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Debarchana Biswas

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ARTICLE



Identity development, acculturation among Bowbazar Chinese community

Debarchana Biswas^a

^aDepartment of Geography, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

ABSTRACT

The development of identity is a procedure of individual change that can take place along various spheres of social and cultural domains. The concept of identity is always remaining fundamental in the process of acculturation and adaptation. The prominence or value has been particularly given on Chinese community of Bowbazar which is an enclave community. The study aims to elucidate that the immigrant groups adjust to the host society by persistent identity development especially by adjusting and adapting to altered or homogenize identity which is most supported along with the integration strategies. The study has been conducted on the basis of qualitative approach as well as quantitative approach. Responses from the community revealed, that the Chinese community of Bowbazar Chinatown through ages is not only able to adapt ideals, values, and behaviors of host culture but also able to retain their ideals, values and beliefs of their own cultures of origin.

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identity; acculturation;
homogenize

Introduction

During 1840s, Chinese rejection was a typical phenomenon almost from all over the world.¹ Identity is constantly the most pivotal idea by which immigrants adjust by acculturating and adjusting to various conditions. The important heed behind interest is that how outsiders similar to Chinese community judge themselves as in various social settings. During each period, there was consistent socio-economic adaptation and improvement among the Chinese community which influenced the nature of safeguarding of Chinese personality or identity. The difficulties of expulsion, the disengagement, the fundamental feeling of partition, the learning of and aching for a vanishing world are more unequivocal. This was the main reason identity of socially uprooted individuals were in severe vulnerability. Among different migrant groups the most important issue was discussions on ethnic identity of an individual which was examined by the researchers from various disciplinary perspectives. The various negotiations on identity are additionally basic purposes of profound and critical contrast which represents what we truly are and since history has never arbitrate for what we have moved towards becoming.²

From the record of De Profundis in the year 1897, Oscar Wilde jested, every person is extraordinary or different from each other. Reflections are diverse of every single individuals relying on others' sentiment. Their activity or aptitude is an impersonation of their lives. So in world like this, where human progress is continuous one thing irrefutably avoids the apparently individual, which is made of simple components, and they should be self-sufficient or an autonomous individual who has his or her own particular character. That is, our identity or character is possibly the main thing which is least each individual eternize.³

The prominence or value has been particularly given on Chinese community of Kolkata particularly Bowbazar Chinatown as this region has a history of various settlements of immigrant groups particularly the Chinese community which is an enclave community and innately connected with the bigger society. They struggle for survival in the different exigent circumstances and construct their own socio-economic territory which shows an elaborate issue of homogenized or hyphenated identity which is prevailing among the Chinese community of Kolkata. This paper aims to understand how the immigrant groups particularly the Chinese community of Bowbazar adjusts to the mainstream society by identity development and their preferred acculturation preferences in order to confront against wide range of challenges.

Acculturation and its association with identity

Concept of identity

The development of identity is a procedure of individual change that can take place along various spheres of social and cultural domains which is very important function in psychological development of an individual.⁴ It is indicated by Feldman that identity development is a period when individuals endeavor to figure out what is one of a kind and extraordinary about them. They attempt to find their identity, what their qualities are, and what sorts of parts they are most appropriate to play for whatever is left of their lives, in precisely their identity negotiations.⁵

The term ethnic identity is basically the feeling of self-identity that originates from one's participation in an ethnic group. Ethnic identity alludes to the input of one's ethnic groups' identity and behavior along with the sentiments related with those groups into one's self-discernment and general identity. According to Erikson, his concept of ethnic identity development is a practice found both in the nature of an individual and in his or her shared culture.⁶ The development of an ethnic identity can be conceived as a different type of identity development, a procedure materializing after some time, as individual experiences the situations and based on their experiences the judgments and decisions are made to know whether ethnicity plays an important role in their lives or not.

