

## SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE TRANSITIONS IN CHINESE IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S LIFE



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### SUMMARY

*Background and aims:* The empirical study examines significant negative transitions in Chinese immigrant children's lives in order to explore what kind of changes and challenges they experience. The focus of our questions was whether these changes and salient transitions fit into the normative crises expected by developmental psychology theories, and how normative crises are intertwined with various phenomena of the acculturation process.

*Methods:* The research sample consisted of 15 Chinese, primary school (grades 5–8) students living in Hungary. Qualitative interviews were conducted applying an autobiographical memory interview technique, the Life-line Interview Method (Assink and Schroots, 2010). The language of the interviews was either Hungarian or Chinese, with the materials analyzed after having been translated into Hungarian. A qualitative content analysis was carried out using both emergent and a priori coding.

*Results:* As a result of this analysis, four main themes emerged in the most negative memories of participants: (1) death of a close family member; (2) difficulty of integrating to a (new) institution or community, including difficulties with peers; (3) separation from significant persons (not as a result of death); and (4) difficulties in performance (learning, sports or art). Events could be categorized as normative and non-normative changes, both in preschool and school age, and each negative transition was related to issues of mobility, acculturation or cultural background.

*Discussion:* The results pointed to some of the most salient negative life events of Chinese immigrant children, also drawing attention to the issues of loss experiences (death, separation) as these were important events besides age-graded normative transitions and developmental challenges.

*Keywords:* Chinese migrant children in Hungary, acculturation, significant life events, autobiographical memories

## BACKGROUND

### **Transition and changes throughout the life course**

Human life is often described using the metaphor of travelling. A journey which lasts for a lifetime with different stations, ups and downs, peaks and valleys. This metaphor is employed by many – including artists, writers and scholars. In the array of sciences, life course perspective (Elder and Giele, 2009) refers to the multidisciplinary paradigm which is used to study the lives of people. In researching the various structural, social, cultural as well as psychological factors influencing one's life, several fields of science are involved such as sociology, history, developmental psychology or biology.

Within psychology, lifespan developmental psychology is concerned with the description and explanation of behavior throughout the life course. In comparison with sociological approaches, psychological approaches focus more on interindividual differences and intraindividual plasticity in development (Baltes et al., 2006).

### **Life-long development: different theoretical approaches**

Life span theories can be constructed based on two approaches. A person-centered, holistic approach considers “the person as a system and attempts to generate a knowledge base about life span development by describing and connecting age periods or states of development into one overall,

sequential pattern of lifetime individual development” (Baltes et al., 2006: 571). The second, function-centered approach focuses on a category of function such as identity, memory, perception, etc. It aims to characterize processes, mechanisms throughout the life span regarding one area of functioning. These approaches can be differentiated, but the two perspectives are often integrated (Baltes et al., 2006).

A good example of an integrated model would be Erikson's model (1963) about human psychosocial development, which is person-centered, but focuses at the same time on identity construction processes. It represents a traditional approach with a holistic, unidirectional and growth-like stance on human development. Following a psychoanalytical perspective, it is no longer in the mainstream of human development research, but it is still one of the most frequently cited theoretical frameworks for identifying important psychological changes throughout the life span, especially concerning personality development transitions (Berk, 2014). This model describes eight fixed-order stages that are organized around a central crisis. Each stage consists of a life task which has to be solved, and the nature and quality of the next stage depends on how the person has resolved the previous stage. The process can be pictured as a journey between these stable stages where transition to different phases are characterized by disequilibrium, crisis and change.

These transition periods are important turning points in an individual's life (Erikson, 1963; Cowan and Cowan, 2012).

Significant life stages are conceptualized to be universal, whose assumption was examined empirically also in a Chinese context by Wang and Viney (1997). Findings of their study showed that – parallel with age changes – establishing a sense of competence (industry, fourth stage in Erikson's model) and forming identity (fifth stage in Erikson's model) were important tasks for Chinese school-age children; however, trust-related issues were prioritized in each school-age group. Such patterns raise the question whether stages have a fixed order, and whether stages develop in a linear or parallel fashion (Wang and Viney, 1997).

Newer findings challenge the unilinear and holistic nature of development showing differences in rates, age-onsets, and age-offsets of developmental trajectories, multidirectional patterns of age-related change. Not all developmental change is related to chronological age, and the initial direction is not always incremental. Key terms within this theoretical approach are multidirectionality, multifunctionality, multidimensionality. Such a complex conceptualization of the development process entails the need for constructivism. According to developmental biocultural constructivism, several forces – biological, psychological, social – have an impact on development, along with the agentic behavior of the individual. The most important factors are normative age-graded influences, normative history-graded influences, and non-normative (idiosyncratic) influences (Baltes et al., 2006). Normative in this context refers to generality.

Certain life changes can be observed in several persons' life in a given age cohort due to biological (e.g. physical maturation) or environmental (e.g. sequential arrange-

ment of developmental contexts) factors. These are referred to as age-graded influences, whereas biological or environmental impacts (e.g. wars) on historical cohorts are referred to as history-graded influences. Non-normative influences on development reflect individual-idiosyncratic biological and environmental events, such as being a victim of an accident or winning the lottery. These events by definition are not frequent, but can have a powerful influence on one's life, on their ontogenetic development (Baltes et al., 2006).

#### **Changes throughout the lifetime: crises and transitions**

Although Erikson, in his books (1963, 1968) conceptualizes the shift between different developmental stages as a crisis, some authors prefer to use the term transition (Cowan and Cowan, 2012). The nature of these transitions are differentiated between normative and non-normative transitions. Normative transitions are expectable and predictable based on biological, psychological or social norms; whereas non-normative transitions are more unusual and less expected in one's life.

Normativity of a change or transition has never been unambiguous; however, since the mid-twentieth century, with the emergence of pluralism, societies provide even less of a definite, normative life course. Changing norms are linked to increased family heterogeneity (social class, family structure, immigrant/minority status, couples' sexual orientation, etc.) and result in a greater variety of life courses (Hofferth and Goldscheider, 2016). In practice, it is often hard to define whether a change is normative or not, because it

depends on the social context or the norms of a cultural group. For example, is divorce normative or non-normative? If an adolescent is becoming autonomous from parents, is it normative or non-normative (Cowan and Cowan, 2012)?

Even though normative life may be harder to define in (post) modern day's societies, the idea of a normative biography still exist in people's mind. Bernsten and Rubin (2002, 2004) have introduced the notion of a cultural life script, which refers to "measurable culturally shared expectations about the order and timing of events in a prototypical life course" (Bernsten and Rubin, 2004: 54).

