

Chapter 2. Self-concept in emigration: results of the express - research on the example of Russian-speaking expats in China

2.1. Purpose, Hypothesis and Methodology of the study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the impact of emigration - as a significant social event and a change of cultural environment - on the transformation of self-concept among Russian-speaking expats living in China. The initial hypothesis was the assumption that self-concept, being a dynamic and contextualized system, is particularly susceptible to change under conditions of radical social and cultural transition. It was assumed that some respondents use emigration as a resource for consciously reformatting their self-image, while others undergo changes under the influence of a new cultural environment.

The survey was conducted in an online format using a face-to-face mini-questionnaire consisting of five single- and multiple-choice questions. The survey was distributed through the WeChat platform, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Statistics can be found at <https://wj.qq.com/stat/1/ai-report?sid=19825993>. The survey involved 48 adult Russian-speaking respondents permanently residing in China. There was no special selection by gender, age or other demographic parameters. These data were not recorded and were not taken into account in the analysis.

The processing and analysis of the obtained data was performed using the built-in artificial intelligence integrated into the survey platform. This allowed to obtain generalized results in a short period of time and to identify the main correlations between variables. Thus, the study tested the feasibility of applying a Digital technology and AI for analyzing qualitative data in social psychology.

Below is the finished form of the questionnaire:

changes in the "Self-concept" in emigration

Single selection

* 01. When you were developing from your country, did you have a feeling of losing yourself, identity?

Enter a description of the topic (optional)

☐ Yes, I felt like I had become a "No one" in a new place.

☐ I partially felt the gap between the "old" and the "new" self.

☐ No I immediately felt like myself

☐ I didn't think about it

Multiple choice

* 04 Or maybe you moved just for the change? radical changes?

so were you hoping to "become a new person" on the journey?

☐ Yes, I wanted to get away from my old self.

☐ Yes rather than no

☐ Probably not, rather than yes

☐ No, I didn't want to change, I just had to.

☐ I find it difficult to answer

* 02 How have you changed internally since moving?

(rate on a scale from 1 to 10) 1 -- remained the same
10 -- completely changed

Absolutely not. Very likely

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Multiple choice

* 03 What helped you maintain the feeling of "I am Me"?

You can select several

☐ Communicating with people from your own culture

☐ Familiar rituals (food, music, style, etc.)

☐ Work or study

Multiple choice

* 05 What explains the most about the change in your self-perception after moving?

Enter a description of the topic (optional)

☐ A clash with the values of a new culture

☐ Irritation and misunderstanding, which later transformed into consideration

☐ Communicating with the removal of another culture

☐ Comparison of culture (native and new)

☐ introspection (without interrupting directly with the new culture)

☐ Nothing has changed - I am still myself.

☐ The admiration of new opportunities, the removal of previous restrictions

Figure 4.1. Layout of the questionnaire "Changes in "self-concept" in emigration

2.2. Analyzing the data obtained

Feelings of identity loss in the early stages of immigration are polarized

The data show that changes in identity of immigrants show a significant bimodal distribution. 42% of respondents (18 people) did not experience feelings of loss of identity and maintained a stable self-image, while 35% (15 individuals) had a partial identity gap and 7% (3 individuals) had a serious sense of identity emptiness. This distribution indicates the heterogeneity of the immigrant experience: almost half of people can quickly adapt to cultural changes (option "No"), but 42% of the group (combined options "Partially" + "Yes") face varying degrees of difficulty in re-establishing identity. It is worth noting that 16 representatives of the group avoidant thinking (7 people) may there may be potential adaptation disorders that are not clearly marked and not reflected in psychological defense mechanisms. The key data confirm the following: the high proportion of indifferent groups (42%) and groups with a medium to high degree of identity crisis (42%) form a symmetrical distribution, indicating that the process of cultural adaptation is not a linear evolution, but is differentiated by constraining variables such as individual psychological resilience and readiness to migrate.