Concept of acculturation

The term acculturation can be explained as adaptation of different cultures which is altered well with other cultures and as a result of which the affinity between different cultures increases.⁷

Acculturation might be characterized as social collaboration and correspondence reaction styles (both competency and straightforwardness/comfort in imparting) that individuals

adopt while communicating with individuals and gatherings from another culture.⁸ Generally members of ethnic group can participate in four possible ways to adapt themselves in a society which is culturally diverse. When a person of different community or ethnic group absorbs or stirred up totally with the host society and conforms to their lifestyle and also societies, assimilation takes place.⁹ Integration process happens where a person of an ethnic group incorporates with the host society by keeping up their own particular culture. Separation is a circumstances or a procedure where individuals from ethnic group gives priority to their own social practices and keep up a specific distance with the dominant society. And lastly individuals from ethnic group who barred themselves from their own unique lifestyle as well as the individuals who confining themselves from consideration with the host society can be termed as marginalized or characterized by marginalization.¹⁰

Reflections of identity and acculturation on Bowbazar Chinese community

The concept of identity is always remaining fundamental in the process of acculturation and adaptation in case of Chinese community of Bowbazar. Regardless of the fact that integration into the dominant group experiences at different levels, the key inquiry the community need to address is the means by which they characterize themselves socially in the domain of identity negotiations either by maintaining their own identity or by giving importance to national identity or both and most essentially how they identify with others in the dominant group, specifically, the dominant cultural group.¹¹ In case of Bowbazar Chinatown, most of the immigrants integrated themselves with the dominant society and as well as, they expressed themselves on the basis of cultural identity and national identity. Identity can be characterized as the manner by which the individual deals with his or her mental self-portrait and performs to the desires of others in regular day to day existence.¹² The Bowbazar Chinese community reacts with flow of the conventional society by comprehending which are socially convenient and by tending to challenges that go to their direction. Most of the individuals react different ways to overcome various challenges related to identity. The three most common ways are (a) going up against the challenges and deliberately reexamining one's character in light of it; (b) depending on outside rules and bolster sources and reciprocate in ways that are seen as socially suitable; or (c) evading or disregarding the challenges and settling on choices and changes just because of particular situational exigency.¹³ So without doubt Identity is not all about reality but it is developed in demonstrations of social collaborations and interactions.¹⁴

Despite the fact that the relationship between acculturation and identity has not been unequivocally elucidated in any of the studies but the idea to link acculturation and identity has been implied in various works. In our view, acculturation strategies are inseparably linked with identity negotiations, in that progression that happen because of various acculturation strategies which might be seen as changes in identity of an individual. Since as the meaning of identity consolidates individual, social, and cultural segments, that might be in a situation to guess on the components by which acculturation strategies influence these three core aspects of identity development.¹⁵

The concept of ethnic identity and acculturation strategies are two distinct forms. Ethnic identity implies to the mixture of one's ethnic group participation and the emotions related with that participation into one's self-discernment and in general identity.¹⁶ Acculturation in the respect of Bowbazar Chinese community depends upon

on the context of ethnic identity. However it concerns the degree to which the person of this community chooses to partake in the social customs, values, ideologies, and implementation of the predominant culture.¹⁷

Distinguishing and analyzing the connections among different characteristics of acculturation and ethnic identity isn't clear as the two builds are intricate and multidimensional.¹⁸ Ethnic identity and acculturation show considerable overlap in case of Bowbazar Chinese community, despite the fact that the acculturation adaptation is an adjustment which is a reaction to the predominant group while the ethnic identity of an individual is a reaction depending upon his or her own particular ethnic group, one process commonly agrees with the other.¹⁹ In both dominant and non-prevailing societies ethnic identity development is conceivable.²⁰ For this situation non-prevailing is the Chinese community or Chinese-Indians. Expressed in an unexpected way, the procedure of ethnic identity development can just occur in a bi-cultural and multi-cultural society like Kolkata. The identity development loses its significance in a society where mono culture practices and eventually the acculturation process aren't conceivable.²¹ The progression of acculturation recommend that there are by and large two particular domains, a dominant group that has more noteworthy impact and power that is the host society and an acculturating bunch that is the Bowbazar Chinese group that experiences or undergoes different forms of adjustment.²² At the point when Bowbazar Chinese community encounters unfriendly social circumstances, the group frequently encounters sentiments of vulnerability and the feeling that regardless of how hard one tries, it isn't workable for them to succeed or change the circumstance. These sorts of circumstances or sentiments grasp them especially after the contention of 1962. Such sentiments make the group to acknowledge the circumstance and recognize that the other is more powerful. Along these lines, the essential task for a migrant is to effectively adjust to the prevailing society of their new condition, while holding the imperative parts of their unique social character, which alludes to as social integration.²³