Traces of normative life scripts can be detected in personal life stories. A study involving Danish and US undergraduates found a considerable (70% among Danish and 46% among US sample) overlap between life script events and personal life story events, which suggests that knowledge of normative life greatly affects which type of events are recalled by persons in a life story task. As life stories are an integrative narrative of self, factors such as personality traits, values and specific characteristics of the personal past may influence the degree of deviation from cultural life script norms (Rubin et al., 2009). By comparing negative and positive life events, and by examining their correspondence to cultural life scripts, Rubin and his colleagues (2009) assume that a life story which varies greatly from cultural normative scripts may be associated with emotional distress, since deviating from the norms, especially if the social context is homogeneous, can be experienced negatively by individuals.

This may be behind the phenomenon that according to Berntsen and Rubin

(2004), when people are asked to recall extremely positive or negative memories, it is more likely that positive memories are life scripts, because most culturally expected transitional events are considered positive and important. At the same time, when people are asked to recall extremely negative memories, life script events are less likely to appear, because highly negative events are typically deviations from the normative sequencing of the life script or they are non-scripted events.

### **Acculturation – different patterns of change**

Acculturation is by definition a process involving change and transition as it is described by many authors, among them John W. Berry who states that "acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact" (Berry et al., 2006: 305).

Cross-cultural transition and its consequences in terms of social and psychological adjustment have been explored and interpreted by more than one model over the decades. It is often conceptualized within a stress and coping framework, which highlights the significance of life changes during cross-cultural transitions, their challenging aspects and the different psychological and social processes which help individuals in adjustment (Berry, 1997; Ward et al., 2001).

A forerunner of this approach was Oberg (1960), who introduced the term "culture shock" and described four phases of emotional reactions during cultural transition. In his view, the process starts with (1) positive initial reactions to the change (honeymoon); followed by (2) negative feelings of various kinds such as frustration,

anger and anxiety as a result of psychological and emotional challenges in the new cultural context (culture shock); then (3) cultural learning and resolution (adjustment) occurs; and finally (4) enjoyment and functional competence can be experienced (acceptance).

Lysgaard (1955) has tested empirically the different stages of transition in cross-sectional studies and proposed a U-curve pattern for the adjustment process with similar terms (honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment) as in Oberg's description. Later, the U-curve hypothesis was further extended to the W-curve hypothesis by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), who suggested a re-adjustment period when a visitor returns home again. Although the U-curve and the W-curve models are often used, their validity are still a controversial issue (Black and Mendenhall, 1991). Empirical findings show different patterns of adjustment trajectories which harmonize with the hypothesis of coping and stress. Literature predicts that "in contrast to 'entry euphoria' sojourners and immigrants suffer the most severe adjustment problems at the initial stages of transition when the number of life changes is the highest and coping resources are likely to be at the lowest" (Ward et al., 2001: 82.)

#### **Acculturation and development as change**

Acculturation processes of ethnic minority children and youth are enriched by ontogenetical development, hence their complex change processes can be conceptualized as acculturation development (Oppedal and Toppelberg, 2016). These children face multiple developmental tasks, since

their ontogenetical development process is bound up with the acculturation process both to the heritage minority culture and to the culture of the majority society. Acculturation development involves processes which are common to all children, such as development of close adult and peer relationships, conflict in social networks or academic challenges. Concurrently, it also includes experiences that are unique to ethnic minority children such as bilingual language acquisition or exposure to ethnic discrimination (Oppedal and Toppelberg, 2016). While for adults, acculturation is built on the previous process of enculturation and can be understood as a second culture acquisition (Rudmin, 2009), in the case of ethnic minority children, socialization happens in the midst of two (or more) sociocultural domains.

Different theories exist about how this parallel socialization is realized and what consequences it has on children's social and emotional life. According to a significant part of acculturation literature, migration-related changes typically appear as a risk factor and this also applies to young people (Rudmin, 2009). At the same time, attention has been drawn to the phenomenon of the immigrant paradox that has been documented consistently in the United States. The essence of this phenomenon is that newcomer children and adolescents in the United States have more positive developmental outcomes than children who have been living in the United States longer, or who were born in the United States to immigrant parents (Marks et al., 2014). It is also documented that bicultural individuals develop bicognitive capabilities leading to potentially beneficial cognitive-social skills. These individuals are more flexible

in their coping styles, more adaptable, more empathetic towards others, have more complex ways of perceiving life problems and challenges (Ramirez, 1983).

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Differentiating between challenges of acculturation and normative crises is often not a simple task for researchers, as it is hard to disentangle the different components of the events. The question is complicated by the fact that the emergence and interpretation of normative crises might not be the same in different cultural contexts, even if there are efforts to find universal patterns as it was attempted regarding the Eriksonian stages as cited earlier (Wang and Viney, 1997).

The aim of this study is to identify significant life transitions, significant crises from the perspectives of Chinese immigrant children living in Hungary. The article also provides a multi-point analysis of the nature of these transitions, crises in order to understand how these transitions are influenced by different factors, such as normative and non-normative developmental factors, or cultural factors related to acculturation process. In our research, we examine only the perceived negative changes, relying on the Eriksonian approach that most important transitions bring with them a crisis, but they can also mean a development opportunity. By studying these negative events and possible developmental opportunities, our aim is to highlight these important transitions in Chinese immigrant children's lives, raise awareness concerning them and provide theoretical bases for possible future interventions.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main question of our research is descriptive in nature and aims to identify which events, key transitions constitute the most negative change, negative crisis in children's personal life stories. In addition to the thematic definition of the changes, we also looked for further features of the changes, raising the following two subquestions in our study.

Our first subquestion was related to the issues of normativity. To what extent do the highlighted events fit into the important life stages, developmental tasks related to normative changes, normative crises as indicated in classic developmental theories, such as Erikson's psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1963)? What other aspects, issues of normativity can be inferred using more recent developmental approaches?

Our second subquestion is related to cultural issues and acculturation processes. How can different developmental transitions be interpreted from a cultural perspective? To what extent is the process of acculturation apparent in the various identified changes in a lifeline?

#### METHODS

##### Respondent Profile

Chinese, primary school students (grades 5–8) participated in the study. The proportion of boys and girls was relatively evenly distributed (7 boys and 8 girls), the respondents' average age was 13.2 ( $m = 13.2$ ,  $min = 11$ ;  $max = 16$ ). The criteria for inclusion were the upper primary school status, not age, because we were interested in the experiences

*Table 1.* Respondents' profile in terms of (1) place of birth; (2) length of stay in Hungary and in China; (3) age period of stay.

