

Practicing Hungarian Identity in Shanghai

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Abstract:

There are approximately 100 Hungarians living in Shanghai. This paper aims to describe the most salient cultural features of their life in Shanghai, and analyze their cultural identity. The description part details in what ways they keep their Hungarian identity in Shanghai, and in what ways they adapt to the local circumstances here. The analysis focuses on the changes in their cultural identity as a result of cross-cultural interactions with local Chinese people and with other foreigners living in Shanghai. The paper analyzed cultural identities related to a China context and that to a social context under the effect of globalization.

Key words: Shanghai, Hungarian, ethnic group, cultural identity, cultural interaction, foreigner, Laowai

Introduction

Shanghai is a metropolitan city with an increasing international role, and with an increasing number of foreigners working and living there. In 2009, the number of foreigner residents was 152,050 in Shanghai², with about 100 Hungarians³ among them. Hungarians represent about 0.0005% of the close to 20 million residents of Shanghai. Why am I interested in researching such a small ethnic group? Firstly, I am a local Chinese with a Hungarian husband, which gave me the privilege of personally participating in their community activities and left me with no other choice than trying to learn about them. Secondly, I believe that my observations and findings are pointing far beyond this community, and they provide valuable insights for those who want to deeper understand the cultural dynamics of foreigners living in China in general. Last, but not least, this is probably the first such attempt to research this community, and to introduce it's unique colors and flavors to those who have not met them personally. "Groundbreaking research" sounds like a big word, let's just say this as an interesting, fresh topic and there is a lot of further work to be done in this area.

I have chosen Shanghai to be the field of my study, because I have been living in this city for more than 10 years, so it is convenience for me to use my observations to support my research. Another important factor is the ongoing cross-cultural interactions in Shanghai. These cross-cultural interactions are underpinned by Shanghai's unique history of a colonized past, and marked by the World Expo or the recent trend that more and more multinational companies select Shanghai as their regional (Asian-Pacific) headquarters. Most Shanghainese people would assert that Shanghai is the most cosmopolitan city in Mainland China. Therefore, how cultures interact with each other is worth studying in Shanghai, and this can provide learning opportunities for other Chinese cities as well.

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² Based on the Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2010

³ The exact number is unknown. This number is estimated by most Hungarians that I interviewed and by officials of the General Consulate of Hungary in Shanghai.

Purpose and methods of this study

The purpose of the study is to understand the most salient cultural features of the Hungarians in Shanghai, and to analyze their cultural identity. Answer questions such as “What brings these people here?”; “Are they happy in Shanghai?”; “In what ways do they keep Hungarian culture?”; “In what ways do they adapt to the life here?”; “How do they change as a result of living here?”; “How does their identity change?”, and so on. Since Hungarians are one of the many foreigner ethnic groups in Shanghai, this study can provide valuable insights towards understanding the bigger picture of foreigners’ life in Shanghai. My long term purpose is to expand this research to include other foreign ethnic groups in Shanghai, which will allow making comparison between them, and will provide big steps towards a comprehensive understanding of foreigners living in Shanghai.

Methods: I used questionnaire and interviews to gather information, and the research data is enriched by my personal observations and interactions with Hungarians over the last 8 years. The first questionnaire survey was conducted in November 2010, and it covered cultural aspects with open questions, likert-scales, and probing questions about language use, food, festivities, social life; it also included questions regarding to personal feelings of living in Shanghai; opinion about various aspects of identity. A current known weakness in the methodology is the small number of respondents: I only had 12 respondents filling in the questionnaires, and I conducted the interviews with only 4 people up to date. Therefore the statistical parts have to be interpreted with caution; one should not derive far-reaching conclusions based on the numbers. Fortunately, my key points are based on the in-depth interviews and my observations over 8 years, and not on the statistical part, therefore I feel it is worthwhile to publish this paper, while I work on gathering more data in the same time.

Definition of Hungarians in Shanghai

A simplified definition would be Hungarian citizens who stay in Shanghai for more than 1 year. However, there are some exceptions: there are also some Hungarians holding passports of other countries, for example, of Romania, Slovakia, USA or Canada, and some of them have double citizenship.