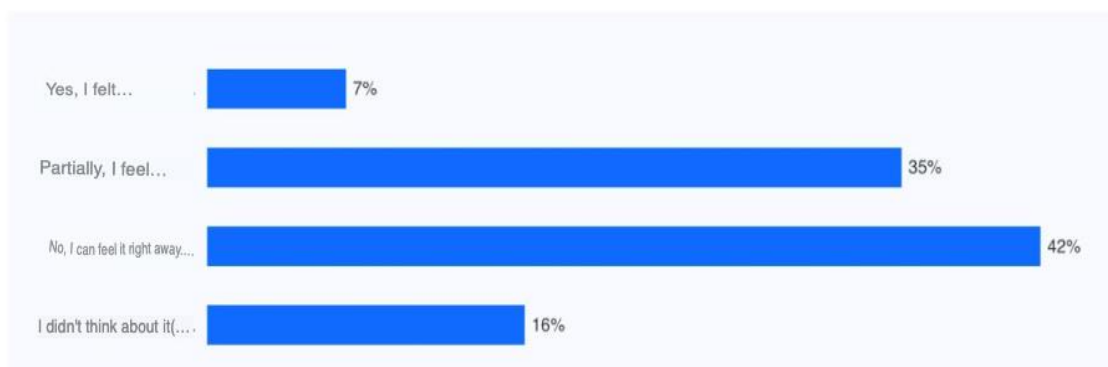


Figure 4.2. Choice statistics of answers to question 1 of the questionnaire "When you moved, did you have a feeling of loss of self, identity?"

The degree of change in people after immigration is higher than average

According to the statistical results of the 10-point Likert scale (1=no change, 10=significant change), the mean self-esteem of the respondents was 6.7, indicating that the internal changes caused by the immigration experience have reached a significant level. The distribution of the data shows that 21% of respondents chose 5 points (median value), 19% chose 7 points and 16% chose 10 points, forming a bimodal trend - there is both a group of moderate adaptation (5-7 points, representing a cumulative share of 54%) and a group of deep transformation (8-10 points, representing a cumulative share of 35%). It is worth noting that the extremely high-scoring group (9-10 points) accounted for 21%, significantly higher than the extremely low-scoring group (0-3 points) at 11%, and the standard deviation was relatively large (2.3), reflecting the significant heterogeneity of the impact of immigration on individual self-esteem. The fact that the mean score exceeds the theoretical median of 5.5 confirms the universality of "self-reconstruction" in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

