Personal Communicative Activity in a Cultural Adaptation Process

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Abstract

The personal activity problem is connected with the increasing speed of society life, communication capabilities, which form a special person's relationship with other people and objective reality. On the one hand, it helps to ensure that the person has more resources and ways of self-realization. But at the same time such a high-speed and full of requirements reality became the cause of passivity, infantilism of an individual, who prefers not really to act, but only to serve needs illusory. A genuine dialogue is replaced by surface contacts that not require a deep sense of trust in the communication. The results of activity's study in People's Friendship University of Russia (PFUR, Moscow, Russia) show, that the sense of alienation in the cultural sphere demonstrates the importance of cognitive "us" and "them" categorization for a more successful cultural adaptation. Feeling of homesickness and own uselessness in a new social situation indicate, that the aggregate internal cognitive and emotional causes lead to the dreams returning at home, where people feel their own importance, from the actual situation of failure in a foreign country. Chinese students in Moscow show a great need to communicate with the Russian and experiencing a sense of recovery, when they feel their own importance and the fact that "they've been noticed". This is contrary to the Russian students opinion, that the Chinese are accustomed to only communicate with their countrymen and do not feel the need to communicate with other cultures. Emerging communication barriers needs professional psychological intervention.

Keywords: personal activity, structural-content and functional components of activity, adaptive activity, effective coping, cross-cultural communication.

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Introduction

The problem of adaptation to another country conditions is high actual today because of the intensive cross-cultural communication among people all over the world. Despite of quantity publications in general, social and ethnic psychology, optimum behavior parameters, that provide concrete person to join another's culture life without serious negative consequences are not found. Comprehensive researches confirm the fact that the cross-cultural adaptation is connected first of all with what kind of internal position and line of conduct was selected by the person. With personal adaptability are connected not only understanding of another's culture features, comprehension of degree of its affinity, but also the relation (more or less tolerant) to it.

T.G. Stefanenko (2000) writes that cross-cultural adaptation is the process of entering a different culture, the gradual development of its rules and traditions. The author identifies the following factors that influence the process of adaptation to the new cultural environment: individual differences (demographic and personal), individual life experience circumstances (pre-exposure experience, arrival motives, language skills). Both can be subjectively or objectively difficult for individual. Cross-cultural adaptation is defined as a phenomenon by individuals who, while moving in an unfamiliar social and cultural environment, strive to establish and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationship with a new situation. Adaptation is an activity which describes a compromise vector in the internal cultural structure and external ambient pressure. Personal activity in a cross-cultural communication provides overcoming the difficulties, connected with misunderstanding and since of alienation.

As T.S. Medvedskaya (2009) shows, there are four functional components in activity structure, which occur in adaptation process: a) substantially-cognitive component; b) operative-motivational component; c) appraisal-behavioral component; d) personal-productive component.

Substantially-cognitive component is an assimilation system and perceived knowledge about the activity nature; it's a presentation of anyone as an active subject, who takes responsibility for what is happening with him in his life. This component also provides a categorization of active and passive concepts in the communication process. Some people access events as occurring accidentally, so they think that cross-cultural communication doesn't depend on themselves and proceeds spontaneously. Other people estimate communication as a process which depends on them, and make concrete efforts to improve the understanding and overcoming cultural barriers, showing a much higher degree of activity at this level.

A.V. Libina (2009) understands activity as a process and result of subject development at the time while solving constantly emerging challenges and difficulties. From this point of view a substantially-cognitive activity component is implemented in the locus of control, taking responsibility for what is happening, understanding the required behavior scheme. Cognitive coping includes the processes of logical analysis as well as situation reactions positive reappraisal. It's being expressed, that in

overcoming the consciousness focusing on every aspect of the situation, the extraction and use of information from the relevant past experience are the most important.

Operative-motivational component acts as a bridge between the substantially-cognitive component as well as appraisal-behavioral component. It's formed in the process of transition from awareness of own active participation in life through goal-setting and planning of specific activities to certain behavioral strategies. Thanks to this component the learned norms of activity content is implemented in personal behavior. The significance of the operative-motivational component is determined by its relationship with the internal standards and the adoption of the activity established boundaries as a moral principle. Depending on the dominant motive the person would show the different activity in a particular area of life. With this component is given an explanation about the active or passive individual behavior in a concrete situation.