Do Hungarians look Hungarian? Can they be identified by their look? In my experience, one can not identify Hungarians by their appearance. Most of the Hungarians look Caucasians, but there is not a typical “Hungarian” look which can differentiate them from people from other European countries. There is even a Hungarian in Shanghai whose parents were immigrants from Vietnam, therefore her appearance has typical Asian features.

The interviewees identified the Hungarian language as the major unifying force between Hungarians. They all speak Hungarian on the native level. This is the key factor in identifying Hungarians and labeling an event or group as Hungarian. Hungarians speak Hungarian language among each other, and enjoying their language is a cohesive force between them.

Basic Demographic Information of Hungarians in Shanghai

As mentioned earlier, the number of Hungarians in Shanghai is estimated to be around 100, and nobody knows the exact figure. This is because there is no mandatory registration of Hungarians at the Consulate General of Hungary in Shanghai. The Shanghai Statistical Yearbook only publishes the number of residents from the major nations, so we remain at guess. The number 100 is estimated by most Hungarians that I interviewed and by officials of the General Consulate of Hungary in Shanghai as well.

The average age of the current sample of this survey (n=12) is 34. Gender distribution is 9 male and 3 females. Highest level of education: 1 doctor, 7 masters, 2 bachelors, 2 unknown level (they didn't respond to this question). Their typical professions (based on my interactions in addition to the current sample) are engineers, managers, experts, consultants, teachers and employees of the Consulate General of Hungary. There are also students and trailing expatriate wives as well.

In average, they have stayed in Shanghai for 5.5 years, and 5 out of 12 plans to stay for more than another three years. 6 of the 12 have Chinese spouses. This data is most likely skewed due to the small sample size, but in general, I do feel that many of the Hungarians in Shanghai have long-term interests, ties and engagements with China; and the reasons for their stay are often a mixture of professional and personal motives.

Practicing Hungarian Culture in Shanghai

This chapter is a description of the most typical ways the Hungarians keep their culture. The most important practices that emerged from the research are language, food, online community, community events, socializing with other Hungarians, festivities and cultural items. The practices are very often combined: an event is announced online, then people meet and socialize, celebrate their festivities and eat home dishes in the same time. We talked about language as the main identifying and cohesive factor in the chapter "Definition of Hungarians in Shanghai". socializing with other Hungarians are included in many other practices therefore I did not discuss it separately.

Food

Most Hungarians are passionate about Hungarian dishes, and food is an important part of culture in Hungary. In the survey, there were both open question and probing questions on the percentages of Hungarian food, Chinese food and other styles on a daily base. 10 out of 12 people stated they have Hungarian meals regularly, around 10% of their meals in average. This shows that Hungarians in general do make efforts to enjoy home food with the familiar old taste. This is remarkable because there are no Hungarian restaurants in the city and some typical Hungarian spices and ingredients are not available in Shanghai. Many Hungarians cook at home time to time with ingredients they brought from Hungary. My husband sometimes cooks gulyás (a strong soup typically with beef) at home, and from time to time we have Pick Szalámi (fermented sausage) and wine brought from Hungary.

To the question "What Hungarian food and drinks do you have in China", I have received the

following long list of Hungarian specialties and delicacies:

- Food: paprika (chili powder), gulyás (a strong soup typically with beef), various soups, töltött káposzta (stuffed marinated cabbage leaves), kolbász (sausage), túró-rudi (chocolate coated cottage cheese), karaván (a kind of smoked) cheese, rakott krumpli (potato sausage casserole), szalámi (fermented sausage), targonya, cénatészta (noodle like products), pörkölt (stew), főzelék (range of vegetable stews), lángos (fried bread), pogácsa (a round home-baked biscuit), lecsó (a thick vegetable stew with sausages and eggs), sport szelet (chocolate bar).
- Drinks: Pálinka (traditional fruit brandy), Unicum (a bitter herbal liquor drink made by a secret recipe), Hungarian wines

I personally have tasted most of the above listed food in Shanghai and also when I traveled to Hungary with my husband. The food prepared by the Hungarians in Shanghai is rather authentic and indeed recalls the memories of Hungary.

