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Successful schooling as a way for immigrants to become successful citizens: Hungarian and Chinese concepts of learning

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Abstract

Rapidly growing migration enhances cultural diversity in the educational sphere. In order to promote effective and culturally sensitive education it is crucial to investigate the cultural embeddedness of learning concepts. This paper presents a Hungarian learning model and compares it with an already existing Chinese one (conducted by Li, 2003). The learning concept was examined by the prototype method (Shaver et al., 1987) through collecting learning-related terms from 183 Hungarian university students. Using the same method as Li (2003) to reveal the Chinese learning model made it possible to compare the two cultural concepts. The findings show that although there is similarity of deliberated conception in both cultures, there were differences as well. The Hungarian students emphasize external goals (diploma, graduation), memorization and immorality (e.g. cheating) whereas the conceptual focus of the Chinese terms is on learning virtues (e.g. diligence, perseverance) and the unity of knowing and morality (Li, 2003). Looking at the results, it becomes a salient question as to which beliefs the Chinese students living in Hungary hold. Is it necessary for the immigrant children to alter their concept of learning to the learning concept of the host society to get successful schooling and to become successful citizens or is the Hungarian education system tolerant enough to let them live up to their own cultural heritage?

Keywords*: successful schooling, learning concept, Chinese, Hungarian, prototype method*

Theoretical background

Intense globalization and the international trend of immigration have a continuously increasing effect on the population of Hungary. Although the Hungarian migration scene is predominantly covered by immigrants from neighbouring countries (such as Romania, the Ukraine, Austria) mostly with Hungarian descent, the presence of non-ethnic European immigrants becomes prevalent as well (UNESCO, 2008). Regarding the immigrant groups one of the largest third country nationals in Hungary are the approximately ten thousand Chinese immigrants (Cartwright et al, 2008). The Chinese community has been relatively successfully integrated into the economic and social life (Feischmidt and Nyíri, 2006). In line with economic success, the growth of Chinese and mixed heritage families has become more visible in the past few years. Recognition of the permanence of Chinese immigrants in Hungary has culminated in the establishment of the Hungarian-Mandarin bilingual primary school in 2004, funded by both Chinese and Hungarian governments. The school cultivates transnational “double” identity, cultural awareness, cross cultural dialogue and tolerance.

Smooth adjustment to the education system of the receiving country should be a basic requirement for the immigrant children to become successful citizens who are able to contribute to the advancement of the society and also who are able to use fully the benefits of the host society. Although getting a successful education has a universal importance the way effective education is considered can differ among cultures; the conception of learning and education-related expectations are filtered through the culture and social structure. Considering the increasing number of Chinese immigrant students in the Hungarian educational system it becomes essential to investigate the quality of schooling the immigrant children get in Hungary, moreover, the match of the expectations toward education between immigrants and the host society. A recent study (Fülöp et al, 2007; Nguyen Luu et al, 2009) examining the integration and social support of Chinese immigrants in four European countries (Hungary, German, Spain and the UK) found that Chinese mothers were discontent with the level of schooling their children got in the host society. The majority of the mothers (88.9%) thought that school requirements in the host country are at a lower level than those in China and many of them (56%) would send their child back to China to study. Reflecting upon the results, it can be assumed that Chinese mothers compared to the European host-national mothers share a different concept of learning and develop different expectations related to learning.

Differences in learning outcomes between Western and Asian children have received much research attention recently (Li, 2002). According to the international large-scale surveys (e.g. PISA, TIMSS) students with East-Asian heritage typically outperform their Western counterparts (Fan and Zhu, 2005). These solid, considerable findings have led the educators and intercultural psychologists to reveal the hidden factors beyond the results. The explanations offered include the conceptualization of effort and ability (considering ability as changeable entity that can be increased by effort) (Hau and Salili, 1997), the parenting style (warm and strictly controlling at the same time with special emphasis on the academic achievement, high parenting expectations on the basis of a highly supporting environment) (Chao 1994, Stevenson and Stigler, 1992) as well as the crucial Confucian philosophical basis (value and role of learning, belief in effort over ability, filial piety, obligation to the parents, sense of duty, respect for the elders) that has an ongoing impact on the everyday life of Chinese people even today and creates a permanent input to the Chinese mindset (Sun, 2008).