In a cultural adaptation process the operative-motivational activity component is expressed in the desire to overcome any difficulties or avoid them. Motivation to succeed enhances individual social connections. For successful adaptation person receives the necessary social informational, moral and other support. Indeed, one of the most important factors positively affecting the adaptation process is the establishment of friendly relations with the majority group (Russians).

Foreigners who have friends among the local residents have the opportunity to learn unwritten rules of behavior in a new culture; they can get more information about how to behave. Informal interpersonal relations with compatriots may also contribute to the successful adaptation, as friends from the native country perform the function of social support. However, in this case the limited social interaction with the new culture can enhance the sense of alienation. If personal motivation is to avoid the difficulties with new circumstances then a number of his or her social bonds remain low, that doesn't contribute to adaptation, but rather becomes the cause of individual isolation from the new cultural environment. Nostalgia for homeland constantly pulling the person in the past, it's very hard to solve the life problems "here and now".

Appraisal-behavioral component is characterized by its expression in relation to others, in achieving goals etc. To understand the way of the development, the person asks him or herself: "What have I done to be like I am now?", so it means, that we ask ourselves about that things, that are connected with the appraisal-behavioral component of activity, whatever sphere of life it may concern. From this point of view the activity is directly related to a person chosen vital strategy. K.A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (1991) believes that the strategy of life in the broadest sense of the word (as opposed to the many vital tactics) – is the individual ability to his or her identity connection with the conditions of life, to its reproduction and development. For each person there is own unique way of life, a way of structuring, organization, evaluation, interpretation. That's why there is a need to distinguish between different scientific ways of life activity. In a new cultural situation person needs more complex range of activities in connection with the fundamentally different external conditions and internal experience. At this level to overcome the difficulties is to find new ways by implementing specific actions to deal with the situation and its consequences.

Personal-productive component refers to the extent of the activity personal significance, productivity level of ongoing efforts to address the existing situational

conditions. This component indicates how successful / unsuccessful people cope with changing environmental conditions, how efficiently they allows stressful situations, which level of the social and psychological adaptation they have. According to P.K. Anokhin (1998), behavioral act serves as a complex functional system, which consists of a "hub mechanisms," which has a certain effect (outcome). A.V. Libina (2008, p. 174) thinks, that we can study the process of existing conditions proactive overcoming, including not only the concrete result (positive, neutral or negative), but also person's satisfaction with the results and himself. From this point of view, personal-productive activity component is a response, in which behavioral act is implemented as a functional system (more or less productive) in cognitive, motivational, behavioral spheres. With proactive overcoming of serious life difficulties as well as everyday situations people become subjects of activity and continuously transform a special relationship with the environment. The latest leads to the personality development, world view, self-perception, place in life, internal resources and capabilities.

Personal-productive activity component features are associated with the life way, which is the focus of many psychological studies (V. Frankl, 1993; K.A. Abul'hanova-Slavskaja, 1991; S.L. Rubinstein, 2000; A.A. Kronik, 1998; T.I. Kolesnikova, 2003). In this case a concrete life situation and the result of human interaction with it appears, according to A.V. Libina, as a "universal measurement's unit of personal life continuum" (2008, p. 130). Productive situation resolving determines the further individual's activity, in which the subject feels himself able to transform reality and himself. Productive activity in cognitive, emotional and behavioral spheres is a measure of how right a person chooses the resolving the situational constraints process. The concept of productive coping fundamentally changes the relationship to a successful person. They are, from this point of view, is not only winners, but also just common people, openly negotiating with themselves, others and life. Overcoming behavior is understood, according to N.G. Osuhova, as "life situations transformation strategy" (2007, p. 49), for which the goal is clearly characterized as well as conscious rational ways to cope with external challenges and internal feelings.

Productive / unproductive problem solving is associated with many components, in particular with the phenomenon of M. Seligman's term "learned helplessness" (2011), when often repeated failures situations lead to avoidance of obstacles install, and consequently to passive response to what is happen. A.V. Libina (2008) shows, that active coping in cognitive sphere includes preserving adequate perception of the situation, the analysis of the incident, the differentiation of own position and other people opinion, finding control points in the successful resolution of the situation in the past, creating a positive mental outlook. In the emotional sphere are considered active strategies expressing own feelings and providing support search from the people around, the manifestation of empathy to other people as well as self-empathy. In behavioral sphere strategies are productive, when there is collaboration with other people, creating promising relationship, adequate self-regulation and search for new opportunities to concentrate efforts on the most important, flexibility and proactive behavior.