The Hungarian Online Community in Shanghai

For many Hungarians in Shanghai, the most active connection to other Hungarians happens via a group mailing list⁴ called shanghai@mozgalom.com. This is a closed, subscription based mailing list in Hungarian language which was started in 2004 by Attila Balogh, a Hungarian entrepreneur and photo artist living in Shanghai. Since 2004, the subscriber number of the mailing list has grown from 10 to more than 80 people, it is subscribed by most of the Hungarians in Shanghai. Anyone can register to the mailing list, as long as he/she has been referred by any member of the online community. Anyone can write, and one can unsubscribe at any time. Through this group mailing platform, members exchange ideas on a wide range of topics: about working and living in Shanghai, tourism in China, news and happenings in Hungary and China, jokes and fun stories, etc. There are also announcements of various kinds of community activities, like interest group get-togethers, parties or cultural events. This mailing list contributes a great deal on a daily basis to connecting Hungarians in this huge city.

A new and notable web site is <http://shanghai.azsia.net/>, also established by Attila Balogh, providing information just about everything in Shanghai in Hungarian language.

The Consulate General of Hungary in Shanghai also has a web site with cultural events and official information including Hungarian language content as a service to the Hungarians in Shanghai <http://shanghai.hungary-china.com/>, and sometimes they also send out invitations and announcements via email to the Hungarians living in Shanghai.

Community Events

Community events are the highlights of Hungarian culture in Shanghai, because they combine many elements (meeting other Hungarians, speaking Hungarian, celebrating Hungarian festivities, and eating Hungarian food, very often with background music or movie from Hungary. Community events usually have an open, welcoming, playful and cheerful atmosphere.

Kolbász-making (sausage making):

Kolbász has great tradition of Hungary, with various home recipes utilizing Hungarian spices. This event is the perfect example of self-organized parties that combine cultural practices: Food

⁴shanghai@mozgalom.com This group mailing list was initiated by Attila Balogh in the year 2004.

and Socializing in this case. It all started when Norbi, one of the Hungarians organized a kolbász-making party at his home in 2009, openly inviting anyone via the Hungarian group mailing list. More than 30 people participated in his party. The event was so good that he organized it again in November 2010. This year it was a full day event with more than 30 people, it started from 10:00 AM and went on until late night. Participants were engaged in the preparation work, buying minced meat, bread, preparing recipes, and bringing some additional food or drinks to the party. The kolbász making process is quite a lot of labor with the huge amount of meat and pig intestines involved. Almost everybody took part in the work, including me and my 6 years old son. We had freshly-fried kolbász together with bread, marinated cucumbers. Pálinka (a traditional spirit made of fruits) was served. The high spirit of the guests and the warm hospitality of Norbi and his Chinese wife made the day unforgettable. The hosts also had prepared pogácsa (a round home-baked biscuit) and töltött káposzta (stuffed marinated cabbage leaves). One of the guests brought Hungarian movies DVDs and played them on the party. After the party, all participants left with about 2 kilograms of sausage to enjoy it later at home.

Other Hungarian self-organized community events:

- Poker parties;
- Photo hobby events;
- Welcome/farewell parties;
- Self-organized cultural events (Experidance evening, Hoco-Guczo book event);
- Badminton/gulyás parties;
- Brainstorming parties to help one of the community members in solving a problem;
- Movie watching events;
- Private home parties without any particular reason or theme;
- Socializing dinners (usually in the Always Café or some Japanese teppanyaki restaurants);
- Excursions near Shanghai;
- Diving trips to Thailand or the Philippines;
- And many more.

Official events:

Besides the self-organized events described above, the Consulate General of Hungary in Shanghai also organizes some events where the community is invited. Such recent event was the National Day Celebration in the Hungarian Expo Pavilion, and the Hungarian Culture Show and Reception at the Expo Centre this summer.

Festivities

My survey included question about festivities that the Hungarians celebrate in China, with the intention to find out how the Hungarians in Shanghai are keeping such customs in China.