(1) place of birth (2) length of stay in Hungary and in China (3) age period of stay	Language of the interview		Number of participants
	Hungarian	Chinese	
was born in Hungary and has never lived in China	p1 (age 13), p2 (age 12), p3 (age 14), p4 (age 14)	p5 (age 11)	5
was born in Hungary and spent some months/years in China between ages 0–6 years	p6 (age 14), p7 (age 12),	p8 (age 12)	3
was born in Hungary and spent some months/years in China between ages 6–12 years	p9 (14), p10 (15)	p11 (16)	3
who was born in Hungary or in China, but has lived in China for the most part of his/her life, and has been living in Hungary for more than 2 years at the time of the interview	p12 (age 13)	p13 (age 13),	2
who was born in Hungary or in China, but has lived in China for the most part of his/her life, and has been living in Hungary for less than 2 years at the time of the interview	p14 (12), p15 (12)		2

of children who attend upper primary school. From the aspect of age, we had an outlier, because in the Hungarian education system it is common practice to put migrant children into lower classes than their age in order to manage language shortcomings in academically less demanding curricula until the child has stronger language competency (Paveszka and Nyíri, 2006). As a result of this practice, an older respondent was included in the sample, who would normally have attended high school if age had been considered.

The linguistic competence of the participants was variable, but it was not part of the

study to assess it. In order to accommodate various language competencies for a successful interview process, the language of the interview was either Hungarian or Chinese, as requested by the participants (10 respondents chose Hungarian; 5 respondents chose Chinese). In terms of length of stay in Hungary, we can speak of a relatively heterogeneous sample if we consider factors such as (1) place of birth; (2) length of stay in Hungary and in China; (3) age period of stay. The sample included participants (1) who were born in Hungary and have never lived in China (5 respondents);

(2) who were born in Hungary and spent some months/years in China between ages 0–6 years (3 respondents); (3) who were born in Hungary and spent some months/years in China between ages 6–12 years (3 respondents); (4) who were born in Hungary or in China, but have lived in China for the most part of their life, and have been living in Hungary for more than 2 years at the time of the interview (2 respondents); and (5) who were born in Hungary or in China, but have lived in China for the most part of their life, and have been living in Hungary for less than 2 years at the time of the interview (2 respondents) (see *Table 1*). As for the educational context, respondents were students of Chinese-Hungarian or English-Hungarian bilingual school (9 respondents) and majority Hungarian state (6 respondents) elementary schools.

### Interview method

In order to identify the significant events of life, an autobiographical memory interview technique, the Life-line Interview Method (Assink and Schroots, 2010) was applied. The method is constructed to study subjective self-organization of past and future events over the course of life. It is a multi-dimensional method in the sense that it asks verbal and graphic data from participants with the use of the footpath metaphor, the metaphor of peaks and valleys of life.

Participants first draw the curve of their life history, starting with birth, and ending with the present. The drawing is facilitated with the help of appropriate instructions and examples (LIM, Assink and Schroots, 2010). The drawing is placed on a pre-printed sheet with a vertical line indicating the positive-negative emotional charge, and

a horizontal line over time. After drawing, participants give a verbal explanation of their lifeline by labeling all the important turning points and events on the line. Labeling includes information and reflections on the events, also, the date of the event. The interview technique includes the presentation of the future after the drawing of the past; however, in this study only data related to the past were processed.

After the general curriculum of autobiographical data (interview phase A), we asked for specific stories, autobiographical memories which were originally not included the lifeline, but might be significant for the participant. In this phase, any memory can be narrated regardless of their connection to the lifeline (interview section B). We included the second phase in order to give space to memories which are harder to integrate into a coherent life-narrative, or which come to the participants' mind at a slower pace.

In our approach, the method takes into account that memories are constructed in a social setting (Reese and Farrant, 2003), therefore, data collection is assisted with conversation tools, such as open-ended, clarifying questions.

### Recruitment and process

Children were approached via schools and via personal communication channels. The ethical consent of the teacher, parents and children were requested according to the ethical protocol of ELTE Institute of Psychology and Pedagogy. The interviews took place in a two-person situation at the children's school or in one of the offices of ELTE, their duration was approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Chi-

nese and Hungarian, the Chinese language data were translated into Hungarian and analyzed in Hungarian.

### Data analysis

Our analysis strategy also used emergent and a priori coding, which is very common in single research projects (Elliott, 2018). The three main directions of the questions (negative life events, normativity, cultural aspects) determined the first trajectory of our codes, but within the explicit themes we worked with free coding for subtopics.

The exact procedure of the analysis and coding was applied as follows. The main focus of our research was to explore which events constitute the most negative change, negative transition for children in their personal life stories. To answer this question experiences and memories belonging to the deepest (graphical) point on the lifeline of the interviewees were identified. These memories – derived from the drawing method – are the most negative memories of the participants. We included all the memories which were at the deepest (graphical) point in the analysis. They were organized into thematic groups in order to create main categories (main topics).

As a second step in interpreting the responses, we thematically analyzed all the memories in the participants' experience material (not just the ones at the deepest graphical points), selecting those which were thematically linked to the main topics found at the deepest points. With this second phase of the analysis, we could explore other aspects, possible alternative patterns of the main topics. For example, if the topic of separation appeared among the main topics, then we analyzed all the memories (even if they

did not appear as the most negative memory) about the topic of separation. In this way, we could draw a more complete picture of the pattern regarding the experience of separation (either it was the most negative experience, or "just" a negative experience).

As the next step, all the memories were analyzed in relation to the issues of normativity and acculturation in order to answer our subquestions.

## RESULTS

The main question of our research was to pinpoint which events constitute the most negative change, negative crisis for children in their personal life stories. We identified the most negative memories on the lifeline, and then thematically analyzed emerging themes. Since some of our subquestions included aspects related to developmental psychological stage, in our report we used both thematic and age categories.

### The most negative changes in preschool and school age

Analyzing the responses of fifteen participants, we found 5 preschool events as the most negative memory and 10 school age events. The preschool experiences were grouped around two themes. One topic is family death, and another is the difficulty of integrating into a (new) institution or community, including difficulties with peers in a kindergarten environment.

Early childhood preoccupations reemerged to some degree in school age. Difficulties around death or challenges of adaptation to a (new) institution or community, including difficulties with peers in school proved to be

important at this stage of life as well. In addition, failure and difficulties in performance (learning, sports or art), and separation from significant persons (not as a result of death) were major issues in school age.

