



## Testing the reliability and validity of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form with Chinese college students

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Currently, there is no instrument to quickly measure adult attachment in the Chinese cultural context. In this study the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form (ECR-S) was translated and tested in terms of reliability and validity with Chinese college students. All items of the Chinese-version ECR-S showed high discriminability and the scale had a two-dimensional structure in both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The internal consistency coefficients of the two subscales of the ECR-S showed excellent reliability, and scores were modestly to highly correlated with the criteria of state adult attachment, self-esteem, anxiety, pressure, depression, and satisfaction with intimate (romantic) relationships. It can be concluded that the Chinese version of the ECR-S has high reliability and validity; thus, it meets the requirements for psychometric tools and can be used to assess Chinese adults' attachment.

### Keywords

adult attachment; close relationships; interpersonal relationships; scale translation; scale validation; Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form

To survive in an evolving adaptive environment, humans are born with the behavioral pattern of retaining close personal relationships with their initial carers (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). *Attachment* was initially referred to as the emotional connection between infants and their fosterers, and was viewed as an internal working model or cognitive schema originating from interpersonal interactions (Cao et al., 2017; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019) that runs throughout the life development process (Peng, Zhang, et al., 2020). In early research on attachment, scholars focused on children and investigated topics such as how they are able to feel secure in their relationships with their principal carers (Pasco Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Peng et al., 2013). As research progressed, it was established that the subjects of individual attachment are not limited to the principal fosterers in the early stage of life, but also may include family members, romantic partners, teachers, and friends, all of whom may become important foci of attachment for the individual during the life process (Peng, Zhang, et al., 2020). Hazan and Shaver (1987) distinguished between and defined three types of attachment: secure, avoidance, and anxiety, where the latter two types represent insecure attachment. Individuals with *secure attachment* can establish intimate relationships with others and feel comfortable with interdependent relationships; individuals with *attachment avoidance* do not trust others and fear intimate relationships; and those with *attachment anxiety* expect to have intimate relationships, but remain suspicious about whether others truly care about them (Worsley et al., 2018).

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Accurate measurement is necessary for research on attachment (Brumariu et al., 2018). At present, many methods are available for measuring adult attachment, including interviewing tools and self-report questionnaires. Interviewing tools, such as the Adult Attachment Interview (van IJzendoorn, 1995), are limited by a long duration time and dependence on experienced administrators. Regarding self-report questionnaires, the most widely used is the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998), which has been translated into various languages and widely applied, with results indicating its high cross-cultural consistency (Sibley et al., 2005). Li and Kato (2006) introduced the ECR into China, and localized and modified it. Both the original and translated versions show good psychometric characteristics (Brennan et al., 1998, 2000).

However, researchers have encountered problems with using the ECR because it consists of 36 items, which makes it inapplicable to some specific participant groups, such as older adults. Wei et al. (2007) used a method combining the conceptualization perspective (rational) and the statistical perspective (empirical) to select 12 items from the original 36 in the ECR to formulate a simplified ECR (ECR-S), and their study showed that the short form measure was as reliable and valid as the original scale. Thus, the ECR-S can be used to rapidly assess the attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance of individuals. So far, however, the ECR-S has not been adapted for use in China. In this study our main intention was to translate, localize, and revise the ECR-S, and to test the reliability and validity of a Chinese version of this scale.