The respondents celebrated the following Hungarian (European) festivals in Shanghai:

- Farsang Carnival,
- 15th March,
- Easter,
- Aug 20th National Holiday,

- Mikulás,
- Christmas.

Mikulás

I personally have participated with my husband and my son in many festival parties in recent years, and the Mikulás is one that really sticks out of memory. Mikulás is the Hungarian for the internationally popular Santa Claus. On the Mikulás party, there was a ritual to have a Mikulás (role-played by a Hungarian community member) appear for the children. He brought gifts in his sack and presented them to the children. The Mikulás talked to the children one by one, praising on their good deeds and reminding them on what to improve. The Mikulás didn't just say some clichés to the children, the gifts and the messages were worked out in cooperation with the parents. This ritual brought great fun to the children, and it was the highlight of the party. Through this ritual, the community's identity was strongly reinforced by sharing the same culture heritage.

Farsang carnival

Farsang⁵ is a traditional Carnival type festival in Hungary. In the recent years, it has been also celebrated by the Hungarian community in Shanghai by a great costume party. It is held sometimes in February or March in one of the western pubs in the downtown area of Shanghai. It is a private, unofficial type of event, yet the Consulate General of Hungary in Shanghai took active part in the organization. More than 50 people participated, Hungarians with their families and some international friends. To me as a Chinese, it was quite an exotic experience to join the costume party and to see people dressed up in amazing forms. We had some pirates, the Incredibles, a Mummy, wild man, ghost, Doctor Hannibal, etc. My husband, me, and our son were dressed like tigers because it was the tiger year in 2010. This Farsang party held in Shanghai is a modernized form of a culture practice: it is based on the traditional customs of Hungary, but mixed with other European and American elements.

Cultural Items

People can put a piece of their homeland in their suitcases when they go abroad, and it is interesting to see what items the Hungarians bring with themselves to Shanghai. We mentioned food ingredients already. Other notable cultural items are Hungarian books, newspapers, music, movies, and gifts. I gathered information about gift items, because they show how Hungarians present their culture to others.

Gifts

The survey included a question "What items from Hungary have you brought to China as gifts?". The following is a summary list of the gift items:

- Drinks: Pálinka, various wines, Tokaji wine, Unicum;
- Food: Hungarian sausages, szalámi (fermented sausage), marcipán (marzipan), dried fruits, túrórudi (chocolate coated cottage cheese), konyakos meggy (dark chocolate candies with cherries in cognac);
- Handcrafts items: embroidered table cloth, Herendi porcelain, magic box, Ajka crystal;
- Other souvenirs: Hungarian T-shirts, Hungarian cards

⁵ Farsang is the traditional Hungarian Carnival, a festival including a costume party.

Summary and Analysis of Cultural Practices

The above described cultural practices show that most Hungarians in Shanghai vividly practice their Hungarian culture, and many Hungarians, especially the ones who are here for a longer time, do keep in touch and indeed form a community. Be it the Hungarian language, community events, books from Hungary or the taste of hometown food, all these make them feel connected to each other and to their home, thus maintaining their cultural identity as Hungarians.

Balance between keeping Hungarian and adapting to the life in Shanghai

The previous chapter was focusing on the Hungarian cultural practices in Shanghai, but this is not the full story. In order to understand the Hungarians in Shanghai, we also need to see how and to what degree they adapt themselves to the circumstances in Shanghai. I summarize this balance in the following table:

	<i>Maintaining Hungarian Identity</i>	<i>Adapting to Life in Shanghai</i>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enjoying speaking Hungarian among each other; ● Enjoying reading books and articles in Hungarian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most Hungarians are fluent in English, speak some Chinese and many speak some other languages as well; ● Most Hungarians don't use Hungarian as the major language at home and work;
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enjoy home dishes and flavors time to time; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They eat Chinese and other style of food in average 90% of the time.
Socializing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They participate Hungarian community events and have active social life among each other; ● They have an average 5 Hungarian friends in Shanghai; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They socialize with local Chinese and other foreigners as well; ● They have an average 2-3 Chinese friends and 3-5 foreigner friends;

Detailed results - Languages spoken:

Options to indicate proficiency level in this questionnaire were:

Not at all, Some expressions, Can manage the basics, Fluent, Native level

Hungarian: All respondents speak it at the Native level.

