

A Study on Expatriates' Cultural Adaptation in China: An Example of Community-based Language Services in Shaoxing

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Abstract

Through questionnaires and case interviews, we investigated the current situation of cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates in Shaoxing, analyzed the factors affecting their cross-cultural adaptation in three dimensions: linguistic adaptation, psychological adaptation, and socio-cultural adaptation, and put forward the following suggestions: enhancing language support, improving accommodation, providing vocational guidance, and encouraging community participation to improve the cross-cultural communication skills of expatriates, with a view to providing constructive suggestions for the development of community-based language services.

Keywords

Expatriates; acculturation; community-based language services.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy and the deepening of its opening to the outside world, more and more foreigners are choosing to live and work in China. Shaoxing, as an important city in the eastern part of the country, has attracted a large number of expatriates by virtue of its rich cultural heritage and vibrant economic environment. It is worth mentioning that Shaoxing Merchants' initiative to hire expatriates for the first time in its history marked an important milestone in the city's efforts to attract foreign talent^[1]. This event not only reflects Shaoxing's openness in promoting foreign investment and international exchanges, but also provides expatriates with the opportunity to work in China and promotes cultural exchange and integration. However, for these expatriates, language and cultural differences have become major barriers to their integration into the local community. Although the Shaoxing municipal government and community management organizations have taken measures to help expatriates adapt to local life, the actual effects of community-based language services and their impact on cultural adaptation have not been adequately studied.

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges of acculturation of expatriates in the Shaoxing community, to assess the impact of dependent language services on their acculturation, and to analyze the problems and challenges in the implementation of the program in order to make recommendations for optimization.

This study has important theoretical, practical and social significance. Theoretically, it will enrich the theoretical system in the field of cross-cultural adaptation, especially in the area of expatriates' cultural adaptation in China, and provide new perspectives and theoretical foundations for subsequent research. Practically, it will provide targeted language services and cultural adaptation support strategies for Shaoxing and other communities, help expatriates better integrate into the local society and improve their quality of life, and provide references for the government and related departments to formulate relevant policies to promote Chinese-foreign cultural exchanges and the introduction of international talents. Socially, improving the cultural adaptability of expatriates can help build a harmonious international community

environment, promote mutual understanding and respect among people of different cultural backgrounds, enhance the inclusiveness and diversity of the community, and contribute to China's globalization process.

2. Overview of International and Domestic Research

With the advancement of globalization and the deepening of international exchanges, the cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates in China has gradually become a hot topic of academic concern. In foreign countries, the research on cross-cultural adaptation began in the early 20th century, with early studies focusing on the mental health problems of immigrants^[2], and then gradually developed into the study of various consequences arising from the cross-cultural process^[3]. Black further classified it into three dimensions, namely general adaptation, work adaptation, and interactional adaptation. Oberg put forward the famous U-shape model, which described four phases of the process of cross-cultural adaptation: honeymoon phase, crisis phase and recovery and adaptation periods^[4]. Berry, on the other hand, explored the four modes of acculturation: cultural integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalization^[5].

Domestic research started late but has developed rapidly in recent years, and scholars have explored cross-cultural adaptation in depth from different disciplinary backgrounds. Yang Junhong (2005)^[6] investigated the cultural adaptation status of international students coming to China and found that interpersonal adaptation was the main challenge they faced. Wang Lijuan (2011) systematically elaborated the development history, classification, research dimensions and perspectives, and related theories of intercultural research^[7]. Wen Wen et al. (2014) pointed out that the level of international students' socio-cultural adaptation in China was affected by their activities with Chinese faculty and students, and international students from East Asia encountered greater difficulties in cultural adaptation^[8].

Of particular interest, Cheng Hui et al. (2024) examined psychological and social adaptation variables through an empirical study of expatriate communities living in China and found that expatriate communities have a better status quo of psychological adaptation, while social adaptation is more significantly affected by objective factors^[9].

In the context of community-based language services in Shaoxing, this study aims to explore the cultural adaptation of expatriates in China. As a city with deep cultural heritage, Shaoxing's community-based language services provide a platform for expatriates to learn and practice Chinese, which helps them better integrate into the local society. This study will draw on domestic and international research findings and combine them with the actual situation of Shaoxing's community to conduct an in-depth analysis of expatriates' cultural adaptation and put forward corresponding suggestions and countermeasures.