#### *Event of death*

Deaths appeared in two categories: the death of the parent and the death of the grandparent. Although these cases were graphically presented as the most negative memories by the participants, not everybody could add a vivid emotional experience when recalling these events. It can be assumed that the negativity of the experience was mitigated by the age of the participants at the time of the event. Some participants hardly remembered the experience of loss in early childhood or in preschool, or they only remembered the fact that they had not received much information from adults about the circumstances of the death:

“Well, I was little, it wasn’t so bad.”;

“Do you remember only a little?”

“Yes.” (memory from the age of 3.5 from a 14-year-old girl).

This is consistent with the literature from several aspects. On the one hand, in infancy – up to approx. 6–7 years old – children do not fully understand the finality and irreversibility of death from a cognitive point of view (Baker and Sedney, 1996). In addition, at the age of 3 children only just start to construct experiences into more complex and coherent memories, but the process is more difficult with experiences which are hard to comprehend for the individual (Nelson and Fivush, 2004). Also, if the child did not have a close emotional relationship with the departed, for example with a grandparent, then the loss could not be identified as a loss of

a personally meaningful relationship (Baker and Sedney, 1996). Consequently, the event was emotionally salient for the child only because of the mourning reaction of the family (Abeles et al., 2004).

However, in line with the most negative memory label, there were memories that had a negative emotional charge, even from an early age. Children recollected negative emotional experiences from an early age which are in sync with childhood mourning symptoms, such as dysphoria. In the case of adolescent memories, the range of emotional reactions were more complex: sadness, anger, regression reactions appeared as emotional components of the experiences.

During the analysis we also examined the normative or non-normative nature of the changes. Studies claim that death-related situations in childhood are considered as non-normative life events which confront children with unanticipated psychological tasks. Death-related losses which are most likely to occur in childhood are the loss of a pet or a grandparent, but even the frequency of these do not match that of normative life transitions such as entering the school system around the age of 6 (Corr, 1996).

#### *Event of death – aspects related to acculturation and mobility*

Another question for analysis was whether different changes and events could be interpreted in terms of acculturation. In the analysis of deaths, we encountered two types of cases in relation to acculturation processes.

One of the cases was that if a major change in the family (death or some other type of sudden change in health, such as a severe illness) occurs in another country (China), some or all of the family members will go to the place of the event and would de-

cide to stay there even for a longer period of time. Children may be entrusted to the care of the grandparent(s) or relatives from the extended family for shorter or longer periods. Based on the literature, we can assume that the loss associated with the deceased can be accompanied by a secondary loss experience, which is otherwise a typical phenomenon after death in the family. Secondary losses are significant changes in one's life as a result of a loss, such as changes in daily routines, moving to a different place, changes in child-care (Baker and Sedney, 1996).

Multiple changes are very likely to occur during moving to another place causing difficulties in the life of the child. However, we found no evidence in our study of the subjective negative effects of experiencing such changes. For example, according to a report of a 14-year-old boy, in the period following the death of his grandmother, he spent his summer with his grandfather and it was a good experience for him during which he could overcome the sadness of loss: *"I lived in China, went to school and I was with my grandfather during that summer. In that period, I was relatively happy. (...) I started not to be so sad about her being dead and all that..."* (memory from the age of 5 from a 14-year-old boy).

It is worth interpreting the experience of this boy knowing his mobility history: in his case the Chinese environment, the home of his grandparents was totally familiar as the family traveled regularly to China. His relationship with his grandfather was very good, which could have been an important resource in the difficult situation. One of the most important factors in mourning during childhood is the comfort of having a safe environment, emotionally accessible, supportive persons, including individuals who

may be different from the primary caregiver (Baker and Sedney, 1996).

In the context of death, another topic that appears in the data is the increasing parentified role in the period of loss and afterwards. The cultural broker role played by the children is a well-known phenomenon in the literature describing the functioning of immigrant families (Kam and Lazarevic, 2014, Nyíri, 2006). In this role children manage interpretation between the parent and the school or other institutions, which aims to remedy the cultural and linguistic barriers of the parents. In such communication situations children need to understand more than one culture, engage in adult conversations and even take part in decisions concerning the whole family (Kam and Lazarevic, 2014).

When considering emotional, cognitive-linguistic-academic and parent-child relationship dimensions, positive and negative aspects of cultural brokering can also be identified. It can contribute to the child's increased self-confidence and fulfillment of his or her childhood obligations (filial piety) (Barna et al., 2012) and respect for parents (Chao, 2006), but at the same time it can result in internalizing (e.g. depression) and externalizing (e.g. aggression) symptoms (Chao, 2006), unhealthy coping behaviors, inappropriate parent-child roles (e.g. parentification) (Kam and Lazarovic, 2014) as well. Various factors influence whether a child experiences brokering as a positive or as a negative experience including norms related to brokering, brokering efficacy and the feelings concerning brokering (Kam and Lazarovic, 2014). Overly challenging situations – when brokering efficacy is not experienced, and negative feelings are involved – might result in negative brokering

experiences for which the following case could be an example.

In our own material, a 14-year-old boy reported that it was very difficult for him to communicate with the hospital when his father was ill, participate in the decisions to be made during the treatment. Also, now in the present, to deal with family life issues in which he has an ongoing and important role to play. Difficulties are shown by the deterioration in learning performance, immersion in computer games, negative emotional outbursts and a general negative assessment of the situation.

*“I’m not angry at them, because I know they’re really trying, but they don’t know anything, and I’ve already said it wasn’t good for me ...that ... that I have to do it, when I also don’t know too much about these things (...) I sometimes feel like I’m an 8 years old, because I just want to play, and yell.”* (experience from the age of 15 from a 15-year-old boy)

During the analysis, we also examined how the topics of the most negative memories appear in the narratives of the other interviewees in negative (but not the most negative) memories. However, in the case of death-related memories we have not found a memory that was negative, but not the most negative. Thus, it is also an important finding that if death appeared in life history, it was construed as the most negative experience in the story of the participant.

#### **Difficulties in integrating into an (new) institution, community, including difficulties with peers**

The difficulty of integrating into a new social community or institution, as the most nega-

tive experience, appeared in memories both in preschool and school age. In preschool, children were particularly affected by loneliness and lack of friends, especially in the initial period of their institutional experiences. In school age, mockery and social exclusion were the most negative experiences.

In our analysis, we analyzed not only the most negative, but all the negative changes related to a new institution, a new community. The experiences of preschoolers were no longer included in the negative experiences, these were among the most negative experiences. During school years, two areas of difficulties were reported in children’s interviews.

One of the topics was the issue of social relationships, the position in the community. Mockery, social exclusion and physical abuse, i.e. different forms of peer bullying were recalled by the participants. As the cause of bullying, cultural difference usually appeared as a factor, even if linguistic deficiencies did not explicitly constitute the source of the problem. Linguistic weaknesses exacerbated the situation.