As reported, adult attachment has been found to be closely related to satisfaction with intimate relationships, because individuals with low (vs. high) levels of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety are more likely to trust others, which increases their satisfaction with their current relationships (Erol & Orth, 2013). Further, insecure attachment may result in negative defense mechanisms, leading to lower levels of self-assessment and higher levels of negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety (Candel & Turliuc, 2019). The attachment styles of people being treated for depressive symptoms are typically insecure, which is the major risk factor of depression (Brophy et al., 2020; Peng, Zhang, et al., 2019). Attachment has long been considered and studied as a stable personality trait. Nevertheless, in addition to stability, attachment styles as working models or dynamic behavioral systems reflect the real experiences of individuals in the scenario of intimate relationships, and these styles will be modified and develop along with the establishment of new relationships and the occurrence of new experiences (Gillath et al., 2009; Peng, Ren, et al., 2020). Thus, attachment is both stable and conditional. It has been shown that the State Adult Attachment Measure developed by Gillath et al. (2009) accurately assesses the current conditional attachment level of individuals. In all, we used state attachment, self-esteem, pressure–depression–anxiety, and satisfaction with intimate relationships as the indices of attachment to evaluate the validity of the Chinese-version ECR-S.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 547 Chinese college students from two general universities in China, who were currently in romantic relationships. We sent out 547 survey forms and 524 were returned, of which 515 were valid (response rate = 94.15%). Any returned forms with evident rules for responses, such as answering “A” for all items, were excluded from analysis. The participants who turned in valid survey forms consisted of 234 men (45.44%) and 281 women (54.56%), and were aged between 17 and 28 years ( $M = 20.34$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ). The study majors of the participants included preschool education, journalism, English, clinical medicine, and civil engineering. Participants stated that they had been in love for between 3 and 41 months. We successfully recalled 84 of the students after 2 weeks for a retest. All measures were completed as a group in a classroom environment, and participants received a pen as compensation. This study was approved by the Committee on Human Experimentation at the Chengdu University.

## Measures

### **The Chinese-Version Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form**

The translation of the ECR-S (Wei et al., 2007), consisted of five steps:

1. Forward translation, in which the original version of the ECR-S was independently translated into Chinese by five postgraduate students majoring in psychology or English.
2. Synthesis of the forward translation.
3. Back-translation, where two professional interpreters independently translated the synthesized Chinese version back into English, and then two English experts compared the accuracy of the back-translated English version to that of the original.
4. Expert committee review.
5. Testing of the prefinal version, for which we recruited 18 college students to evaluate the intelligibility of each item, which should be above 95%.

The Chinese version of the ECR-S comprised 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *agree strongly*. Of the 12 items, four are reverse-scored.

### **State Adult Attachment Measure**

The State Adult Attachment Measure (SAAM), developed by Gillath et al. (2009), consists of 21 items, with seven items allocated to each of three subscales: security, anxiety, and avoidance. Example items include “I feel secure and close to other people” (security), “I really need to feel loved right now” (anxiety), and “I’m afraid someone will want to get too close to me” (avoidance). Participants respond to each item using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *agree strongly*. Ma et al. (2012) translated the SAAM into Chinese and tested its reliability and validity. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for security, anxiety, and avoidance were .91, .84, and .89, respectively, in this study.

### **Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21**

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 was used to evaluate the depression, anxiety, and stress of the participants (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This scale consists of 21 items divided across three subscales—depression, anxiety, and pressure—each comprising seven items. Some item examples include “I felt that I had nothing to look forward to” (depression), “I found it hard to wind down” (stress), and “I was aware of dryness of my mouth” (anxiety). Participants rate how often each statement applied to them over the past week on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = *did not apply to me at all* to 3 = *applied to me very much or most of the time*. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the depression, anxiety, and pressure subscales were .89, .85, and .85, respectively, in this study.

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a single-dimension measure comprising 10 items, five of which are reverse-scored. Sample items include “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.” Responses are made on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. This scale has been translated into Chinese by previous researchers and has shown good reliability and validity in the Chinese cultural context (Lumei, 2006). The average score of all the items is considered as the score for this scale, and a higher score indicates a higher level of self-esteem (Wu, 2008). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient in this study was .83.

### **The Quality of Relationship Index**

The Quality of Relationship Index (Patrick et al., 2007) was used to evaluate satisfaction with intimate relationships. It consists of six items (e.g., “My relationship with my partner makes me happy”) rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *agree strongly*. Items are averaged such that higher scores reflect higher relationship satisfaction. This scale has been translated into Chinese and has shown good reliability and validity in the Chinese cultural context (Hou & Song, 2019). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .83 in this study.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, independent samples *t* tests, and exploratory factor analysis were performed with SPSS 18.0. Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out using Amos 17.0.