3. Research Analysis of Results

Based on Searle and Ward's dichotomy (2022)^[10] of cross-cultural adaptation, this study targets the current situation of cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates in Shaoxing from three aspects: linguistic adaptation, psychological adaptation and cultural adaptation. The research questions mainly include two aspects: (1) the problems and current situation analysis of the cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates in Shaoxing; (2) the analysis of important factors affecting the cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates in Shaoxing. The study used a questionnaire survey combined with case interviews, and selected expatriates from different areas of Shaoxing as the research subjects, including 61 males and 18 females.

A total of 95 questionnaires were distributed, of which 79 valid questionnaires were returned. The specific target information is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Basic information of the research subjects

Item	Category	Number	Percentage
Nationality	Iran	21	26%
	Afghanistan	7	9%
	Yemen	6	8%
	Korea	3	4%
	Pakistan	28	35%
	Andorra	2	3%
	Egypt	4	5%
	Russia	8	10%
Age	<30	10	13%
	30-45	48	61%
	>45	21	26%
Time in China (Shaoxing)	Less than a month	19	24%
	1-6 months	24	30%
	6-12 months	8	10%
	More than a year	28	36%
Occupation	Student	7	9%
	Teacher	2	3%
	Employees of the enterprise	69	87%
	Freelancing	1	1%

Based on the tabular data, we can see that among the groups surveyed, Pakistanis have the highest percentage with 35%, followed by Iranians with 26%. In terms of age distribution, the group between 30 and 45 years old has the highest percentage of 61%, while the groups younger than 30 years old and older than 45 years old account for 13% and 26% respectively. In terms of the time spent in China (Shaoxing), the group with more than one year accounted for the highest proportion of 36%, followed by the group with 1-6 months, accounting for 30%. In terms of occupational distribution, employees of enterprises accounted for the majority with 87%, students accounted for 9%, while teachers and freelancers had lower proportions of 3% and 1%, respectively.

(1) Language Adaptation

Language adaptation refers to the process by which an individual learns, uses and gradually integrates the local language in a new language environment. This process involves a number of aspects, and this paper only investigates the expatriates' own language ability, their learning and use of Chinese, and the number of times they use Chinese in their daily lives.

It also analyzes the data in these three areas to find out the problems that exist. They are language proficiency and diversity; Frequency and fluency in Chinese and Concerns about Chinese language services in the community.

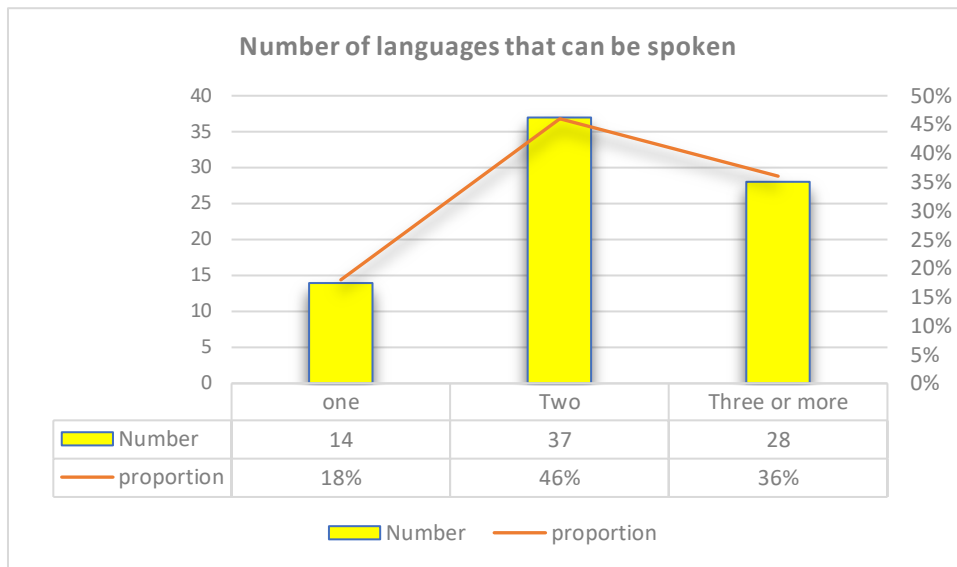


Figure 1: Number of languages that can be spoken

As Figure 1 shows that the percentage of expats who speak only one language is 18%, which limits their ability to communicate in a multilingual environment. Forty-six percent of expatriates speak two languages, indicating that they have a certain level of linguistic adaptability, but may still need to improve their Chinese language skills to better integrate into the local community. Thirty-six percent of expatriates speak three or more languages, indicating that they have strong language learning abilities and are more likely to adapt to a Chinese-speaking environment and integrate into the local community.