The difficulties experienced in dealing with other people associate with self-doubt and emotional problems when negative emotions and expectations prevail over positive

emotions. As our previous study shows (Medvedskaya, 2010 a), the feeling of alienation in a cultural environment is associated with almost all scales of A.I. Krupnov's "Adaptation" Inventory. It indicates a solid foundation of categorization "us" and "them" for a more or less successful cultural adaptation. Feeling of homesickness and own uselessness in a new social situation are related to each other, indicating that the aggregate internal cognitive and emotional causes leading to the return of their dreams at home, where people feel their own importance, from the situation of failure in a foreign country, where a person sometimes feel discarded, "alien".

In this case constant thoughts and feelings that return in his or her past are associated with lack of success in the present, when a new situation requires the active involvement in the process of communication with new culture. In this case the person turns out to be in a vicious circle where the negative experience in intercultural communication and a denial from it brings to the past. In this case nostalgia and the desire to return to native country contribute to a growing rejection of dialogue with other people, communication doesn't improve, someone feels uncomfortable and experiences frustration in the present.

It's identified significant differences in coping with the process of adaptation, which are on a continuum between active and passive coping. The first is seen in the desire to change the situation and may be similar to a problem-oriented coping adaptation. This type of coping may be relatively productive when the majority society has little interest in meeting the needs of minority or there is negative attitude about it. Passive coping reflects the patience and self-modification, and reminds intercultural strategy of assimilation. This strategy may be successful only when the dominant society has a positive attitude and ready to accept new members of cultural groups. If the relationship between "we" and "they" are hostile, the passive coping strategy is likely to lead to high levels of intergroup discrimination and ethnocentrism. From this point of view integration is positively correlated with goals orientation, separation is positively associated with a focus on the emotional state and its avoidance, assimilation is positively correlated with the orientation of both the task and the emotions.

Method

The present study is part of the Study "Personal activity in modern communication systems: content features or appearance". The work was done on the basis of the agricultural, philological, environmental faculties (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia). To study the personal communicative activity in a cultural adaptation process 60 Chinese students, 19-23 years old were engaged. There were used the following Russian adapted diagnostic techniques: "The Motive-enactment Test" (J. Kuhl), "Cognitive Orientation" (J. Rotter), "Indicator Strategies" (D. Amirkhan), "Motivation to Success" (T. Ehlers), "Motivation to Avoid Failure" (T. Ehlers), "The Coping Strategies Inventory" (R. Lazarus), "Identification of Individual Coping Strategies" (E. Heim), "Picture Frustration Test" (S. Rosenzweig), "Adaptation" Inventory (A.I. Krupnov). For processing the empirical data there were used mathematical-statistical and qualitative analysis (X^2 Pearson, t-t-test, correlation and factor analysis). It was also organized the Multicultural training with 9 Chinese students to study deeper communicative activity in a cultural adaptation process.

Results

A comparative analysis of the sign distribution at the level of substantially-cognitive activity component shows significant differences in locus of control ($X^2 0,010 = 11,67$); it's also identified gender differences in the direction of the reaction ($X^2 0,002 = 12,18$), indicating that Chinese girls more likely than boys to feel responsible for what happens. At the level of the operative-motivational component observed differences in the sample on the scale of the action / state orientation ($X^2 0,01 = 11,08$). In the study sample, the number of young men with a focus on action is higher than among girls. There are differences in motivation for avoiding failure between boys and girls ($X^2 0,026 = 40,41$), with higher girls' rates. At the level of an appraisal-behavioral component there are observed gender differences in the action control in failure situation ($X^2 0,001 = 36,41$), with higher scale results among young men. There are differences in how often students choosing search social support strategies ($X^2 0,01 = 41,24$), the average on the scale inherent in most young men, and Chinese girls have higher results.

