

An Empirical Study on Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Chinese Overseas Students in Malaysia: Survey of Chinese Students at Segi University, Malaysia

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Abstract—China has become the world's largest exporter of study abroad students, under the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. Chinese overseas students have more chances to study in the OBOR countries members compare than ever before. However, before planning to study abroad, Chinese students expect that their study and life run would well. When they arrived in the destination of study and spent several months living there, they confronted the real situation or gap between their expectations and the actual situation in the new environment. This current study used cross-culture adaptation theory and model to describe their situation and adaptation. In this study, the results of the qualitative and quantitative research method showed that the differences between expectation and actual situations faced by the Chinese students were caused by some obstacles, such as the English barrier, psychological preparation, and participation in local social life. Furthermore, based on their cross-cultural difficulties, it is technically crucial to provide some countermeasures and suggestions for improving the cross-cultural adaptability of Chinese overseas students.

Keywords—One belt one road initiative, expectation and actual situation, cross-cultural adaptation

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, the “One Belt, One Road” initiative has been carried out in-depth and has achieved remarkable results, reflecting the new development trend of globalization, which is jointly discussed, co-constructed, and shared [4]. In the process of globalization, education plays a fundamental role and a leading role. On the one hand, the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, promote the international export of China’s higher education and cultivate localized talents for the interconnection of “One Belt, One Road” countries and regions [4]. On another hand, Statistics show that China has become the world’s largest exporter of study abroad and the largest destination for study abroad in Asia [2].

The international talents involved in international affairs and competition are the basic guarantees for the continuous implementation of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative. Chinese students going abroad will be able to absorb and learn

from the international advanced talent training and academic research experience, and it is beneficial to promote the exchange and understanding of diverse cultures and the international community’s recognition of national culture and enhance the international influence and competitiveness of higher education [2].

China needs to intensify the cultivation of high-end international talents and provide a talent base for the country to participate in international affairs and enhance its international competitiveness. The students must be familiar with local languages, cultures, customs, policies, and solve the problem of localization. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the technical talents of the international industry [2]. The professional training and higher education for Chinese young people will provide more basic support for Chinese enterprises to participate in the “Belt and Road” development in the future, and better promote in international “One Belt, One Road” strategy implementation [2].

Kim conducted cross-cultural adaptation research at the individual level and group level. Individual-level studies focus on sojourner’s psychological adjustment in new or unfamiliar cultures [3]. By observing the process of self-reaction and interpersonal communication in an unfamiliar environment, it is possible to explain and understand the re-socialization and coping processes of newcomers, including immigrants, short-term settlers, refugees, and members of different nationalities. Psychology and communication in the field of scholars mainly use this individual-level approach to cross-cultural adaptation [1]. The influence of globalization on human society urgently requires the ability of cross-cultural adaptation and a more systematic study of this concept. The popularity of studying abroad has become the focus of attention.

This paper takes this as the research object and analyzes the adaptability of the education of Chinese students abroad. Starting from the adaptive advantages of Chinese overseas students, this paper analyzes the process of studying abroad and finally puts forward some countermeasures and suggestions for improving the educational adaptability of Chinese overseas students. It is expected that this research can help to draw lessons from the educational adaptability of overseas students in China. Foreign language ability plays a crucial role in the education adaptation of international students, so before going abroad, international students must

realize the importance of language skills and make adequate preparations. For students studying in non-English-speaking countries, they should invest more time and energy before studying abroad, and be psychologically prepared to bear more difficulties [5].

In this research, the gap between the actual situation the respondents encountered and the expectations the respondents imagined before studying abroad will explain the cross-cultural difficulties Chinese students faced. Then, based on their cross-cultural difficulties, puts forward some countermeasures and suggestions for improving the cross-cultural adaptability of Chinese overseas students.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Population

A demographic variable questionnaire was prepared by the researcher that was used in order to determine certain independent variables, which were gender, religion, highest degree obtained in China, the purpose of staying in Malaysia, major that had been studied in Malaysia, length of study duration in Malaysia, English level before arriving in Malaysia, and life experience in Islamic country.