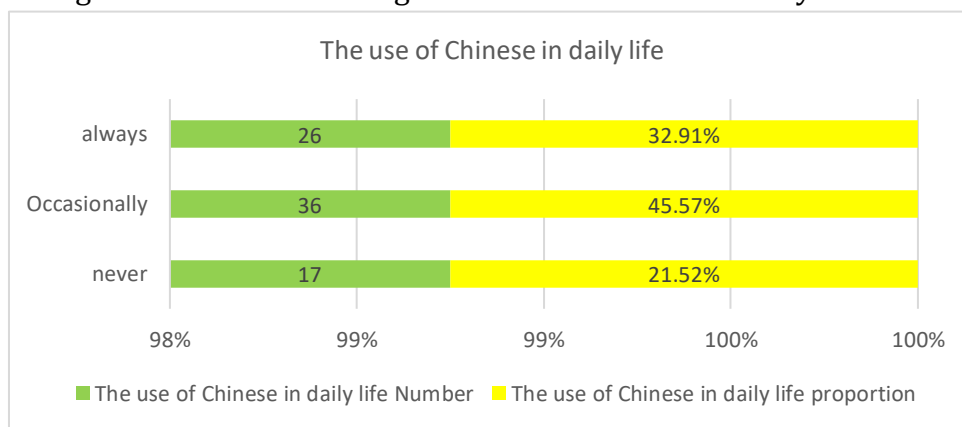


Figure 2: The use of Chinese in daily life

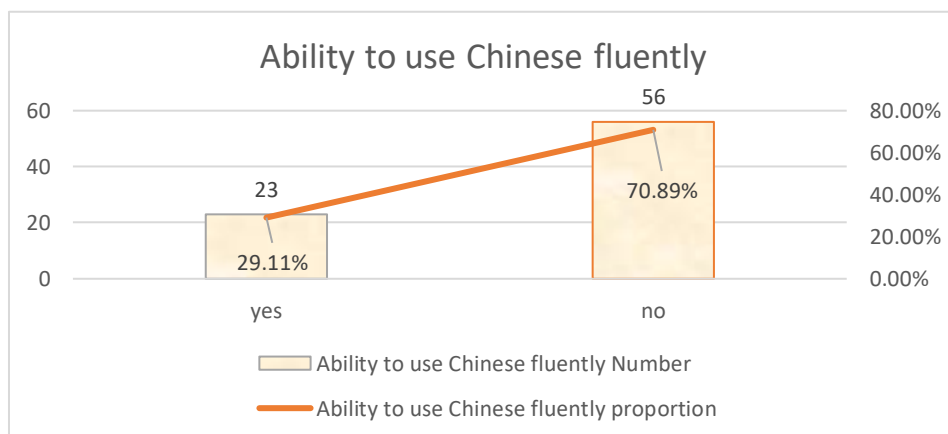


Figure 3: Fluency in using Chinese

Figure 2 and 3 reveal that 21.52% of expats never use Chinese, which may have something to do with their social circle or that their work and daily activities do not require Chinese. 45.57% of expats use Chinese occasionally, which means that they have some basic knowledge of the language, but probably not enough to communicate in a complex or in-depth way. 32.91% of expats use Chinese all the time, which is a positive sign that they are able to use Chinese in comfortable using Chinese in their daily life. The fact that 70.89% of people cannot speak English fluently indicates that there is a large market for those in need of English language services. Even so, 29.11% of people are still able to use English fluently.