English: All respondents are at least Fluent; 2 speak it at the Native level.

Chinese: Some expressions: 5 people out of 12; Can manage the basics: 4 people out of 12;

Fluent: 3 people out of 12.

How many Hungarians speak mainly Hungarian at home?

Only 2 out of the 12, which means that except remaining single, other Hungarians in Shanghai have non-Hungarian spouses or partners (mostly Chinese, and also of other countries).

How many Hungarians speak mainly Hungarian at work?

Only 2 out of 11 working respondents use Hungarian as a main language at work. 6 people of the 11 use Chinese, and all uses English at work. This means that most Hungarians work in the international arena (multinational or multicultural organizations).

How happy are they in Shanghai?

This likert-scale survey question had the following answer options:

Very unhappy=1, Rather unhappy=2, So so=3, Rather happy=4, Very happy=5.

The average result is 4.25, rather happy. (n=12, bigger sample is needed to verify this). This result shows that most Hungarians successfully adapt to and enjoy life here.

Do they feel Shanghai as their home?

This likert-scale survey question had the following answer options:

Absolutely not=1, Not really=2, Can't tell=3, Quite a bit=4, Absolutely =5.

The average result is 2.83. It means not really, or rather mixed feelings about this point. This shows that even though most Hungarians stayed in Shanghai already for a longer time (an average 5.5 years in this sample), and they feel rather happy here, but most of them feel Shanghai is just a temporary station in their life, and they have not deeply integrated into the local society and they have not assimilated to the local culture.

Changes due to the experience of living in Shanghai

Both the interviews and the questionnaires confirm that most people noticed changes in their life, one aspect is changes in life style, for example, eating habit, social life, etc. Other aspects are reflected in their behavior patterns and perceptions. As for the latter ones, one direction is to increase one's tendency to certain Chinese values and behavior patterns (becoming more flexible, patient, and positive are the most typical changes), another direction is becoming more international (becoming more open minded, increasing cross-cultural communication skills).

Cultural Adaptation in Shanghai- in local context and cosmopolitan context

Culture adaptation for Hungarians in Shanghai can be analyzed in two aspects: One of a local context and the other a cosmopolitan context. The former is adaptation to local environment, which is through experiencing a local culture, and through interactions with local people; and the latter is adaptation to a cosmopolitan environment in Shanghai, which is to say, through interactions with the other foreigners. The changes of Hungarians due to the experience of living in Shanghai can be analyzed from the two aspects of context.

Cultural adaptation for most Hungarians in Shanghai mainly means adapting to a cosmopolitan culture. Shanghai has exhibited the features of a cosmopolitan city, with foreigners of diverse culture; there are plenty of convenient facilities aiming at foreigners, for example, restaurants, bars, foreigner condensed living areas; There is a vivid cosmopolitan life style in

Shanghai. Most Hungarians in Shanghai are living a cosmopolitan lifestyle rather than a local Chinese life style; this is very clearly highlighted by the languages spoken and the habits of socializing: they socialize more among each other and with other foreigners rather than with Chinese people. Adapting to Chinese environment for them mainly means getting used to the “material environment” (climate, food, traffic, artifacts), and to find Chinese people who are “westernized” or open to foreign cultures.

Mutual Perception and Identity

Cultural identity can be analyzed from two sides- self identification and identification by others. In the previous chapter we talked about the culture practices of Hungarians, through which we could get an insight of their practices of the Hungarian identity. However, unless having personal relation with Hungarians, the Hungarian culture is not known to most of local Chinese people. This can be due to the reason that Hungary is a small country and does not have much prevalence businesswise in China.

Hungarian in Chinese people’s eyes

To many Chinese people, the image of Hungary is connected with a used-to-be socialist country. Since 1989, the political landscape has changed in Europe, which has made Hungary one of the westernized countries. However, according to my observation in Shanghai, most Chinese people have little knowledge about the current Hungary, besides knowing that Hungary is one of the Easter European countries; Actually before I met my husband I knew very little about Hungary, besides having heard of the name of Petőfi, a famous revolutionary Hungarian poet, whose most famous poem lines are “Life is dear, love is dearer. Both can be given up for freedom” in the Chinese translated form.