A total of 200 valid questions were collected in this questionnaire. Table 1 shows that 83 men (41.50%) and 117 women (58.50%) have no religious beliefs. As far as religion is concerned, the vast majority of Chinese students do not have religious beliefs. Students with Muslim beliefs accounted for 3% of the total. In the survey of the interviewees' academic qualifications, it was found that most of them were undergraduates and graduate students, accounting for 32.5% and 57%, respectively. The purpose of coming to Malaysia was mostly for exchange students, accounting for 62% of the total interviewees. As far as the major of the interviewees were concerned, most Chinese students chose social sciences, and a few choose natural sciences, accounting for 72.5% of the total. Most of the interviewees have accounted for 51% of living in Malaysia for more than three months; most of the interviewees are exchange students for one semester. Subsequently, the students that have the plan to live in Malaysia for at least six months account for 52.5% of the total.

According to the survey on the English level of Chinese students before studying abroad, it showed that 58.5% of the Chinese students have medium English proficiency, and 35% of respondents have poor English proficiency. In the section on the experience of whether Chinese students live in Islamic countries, almost all Chinese students did not have such experience. Most of the respondents also said that they had no friends, relatives, and family members in Malaysia beforehand. In terms of achievement, according to the statistical table of the interviewees, the average GPA of 3.0-3.99 accounted for 41.5% of the total, while the GPA of 2.50-3.00 accounted for 36.5% of the total, while the GPA of 2.50-3.0 and 3.0-3.99 accounted for 51% of the total in the last semester. Chinese students account for 31% of the total.

B. Research method

The qualitative research method and quantitative research method were applied in this work. Firstly, the *T*-test was applied to explore the difference between thought cognition before and after going to Malaysia. The corresponding value of expectation and actual situation showed the gap for their integrations. Secondly, some related questions in the interview were asked to check the actual situation the respondents encountered and expectations the respondents imagined before studying abroad. Subsequently, a structured in-depth-interview and focus group interview had been given to respondents comparing their expectations to their actual situations; these questions include:

1. What are the respondent's expectations before studying in Malaysia?
2. What is the actual situation the respondent confront while studying in Malaysia?
3. Why does the respondent prefer studying in an Islamic country to other countries?
4. What does the respondent think about Islamic culture, and how to respond it?
5. Why does the respondent choose to study in Malaysia?

Has the respondent ever visited an Islamic country, or has the respondent ever studied abroad in an Islamic country before studying in Malaysia? If yes, what is the reason for choosing an Islamic country?

C. Reliability Analysis of Cross-cultural Adaptation Scale

The results of reliability analysis are as follows: the results show in Table I that the reliability of each level or structure is higher than 0.8, indicating that the reliability of the level of structure is ideal. The reliability of the cross-cultural adaptation scale is 0.871, it means excellent reliability.

TABLE I. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF THE SCALE OF CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION.

Investigation scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Item number
Culture shock	0.860	4
Honeymoon stage	0.894	5
Crisis stage	0.889	5
Adjustment stage	0.885	5
Biculturalism stage	0.840	3
Cross-cultural adaptation scale	0.871	22

D. Validity Analysis of the scale of Cross-cultural adaptation

TABLE II. KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST.

KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN MEASURE OF SAMPLING ADEQUACY		.813
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3124.367
	df	231
	Sig.	.000

It is shown in Table II above that the KMO was 0.813, which is higher than 0.7. This scale is suitable for factor analysis. The corresponding P values of the Bartlett sphericity test were all less than 0.01. Therefore, Bartlett sphericity detection has a high significance. It means that the scale is very suitable for factor analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Cross-cultural adaptation

Integration is absolutely an effective strategy, no matter what points of view. Most Chinese International Students choose to both accept host culture and maintain a home culture in the whole process of intercultural adaptation. On the one hand, accepting host culture is a pleasant way of living, no matter what the motive is, passively or actively. If students want to complete their study life, to solve problems in non-study life smoothly, in most cases, turning to host culture for help is necessary and inevitable.