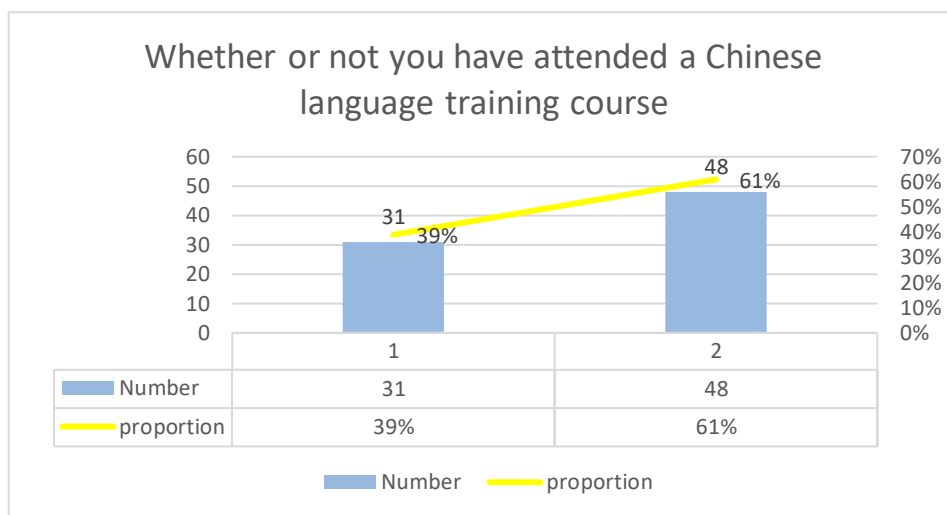


Figure 4: Attending Chinese language training course

This may be related to the fact that they have attended Chinese language training courses, as seen in Figure 4, 39% of them have attended Chinese language training courses, which may help them to improve their language skills and better adapt to the living environment in Shaoxing City.

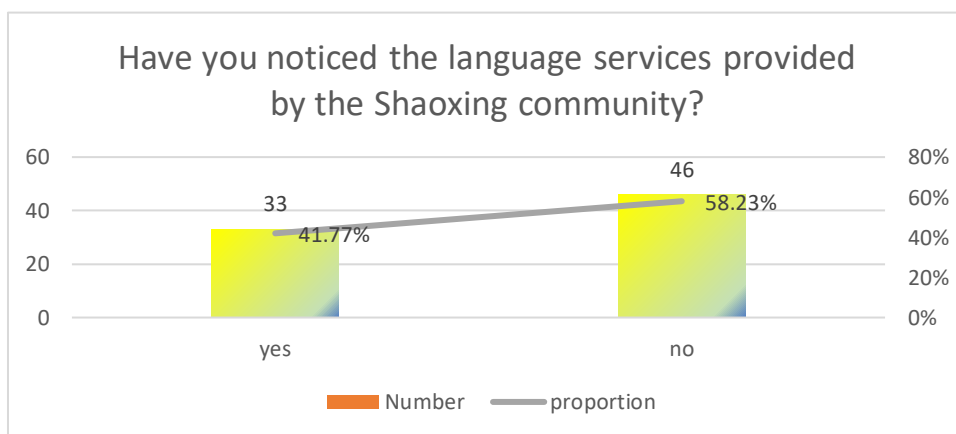


Figure 5: The notice on language services provided by the Shaoxing community

It can be seen that only nearly half of them noticed the relevant language services provided by the community, and still half of them paid no attention to the community language services, and most of them answered no to the question of whether or not they had participated in Chinese language training courses, which shows that they did not pay enough attention to the Chinese language.

(2) Psychological Adaptation

Psychological adaptation involves the attitude of adapting to the culture, confidence in language learning, the number of times they share their views with family and friends, and their plans for the future. When people from different countries come to Shaoxing to study and live in this unfamiliar environment, psychological adaptation is a prerequisite for their cross-cultural adaptation, which directly affects their socio-cultural adaptation or academic adaptation. The psychological adaptation of expatriates coming to Shaoxing is shown as below.

Adaptation of cultural attitudes

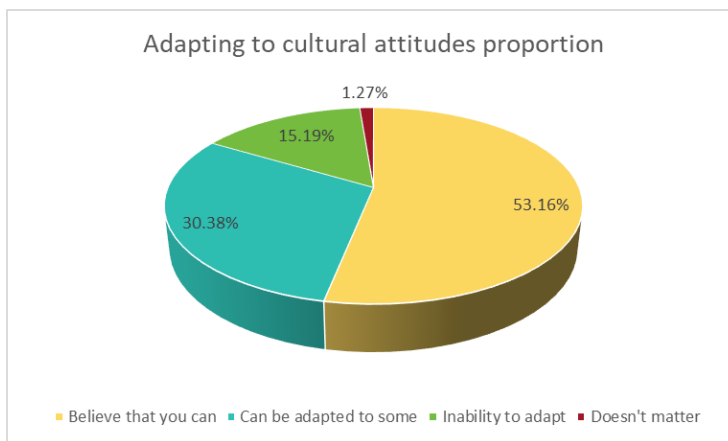


Figure 6: Attitudes on adapting different cultures

Figure 6 shows 53.16% of the expatriates believe that they will definitely be able to adapt to Chinese culture, and their positive attitude towards adapting to the new environment is commendable; 30.38% of the expatriates believe that they can only adapt to a part of Chinese culture, which may mean that they have difficulty adapting to certain aspects of the culture, but are still trying to adapt; and 15.19% of the expatriates say that they are unable to adapt, and that they are encountering greater psychological adaptation challenges and need more support and help. There is one thing need to be mentioned that 1.27% of the expatriates think it doesn't matter whether or not they can adapt to cultural attitudes.