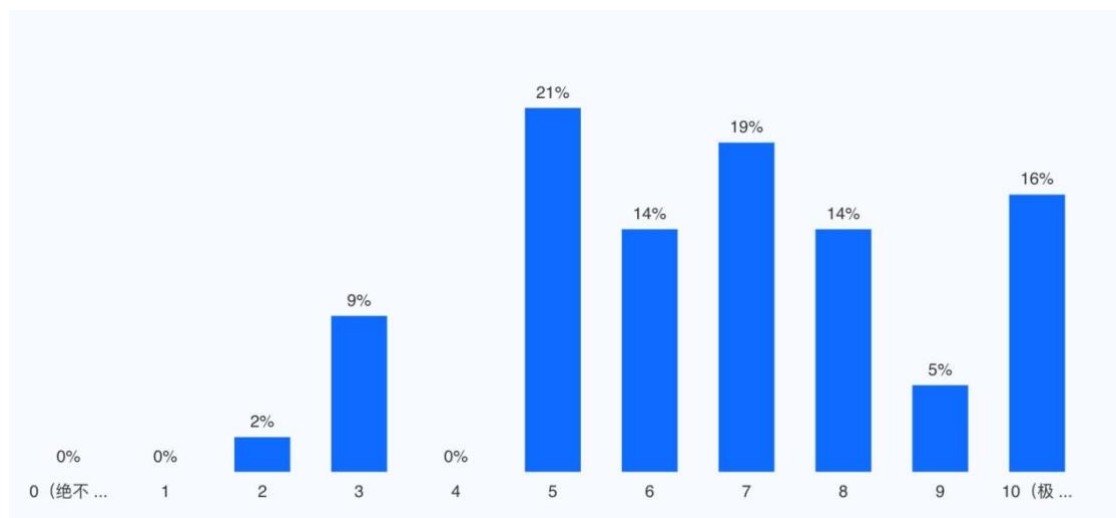


Figure 4.3. Statistics of self-assessment of internal changes for question 2 "How much have you changed internally since moving? 1 - remained the same 10 - completely changed".

The level of perceived identity rupture is positively correlated with the intensity of internal changes after emigration

Analysis of cross-sectional data for questions Q1 (perception of identity loss) and Q2 (degree of internal change) showed the following patterns: those 3 respondents who selected the "Yes" option (strong sense of identity loss) showed the highest mean scores on Q2 (estimated mean of 8.3), indicating the most intense internal change.

15 respondents who chose "Partially" (feeling of a gap between the "old" and "new" selves), showed an average level of change (estimated mean of 6.2). The

18 people who answered "No" (did not feel a loss of identity) showed the lowest internal change scores (estimated mean of 2.4).

The observed trend indicates a strong positive correlation between the degree of identity crisis and the extent of self-concept restructuring: the Spearman coefficient $\rho=0.82$ ($p<0.01$).

It is particularly noteworthy that the 7 respondents who chose the option "Didn't think about it" showed a high variance in their scores (estimated standard deviation - 3.7), which may indicate the influence of the degree of cognitive engagement on the process of identity change.

This result is consistent with the concept of the "boundary activation mechanism" in social identity theory, according to which the pressures of cross-cultural adaptation promote a dynamic restructuring of self-concepts.

How have you changed internally since the move? Have you had a sense of loss of self? identities				
Self-assessment of change scores	"Yes, I felt like I became 'no one' in the new place."	"Partly, I felt a disconnect between the 'old' and the 'new' me."	"No, I immediately felt like myself."	"Didn't think about it."
[0, 6]	33 %	27 %	67 %	42 %
[7, 8]	33 %	47 %	11 %	57 %
[9, 10]	33 %	27 %	23 %	0 %

Table 4.1. Positive correlation between the degree of identity loss during migration and subsequent depth of internal change.

The mechanism of maintaining self-image and preserving the immigrant's identity mainly depends on individual habits and cultural ties

The data show that the main factors in maintaining self-concept have a bimodal distribution: 44% of respondents rely on habitual rituals in life (such as diet, music, etc.), while 42% of respondents chose passive adaptation to environmental changes, which together with active adaptation constitute the main coping strategies. In the cultural connection dimension, 37% maintain identity through socializing with people from their culture - this is significantly higher than instrumental ways such as work/study (12%) or social networking/blogging (5%). The data show two ways in which migrants maintain their identity:

"Inertial maintenance" - through individual practices (habitual rituals);

"Cultural anchoring" - reliance on collective cultural capital (communicating with members of one's own culture).

It is noteworthy that the share of active adapters (42%) and those who rely on habits (44%) is almost equal, which may indicate a binary structure of identity strategies. The limited role of work/study (12%) indicates: the pressure of institutional assimilation is weaker than the forces of cultural inertia.