## Results

### Test of Common Method Bias

Harman's single-factor test was used to test for the presence of common method bias. All items in all scales were included in the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which showed that 12 factors had eigenvalues larger than 1, and the variance explained by the first factor was 22.14%, which is below the critical value of 40%, indicating nonsignificant common method bias.

### Factor Analysis

The data were randomly divided into two halves, with one half ( $n = 258$ ) used for EFA. The value for Bartlett's test of sphericity was 1689.24 ( $df = 66, p < .01$ ), and the result of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test for sampling adequacy was .85, indicating that these data were suitable for EFA. Then, the EFA was performed, and two factors had an eigenvalue larger than 1. The two factors explained 61.68% of the total variance. The factor loadings of each item varied between .59 and .89, as shown in Table 1. Factor 1, attachment avoidance, comprised six items, and factor 2, attachment anxiety, also comprised six items, as in the original scale.

The other half of the data ( $n = 257$ ) was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), as shown in Figure 1. The factor loadings of all items were significant ( $p < .01$ ). The fit coefficients were all acceptable, chi squared/degrees of freedom = 2.53, root mean square error of approximation = .07, standardized root mean square residual = .08, comparative fit index = .96, and attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety were positively correlated. This indicates that the two-factor model fit the data well.

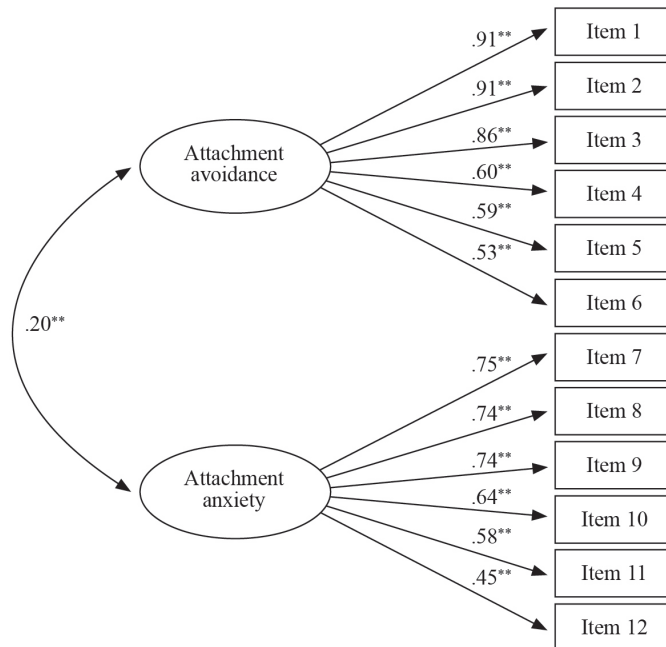


Figure 1. *The Two-Factor Model of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form*

### Item Analysis

The items were analyzed using the critical ratio (*CR*) and correlation coefficients of each item and the total score for each subscale. The *CR* value of each item was significant ( $p < .01$ ), as shown in Table 1. The correlation coefficients ranged from .62 to .85 and were all significant, indicating proper discrimination of all items.

### Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency and test–retest reliability were calculated to evaluate the reliability of the Chinese-version ECR-S. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety were .89 and .83, respectively, and the test–retest correlation coefficients were .80 and .72 ( $p < .01$ ) for the group of 84 recalled participants.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients, Critical Ratio Values, and Factor Loadings of Items in the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form

Item	Factor loadings (Attachment avoidance)	Factor loadings (Attachment anxiety)	CR	r
1	.89		28.45**	.85**
2	.87		26.73**	.84**
3	.85		26.15**	.84**
4	.79		25.60**	.82**
5	.78		25.34**	.81**
6	.64		23.90**	.74**
7		.81	29.94**	.81**
8		.77	28.19**	.80**
9		.72	22.25**	.76**
10		.69	19.93**	.72**
11		.66	18.00**	.70**
12		.59	14.10**	.62**
Characteristic root	4.65	2.75		
Variance explained	38.72%	22.96%		

Note. CR = critical ratio.