Confidence in language learning

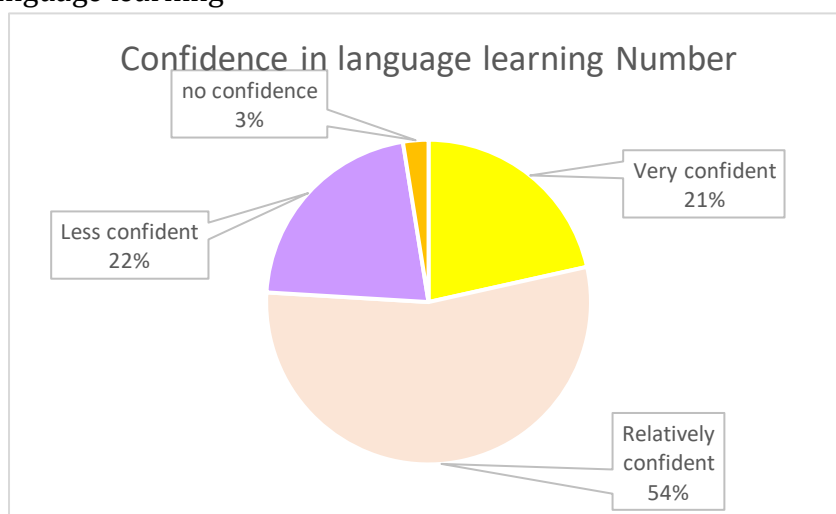


Figure 7: Language Learning Confidence

In Figure 7, 21% of the expatriates are confident in learning Chinese, which indicates that they have a positive attitude towards language learning, which is crucial for them to live and study in Shaoxing. 54% of the expatriates think that they can only understand part of a sentence with

relative confidence, which may mean that they are having difficulties with the language and need more linguistic support. 22% can only understand words, which suggests that they may need more time and resources for language learning.

The number of times you share your thoughts with family

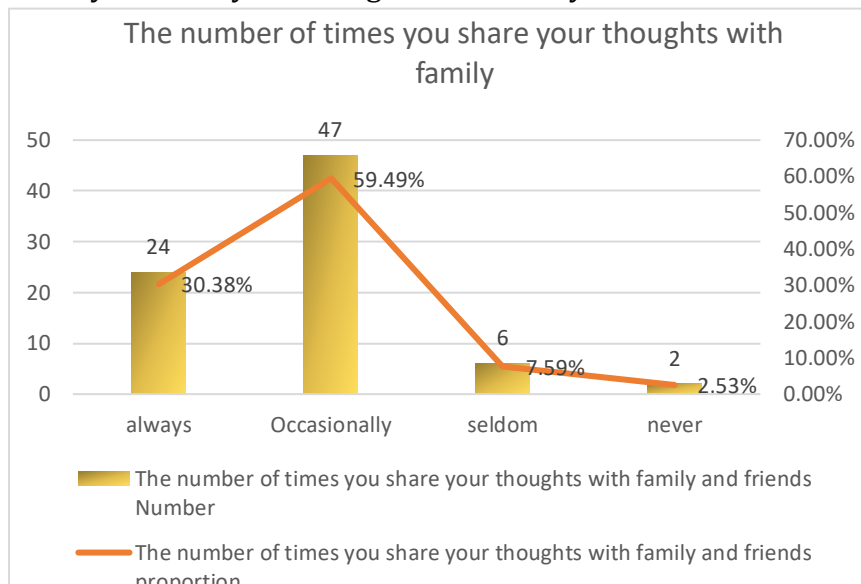


Figure 8: Frequency of sharing thoughts with family

Figure 8 demonstrates that 30.38% of expats always share views with family and friends, which suggests that they are doing better in terms of social and emotional support, which could help their psychological adjustment. 59.49% of expats occasionally share views with family and friends, which could mean that they are seeking support with some frequency, but there is still room for improvement. 7.59% of expats seldom share views with family and friends, which could suggest that they are social and emotional support, and may need to be encouraged to interact more with others.