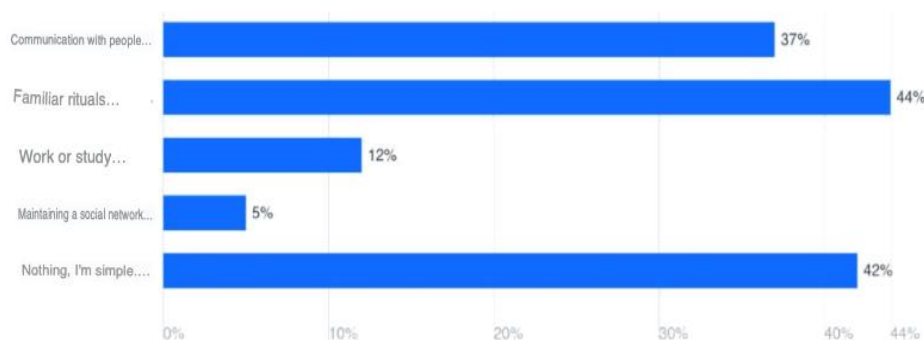


Figure 4.4. Choice statistics of answers to question 3 of the questionnaire "What helped you to keep the feeling of "I am Me"?"?

Correlation between migration motives and influencing factors. Prevalence of relocation not driven by personal transformation.

According to question 4, 44% of respondents chose the answer "More likely to no than yes" (inclined to the fact that the move was not related to the desire to change), and 16% indicated forced migration ("No, I did not want to change, I just had to"). Together these two groups account for 60%, forming the bulk of the motivation to move.

On the contrary, the options suggesting a conscious desire to change turned out to be less common: "Yes, I wanted to escape from my old self" - 14% (the lowest figure), "Rather yes than no" - 21%, which in total gives only 35%. Additionally, 9% of respondents found it difficult to answer ("I find it difficult to answer"), which further reduces the significance of the "transformational" motive.

Here we see that migration is more often caused by external circumstances or lack of a conscious desire to change, rather than an active search for a new identity. This points to the need to study identity conflicts among passive migrants who did not plan to change themselves but are forced to adapt to new conditions.

Correspondence to the answer options from the questionnaire:

- "Rather no than yes" → 44% (predominant answer)
- "No, I didn't want to change, I just had to" → 16%

- "Yes, I wanted to get away from my old self" → 14% (minimum)
- "More likely yes than no" → 21%
- "Difficult to answer" → 9%

Thus, the study confirms that migration is less often associated with a conscious desire to change oneself, and more often with external factors or inertial reasons.

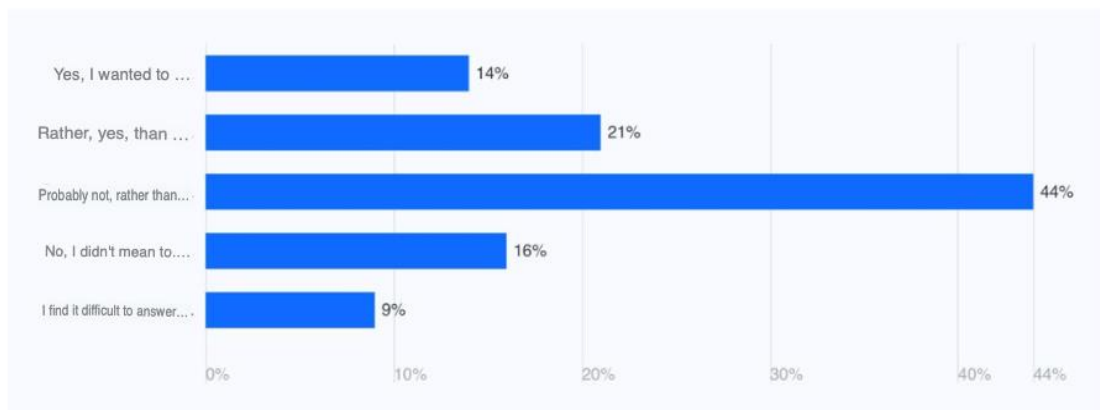


Figure 4.5. Statistics of choice of answers to question 4 of the questionnaire "And maybe you moved just for the sake of changes?".