A brief history of Chinese in Bowbazar, Kolkata

Atchew was the first Chinese who settled in Kolkata, near Achipur. He was a tea merchant. His unique name was Yang Dazhao. In the year 1778 he established a sugar mill close to Kolkata and conveyed numerous laborers from China to work for him. The Chinese were first settled near Bowbazar area which is later named as 'Cheenapara' or 'Chinatown' with a population more than 15,000. They were mostly comprised of Hakkas, Cantonese, Hubinese, and Shandongs. Most of the Chinese employed in carpentry and tannery business. Later they flourished in other businesses like dentists, shoemakers, restaurateurs, dry cleaners, and hairdressers.²⁴ The Bowbazar Chinese community mixed up well with the majority of Bengali Hindu residents. The Bowbazar Chinese community reacts with flow of the host society by comprehending which are socially convenient and by tending to challenges that go to their direction. Due to the conflict of 1962 the deterioration of India–China relations was inevitable. The constant monitoring of the police over the Chinese community of Bowbazar has increased. During 1962, many Chinese were tagged as Anti-Indians and sent to Deoli, Rajasthan which was an internment camp. After the conflict of 1962 around 3000

Chinese were deported to Mainland China.²⁵ Most of the Chinese leave India and went to Canada, Australia, Singapore, New Zealand, and United States of America for better opportunities. Present study on Chinese community of Kolkata reveals that only less than 1500 Chinese people left in Kolkata.

Study area

Despite the fact that reconciliation into the host society happens at different levels, my study focuses around Bowbazar Chinatown of Kolkata. The first Chinatown was emerged near Central Kolkata which was known as 'Bowbazar'. The Chinese migrants were first settled here and small 'Chinatown' which is known as 'Cheenapara' emerged in the nineteenth century. As the Chinese community of Bowbazar reacts with the flow of the mainstream society by discerning which are socially pertinent and by addressing to challenges that go to their direction, I chose Bowbazar Chinatown as my study area to show how immigrant groups adapt to the mainstream society by continuous identity development particularly by adapting homogenize identity which is mostly favored along with integration strategies by confronting all kinds of challenges.

Methodology

A qualitative and quantitative approach along with in-depth interviews was carried out in order to obtain a detailed comprehension of the experiences and encounters of identity negotiations of the Chinese community of Bowbazar Chinatown. The number of inhabitants in the Chinese community of Kolkata is under 1500. There is no legitimate Census information is accessible till date. Be that as it may, the members from Indian Chinese Association used to keep up a computation of the present populace of Chinese in Kolkata each year. So from their information the populace is limited to under 100 in Bowbazar, as most of the Chinese of Bowbazar used to relocate in different parts of Kolkata especially Tangra. So the participants were chosen on the basis of purposive, snowball sampling and through other confidential networks. The members who are potential were reached through web-based social networking, individual contacts, associates, and friends. A self-report survey was created for the present study. Participants are 50 Chinese who are currently staying at Bowbazar Chinatown. Altogether 60 copies were distributed and among the rectified ones, 50 were finished and legitimate.

In addition I have utilized MIRIPS questionnaire that is Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies (MIRIPS). MIRIPS is a community-oriented task being done in various nations, utilizing a typical research structure and a typical research instrument. This venture examines whether sentiments of social security, ethnocentrism, chain of importance, and correspondence are found in numerous social orders. The author composed an email to J.W. Berry and acquired his consent to utilize a portion of the things from the MIRIPS survey to decide acculturation strategy of the Chinese community of Bowbazar. The part of MIRIPS project used to measure four strategies of acculturation that is, assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. The author insinuates MIRIPS survey and incorporates a few things from acculturation attitudes and expectations of non-

dominant groups to make it appropriate to fathom the acculturation techniques of Chinese community of Bowbazar. Things are scored using a 5 point Likert-type scale (strongly agree-5, agree somewhat-4, neutral-3, disagree somewhat-2, strongly disagree-1). A mean score is then figured for each part on every last one of the four methodologies to fathom the most supported acculturation attitudes of the community. Here, the mean score is taken into consideration in order to get the overall score for each acculturation strategies. A portion of the items in every one of the categories like I incline toward social activities which include both the Indian and Chinese individuals (integration), I favor social activities which include host society only(assimilation), I like to have just Chinese companions (separation), I would prefer not to go to any of the social activities which include members from any community(marginalization).

Analysis of data

Preferred acculturation strategies of Bowbazar Chinese community

According to statistics, the gender orientation is adjusted between 32 males (64%) and 18 females (36%). The ages of the participants range between 28 and 40 years with 28 of them below 37 years (56%) and rest, that is, 44% has age below 40 years. They belong to extensive variety of professions including engineers to shop owners, business persons.