Another issue that has emerged from the reports was the school itself as a system, and the difficulty of adapting to it. In the case of Hungarian experiences, the difficulty of switching between kindergarten and school was mentioned by the subjects, but it was hard for them to formulate what caused the difficulty.

*“When I was here in the school for the first time, I looked at the director and cried. [...] I do not know why. Fearful. Do you remember why the situation was so fearful? I do not know why. (...) After, not. Because there are [were] many Chinese friends. I learned to read and write.”* (memory from the age of 6 from a 14-year-old girl)

In relation to the experience of institutional change in China, children could name specific reasons for their difficulties, especially in the case of boarding schools. Many experienced these schools as very rigorous.

*"In China, school is very strict, there is a lot of pressure. As I was a boarder, I had to get up very early every day and then we studied all day very late until bedtime. It was very stressful, that's why I drew such ups and downs."* (memory from the age of 6 from a 13-year-old girl).

In the analysis, we also examined the normative or non-normative nature of changes related to institutions or communities. Both in Hungary and in China, early childhood education is considered to be a part of basic education (Molnár et al., 2015, Zhu, 2009). Entering a new educational institution at the age of 6–7 is a socially regulated transition in Hungary as well as in China (World Bank, 2017). Thus, the marked changes that are linked to either the beginning of the kindergarten or the beginning of the school can be regarded as normative.

As a most negative memory, we could only find experiences related to the beginning of the kindergarten, but not the school. In school age, transfer to a different school was the basis for the formation of a most negative experience, but not the event of beginning school itself. Among all the negative experiences in school age, children reported difficulties related to the beginning of a phase and inter-phase shifts as well.

The topic of integration into a community or institution was also examined in terms of acculturation. When there was a cultural aspect in the data, it was usually grouped around two themes: cultural difference and/or lack of linguistic competence. Some, but

not all, of the experiences were also linked to mobility when changing schools had to be done due to international mobility.

Cultural difference caused difficulties for children who lived permanently in Hungary just as much as for those who had to acculturate to a new cultural environment. It is important to note that not only moving to Hungary, but moving from Hungary to China could also be a source of difficulties, especially if Chinese language competence, knowledge of Chinese customs or school expectations were not adequate.

*"They mocked me, they beat me up too, because I was different from them. The habits are [were] different, I didn't speak Chinese, just sat there. They thought I was a strange kid."* (memory from the age of 6 from a 15-year-old boy)

Changing between different linguistic-social environments needs to be done several times if the family chooses the strategy for the child to be part of Hungarian and Chinese school system as well. This strategy is relatively typical among Chinese families living in Hungary (Nyíri, 2006), which results in a relatively high level of student fluctuation regarding school career (Vámos, 2013). This pattern was present among our participants too, and from the perspective of the children it meant that after being in a Hungarian context, one had to adapt to the Chinese context, then reintegrate into a Hungarian context again. This process was usually hindered at more than one point because of linguistic competence issues, cultural differences, or social and learning difficulties.

In our interpretation this phenomenon is a subtype of acculturation stress related to (multiple) cultural reentry in the process of

transnational acculturation. There are very few research data on this phenomenon, if any. Reentry shock, reverse acculturation processes are discussed mostly regarding the experiences of sojourners (Szkudlarek, 2010). But even if some aspects are similar, the life situation (educational, legal, social, etc.) of young or adult sojourners are very different from that of immigrant children.

Studies on experiences of Third Culture Kids<sup>1</sup> provide a more complex picture on how children live through multiple culture changes (Kortegast and Yount, 2016, Cottrell, 2007). However, social status, cultural experiences and even social perception of Third Culture Kids might be going through some changes over time in themselves (Fry, 2007). This may be even more true when we make comparisons with immigrant children. Very distinctive experiences of reverse acculturation stress were reported in detail by one of our participants.

*“We came back to Hungary. It was very hard, it was worse than going back to China, because then I could only speak a little Chinese [...] Here the level is [was] zero, because I did not speak to anyone and forgot that I was born in Hungary. [...] Actually, what happened with me at the age of at 6, the same happened when I was 10. I had to take ..., the first Hungarian word I learned was 'stupid', the second is... sorry for the expression, but 'motherfucker', 'fucking Chinese', I learned this be-*

*cause I heard it the most. These were the most common, I had to take on these habits. Because it was really terrible in the 4th grade, every day with all the extra lessons. And all sorts of things [...] I fought in the school every day. At first not, I didn't fight in the first week, they beat me up hard, and then I thought I'd give as good as I got. Yes, they were very bad things. [...] Well, they're all good friends now.”* (memory from the age of 10 from a 15-year-old boy)

#### **Separation from emotionally significant persons (not as a result of death)**

Separation from emotionally important persons, as the most negative experience, only appeared in school-age memories, but as a negative memory, the issue emerged in pre-school and school-age experiences as well. In the analysis of deaths, we have already seen that the loss of a person can be a very significant event in a child's life. If the loss is not related to death, it is less definitive and irreversible, yet it can still be emotionally challenging.

The most negative experience was separation from the parent, and separation from a class teacher as a result of entering into a new grade. Separation from grandparents or a friend also appeared as a negative experience, which in most cases was a consequence of moving, and happened in both preschool and school age.

<sup>1</sup> Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a term of John and Ruth Hill Useem (Useem, 1993, cited by Pollock and Van Reken, 2001), who studied expatriates and observed that expatriates create a shared lifestyle within the expatriate community which starts to function as an interstitial culture or culture between cultures. The home country is identified as the first country, the host culture is the second culture, and this interstitial culture is the third culture. Children of expatriates who spend a significant part of their developmental years outside the parents' culture in this third culture are called Third Culture Kids (Pollock and van Reken, 2001).

By examining the normality of these experiences, we found that the normative nature of the separation from an important person can only be determined by knowing the context of the event. Separation experiences at the most negative point in lifelines were special in that they were accompanied by more changes affecting the child's life. These were, for example, the beginning of school or the entry into a higher class, which are natural, normative parts of a child's life in many societies, but additional factors (e.g. societal arrangements, availability of school, etc.) can determine whether school progression is accompanied by separation from parents or the home in a given societal context.

In China there are two factors – rural out-migration and the Rural Primary School Merger Program<sup>2</sup> launched in the late 1990's or early 2000's – lead to the phenomenon that many Chinese children started to attend boarding schools. Therefore, we can assume that going to a boarding school cannot be seen as non-normative as it is not atypical, unexpected or unpredictable in the Chinese context. However, even if it might be considered as an optional school career for some children, parental separation and admission to a strict boarding school, appeared as a difficulty in the children's reports.