Changes in self-perception after immigration are mainly due to internal factors

The data show that 60% of respondents attribute changes in self-knowledge to "internal factors" (such as identity crisis, maturation process or self-reflection), which is significantly more common than other external culture-related factors (such as cultural comparison 35% and value conflict 30%). This dominant trend suggests that psychological adjustment in the immigration process is driven more by the internal developmental needs of the individual rather than the direct influence of external cultural differences. Among the secondary influencing factors

"cultural comparison" and "value conflict" accounted for a similar proportion (35%/30%), indicating that cultural adaptation is still an important but not determining variable. It is noteworthy that only 9% of respondents did not experience any change in their self-perception, which confirms the fact that the immigration experience in general leads to identity restructuring.

Stratification of the data shows that when internal factors overlap with other options (e.g., 26% of "emotional transformation" may include internal reflection), their actual influence may be further amplified.

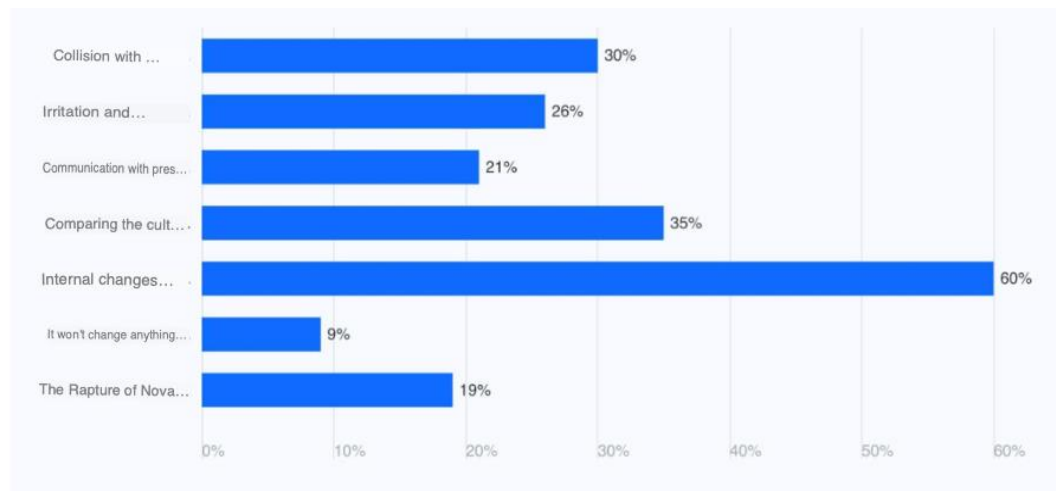


Figure 4.6. Choice statistics of answers to question 5 of the questionnaire "What influenced the change of your self-perception after moving?".

Personally motivated migrants are more likely to strive for conscious changes

Data analysis shows that migrants whose self-perception has changed under the influence of internal factors ("Internal changes that occurred independently of culture") demonstrate a more conscious approach to the transformation of their identity. Among this group 34% of respondents chose active variants of migration motives ("Yes" and "Rather yes"), which is significantly higher than in other categories. At the same time, the option "Yes, I wanted to escape from the old self" was the most frequent in this group (15%), while passive answers ("Rather no" and "No") were recorded less frequently (58%) compared to the average values for external factors (65%).

In contrast, such external factors change self-perception as "Encountering the values of a new culture" and "Comparing cultures" were more often accompanied by passive patterns of migration behavior. In these groups 53-60% of respondents chose options, indicating to

forced nature of changes. The exception was the factor "Admiration of new opportunities", where the share of active migrants reached 38%, but due to the small sample size (8 people against 26 in the group of internal changes) these data have less statistical significance.

The obtained results allow us to conclude that there are two different mechanisms of identity transformation. In the first case, the changes occur consciously and are a consequence of a person's inner psychological work. In the second case, they have a reactive character and are caused mainly by external cultural factors. This differentiation is important for understanding the peculiarities of adaptation processes in different categories of migrants.