There are significant differences between boys and girls on a the reaction pathway scale in the situation full of obstacles ($X^2 0,05 = 5,74$). Young men in a stressful situation related to the decision to overcome the difficulties, often react to it, blaming others for what happened. In charge situation are revealed the same differences on the distribution of response types ($X^2 0,03 = 6,75$) and the direction of the reaction ($X^2 0,04 = 6,48$) between boys and girls. While young men often exhibit extra punitive behavior, the girls go on to solve the problem with self-incrimination. In the sample there are gender differences on the scale of escape - avoidance ($X^2 0, 002 = 41,72$), with higher values on the scale among girls. In cognitive sphere boys use productively coping offer than girls ($X^2 0,035 = 6,69$). In emotional sphere boys compared with girls increasingly express confidence in difficult situations ($X^2, 027 = 7,26$).

To study the groups oriented on action / state, in terms of the operative-motivational component it was used t-test. It's revealed that at the level of substantially-cognitive activity component observed differences in internal locus of control between the two groups of subjects ($t = 5,65$, $p \leq 0,001$). State focused subjects' external locus value is higher than that of action-oriented students ($t = 5,77$, $p \leq 0,001$). In the group focused on the state subjects, the average value of taking responsibility is higher than that of the action-oriented subjects ($t = 3,17$, $p \leq 0,002$).

At the level of the operative-motivational activity component are revealed differences on the scale of the motivation for avoidance ($t = 2,25$, $p \leq 0,025$). At the level of appraisal-behavioral component action-oriented subjects have a higher score on the scale of solving problem ($t = 3,01$, $p \leq 0,003$), while a state focused participants revealed a higher score to search for social support ($t = 3.31$, $p \leq 0,001$) and avoidance ($t = 3,44$, $p \leq 0,001$). There is a higher average score on the scale of responsibility acceptance ($t = 3,17$, $p \leq 0,002$) and escape - avoidance ($t = 4,58$, $p \leq 0,001$) among state focused subjects. In the based on action sample are found a higher average score on planning solutions ($t = 3,24$, $p \leq 0,001$).

In the statistical analysis with Spearman criteria is revealed that the communicative aspect of Chinese students adaptability in this sample was positively correlated with

the scales of confidence ($S0,01 = 0,616$), emotional experience ($S0,01 = 0,639$) and alienation ($S0,01 = 0,501$). The confidence component is also positively associated with emotional experience ($S0,01 = 0,626$), nostalgia ($S0,01 = 0,394$) and alienation ($S0,01 = 0,491$). The latter correlates with nostalgia ($S0,01 = 0,537$), and the scale of adaptability, in turn, is negatively related to the scale of homesickness ($S0,01 = -0,533$).

Factor analysis using the principal components method and Varimax rotation allowed overall factorization variable at personal-productive activity component. As shown statistically, the first common factor of productive coping, explaining about 32% of the total variance, consists of searching social support (0,58), confrontation (0,68), distancing (0,68), self-control (0,64), taking responsibility (0,54) and the escape-avoidance (0,74), so this factor is called "efforts to change the situation". The second productive overcoming stressful situations factor, which explains about 17% of the total variance, includes problem solution (0,67), motivation for success (0,64), planning solutions (0,78) and a positive re-evaluation of the situation (0,6) because of this we have identified it as a factor "independent active resolution of the situation". The third factor explaining about 12% of the total variance, consists of internal control locus (0,84), control the operation in case of failure (0,54), as well as the external locus with negative sign (-0,87), so that's why it's interpreted as a factor "self-control of planned and committed activities".

Discussion

The results indicate that Chinese students sufficiently positive to other ethnic and social groups, however, they face significant challenges in adapting to the new multicultural environment, have some serious communication difficulties and feel confident enough in Russia. Definite fixation on their own ethnicity may reflect the internal setting of Chinese students to the unconscious opposition to the new social and cultural environment in which the transition to the new environment of the study group members felt as a threat to their own ethnic integrity. Subjects of this sample have an overall controversial background, on which the adaptation process to a new cultural environment bases, coupled with a sufficiently high interactivity, as well as conservatism, a desire to control the new environment without regarding students' individual characteristics. The latter, apparently, is connected not only with a negative other groups attitude but also with the ethnic ontogenesis features, when every Chinese is instilled the idea of the society primacy over the individual.