Future intentions:

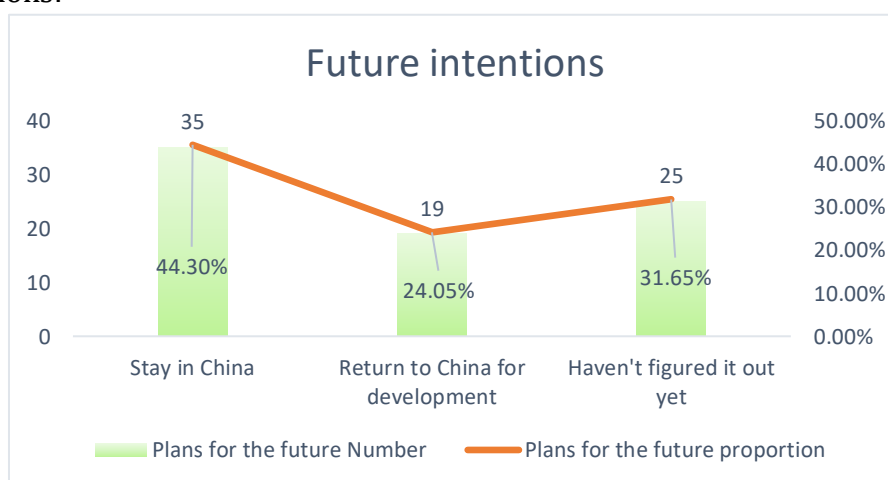


Figure 9: Future intentions

In Figure 9 above, 44.30% of expatriates plan to stay in China, indicating a positive attitude towards their future in Shaoxing, which is important for their long-term adaptation and integration. 24.05% of expatriates plan to return to their home country, which may mean that they have reservations about their long-term adaptation in Shaoxing. 31.65% of expatriates'

intentions for the future depend on circumstances, suggesting that they may still be waiting to see and assessing how they will fit in.

(3) Socio-cultural adaptation

Socio-cultural adaptation was designed as a questionnaire in terms of food and accommodation, friendships and activities, and culture and work.

a. Dietary adaptation

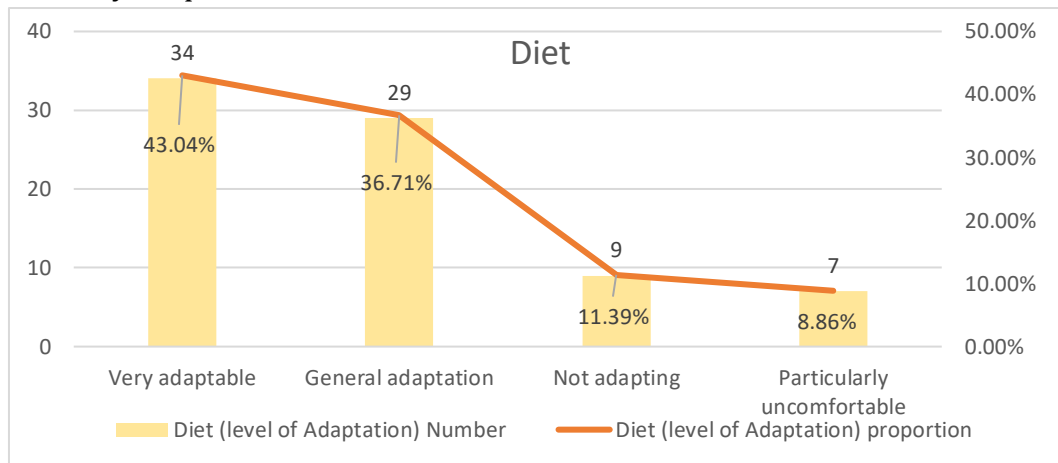


Figure 10: Diet (level of adaptation)

Figure 10: In terms of dietary adaptation, the data shows that 43.04% of expatriates said they were very well adapted to Chinese cuisine, indicating that the diversity and uniqueness of Chinese food is recognized and enjoyed by some expatriates. However, there are also some who say they are not adapting or especially not adapting, which may be related to personal eating habits, religious beliefs or health concerns. To help these expatriates adapt better, the community can organize cooking classes to introduce Chinese food culture, as well as provide food choices that fit their dietary habits.

Accommodation satisfaction

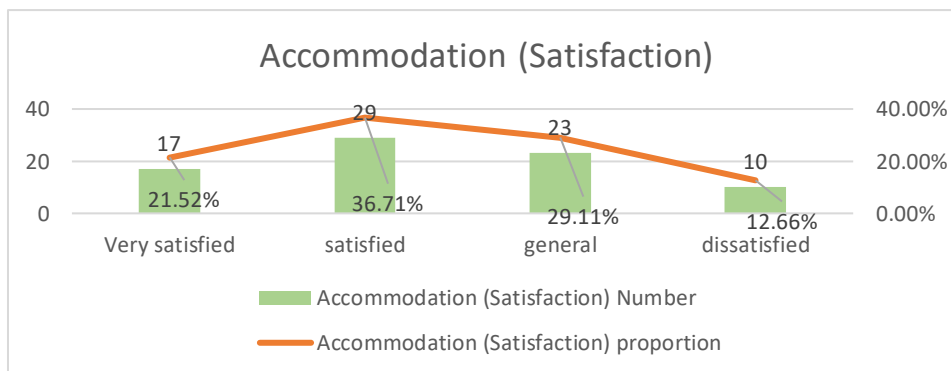


Figure 11: Accommodation (level of satisfaction)