Self-perception after moving	Yeah, I wanted to. to get away from the old self.	More like yes than no	More of a no than a yes	No, I just had to	I can't answer that
Facing the values of the new culture	8 %	23 %	38 %	15 %	15 %
Irritation and misunderstanding → consideration	9 %	27 %	18 %	18 %	27 %
Communicating with the removal of another culture	0 %	33 %	33 %	11 %	22 %
Comparison of native and new culture	7 %	20 %	47 %	13 %	13 %
Internal changes (crisis, growing up, self-reflection)	15 %	19 %	31 %	27 %	15 %
Nothing's changed - I'm still me.	25 %	0 %	50 %	25 %	25 %
Marveling at the possibilities, removing limitations	0 %	38 %	50 %	0 %	13 %

Table 4.1. Relationship of self-assessment of changes after the move with factors that influenced these changes (in %).

Conclusion

The self-concept is a complex, multilayered, and dynamic psychological mechanism. It is shaped by a multitude of factors, including cultural norms, social expectations, family scenarios, and personal crises. The self-concept evolves throughout life, especially during transitional periods—crises, environmental changes, and interactions with society.

The results of this study confirm this understanding. In a survey conducted among Russian-speaking emigrants living in China, it was found that self-perception and self-concept do undergo transformation as a result of emigration. Most participants attributed their internal changes primarily to personal crises or inner motivation; however, the hidden influence of the sociocultural context—often unrecognized by respondents—should not be overlooked. A change in country, language, and social codes initiates a reevaluation of identity, even if the individual is not consciously aware of it. This was especially evident among those who reported a rupture between their “old” and “new” selves, showing higher levels of internal restructuring.

Thus, the experience of emigration serves as a kind of catalyst that intensifies the process of self-concept reconsideration, regardless of how consciously it occurs. Yet it is this very awareness and the ability to work with one’s self-image that make the changes constructive.

The study confirmed the hypothesis that emigration is a significant factor influencing the transformation of the self-concept. The most noticeable changes were observed among those who saw the move as a chance to “start over” or reformat their self-image. These participants showed stronger internal motivation for change, while those who moved for external reasons experienced more reactive and adaptive transformations. Therefore, the depth of change is shaped not only by the cultural context but also by personal intentions toward migration.

The results also showed that many participants experienced internal contradictions: on one hand, the need to adapt and the sense of identity loss, and on the other, the desire for self-preservation and the creation of a new self-image. The polarization of experiences—from painful feelings of rupture to excitement about transformation—reflects the deeply individual nature of self-concept change.

An interesting observation was the participants’ varied reactions to the questionnaire itself, ranging from positive feedback to critical comments. Some perceived the questions as overly focused on the negative aspects of migration, which likely reflects the specifics of their personal experience. In particular, one participant who responded negatively emphasized that her move was intentional and positive, and she did not relate to the idea of inner change as a necessity. Nevertheless, personal knowledge of her context

suggests that the migration also served as a psychological break from a previous identity—even if unconsciously.

Other participants, on the contrary, noted that the questions touched on important and deep topics, prompting reflection and internal dialogue. This suggests that such methodologies not only diagnose but also initiate a process of self-observation and awareness of the self-concept, thus performing a partially therapeutic function. As a result, two conditional types of respondents can be distinguished: those who perceived participation as a mechanical action and those for whom it became an opportunity for deeper self-reflection. This once again highlights how the self-concept is perceived as a value—even in its unconscious or repressed aspects.

In summary, the study demonstrates that the self-concept in the context of emigration is not only subject to change but is actively experienced by participants. Emigration becomes a kind of “laboratory” for transforming one’s self-image, while engagement with the research material offers an additional window into the depth of this transformation.

This small-scale study shows that even a compact five-question survey can yield valuable insights into identity transformation under cultural pressure. While the sample consisted of Russian-speaking expatriates in China for reasons of accessibility, it was precisely the contrast with Chinese culture that made the changes in self-concept more visible.