Since I met my husband, I have witnessed the lack of knowledge about Hungary among many ordinary Chinese people. At certain occasions, people would like to ask where he is from, and when giving the answer “Hungary”, some people looked puzzled, since they have not heard of this country. Some people tend to confuse Hungary with other Eastern European country like Czech, and may confuse the capital city Budapest as Prague.

In China, there are certain stereotypes regarding people of different countries. For example, Russians are related with Vodka; Germans are related with beer; Japanese are thought to be work-holic, Americans are casual, etc. These cultural stereotypes came from impressions which were related to literature, movies, or reputations due to certain interactions in the past.

However, as for Hungarians, it seems that there is not such a stereotype formed. Drawing my experience in Shanghai, I have not heard any people talking about stereotyped behavior of Hungarians. This can be due to the fact that Hungarians are far less in number comparing to that of other foreigner ethnic groups in Shanghai. There is not a ready repertoire where Chinese can pick out certain characters to describe the Hungarians. Therefore, the image of the Hungarians is a little bit blurred, and a Hungarian tends to be identified more with the generalized image as a Laowai, or as an Eastern European.

A trans-continental identity as “European”

Since Hungary is one of the European countries, the Hungarian culture has in many ways commonalities with a European culture. For example, bread and cheese are indispensable for Hungarians, and they are considered to be typical European food; Besides that, Many European countries have common festivals like the St. Nicholas Day (Mikulás Day in Hungary), Christmas, Easter, etc.

The Hungarians in Shanghai identify themselves as Europeans. In my survey this Europe-identification can be seen from statement like “I consider Europe as my home”; or “I have European breakfast(to keep as Hungarian)”, etc. In my analysis about European identities practiced by Hungarians in Shanghai, I would like to refer to Wolfgang Kaschuba’s work “From National to Global: European Identities on the Move”. He analyzed the European identity which is constructed from different perspectives, ie, the political perspective and the people perspective, and a globalizing perspective.

The European identity is especially prevalent in a trans-continental context, and for Hungarians in Shanghai, they have presented a European(western) culture to the local Chinese people; Some Hungarians practice this European identification through engaging with social network such as EU Chamber of Commerce.

My interviewees had shared with me about the European features that they think Hungarians have: for example, quality oriented, being critical, having high-expectations (which is related to quality oriented) etc.

From my observation, I have seen the behavior patterns with the above European features in my husband, his fellow Hungarians, and other Europeans (Westerners in general, which are usually represented by Europeans). For example, they have showed to have good eyes for defects in designs of products and projects. From my understanding, these behavior patterns are exhibition of European (Western) values, and Hungarians in Shanghai have showcased identifying with and practicing these values. Different behavior patterns differentiate Westerners from the local Chinese, and the differences are usually boiled down to the explanation of culture difference. In the China context, I want to point out that these differences actually shape a community (a Westerner community), which the Hungarians identify with.

A “Laowai” identity in the Chinese context

In China, the word for foreigner is “Wai Guo Ren” in Mandarin. “Wai” means outsider, or other, “Guo” means country, and “Ren” means people. However, in oral form, a mostly commonly used oral term to refer to foreigners is “Laowai”. “Lao” is prefix to refer to somebody, and “Wai” means outsider. In most cases, Laowai is used to refer to white foreigners.

A Hungarian in China may not be firstly identified as a Hungarian, but as a Laowai from his appearance. Therefore, the experiences they have in interactions with local people are related to the Laowai experience.

In the Chinese context, Laowai experience is related to an imagination about westerners, whom are thought to be Caucasian, English speaking, rich, culturally different with behaviors which sometimes appear to be funny in the Chinese eyes. I have observed in Shanghai a “Laowai” phenomenon, from which certain practices can be observed, for example, in a Shanghai context, Laowai are usually favored in the interactions with the locals. A certain cultural capital is attributed to the Laowai identity. Being a Laowai actually gains certain cultural resource for a

foreigner in Shanghai. In another article of mine “Laowai in China and its Cultural Resource”, I have analyzed this phenomenon. A Hungarian may experience this “Laowai” culture in a Shanghai context, in which his/her identity in the Chinese eyes is “Laowai-ed”, in another word, more related to Laowai features rather than to Hungarian features.