Almost all of the negative (but not the most negative) separation experiences were mobility-related, therefore, in the following paragraph we show the issue of normativity together with aspects of acculturation.

Some of the experiences related to losses which were the results of the family's

migration strategy. In these memories, children reported cases when they had to leave the primary caregiver because they were either "forwarded" to or "left behind" with an extended family member. In the case of our interviewees, the separation occurred in all 3 ages, infancy, toddler and school age. A negative separation experience also occurred when parting happened from an extended family member who had played the role of the primary caretaker for a longer period of time, as it was reported by a 14-year-old participant who spent the first 3 years of her life with her grandmother: *"I missed grandma, and my mom told me that I cried for a long time"* (memory from the age of 3.5 from 14-year-old girl).

Although separation can be difficult, the process has positive sides when it is over. After a left behind experience, some children had positive feelings regarding reunion, which could be emotional support for those who had come to a new country for the first time: *"What was it like for you [in Hungary] in the first days, do you remember?" "I feel [felt] good because my mother is [was] here."* (memory from the age of 8 from a 13-year-old girl).

When analyzing the normativity of such separation experiences, it is important to realize that migration separation, when parents migrate and leave their children behind for a shorter or longer time, is a well-documented phenomenon in transnational families' lives (Zentgraf and Stoltz Chinchilla, 2012). Studies conducted in collectivistic cultures shows that in communities where there is a strong familial

<sup>2</sup> The Rural Primary School Merger Program aims to shut down isolated, rural schools and provide quality educational facilities and educational staff for rural children in geographically centralized schools (Shu and Tong, 2015).

kinship network, it is relatively easy for a mother to migrate and leave her children behind with relatives or close friends. Such parental behavior is not necessarily considered as deviant (Waters, 1999, cited by Pottinger, 2005).

### **Negative experiences related to performance: failures and difficulties**

The performance-related failures and difficulties were only apparent at school. The topic of the most negative experiences was organized around several subthemes. On the one hand, the failures and bad grades in different subjects meant clearly negative experiences for some children. Also, a very negative experience was failure in competitions (exclusion or defeat) or in community performances (e.g. art and theater) which were accompanied by shame. A third topic in the most negative memories was related to the issue of overload as a result of weekend school obligations and extra classes.

Among the negative experiences, various phenomena of school performance difficulties were found. Difficulties in mathematics, natural sciences and grammar subjects; the stress associated with exams at the end of the year; and the lack of diligence in learning were the topics that emerged. Among the most negative and negative experiences there were both lower and upper class memories, as well as experiences related to both Hungary and China.

In relation to the normative nature of experiences, we can state that concerns and negative memories related to academic issues are considered normative, as it is a well-established function of elementary school to provide opportunities for children to gain basic competence in various are-

as (Epps and Smith, 1984). Cultural issues may come to the fore when we take a closer look at these experiences.

Some of the difficulties experienced in Hungary were due to the difficulties of learning in a non-mother tongue (Hungarian), others were concerned about the burdens of acquiring competencies tied to one's own cultural background. For example, learning Chinese writing is burdensome, as well as going to extracurricular Chinese school at the weekend. Also, there are mobility-related difficulties not just in terms of social issues as we described earlier, but in relation to performance as well.

If the child participates in the Chinese educational system during school socialization, it is necessary to live through particular characteristics of Chinese education. As mentioned earlier, children find Chinese education very difficult and rigorous, and different in terms of academic expectations. Mathematics was one area where problems emerged, many found the first-class mathematics requirements difficult in China, especially if they had had preschool socialization in Hungary, hence they lacked basic knowledge compared to those Chinese children who had a preschool background in China.

*“In China, children in kindergarten already start to learn, they learn basics such as addition, and basic, easy Chinese characters. I didn't, because I was in Hungary, we just played in kindergarten! I remember that we just played, I ate and went home. That was it, I played in the sand pit! Yes, I played with sand with my peers, we threw mud at each other. This is how kindergarten was. There, they started to count for real. In kindergarten already within 100 or 10, but that*

*was already known. So, then, they didn't know that I came from another country, they just thought I was a stupid kid, why didn't I know this, it should have been [taught] in kindergarten. Then, yes, it was very difficult, I often cried about my grades being so bad. Mom, why are they so bad? But she was proud, because she knew that tests in China were 100 points, and in the first grade it should have been around 90 points, and I got something like 60–70–80 points, and Mom was proud that even having learned nothing before, as a beginner, I could quickly pick up things to get 60-70-80 points. But I saw things differently.”* (memory from the age of 6, 15-year-old boy)

## DISCUSSION

In our analyses we were looking for negative transitions in Chinese children's lives in order to explore what kind of changes and challenges they experience. Also, we wanted to examine whether these changes, salient transitions or crises fit into the normative crises expected by developmental psychology theories, and how these normative crises are absorbed by various phenomena of the acculturation process.

We found 4 main themes emerging in the most negative memories: (1) death of a close family member; (2) difficulty of integrating into a (new) institution or community, including difficulties with peers; (3) separation from significant persons (not as a result of death); (4) difficulties in performance (learning, sports or art). In these analyses those memories which were perceived as negative, but not most negative were analyzed as well; however, only those whose

topic were related to the four main themes. We analyzed these memories to gain a more complex picture of the main themes. Concerning the temporal distribution of negative changes, we found that among the most negative memories preschool and middle school age memories could be identified as well, but middle school age events were most represented suggesting that school is a more demanding phase in children's lives compared to the preschool period.

### **Negative transitions in preschool age – does a normative crisis arise?**

The phase of preschool period (or early childhood) from a developmental perspective is often referred to as the period of playful exploration and initial attempts of collaborations with peers (Berk, 2014). According to Erikson (1968) children's main focus in this period is to cultivate their own initiatives and desires to take actions; and to understand moral obligations, self-regulations while executing these actions. In Chinese children's lives the latter is particularly important, as parents emphasize the importance of impulse control in order to prepare children for adapting to collectivist social norms later in life (Ho, 1994).

In our results in the preschool period two topics were identified as most negative: (1) difficulty of integrating to a (new) institution or community and including difficulties with peers; and (2) death of a close family member.

In the preschool age the theme of difficulties of integration into a community was strongly related to lack of friendship and the lack of collaborative play which engendered loneliness. Friendship in early childhood very often serves as a social tool to organize

play behavior and maximize enjoyment of such activities (Parker and Gottman, 1989, cited by Rubin et al., 2006). Supportiveness and exclusivity also start to be important factors for children at this time (Seban, 2003). Difficulties in forming friendships and engaging in collaborative play might be a strong negative experience for children, when the most important activity of this period, playing, is impeded.

