



Aligned or Apart? Ethnic Identity Congruence and Discrepancy among Chinese Immigrant Couples

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnic identity (EI)

- The extent to which individuals define their sense of self in relation to their heritage culture and the mainstream culture they are acculturating into.
- A key indicator of acculturation & adaptation (Berry et al., 2006; Noels et al., 1996).
- Previous research: mostly at the individual level
 - Little research attention to the dyadic/relational contexts

Family Acculturation

- A double transition for immigrant families in that both the individual and the family adapt to the new culture.
- Previous research: Mostly on the parent-child dyads
 - Limited research attention to the couple dyads

Spouses can function as mutual agents of acculturation

- Each partner's EI development may influence, and be influenced by, the other's.
- EI congruence & discrepancy may have important implications for individual adaptation, marital harmony, and cultural transmission to children.

❓ **How partners' EI are similar (convergent) or different (divergent)?**

The Present Study:

- Examine patterns of EI congruence & discrepancy for Chinese immigrant couples in Canada.
- How Chinese immigrant husbands and wives perceive their Chinese and Canadian identities similarly or differently
- How partners' trajectories align or diverge over the course of their settlement

METHODS

Participants

- 56 couples in multiple Canadian cities from Chinese Immigrant Participant Pool
- Age: 30 - 50 ($M = 38.56$, $SD = 11.47$); Migration: 2-20 years ($M = 6.34$, $SD = 9.82$)

Procedure

- Recruited from Chinese festivals, community associations, & social media
- Complete online questionnaire & Zoom interview (\$50 compensation)

Measures

Social Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004)

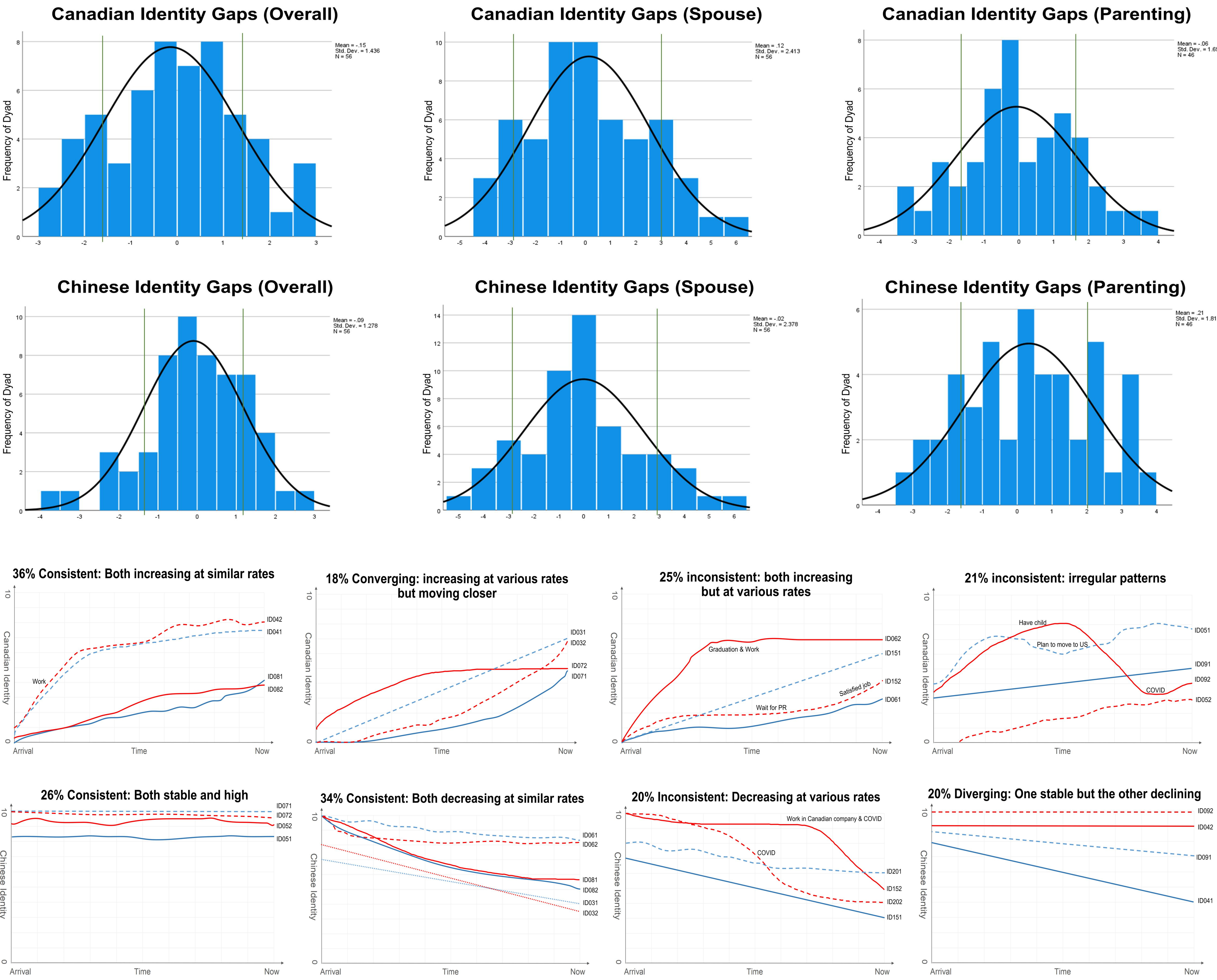
- 12 items for identity ties, centrality, and affect ($\alpha_{ca} = .86$, $\alpha_{cn} = .87$).
- Rating from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

Situated Ethnic Identity Scale (Clément & Noels, 1992)

- 24 situations in 6 settings (school, work, community, friend, family, children).
- Rating from 1 (*not at all Chinese*) to 7 (*very strongly Chinese*), and 1 (*not at all Canadian*) to 7 (*very strongly Canadian*) for each situation ($\alpha_{ca} = .83$, $\alpha_{cn} = .81$).

Canadian and Chinese Identity Trajectory Lines

RESULTS



DISCUSSION

- Chinese immigrant couples' EI evolve interdependently, showing both shared and divergent trajectories shaped by relational and contextual factors.
- High EI congruence may reflect shared cultural values and coordinated strategies for navigating Canadian society and Chinese culture, potentially enhancing individual and marital adaptation.
- Conversely, EI discrepancies, especially Canadian identity gaps, may signal differential adaptation processes (e.g., language proficiency, occupational engagement, local community networks), which may impact spousal mutual understanding.
- Qualitative comments suggest that life events and social environment may change individual identity trajectories and couple EI congruence.
- The findings highlight the value of a couple-centered lens in studying EI.
- Ethnic identity development is not only personal but also relational and dynamic.
- Programs supporting immigrant families can benefit from acknowledging that successful adaptation involves not just individual identity reconstruction but also the alignment—or constructive negotiation—of identities within intimate partnerships.