On the other hand, maintaining a home culture means students can get immense psychological and emotional supports to face and solve difficulties or problems in the host culture. In some cases, speaking in the home language and having a traditional home dinner can be a kind of enjoyment for the long wandering students in another country. Maintaining customs and norms in home culture is a representation of maintaining home identity. Many students show that when they are among other ethnicities, they realize the importance of their particular ethnicity. Most students studying abroad try their best to maintain the balance between home and host, so integration is the first choice.

However, the table below indicates that in the aspect of integration expectation is better than the actual situation, the corresponding value is 3.64 ± 0.59 larger than 3.47 ± 0.65 ; which means Chinese students have cross-cultural difficulties in the aspect of integration, and the expectation of integration is better than an actual situation of integration. The gap will be described via an in-depth interview and focus group interview as follow.

In Table III below showed the international students in Malaysia before and after the ideological understanding of Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization related aspects of the difference test. The results showed that the correlation coefficient between the related aspects of Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization of international students' thinking before and after going to Malaysia were 0.376, 0.734, 0.734, 0.664, and 0.798, respectively. The corresponding significance was less than 0.01, reaching a very significant level, indicating that the students have a significant correlation between thinking about

Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization before and after going to Malaysia.

TABLE III. THE DIFFERENCE TEST OF THOUGHT COGNITION BEFORE AND AFTER GOING TO MALAYSIA (M ±SD).

Class	Expectation (n=200) M ±SD	Actual Situation (n=200) M ±SD	t	p
Integration	3.64±0.59	3.47±0.65	3.389	.001
Assimilation	1.84±0.79	1.99±0.85	-3.611	.000
Separation	2.38±0.76	2.51±0.89	-2.590	.010
Marginalization	2.00±0.79	2.10±0.84	-2.803	.006

Before and after going to Malaysia, the significance of the comparison between the related aspects of Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization of the foreign students were 0.001, 0.000, 0.010, and 0.006, they were all less than 0.05, reaching a significant level at 0.05, it showed that there were significant differences in the related aspects of Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization between overseas students before and after going to Malaysia. By considering the mean value, it showed the student's thinking and understanding of going to Malaysia, the post-test of relevant aspects in Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization was superior to pretest. In the aspect of the Integration, the pretest score was better than the post-test.

The technical gaps between expectation and the actual situation are listed as follows:

1. English ability

Chinese students, before going abroad, tend to adapt to English daily communication so that they can communicate better with the local people. However, in order to study in Malaysia, the students are expected to adapt to the local life in 2 months fully, and the communication with the local people is not as smooth as they imagine.

2. Psychological preparation

Going abroad to study away from their parents and friends will make the students feel lonely without sufficient preparation. Facing the strange new environment without any experience and having to adapt to the local life within a short time estimation at the same time brought burdens for the students in adapting to social and cultural life in Malaysia.

3. Participate in social practice

Chinese students' actual participation in local social practice before going abroad was low. On the other hand, part-time jobs in Malaysia local schools are not allowed. With the curriculum schedule problem, students rarely have time to participate in other cultures, the course of history, and China students rarely have the opportunity to participate in the Malaysian Professor research projects. Before going abroad, the students are expected and planned to participate in social and cultural activities. Subsequently,

some activities, such as tourism, the student’s participation in local collective activities, read the local newspapers, television and other simple activity with their classmates. The level of participation in the learning experience in different settings will significantly help to improve the academic level, cross-cultural adaptation, and local language skills. In a way Chinese students learn their own Mandarin, which also uses various instruments and methods to understand the language well.