Despite of the large amount of research carried out on this field the main question remain neglected, namely whether learning means the same thing to Westerners and East Asians. To address this issue Li and her colleagues (2002, 2005) started a research series to reveal the meaning beyond the term of learning in the Chinese and American culture. The results show interesting differences, namely the ‘virtue-driven’ Chinese learning model tends to mirror the ancient Confucian values, emphasizing the learning virtues as diligence, perseverance, endurance and concentration. Moreover, learning in China, in its various forms and levels, is widely conceptualized as integrating the cultivation of one’s moral character, the knowledge acquisition and social purposes such as contribution to the society. The ‘mind-oriented’ American model refers to the special role of the mind and cognition in the process of learning emphasizing the characteristics of the learner (e.g. motivation, ability, IQ). These models seem to function adaptively in

the culture they were developed but still there is a question unanswered whether possessing these approaches to learning stay adaptive even crossing the boarders.

Despite much research on the exploration of the Chinese learning concept (Li, 2005), just a few studies started to investigate the possible effects of acculturation on the learning beliefs (Li, in press) and there is no research considering the Hungarian general approach to learning except for studies focusing on specific aspects of learning (e.g. achievement motivation- Réthy; 2001, learning strategy- OECD, 2004, immorality in terms of learning, Fülöp, Ross et al, 2007; Orosz, 2009).

Goal of the study

The goal of the study was to reveal the Hungarian learning model and compare it with the Chinese one (conducted by Li, 2002) in order to serve as a starting point to a wider research project which aims to investigate the learning beliefs of Hungarians and Chinese immigrants living in Hungary and to capture in what extent acculturation affects the conceptualization.

Method

In the present study to access the learning beliefs of Hungarian university students (N=183) we used the same method namely the prototype research method (Rosch, 1978; Shaver et al, 1987) that was adopted in an earlier study by Li (2003) to reveal the American and Chinese learning models. Using the same procedure thoroughly made it possible to compare the different models. The method involved two main steps:

1. generating a list of learning-related terms
2. similarity sorting

The first step involved three sub-procedures:

(a) generating an initial list (3 college-educated adults gave free associations to the Hungarian terms of learning),
(b) expanding the list (20 more participants enlarged the pool of items)
(c) validating the list (60 more participants individually rated each item on a 4-point scale according to its relation to learning, ranging from 1(*meaning no relation*) to 4 (*strong relation to learning*).

The final list contained 218 learning-related Hungarian terms (and 225 terms in the Chinese sample, Li, 2003).

In the second main step 100 university students of different majors categorized the items of the final list via a web-based program and the data were processed by using cluster analysis. The final hierarchical structure of the learning-related terms was visualized by the result of the cluster analysis.

Results

The findings show both similarities and differences between the models. Both Hungarian and Chinese culture have relatively deliberated conception of learning (218 and 225 terms, respectively), however, despite the similarity there were differences with little overlap in the actual conception between the cultures as well.

From a linguistic perspective, most Hungarian items (90%) included single and regular words (e.g., *diploma*, *book*), whereas most Chinese items (92%) had multiple words with modifiers and idiomatic expressions including ancient proverbs and sayings (e.g. *modest people learn much as little, gain new insights through reviewing old materials*) (Li, 2003).

Considering the content of the list of learning related terms, there were interesting differences as a result of the rating procedure. The top 20 learning related phrases/terms (see Table 1) as the main core of the concept cover different key elements regarding learning and become the basis on the process of concept-development. The Hungarian list mostly includes words with pragmatic purpose (40 %, e.g. *graduation, final paper*), learning is typically associated to practical reasons in the Hungarian sample. Moreover the concept is classically conceptualized in the academic scene listing the formal academic requirements and 'must do's in order to complete an educational stage and enter the next level. The requirements listed in the Chinese sample are rooted in the learner's attitude and one's internal commitment to learning (80%, e.g. *take great pains to study, eager to learn*) but formal requirements prescribed by external factors (e.g. institution, education law) and is conceptualized on a wider basis. Possessing this approach makes possible to access learning in any situation even out of the platform of formal education.