Now coming to the preferences of acculturation strategies, integration is the most preferred one.

From the analysis it has been retrieved; 13 respondents are incorporated in the assimilation class, five respondents are included in separation category. Integration strategy is the most common strategy as 30 respondents choose integration as the most preferred one and lastly 2 respondents are included in the marginalization category.

As appeared in *Table 1*, the recurrence of choosing the preference for integration constitutes about half of the respondents choices that is (60%) and separation representing 10% only. Assimilation was favored by 13 of the respondents which constitute around 26% and marginalization accounted for only 4%. Moreover, integration strategies have been preferred by 18 males (56.25%) and 12 females (66.67%). The integration strategy is most preferred by females as they adapt well to the host country's cultural values by keeping one's own cultural values. This strategy is mostly adapted by both females and males because the host society is indeed culturally diverse. As we all know Kolkata is a multicultural society and from British era many diverse groups came here and established their existence. Moreover as prejudice is low, integration is the most favored acculturation strategies for the Bowbazar Chinese. Separation and marginalization are very rare for the Chinese in Bowbazar as most of them are well acculturated with the host society. The percentage which shows little amount of marginalization and

Table 1. Distribution of the Preference for the Acculturation Strategies by Gender.

Acculturation Strategies	Male		Female		Cumulative Percentage
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Integration	18	56.25	12	66.67	60
Separation	4	12.50	1	5.55	10
Assimilation	9	28.13	4	22.22	26
Marginalization	1	3.13	1	5.55	4

separation consists of those people who were around 40 years and it is known from interview that they are suffering from diseases for which their psychology or outlook towards the society has changed. Among 50 respondents, 26 % preferred assimilation as they are considered to be non-dominant since they would prefer not to proceed with their own particular cultural identity and seek for communication with other culture. Many Chinese of Bowbazar Chinatown have been seen to be married to Hindu and they totally assimilate with the Bengal culture. While having interaction with some of the respondents it has been revealed in order to confront challenges with the society they assimilated themselves by revising their own cultural identity. They argued most of the Chinese of Bowbazar at first tried to integrate with the host society but after the conflict of 1962, most of them got forcefully separated from the society and were tagged as 'Anti-Indians'. So to confront with the situations many of them assimilated to the host society preferably by marrying and by changing their names and religions.

So, the integration is the most preferred acculturation strategies among the Chinese community of Bowbazar, self-identification with different cultural groups showed that most of the Chinese regard themselves as Chinese-Indian or Indian-Chinese.

Preferred identity negotiations of Bowbazar Chinese community

So, from the analysis of findings it is deduced, 43 of the respondents i.e. 86% have identified themselves as Chinese-Indians or Indian-Chinese. Five that is 10% of the respondents identified themselves as Chinese only and the rest considered that they do not belong to any of the cultural identity. From in-depth interview I perceived that most of the people of Chinese community belong to homogenized identity. The reason of choosing homogenized identity, that is, Chinese-Indians or Indian-Chinese is the story behind maintaining their own cultural values, beliefs, and own cultural practices while finding a balance within the dominant society. As soon as they settled in Kolkata they established their own religious institutions, schools, organizations and even started a newspaper on their own languages. Slowly as the situations changed over time, they integrated and mixed up well with the host society. From interviewing many respondents it is clear that Indian side of identity is totally depending upon the attachment of birthplace or citizenship or the span of residence in India. For instance, a 47-year old respondent said,

*'I consider myself as Indian-Chinese, because Indian side obviously based on birthplace and citizenship, and Chinese side exists, because it's obvious that I look like Chinese. So I think of myself as Indian-Chinese because to me India or my country comes first.'*²⁶

Interviewing a 39 year old respondent revealed that she is just opposite as she judge herself Chinese

*'I am Chinese because ethnicity comes first to me, but if I consider my culture I would rather like to integrate with Indian culture. I love Indian culture. So I am a Chinese-Indian in India.'*²⁷

So it is quite clear that ethnicity depends on the Chinese lineage while integrating into Indian culture depends upon their love for Indian culture. They are quite familiar with the Indian culture so this ethnic community finds it quite easy to identify themselves as

‘Chinese-Indians’ or ‘Indian-Chinese’. Chineseness related with something more profound including esteems, convictions, social roots, dialect, and socialization not only at home but also to the outside world. So it is quite clear that in case of Bowbazar Chinese community the feeling of Chineseness is accepted to live, in their race or blood. Identity negotiations and acculturation is quite evident for Chinese community of Bowbazar. They integrated themselves by maintaining their own cultural values and practices and as well as giving importance to their birthplace as well as accepting the values and beliefs of host society also.