The death of a close family member was also among the most negative events in preschool children's lives. Their negativity is showed by the fact that death events were perceived not as negatives, but as the most negative memories. As Berntsen and Rubin (2004) pointed out, when people are asked to recall significant negative memories, they are very likely to call upon events which deviate from the sequencing of a normative life script or which are non-scripted events. Although death is an inevitable part of life, on a personal level death is considered as a non-normative event (Corr, 1996).

At the same time, on a general, universal level death events are not unusual or non-normative. According to Pataki (2001) one of the episode schemes (*primordial experiences*) which recurring in life-history scenarios is the personal experience of basic anthropological situations (birth, marriage, death, loneliness or illness). Thus, the topic of death itself is in general a very important part of life-history scenarios. In this sense, the emergence of death in children's stories can be considered as normative and universal.

### **Negative transitions in school age – does normative crisis arise?**

In middle school age, performance and community are the focal point, as one of

the most influential Western theorists, Erik Erikson says about this period of children's life: by the time school age comes children are "ready to learn quickly and, avidly, to become big in the sense of sharing obligation, discipline, and performance [...], also eager to make things together, to share construction and planning" (Erikson, 1968: 122).

The importance of performance and community obligations at school age also fits easily into Chinese traditional parental thinking. Preparation for collective obligations starts from an early age as we described earlier. However, in traditional Chinese parenting, parents do not think that children are able to comprehend and learn much below the age of 6 (Chan et al., 2009; Ho, 1994). According to Ho (1994) parents tend to be lenient with preschool children and focus on impulse control parenting goals rather than cognitive development goals. It is not until the school years that performance and achievement clearly are pushed to the forefront of parental socialization.

Studies on both parental and children's values and motivations show that school performance, academic learning are very important because of Confucian traditions (Hau and Ho, 2010). In Confucian tradition there is a strong relationship between learning and moral development, it is one's moral obligation to commit to lifelong learning, search for knowledge and improve continuously. One must be prepared to endure hardship, persevere and single-mindedly focus on the learning process (Li, 2002).

Also, achievement and learning in Confucian tradition is inherently social. Ideal learners center their emotions "on happiness for themselves but gratitude toward their families' nurturance of good learn-

ing and shame, guilt, and self-reproach toward poor learning” (Li, 2002: 263). Strong belief in effort is also part of the mindset of Chinese immigrants, which is referred to as the “frame of success”. It is a common thinking pattern among Chinese immigrants which stresses the importance of learning as a means to nurture Chinese cultural traditions and ensure social mobility (Lee and Zhou, 2015).

Academic effort as a source of education success (Sebestyén, 2017) and importance of school and learning (Nyíri, 2006; Barna et al., 2012; Nguyen Luu et al. 2009) were showed in studies with Chinese Hungarian immigrants as well. In addition to the above, it is worth emphasizing that although culture and socialization are important factors, societal and personality issues might also play a role in the phenomenon of achievement issues in Chinese immigrants' lives. As in the aforementioned model of frame of success, Lee and Zhou (2015) stress how social status might play an important role in achievement by being a motivating factor for upward mobility. Studies on personality relating to achievement among immigrants also show that culture plays only a partial role in success. According to Boneva and Frieze (2001) those immigrants who choose immigration because of economic reasons have higher achievement motivations.

Although in middle childhood industry and productive work are the most important features (Erikson, 1968), this is also the period when children open up to relationships outside the family more than before. In this age, instead of a group of children playing together, peer groups are formed with a more complex group structure and norms (Rubin et al., 2006). In Western social contexts, middle childhood marks a great shift

for children as the proportion of social interaction that involves peers increases. As for negative interactions, it is typical for this era that verbal and relational aggression (insults, derogation, threats and gossip) gradually replace direct physical aggression (Rubin et al., 2010). Also, bullying and victimization tend to blossom during middle childhood and early adolescence (Espelage et al., 2000).

According to our results, in the middle school period four topics were identified as most negative: (1) failure and difficulties in performance (learning, sports or art); (2) difficulty of integrating into a (new) institution or community and including difficulties with peers; (3) death of a close family member; (4) and separation from significant persons (not as a result of death).

Both performance issues and integrating into a more complex social community are inherent parts of the middle school phase; therefore, having difficulties in these crucial areas can provide a thorough ground for constructing the most negative experiences.

As for death and separation, their common feature is that in both cases the individual experiences some sort of loss. As discussed earlier, although the experience of death-related loss in human life is universal, the event of death itself, especially in children's life, cannot be considered normative (Corr, 1996). When we compare the bereavement process of children at different ages, we can see that whereas younger children until approximately the age of 6 or 7 are typically unable to fully understand the concept of death, older children grasp its nature in a more and more outlined way. Children between 6 and 9 usually understand its irreversibility, but they still do not convince death as being universal and inevitable. It is only after about the

age of 10 that death is seen as universal, inevitable and irreversible (Baker and Sedney, 1996). Although cognitive differences also appeared in the responses of our respondents and younger respondents had more limited, less detailed memories, the significance of death events was similar in both age phases. Death-related events were constructed as the most negative experience in both age phases.

As discussed earlier, the normativity of separation experience is very contextual, as it can be tied to normative steps related to life stages, such as institutional change. At the same time, they can be unique or influenced by the arbitrary variables in one's individual life, such as mobility of a friend or work opportunities of a parent.

#### **The acculturation aspects of negative experiences**

From the point of view of acculturation, we have seen in the results that acculturation and cultural issues appeared in some way in all four main themes. Issues of mobility and loss have not surprisingly emerged as an important topic both in relation to death and separation.

As it is well-known from previous studies, a significant proportion of Chinese immigrants living in Hungary follow a transnational acculturation strategy, which means that they maintain close personal and economic relations in the mother country and also in other countries (Örkény and Székelyi, 2010). In transnational families in spite of the distance and difficulty of close contact, the millennial tradition of filial piety has not been eroded. The younger generation still has to respect and support the older generation, even in transformed ways. With the lack of physical presence,

practical and material support might be hampered and compensated by greater psychological support (Tu, 2016). In the case of death or illness of an older relative, filial piety obligates the younger generation to take care of the deceased. They may also support the surviving relatives, which often means an extended stay in the home country or further separation of the family, as certain family members have to be present in the home country, while others have to take care of responsibilities in the host country.

