of the two cultures (such as the

pictures of the dragon, the Great Wall and Confucius used to start Chinese culture, Initiate pictures such as the Statue of Liberty and the Eagle in American culture), thereby initiating the corresponding cultural identity, and then measuring the characteristics of the subjects in related variables (Hou Ling, 2016). This method is effective because the selected pictures are religious symbols, cultural icons or pictures of people with wide influence in a specific culture. These pictures link many elements of cultural knowledge (Hou Ling, 2016) and are cultural codes familiar to most people living in this cultural environment. Therefore, it can trigger the corresponding cultural knowledge network of bicultural individuals and arouse the specific mood of subjects. For example, the researcher takes Hong Kong people (Rohos, 2018) as the research object. When starting western culture, individuals with a high level of bicultural identity integration show behaviors unique to westerners; When oriental culture is started, people with high level of bicultural identity integration show behaviors consistent with oriental culture.

5. Bicultural Identity Integration and Psychological Adjustment

Bicultural identity integration, as a cultural adaptation strategy, exerts two of the most common and well-documented influences on mental health and social adaptability. Psychological adjustment primarily involves life satisfaction, positive emotions, self-esteem, and also includes lower levels of alienation, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and other negative emotions. Social adjustment includes academic achievement, career success, social skills, and lower levels of social behavioral problems and interpersonal conflicts. Rogler et al. reviewed 30 studies related to cultural adaptation and suggested that the relationship between bicultural experience and psychological and social adjustments is inconsistent. Some researchers argue that a positive relationship exists between the two, while others claim a negative one. For instance, Moyerman and Forman conducted a meta-analysis of literature on the relationship between cultural adaptation and psychological adjustment, concluding that the relationship between cultural adaptation and psychological adjustment is uncertain across different adjustment categories (such as anxiety, depression, stress, self-esteem, etc.). A recent meta-analysis involving 83 studies with a total of 23,197 participants demonstrated that the seemingly contradictory findings above stem from different measurement methods of bicultural identity integration. Bicultural identity integration has been shown to positively correlate with mental health and sociocultural adjustment (e.g., higher self-esteem, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, better academic achievement and career performance, and fewer problematic behaviors). However, when studies used univariate scales or directly measured cultural adaptation strategies, this relationship was negligible, weakening the overall meta-analysis results. Conversely, when bivariate scales were used, the relationship was significant, stable, and positive. In other words, bicultural identity is associated with better psychological adjustment, but this relationship can only be detected when bicultural identity is measured using bivariate scales. Individuals with higher levels of bicultural identity integration tend to exhibit higher levels of mental health and social adaptability due to their ability to navigate between two cultures, granting them access to social support networks from both cultures. This process of navigating between cultures leads to higher levels of social cognitive flexibility, which buffers the negative impacts of psychological disturbances (such as anxiety and loneliness) and social maladjustments (such as interpersonal conflicts and culturally inappropriate expressions) faced by bicultural individuals.

6. Conclusion

Bicultural identity integration is a process in which individuals possess and integrate two cultural identities at the same time in a multicultural environment. This review of literature reviews the main research areas of bicultural identity integration, including identity construction, bicultural conflict and adaptation, influencing factors, and mental health effects. In addition, the paper also pays special attention to cultural leapfrog, bicultural education, age factors, cultural transformation and bicultural working environment, so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding and research guidance. Future research can further explore the mechanism of cultural leapfrog, the practical effect of bicultural education, the difference of age factors, the strategies of cultural transformation, and the challenges and opportunities in bicultural working environment. These studies will contribute to better understanding and facilitating individual identity integration and adaptation in bicultural settings.

Acknowledgements

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