Shift in degrees of identity of Bowbazar Chinese community

From survey it is interesting to find out that there is a shift in degrees of identity within the sphere of family, friends, work/school and community.

If we look at the [Figure 1](#), in case of family situation there is a big gap between hyphenated identity i.e. Indian-Chinese identity and Chinese identity. Chinese identity is dominant within the family members as well as with friends. But if we look out at the work and community domain, Indian-Chinese identity is picking up above Chinese identity. So actually it is quite significant that the Bowbazar Chinese maintaining the Chinese identity as well as Indian identity in work and in community. But they practice their own cultural values in home environment. They take the strategy of shifting identities. This situation can be best explained from the interview of a 45-year respondent,

*‘I am Chinese at home, I try to speak in Chinese language with my family members especially with my Grandpa, and I love to eat Chinese food, and sometimes watch Chinese movies and programs and listen to Chinese songs also. But at work or when I am in a community programme, I am an Indian first then Chinese because citizenship comes first and I don’t want to be treated as a minority. I want to tell them I’m capable of doing what they are capable of doing’.*²⁸

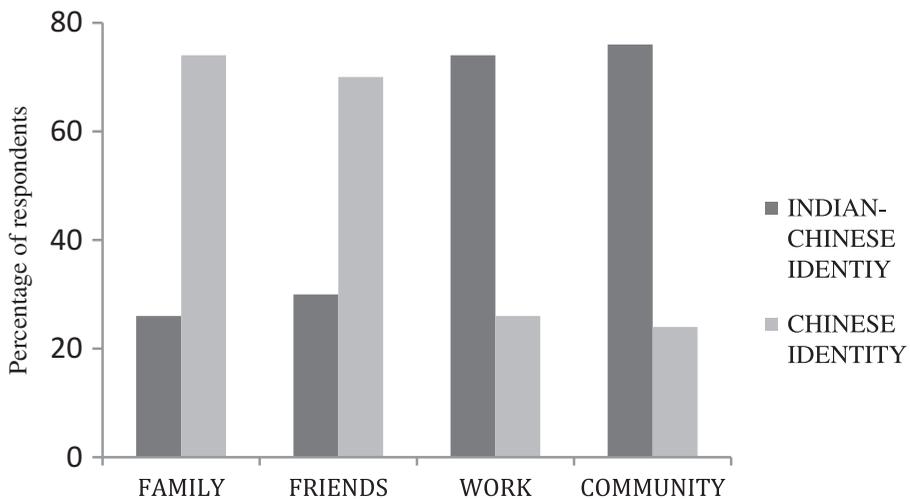


Figure 1. Shift in degrees of identity negotiations.

So actually they are integrating with the host society and by this they are psychologically adapting with the concept of feeling well and doing well within a multicultural society.

It is very clear that calibrating through at least two societies is an everyday routine for Bowbazar Chinese community. They should tackle the quest of identity negotiation through shifting identities to introduce themselves in such a way to satisfy the desires of individuals from both the ethnic community and dominant society. So they take the common strategy of shifting or altering identities by which acculturation process becomes much easier for them. Most of the Chinese of Bowbazar area has adapted to the shifted identities and they assumed that regardless how well they communicate in Hindi, Bengali language and how well they maintain a close relationship by integrating with the host society, their physical appearance would always differentiate them as the Chinese. The Chinese community's successful identity intercession is laid to the extent on which the Chinese community shifts from one cultural domain to another without feeling muddled. However alternating identities did not recommend equal identification within the two societies. For shifted identifiers, more grounded feeling towards their own cultural values and practices is inevitable.

So it is a perplex apprehension to discuss what defines identity of a Chinese people. It is excessively shortsighted, making it impossible to inflict a secure identity upon the Chinese community of Bowbazar. Many Chinese who are staying at Kolkata cannot able to speak in Chinese but very fluent in English and Hindi. They assimilated themselves very well with the dominant society. There are additionally other people who are more connected to India and want to feature their nationality instead of their ethnicity. In this context one respondent stated,

*“Obviously I am Indian. I am staying here for more than 70 years. I have Aadhar card, Voter Id Card. Nationality always comes first to me. But I look like Chinese which I can't deny yet I have numerous Indian companions and I love to talk with them.”*²⁹