Figure 11: In terms of accommodation satisfaction, 36.71% of expatriates were satisfied with the accommodation conditions, reflecting the community’s efforts in providing accommodation services. However, there were also 29.11% who considered the accommodation to be average and 12.66% who were not satisfied. This suggests that the community needs to further understand the accommodation needs of expatriates and improve the accommodation environment in order to increase their satisfaction with their stay.

Frequency of participation in activities

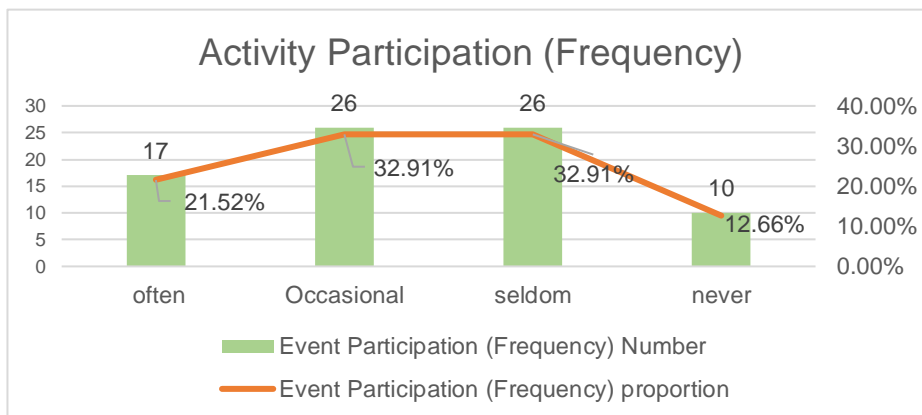


Figure 12: Activities (frequency of participation)

Figure 12: In terms of frequency of participation in activities, 21.52% of expatriates participated in community activities regularly, which helped them to better integrate into the community and make new friends. However, 32.91% seldom or occasionally participated and 12.66% never participated, which may mean that there is still room for improvement in the publicity, scheduling or content of community activities. The community can design more attractive activities through questionnaires or interviews to understand the interests and needs of expatriates in order to increase their participation.

Degree of adaptation to cultural practices

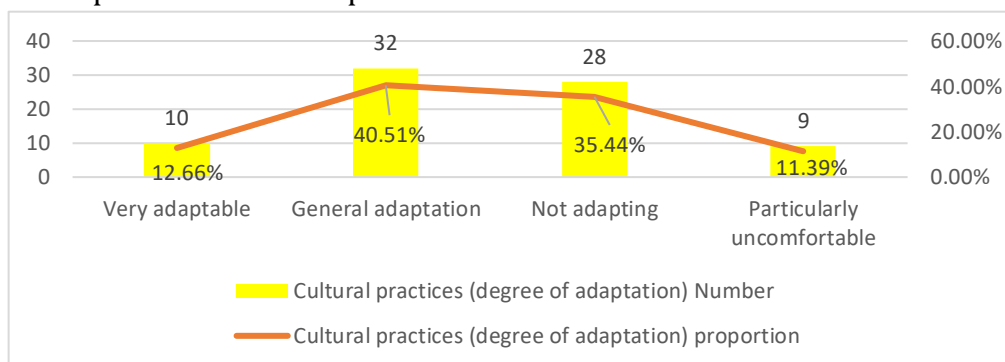


Figure 13: Cultural practices (degree of adaptation)

With regard to the degree of adaptation to cultural practices, only 12.66% of expatriates said they were very well adapted to Chinese cultural practices, while 40.51% said they were generally adapted and 35.44% were not, which indicates that there is still much room for improvement in cultural adaptation. Communities can organize cultural festivals, lectures and exchange activities to help expatriates gain a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and promote cultural exchange and integration.