How Hungarians in Shanghai accept the “Laowai” identity

In my research I have asked a question “How do you feel, and what do you think about this word Laowai, and what do you associate with it?”

My respondents have showed different opinions. And according to reactions to this word, I have grouped them in positive, negative, and neutral attitudes, details as the following:

- Positive
 - “White face. Depends on the situation, in most cases the use of it is related to respect, and gives extra right.”
 - “Funny. Do not disturb. Makes me more self confident.”
 - “It's very little bit impolite but friendly and funny way to refer to foreigners, an outsider, someone who does not understand China and the Chinese ways very well.”
 - “I like being a Laowai.”
- Negative:
 - “I feel it is a symbol of segregation. I do not like to be called Laowai, to be put into a certain category.”
 - “I met this word more when I was living in Guiyang, and due to constant attention it was connected to bad feelings. Its more like being something interesting than to be recognized as a person.”
- Neutral:
 - “I feel indifferent about it because that is what I am here. I think the word usage makes sense because I am not Chinese. ”;
 - “Depends how it is said. I am usually disinterested if it is meant to be negative. Old Chinese have a generally bad impression about foreigners and with a good reason up to a certain extent. Despite of history and the nationalism indoctrinated centrally, I think the situation is sill quite good.”
 - “As I am originally from Vietnam, Chinese people think I am one of them from the outlook; but sometimes I really feel that I am Laowai when I can not adapt to Chinese behavior.”
 - “It all depends who said it and in what context.”

Just as the word suggests, “Laowai” refers to outsiders, as “outsiders” the foreigners are the “others” for local Chinese people. The “otherness” actually helps to shape an identity for the “others”, ie, “foreigners” and “Laowai” in China. Through my survey we have found out that the Hungarians in Shanghai are familiar with the term “Laowai”. No matter whether they like it or not, they have common experience of being refered to as Laowai, and being treated as Laowai.

Some Hungarians take the identity as Laowai in the positive way, and may even make use of it. One example is very self-evident, that Gabor has actually registered a domain name as Laowai.com6 in 1998. The idea was to develop a website for the foreigner community in China, to provide a platform for publishing know-how livings in China, as well as classified fields and forums.

From my interview, one of my respondents has shared with me how he sees “Laowai”, to quote as following: “I think it is just a funny word. Actually Laowai is a label for the culture of foreigners in China. It says a lot about how Chinese people and foreigners see each other in this country. Maybe you know the Japanese word, which can be the equivalent word of Laowai, it is Gaijin. Gaijin in Japanese is a derogatory term, it is a bad word. Whereas Laowai in Chinese is more like KeAi (lovely). It shows a lot about (the culture) You know Japanese people are more racist, they think of foreigners as inferior. Chinese people have this kind of mixed relation. It is not like (that in Japan), eg, you go to African countries, where people just look up on foreigners, and think they are superior. Chinese people don’t think like that. “Laowai”, I like this term, because Waiguoren people say “We are Laowai”, and you have laowai.com⁶, etc. It’s funny, I like it very much.”

A transnational identity- “Global Citizen”

Identity is a multi-facet matter which is worth exploring into. In my survey, there was a question “I feel I am more a global citizen than a Hungarian”. With the word “global citizen” I mean the transnational identification which is not restricted to geographical or national boundaries. This term was used by my husband when drawing his experience of more than 16 years living in China, he feels strongly an identity as a global citizen besides the identity as a Hungarian in China.

The options for the answers are Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Can’t tell, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree.

The results shows: Strongly agree: 4 out of 12; Somewhat agree: 5 out of 12; Somewhat disagree: 1 out of 12; Strongly disagree: 3 out of 12.

Since 9 people out of 12 agree on the identification as a “Global citizen”, I feel it is worth exploring into this identity with an insight of those people’s background.