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Validity Analysis

The validity of the Chinese-version ECR-S was evaluated in terms of construct validity, convergent validity, and criterion-related validity. The CFA results already provided evidence for the excellent construct validity of the Chinese-version ECR-S. The convergent validity is characterized by the average variance extracted (AVE) value. According to the formula of AVE value =  $\sum \lambda^2 / n$ , where  $n$  is the number of items and  $\lambda$  is the standardized factor loading, the AVE values of the two factors were computed to be .65 and .52, both of which are larger than the critical value of .50, as well as the correlation coefficient of .20.

Additionally, the results of correlation analysis (see Table 2) show that attachment avoidance was significantly and negatively correlated with SAAM security, intimacy quality, and self-esteem; and significantly and positively correlated with SAAM avoidance, SAAM anxiety, stress, anxiety, and depression. Attachment anxiety was significantly and negatively correlated with SAAM security, intimacy quality, and self-esteem; and significantly and positively correlated with SAAM anxiety, SAAM avoidance, stress, anxiety, and depression.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Attachment Types and Related Criteria

	SAAM security	SAAM avoidance	SAAM anxiety	Intimacy quality	Stress	Anxiety	Depression	Self-esteem
Attachment avoidance	-.29**	.54**	.25**	-.32**	.25**	.27**	.34**	-.32**
Attachment anxiety	-.21**	.23**	.45**	-.28**	.39**	.40**	.37**	-.34**

Note.  $N = 515$ . SAAM = State Adult Attachment Measure.

## Discussion

In this study we translated and revised the ECR-S in strict accordance with the scientific guidelines for cross-cultural adaptation. Results show that the Chinese-version ECR-S has high reliability and validity, meeting the requirements for psychometric tools.

Item analysis showed that the *CRs* of all items were significant, and the correlation coefficients of each item and the total score of each subscale of the ECR-S were all above .60, indicating that items had high discriminability (Lopez-Fernandez, 2017; Rosas-Carrasco et al., 2016). The EFA showed that the Chinese-version ECR-S had a two-factor structure, which matches the original short-form version (Wei et al., 2007). As for reliability, the results in our study indicated that this scale has good stability and consistency (Peng, Feng, et al., 2019). In addition, the CFA showed that this two-factor structure fit the data well, indicating that the Chinese-version ECR-S has high construct validity. Additionally, ECR-S scores were modestly to highly correlated with criteria such as state adult attachment, self-esteem, anxiety, pressure, depression, and satisfaction with intimate (romantic) relationships. In all, it can be concluded that the Chinese-version ECR-S has high reliability and validity that meets psychometric requirements for use in assessing Chinese adults' attachment.

The ECR-S has some evident advantages; for instance, Li and Kato (2006) found that some items in the ECR were not suitable for assessment of Chinese people's close relationships. However, all items of the ECR-S have high discriminability, and the two-factor structure of the ECR-S is clear. Moreover, this scale has only 12 items, compared with 36 items in the ECR, which makes it suitable for the assessment of adult attachment within a short time frame. The Chinese-version ECR-S is an efficient and accurate scale for testing attachment of Chinese adults, and this instrument can be used with confidence in future studies.

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## Appendix

### The Chinese Version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale–Short Form

1. 在需要的时候，我会向恋人求助和倾诉，这很有用。
2. 我想与恋人亲近，但我又总是会退缩不前。
3. 我会向恋人寻求诸如安慰和承诺等东西。
4. 我试图避免与恋人变得太过亲近。
5. 我经常与恋人讨论我所遇到的问题以及我关心的事情。
6. 当恋人跟我过分亲密的时候，我会感到内心十分紧张不安。
7. 我需要我的恋人一再地保证他/她是爱我的。
8. 我发现恋人并不愿意像我所期待的那样跟我亲近。
9. 我想跟恋人非常亲密的愿望，有时会把他/她吓跑。
10. 我并不是经常担心被恋人抛弃。
11. 如果在我需要的时候恋人却不在我身边，我会感到沮丧。
12. 我担心恋人不会像我关心他(她)那样地关心我。