Table 1. The top 20 learning-related word/phrases rated by Hungarian and Chinese university students

Rank order	Hungarian Items	Chinese Items (personally provided by Jin Li)
1.	Teaching	Keep on learning as long as one lives (lifelong learning)
2.	Higher education	Read extensively
3.	Final exam	Learn assiduously
4.	School	Read books
5.	Memorization	Diligent (in one's learning)
6.	University	Extensive knowledge and multi-faceted ability
7.	Language learning	Study
8.	Diploma	Make a firm resolution to study
9.	Life-long learning	Study as if thirsting or hungering
10.	Exam period	There is no boundary to learning
11.	Homework	Concentrate on learning
12.	Professor	Eager to learn
13.	Absolvation	Take great pains to study
14.	Graduation	Seek knowledge
15.	Language exam	The learned understands reasoning
16.	Final paper	Study abroad
17.	Teacher	Do one's utmost to self-study
18.	PhD	Learning without thinking is labour lost; thinking without learning is perilous (Confucius)

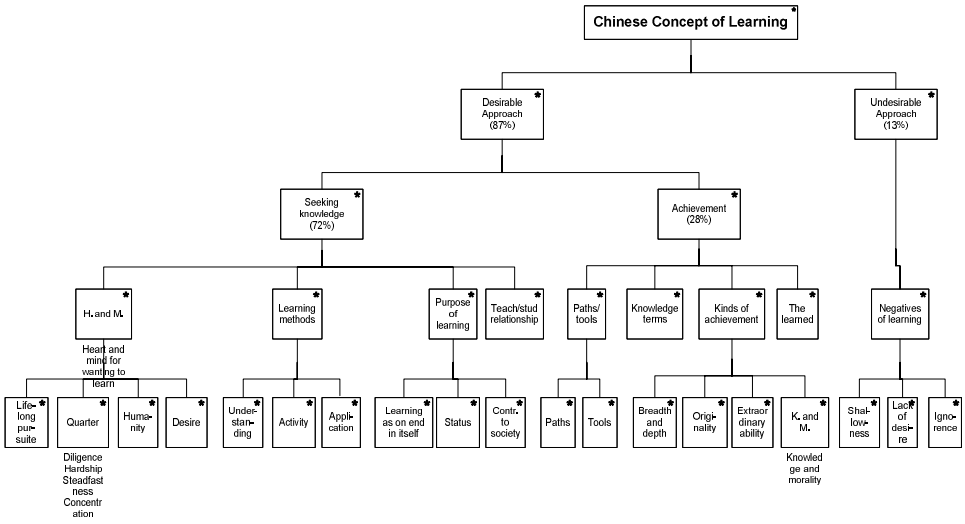
19.	Knowledge	After learning, one understands that one's knowledge is inadequate (Confucius)
20.	Educated people	Long-term diligence is the road to the mount of knowledge; endurance of hardship is the boat to the boundless sea of learning

The pragmatic/instrumental approach of Hungarian sample can be traced by looking at the whole set of learning-related terms, not only the top twenty. Hungarian students connected learning also with immorality listing unfair tools (e.g. cheating-mean score (out of 4): 2.93, copy-mean score: 3) in order to succeed and excel, in the Chinese list no phrase referred to the application of unfair methods to accomplish a task.

The final 4-level hierarchical structures of the Hungarian and Chinese learning models (Figure 1-2) give a closer look at the most important categories and dimensions university students develop and along which they organize the concept of learning. The most important results will be highlighted below.