Firstly, the survey shows for the people who identify themselves as “global citizen”, it is related to the work and life they are having in China. Many Hungarians that I know have stable career related to Shanghai. They include entrepreneurs, freelancers, expats and locally-employed people who are working in international companies.

Secondly, the survey shows that 7 respondents of mine claim to have non- Hungarian spouse. 6 of them actually have Chinese spouse. These international families are product of globalization, in the aspect of ethno-scape. The personal choice to marry non-Hungarians illustrates one’s culture adaptation, that he accepts the “Other” culture and combines it with his own. The Culture hybridity practices are apparent with intercultural families in China. For example, my husband speaks Chinese and English to both me and our son at home, and most of the time we eat Chinese food; Kati, another respondents of mine, she has an Italian husband, at home she speaks Hungarian to her kids, and her husband speaks Italian to his kids. At home she eats 50% Hungarian food, 10% Chinese food, and 20% of other mixed styles. (this portion applies to her family members because she is in charge of cooking.) The culture practice are extending to the children of the international families as well. If the parents speak different languages to their children, the children usually can pick up both languages from their parents.

Shanghai is the leading city in the number of foreign marriage registration. Foreign marriage

⁶ www.laowai.com this website was created by Gabor Nagy (Hungarian) in Shanghai and it functioned as a social website with information about living and working in Shanghai.

is the marriage between foreigner and Chinese. It is said that every 3 of 100 marriage registration is foreign marriage.⁷ The average number of foreign marriage registration in Shanghai is 3000 couples per year.⁸ The culture hybridity of international marriage between Chinese and foreigners in China illustrates in a way how the identity of “global citizen” is practiced.

From the analysis we could see that the time of stay and one’s personal cultural experience have relations to one’s self-identification as “global citizen”. Comparing to other identities discussed earlier, ie, as Hungarian, as European, or as Laowai, the identity of “global citizen” is more a self-identification than identification by others. In another word, it is not an identity with apparent features which can be judged from the outside. It is more a positioning of oneself as a result of his/her transnational experiences.

Conclusion: Multi-facet Identity of Hungarians in Shanghai

In the previous chapters we have discussed about cultural identities in three layers. The first layer as Hungarians, which is related to the Hungarian ethnic heritage; the cultural practices of Hungarians of individual level and community level, when they are living in another country, (in this case it is China), have maintained the Hungarian identity and presented a Hungarian culture in another country.

We also discussed a trans-continental identity, which is that of a European. When a Hungarian comes to China, a European identity stands out due to interactions with other people.

The identity of Laowai is unique in the Chinese context, and this identity is strongly expressed in the interactions between a foreigner Hungarian and the local Chinese people. My research reflects the mutual perceptions of Hungarians in Shanghai and local Chinese people, as a result of interactions between them. A Hungarian is perceived as a Westerner, and a Laowai in the Chinese context. The Laowai identity is related to a cultural experience, through which a Hungarian may take this identity passively or actively. My study has analyzed different attitude towards this identity by Hungarians in Shanghai, and pointed out that there are positive identification with it.

Another identity we discussed is a transnational identity as “global citizen”. This identity has brought a new perspective in the study of culture adaptation, which is neither assimilation nor acculturation. In fact, this is a product related to globalization. In Appadurai’s⁹ work on globalization and modernization, he has analyzed global cultural flow in five dimensions: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples. My current research aims to exploring into the transnational identity through further studies in the future.

⁷ <http://news.9ask.cn/hyjt/hyzt/201011/962828.shtml>

⁸ This number comes from Shanghai Municipal Affair Bureau, that from 1995 to 2002, the total registration of international marriage registration is 21,000 couples, which makes yearly average registration at 3000 couples. Quoted from <http://news.9ask.cn/hyjt/hyzt/201011/962828.shtml>

⁹ Appadurai articulated a view of cultural activity known as the social imaginary. For Appadurai the imaginary is composed of five dimensions of global cultural flow: 1) ethnoscaples; 2) mediascaples; 3) technoscaples; 4) finanscaples; 5) ideoscaples. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arjun_Appadurai