The Chinese communities of Bowbazar area have complex identity issues and they literally struggle to explain what makes them Chinese or Indian Chinese. Here an interesting strategy of hybrid identity among most of the respondents has been noticed. They regarded themselves as half Indian half Chinese but according to the situations they blend themselves with the host society as well as in their own society which appears to keep the identities of two communities different as well as isolated and shifted forming a half and half or mix-up identity as they navigated through the two cultural backdrops. In this context one respondent said,

*“I am Chinese when I am with Chinese groups, but act like Indians when I am with them. Actually I fit myself, depending on the situations.”*³⁰

So it is clear that the Chinese community of Bowbazar integrate themselves very well with the dominant society for which they became quite skilled with both groups in switching between cultural practices and maintain their identity.

Conclusion

This study examined that majority of the Chinese of Bowbazar Chinatown considered themselves Indian-Chinese or Chinese-Indians. Most of the people of this community

integrate themselves with the main stream of the society. They take integration strategy as the easiest strategy to adopt. Each and every individual revised their own identity when needed by which they confront the challenges. They rely on external norms and responded in ways which are socially appropriate. Most of the Chinese particularly females accepted integration strategies as they are generous and mostly accepted within the society. Interestingly shifted or homogenized identity is the most commonly accepted category among all of the respondents. In case of Bowbazar Chinatown, Indian-Chinese identity reflects the citizenship or birthplace criteria. But Chinese identity is much deeper as they perform all kinds of Chinese beliefs and religious practices. So though they prefer to shift their identities demanding on the situations but still they believed that they belong to any one culture to particularly the Chinese culture as Chineseness is in their heredity or in blood. So to 'fit in' within various domains of social issues homogenized or alternated identity is the perfect choice for them.

In case of Bowbazar Chinese community concept of acculturation is generally associated with identities which are continuously shifting along with the integration strategy which is considered to be the most preferred one. But it is not compulsory to suggest that homogenized identities or adapting to the strategy of integration, have same extent of impact and recognition or empathy with both cultures.

The Chinese community of Bowbazar is continuously adjusting between cultures. So they are in a continuous search for a cultural home which put up many challenges for them as 'culture' is not related with one place. This community persistently tries to engross themselves to keep up a harmony between the desires of their own traditional identity and the expectations involving within host society. Integration into the dominant society does not really recommend that the Chinese community has the equivalent level of empathy with the two societies. Those in the community able to simultaneously shift through different cultural contexts and become very much skilled at adapting or confronting to situational attributes which make progress in identity negotiation. So it can be concluded that the Chinese community of Bowbazar Chinatown through ages is not only able to adapt ideals, values, and behaviors of host culture but also able to retain their ideals, values and beliefs of their own cultures of origin.

Notes

1. Min and Kim, "The Paradox of Ethnicization and Assimilation," 231-251.
2. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 393-403.
3. Lawler, *Identity Sociological Perspectives*, 7-13.
4. Smith, "Differentiating Acculturation And Ethnic Identity," 1-114.
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Ibid., 4.
7. Kroeber, *Anthropology*.
8. Barry, "Development of a New Scale for Measuring Acculturation," 193-197.
9. Ibid., 8.
10. Neto, Barros, and Schnitz, "Acculturation Attitudes and Adaptation," 19-32.
11. Liu, "Searching for a sense of place," 26-35.

12. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*, 1-173.
13. Berzonsky, "Self-Construction over the life span," 155-186.
14. Berger, *Invitation to sociology*.
15. Schwartz, Montgomery, Briones, "The Role of Identity in Acculturation," 1-30.
16. Yancey, Aneshensel, Driscoll. "The Assessment of Ethnic Identity," 190-208.
17. Ibid., 4.
18. Phinney, "Ethnic identity and acculturation," 63-81.
19. Sodowsky and Lai, "Asian Immigrant Variables and Structural Models," 199-210.
20. Sodowsky and Maestas, "Acculturation, ethnic identity, and acculturative stress," 131-172.
21. Ibid., 15.
22. Berry, Poortinga, Seagall, and Dasen, *Cross-Cultural Psychology*.
23. Berry, "A Psychology of Immigration", 615-634.
24. Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong*.
25. Bose, "The Kuomintang in India," 257-269.
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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Debarchana Biswas is a UGC-Senior Research Fellow, pursuing Ph.D. from Department of Geography, University of Calcutta. Her research interests cover ethnicity, acculturation and various perspectives of social geography.

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