Degree of adaptation to work or study pressure

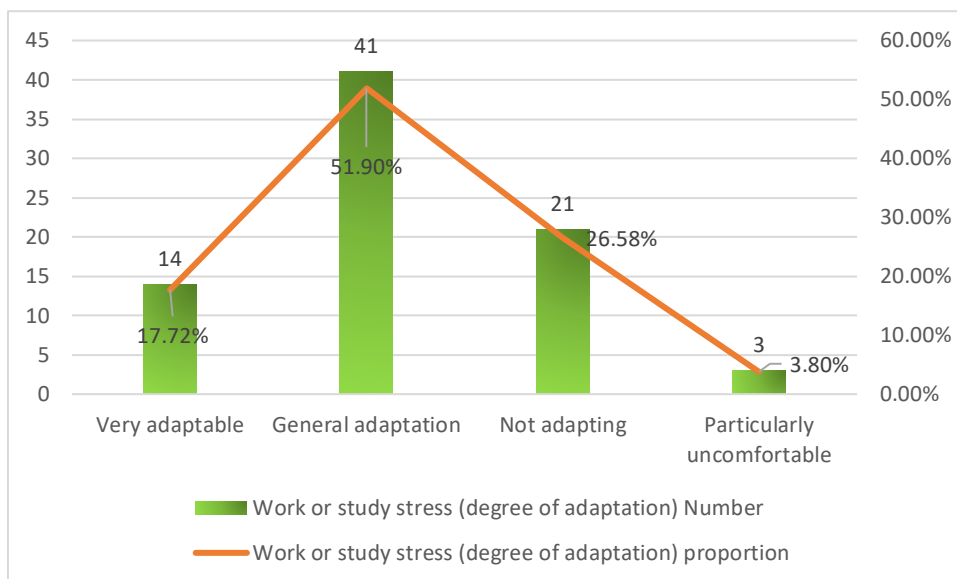


Figure 14: Work or study stress (level of adaptation)

With regard to the level of adaptation to work or study pressure, 17.72% of expatriates said they adapted very well, 51.90% said they adapted moderately, while 26.58% did not adapt. This may be related to language barriers, work environment or academic pressure. The community can provide language support services, such as English corners or Chinese language classes, as well as career development and academic guidance, to help expatriates better cope with stress at work and study.

4. Suggestions for Expatriates on Cultural Adaptation

Through our research on expatriates in Shaoxing, we found that expatriates showed significant differences in language adaptability, with some of them fluent in Chinese, while a significant percentage rarely or never use Chinese, highlighting their need to improve their Chinese language skills. In terms of psychological adaptation, most expatriates had positive attitudes towards Chinese culture, but faced challenges in terms of confidence in language learning and showed mixed performance in terms of social and emotional support. The socio-cultural adaptability survey showed that expatriates had varying degrees of adaptability in terms of diet, accommodation, participation in activities and cultural practices, suggesting that there is room for improvement in community services to meet the needs of expatriates.

In response to these findings, we make the following suggestions to facilitate expatriates' cultural adaptation:

(1) The number of expatriates lacks access to language learning resources, or they may not realize the importance of learning Chinese. In response the community should enhance language support services, such as providing additional Chinese language training courses and offering online learning platforms to improve expatriates' language skills. Second, cultural exchange activities such as festival celebrations and cultural lectures should be organized to enhance expatriates' community participation and increase their understanding of and participation in Chinese culture.

(2) The psychological adaptation of expatriates in Shaoxing is characterized by diversity. Most expatriates have a positive attitude towards adapting to Chinese culture, but there are some challenges in terms of confidence in language learning. Their performance in socialization and emotional support varied, as did their future intentions. To improve expatriates' psychological adjustment, Shaoxing can provide more language support services, encourage expatriates to

participate more in social activities, as well as provide them with guidance on career planning and future directions to help them better integrate into the local work environment.

(3) Improving accommodation based on expatriates' feedback and provide more accommodation options that meet their needs. At the same time, we encourage them to participate in community activities and build up social networks to enhance their psychological adaptability.

Through these measures, we expect to provide stronger support for expatriates' cultural adaptation in Shaoxing City and promote their integration with the local community.

5. Conclusion

By investigating and analyzing the cultural adaptation of expatriates in Shaoxing City, this study reveals their current situation and challenges in terms of linguistic, psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. The findings suggest that although expatriates have made some progress in adapting to Chinese culture, they still face many challenges, especially in language learning and psychological adaptation. Therefore, the optimization and improvement of community-based language services are crucial for enhancing expatriates' cultural adaptation.

Through this study, we propose a series of targeted recommendations aimed at helping expatriates better integrate into community life in Shaoxing City, improving their quality of life, and promoting Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges. It is hoped that this study will provide a valuable reference for Shaoxing City and other similar communities to support the cultural adaptation of expatriates, as well as provide new perspectives and theoretical foundations for future research.

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