As mobility might increase uncertainty in children's lives, we assume that it may be more important for immigrant children's parents to be involved in the bereavement process. Factors that are generally important in grieving children's life such as providing accurate and age-relevant information about the death, the comforting presence of a parent or a parent-substitute, or allowing the child to participate in the social rituals that follow the death might be of more relevance than in non-immigrant circumstances (Baker and Sedney, 1996).

The issue of mobility and loss was clearly tied to separation in our results. As it was discussed before, migration separation is a very often applied practice in transnational families. However, its evaluation is complex and controversial, because the costs and benefits of leaving the child behind can be seen from culturally different perspectives. An individualistic, western cultural perspective puts the indivisibility of the mother-child attachment at the forefront, focusing primarily on the mother-child dyad. However, in many collectivist cultures multiple significant relationships are present and children's emotional needs can be met by extended family members (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Researchers

argue that understanding family strategies needs to consider the micro- and macro-level contexts of these decisions (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). On the other hand, there are studies also from a collectivistic cultural field which have revealed the negative impacts of the experience of being left behind on the children's psychosocial development (Ling et al., 2017).

Acculturation issues regarding integration to institutions, social communities and performance were in line with previous studies on acculturation difficulties encountered by Chinese immigrants. Research showed that language and communication difficulties, unknown cultural habits and values, interpersonal relationship problems, learning and career-related difficulties, discrimination experiences, and loneliness are highlighted acculturation difficulties for Chinese immigrants (Yeh and Inose, 2002). Intergenerational conflicts, differences in expectations of parents and children which are also a very often mentioned source of conflict and often in relation to school and home matters (Li et al., 2016), were brought up in our results in connection to an emotionally burdensome family loss event, such as the death of a family member.

Difficulties related to institution change highlighted that adaptation is not only hard for the children when they enter a new Hungarian context, but Chinese institutions and peer communities in China may also be challenging for a minority Chinese children coming from Hungary. Multiple mobility between the home and the host country was responsible for a phenomenon similar to re-entry adjustment period when returning home in a W-curve model (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963). With the exception that returning home in this case should be

interpreted with limitations due to age specifically. In the life of immigrant children, the "home" country lacks the whole childhood socialization process; instead there might be partial socialization in the home country. We identified this phenomenon as a subtype of acculturation stress related to (multiple) cultural reentry in the process of transnational acculturation.

### LIMITATIONS

When evaluating and interpreting the results, it is important to take into account the limitations of the objectives and methodology of the analysis. The study focuses solely on negative life events which can be distorting for more than one reason. Firstly, when negative life events are being analyzed without the context of the whole life, without being informed about the positive life changes and the subjective evaluation of the positive and negative events in relation to each other, one cannot gain a complex view of the importance and relevance of these events. Secondly, although previous studies have argued about the significance of life changes in the life of immigrants, refugees and sojourners (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, cited by Ward et al., 2001), research also shows that life changes and psychological well-being albeit related, are only in themselves insufficient to describe the acculturation process of individuals. Personality, social support, appraisal and coping styles are also inevitable factors of the outcomes (Ward et al., 2001).

Another, possibly distorting, methodological issue in the interpretation of the results is that the (graphically) most negative memories were identified within the individual's lifeline in each case. Some of

the most negative life events appeared on a relatively neutral life line as a “small valley”, while others were deep troughs within a very volatile life line with high amplitude. Therefore, the concept of “the most negative memory” has to be understood as the most negative experience for the respondent, which is a subjective experience.

## CONCLUSIONS

Examining the most negative changes in the life of Chinese children living in Hungary, we found four major themes of life events: (1) death of a close family member; (2) difficulty of integrating to a (new) institution or community, including difficulties with peers; (3) separation from significant persons (not as a result of death); (4) diffi-

culties in performance (learning, sports or art).

Regarding the normative nature of the events, we found normative and non-normative changes as well, but none of the normative changes were related to social-historical events. Each negative transition was somehow related to issues of mobility, acculturation and cultural background which aspects were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted in our study.

Based on the results of our research, we suggest that it would be worthwhile to look more closely at the issue of loss experiences (death and separation) in the lives of migrant children, because besides age-graded normative transitions and developmental challenges (performance, integration in peer community), the prominent role of loss-related life experiences have appeared in negative life events.

## ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

*Háttér és célkitűzések:* Az empirikus tanulmány kínai bevándorló gyermekek életének jelentős negatív átmeneteit vizsgálja annak érdekében, hogy feltárja, milyen változásokat és kihívásokat tapasztalnak meg. Kérdéseink középpontjában az volt, hogy ezek a változások és kiemelkedő átmenetek illeszkednek-e a fejlődépszichológiai elméletek által elvárt normatív krízisekhez, és hogy ezek a normatív krízisek milyen módon fonódnak össze az akkulturációs folyamat különböző jelenségeivel.

*Módszer:* A kutatási minta 15, Magyarországon élő kínai általános iskolás (5–8. évfolyam) diákból állt. Kvalitatív interjúkat vettünk fel egy önéletrajzi emlékezeti interjú eljárás, az Életvonal Interjú Módszer (LIM, Life-line Interview Method, Assink és Schroots, 2010) segítségével. Az interjúk nyelve magyar vagy kínai volt, az anyagokat magyar nyelvre fordításukat követően, magyar nyelven elemeztük. A kvalitatív tartalomelemzés során használtunk mind emergens, mind a priori kódolást.

*Eredmények:* Az interjúanyagokat elemezve a résztvevők legnegatívabb emlékeiben négy fő témát azonosítottunk: (1) egy közeli családtag halála, (2) egy (új) intézménybe vagy közösségbe való beilleszkedés nehézségei, beleértve a kortársakkal kapcsolatos társas nehézségeket is, (3) szeparáció egy érzelmileg jelentős személytől (nem halál következményeként) és (4) a teljesítmény nehézségei (tanulás, sport vagy művészet terén). Az eseményeket normatív és nem normatív változásokként lehetett besorolni, mind az óvodás, mind az iskoláskori

emlékekben. Minden negatív átmenet kapcsolódott a mobilitással, az akkulturációval vagy a kulturális háttérrel összefüggő kérdésekhez.

*Következtetések:* Az eredmények rámutattak a kínai bevándorló gyermekek néhány leginkább kiemelkedő negatív életeseményére, különösképpen felhívva a figyelmet a veszteségekkel összefüggő tapasztalatok (halál, szeparáció) kérdéseire, mivel ezek jelentették a fontos eseményeket a korosztályra jellemző normatív átmeneteken és fejlődési kihívásokon túl.

*Kulcsszavak:* kínai bevándorló gyerekek Magyarországon, akkulturáció, jelentős életesemények, önéletrajzi emlékek

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