The Chinese model (Figure 1; Li, 2001) is clearly value-loaded and coloured by emotions with the two main superordinate categories: desirable (87%) and undesirable (13%) approaches. The majority of items (87%) felt into the positive category which contained various desirable and valued ideas about learning, whereas the right side compiled warnings and things to avoid in learning. The desirable approach covers how learners actively seek knowledge, moreover the consequences of learning. The Chinese belief of learning pays attention to seek knowledge more than achievement with the larger category size on the left (72 vs 28%).

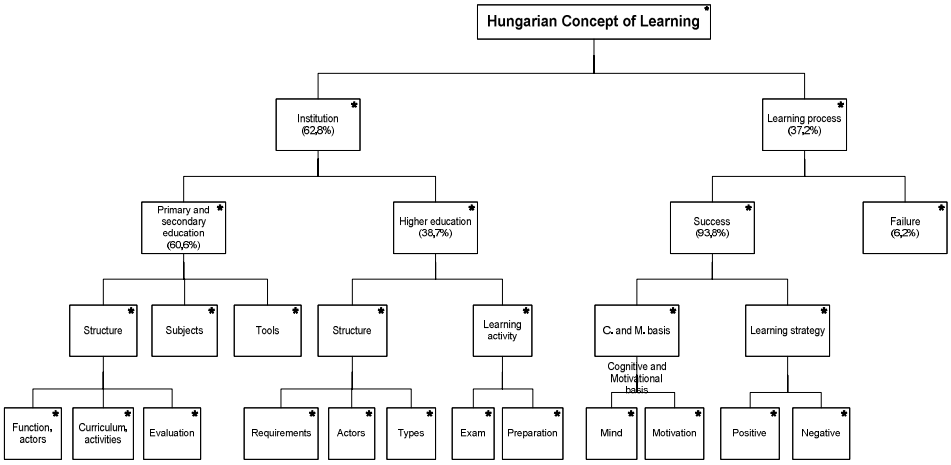
Figure 1. The Chinese hierarchical structure of learning (based on Li, 2001, p. 123) *(the numbers indicate the percentage of items felt into the given category)*



The core of the model is *'the heart and mind for wanting to learn'* subcategory, which summons the essence of the Chinese approach to learning and coloured by the ancient tenets of Confucianism. This category emphasizes the passion for life long learning, the learning virtues as diligence, endurance of hardship, steadfastness and concentration, additionally to stay modest regardless of achievement to preserve the permanent desire and need to improvement and self-cultivation.

The Hungarian model (Figure 2) is typically descriptive and refers to the institutional structure of education (63%) and only a smaller category deals with the actual learning process (37%) which is divided along the outcomes into a more significant 'desirable-success' (94%) and a minor 'undesirable-failure' (6%) paths (e.g. learning disability, school phobia).

Figure 2. The Hungarian hierarchical structure of learning
(the numbers indicate the percentage of items felt into the given category)



Comparing the two models, it is interesting to see that whereas the Chinese model contains institutional and structural aspects as well, the referred category appears in a lower level in the Chinese hierarchical structure including fewer items. The institutional factors play a more essential role in the Hungarian model being a more inclusive category with a more powerful organizing effect on the approach to learning. Unfolding the left "institution" path it can be seen that Hungarian university students hold a quite sophisticated mental map of the institutional and formal background of education it is clear for them what (e.g. subjects) is expected, when (e.g. educational level) and by whom (e.g. actors). Tracing the right part of the figure through the 'success' line the factors are depicted that contribute to the positive outcomes of learning. This path mostly includes the motivational and cognitive basis of learning and the required learning strategies to master the subject.

Moral aspects or overwhelmingly positive approach to learning were not emphasized in the Hungarian learning model.

Discussion

Comparing the two cultural models, despite of the sophisticated approach to learning in both cultures there were considerable differences regarding the actual content of the learning maps.