These results appear to be due to the fact that the difficulties faced by Chinese students to communicate with other people associated with self-doubt and emotional problems when negative emotions and expectations prevail over positive emotions. In addition, the sense of alienation in Russia is connected with almost all the test scales adaptability, indicating that the sense of alienation in the cultural sphere demonstrates the importance of cognitive "us" and "them" categorization for a more successful cultural adaptation. Feeling of homesickness and own uselessness in a new social situation are closely related. This apparently means the aggregate internal cognitive and emotional causes leading to the return in their dreams to their homeland, where the subjects feel their own importance, from the situation of failure in a foreign country, where Chinese students often feel thrown "strangers".

In this situation low value of adaptability and simultaneously high nostalgia show that persistent thoughts and feelings that return someone in the past, are associated with lack of success in the present, when a new situation requires more personal involvement in the process of communication with the foreign culture. In this case, the subjects appear as if in a vicious circle where a negative experience in intercultural communication leads to avoidance from it and to past life dreams activation. Nostalgia and the desire to return home contribute to a growing rejection of dialogue with other people, communication doesn't improve, a person feels uncomfortable, and even more are existing the frustration of present situation.

It is interesting that in spite of high behavior flexibility degree the Chinese students are often not able to forgive mistakes, it's difficult for them to endure physical or psychological discomfort. Students of the sample expressed a high degree of readiness for tolerance, first of all, at the social level, but also a feeling of depression associated with negative emotions and alienation.

Thus, the Chinese students, experiencing steady desire to adapt successfully at social and psychological level, feel the nostalgia that often lead to negative emotional states and non-communication with the new environment. The latter leads to an even more isolation, rooted in the past and growth depression. In this case, the ability to hide their own negative feelings is certain obstacle to cross-cultural understanding, as it's often seen around like avoiding interaction with the new environment as unwillingness to cooperate.

In a stressful situation, Chinese students often use a strategy to solve the problem, which may be associated with a desire to act independently, while seeking support from the native environment. Students in this sample perceive the world as a complex, unpredictable, full of incomprehensible meaning and living rather chaotic, but not according to certain laws of justice or logic. A person in this cold, uncontrollable world, has its place, it seems rather successful, must hope on him or herself, has to show high self-control and live in the present, not predicting anything beforehand. This indicates a certain social field-dependence on the environment. Existence in it it's determined by case, so it is unpredictable and unavoidable, that causes more contemplative than the active view of the world. Life goes more in the past and present than in the future, and the satisfaction with the past and present part of life is often low.

Chinese students are capable less accurate than other estimate the state, feelings and desires of people in their non-verbal expressions, facial expressions, postures, gestures, which is probably due to the low level of non-verbal expressivity that is acceptable to the Chinese culture. For students of the study sample is more complex to orient in the verbal context of the situation, to understand clear what people say to each other. Students in this group also often have difficulty in analyzing situations of interpersonal interaction, which could negatively affect the process of communication and adaptation in general.

Conclusion and implication

Summing up, it should be noted that Chinese students, showing a high level of activity during studying process are in some kind of isolation from the big society,

resulting in a predominantly passive-avoidant coping strategies of adaptation. The conducted cross-cultural training has shown, that Chinese students, in particular, noted the complexity of Russian language as avoidable, but the communicational difficulties seemed to them as a more serious obstacle to the understanding of other cultures. In addition it should be noted, that in a multicultural space of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia Chinese students do not feel the understanding from other students for objective reasons related to the low level of knowledge about the culture and its specificity. For example, when in framework of cross-cultural training Chinese student was asked to list the factors that helped and hindered in communication, he repeated several times some of "roots" and their effect on health. However, other presented students perceived this information as wrong because of language mistake and weren't psychologically prepared to its reinterpretation. In fact the Chinese student pointed in this case to assistance of the "here and now" relationships with ancestors, emphasized the importance of family in a difficult situation. So it should be noted the importance of a better understanding of cultures participating in a multicultural communication PFUR space to increase the activity of students in the adaptation process. With creating the conditions for understanding on the substantially-cognitive component's and operative-motivational component's level, it may be expected a more active coping behavior at different stages of acculturation.

The problem of tolerant and simultaneously active behavior in the multicultural world is connected not only with the foreigners relation to other communication participants, but also with "Natives" who indirectly appears connected with the process of cultural shock stages passage and more or less successful adaptation of foreign students in Russia. Therefore is required active participation in acculturation process both foreigners and the Russian students. The latter by the way may solve the internal and interpersonal problems in the course of dialogue with "Others", unlike them people, living on the own laws and traditions.

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