The Hungarian students perceive the concept of learning in the framework of formal education, put great emphasis on the different educational levels (elementary school, university), additionally the concept is related strongly to instrumental motivation and performance orientation (e.g. diploma, graduation). These results provide some support to previous studies considering the role of instrumental motivation among Hungarian students (OECD, 2004; Csizér and Kormos, 2008). The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey (OECD, 2004) measured in what extent the students are motivated by personal enjoyment and satisfaction derived from learning for its own sake (intrinsic motivation), as well as their motives for learning affected by a reward or punishment that is external to the activity itself (instrumental motivation). The results showed that Hungarian students scored relatively high on instrumental motivation, indicating how important external factors (e.g. to fulfil one's goals, to get a job, requirements for further study) play in learning. The role of instrumental motivation is especial important in the field of language learning in Hungary. Instrumental motivation received higher endorsement from primary students than integrative motivation that was supposed to measure the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people from another culture that speak that language (Csizér and Kormos, 2008). Based on these results it seems that the motives for learning in Hungary are strongly associated with the pragmatic, utilitarian benefits of knowledge acquisition. Moreover, the primary platform of learning is the in the school and Hungarian schools do not develop long term aspiration in the students or create a learning environment that will allow students to "learn how to learn" under self-motivated and self-managed conditions in any situation under any circumstances.

Contrary to the Hungarian conception, most of the Chinese terms deal with learning virtues such as endurance of hardship, concentration, diligence and perseverance which serve as a basis to life-long learning (Li, 2003). External conditions for learning turn to be less essential than the learners' own personal agency for seeking knowledge. In addition, the whole concept is deeply rooted in the ancient Chinese philosophy indicated by the considerable number of Confucius sayings.

The discrepancy in the concepts can be explained by the goal orientation framework (Nicholls, 1984; Dweck, 1986). The Chinese approach, namely the heightened importance on the learning virtues and the long-life struggle toward self-perfection fits quite well in the mastery orientation theory. Students with mastery goal orientation engage in learning with the purpose to improve their skills and knowledge and focus on 'doing the best they can', they are less influenced by external performance indicators such as grades. The Hungarian students' learning belief rather expresses performance

orientation. Students with performance goal orientation focus on external indicators for success and are more concerned with demonstrating their abilities relative to other students. After completing the task, they usually stop trying and do not intend to struggle toward self improvement and self-perfection. Moreover they don't make effort to accomplish challenging tasks to avoid the possible negative outcome of the social comparison.

Placing the results in a migration context, possessing a virtue-orientation and mastery-orientation might be highly adaptive for immigrants because concentrating on the process of learning and being less preoccupied by external standards of achievement seem to be context-independent, it is rested on the learners internal attitude and can be activated in any situation. On the contrary, the pragmatic performance orientation requires more knowledge about the conditions of the situation and the prescribed steps to take in order to succeed and reach goals.

For a newcomer who has not adjusted to the new cultural context yet and has not become familiar with the novel beliefs, values and norms of the host society, the virtue orientation could be more effective to adjust smoothly. And that is exactly the case among the overseas Chinese students who also out-perform the Western students and show similar approach to learning as their counterparts in China (Chen and Stevenson, 1995).

In Hungary, the migration policy is less elaborated and there is a lack of comprehensive integration strategy, moreover the budget for intercultural education is limited. Newcomers are left alone to decide which school to enter; authorities provide limited and outdated information on this issue. Schools are not required to address newcomers' specific needs, or help them to cope effectively in a diverse society (MIPEX, 2011). In the case of Chinese immigrants in Hungary, the Hungarian-Mandarin bilingual primary school is the only one that takes into account their cultural background and provides adequate supporting opportunity in their adjustment. In Fülöp and her colleagues' study (Fülöp et al, 2007; Nguyen Luu, 2009), Chinese mothers reported that their children went to the bilingual and other Hungarian schools relatively successfully integrated into the school system. It can be assumed that beside of the culturally tolerant education setting provided by the Hungarian-Mandarin bilingual school Chinese immigrant students can cope with the challenges and can excel even under less desirable circumstances with the support of their approach to learning. In order to support these results and further test the 'desirable approach to learning in migration context' hypothesis, more research is needed to reveal the conceptualization of learning of the Chinese immigrant students learning in Hungary.

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