B. Factors affecting cross-cultural adaptation

This analysis was performed by implementing the hypothesis described as follows:

- H1 : The overall impact factors have a positive impact on cross-cultural adaptation;
- H1_a : Personality has a positive effect on cross-cultural adaptation;
- H1_b : English ability has a positive effect on cross-cultural adaptation;
- H1_c : Malay ability has a positive impact on cross-cultural adaptation;
- H1_d : Experience in Islamic Country have a positive impact on cross-cultural adaptation;
- H1_e : The attitude towards Islamic culture has a positive effect on cross-cultural adaptation;

To analyze the impact of each dimension of influencing factors on cross-cultural adaptation, Personality, English Ability, Malay Ability, Experience In Islamic Country, The Respond To Islamic Culture was decided as the independent variables, and the dependent variable was Cross-Cultural Adaptation. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 4. By considering the results table, the R² of the model is equal to 0.510, showing that the joint interpretation of independent variables is 51.0%. The table shows that the F value of the model is 40.370 in ANOVA and F test, and the significant level P is less than 0.01, which indicates that it is significant to cooperate with a regression line. It means at least one regression coefficient has a significant effect on calibration variables.

Tolerance (i.e. *Tolerance*) and variance expansion coefficient (VIF) can be used to test whether there is a multivariate collinearity problem in multivariate regression analysis, and the tolerance is between 0 and 1. When the Tolerance value is closer to 0:00, it is indicating the linear coincidence problem between variables, and if the coefficient of variance expansion is greater than 10, then there is a linear coincidence problem among independent variables, as shown in the table. The Tolerance value of the above analysis model is 0.651 to 0.867, and the coefficient of variance expansion (VIF) is not higher than the evaluation index value of 10. It is shown that there is no linear coincidence between the independent variables entering the regression equation.

On the test results of regression equation parameters and regression coefficients shown in Table IV, the corresponding significant level of Malay ability was 0.071, which is more than 0.05, meaning it did not reach a significant level. The results showed that Malay ability had no significant effect on

cross-cultural adaptation, assumption H1_c was rejected. The non-standardized regression coefficients of Personality, English ability, Experience In The Islamic World, and Respond to Islamic Culture were 0.081 / 0.150 / 0.055, respectively. The standardized regression coefficient was 0.186, 0.380, 0.170 and 0.514, respectively. The significant levels of the four predictive variables were all less than 0.01. To reach the level of significance at the level of 0.01, it explained that Personality, English Ability, and Experience In The Islamic Country. Respond to Islamic culture has a significant positive effect on Cross-cultural Adaptation. From the standardized regression coefficient, it shows that respond to Islamic Culture has the greatest influence on Cross-Cultural Adaptation. The regression equation of non-standardization was Cross-Cultural Adaptation = 2.454 + 0.081 * Personality + 0.15 * English Ability + 0.055 * 'experience in Islamic Country + 0.197 * 'Respond to Islamic Culture.

TABLE IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF INFLUENCING FACTORS.

Factors	Calibration variable: Cross-cultural adaptation			t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.454	.105		23.421	.000		
Personality	.081	.023	.186	3.453	.001	.867	1.154
English ability	.150	.024	.380	6.363	.000	.708	1.412
Malay ability	.032	.018	.109	1.816	.071	.700	1.429
Experience in Islamic country	.055	.020	.170	2.726	.007	.651	1.536
The respond to Islamic culture	.197	.021	.514	9.227	.000	.815	1.227
R2	0.510						
F	40.370**						

C. A strategic approach to cross-cultural adaptation

Before During last decade, Malaysia has become attracting academic destination for international Chinese students due to their affordability in tuition fee and living expense compare to other countries, increasing the global ranking of their universities, the widely use of English for official and major language in public environment, home to millions of Chinese descents, cultural similarity between China and Malaysia makes the Chinese peoples feel like at hometown. Then, their hospitality to welcome Chinese peoples, short distance by plane, and current intensive bilateral engagement between two countries confirm the international Chinese students to select Malaysia as their proper choice to study. Despite most of them have not ever visited Islamic counties, but Malaysia is most familiar than others.

The first time when international Chinese students arrived in Malaysia, they expect to run their life smoothly and easier as they thought before. However, most of them have not prepared yet to adapt to a new situation, habit, and culture in

an Islamic country. In this critical case, a comprehensive strategic approach to cross-cultural adaptation is highly needed to help them for studying in Malaysia.

The result of the T-test indicated that the aspect of Integration expectation is better than the actual situation. It corresponds to the value of 3.64 ± 0.59 that is higher than 3.47 ± 0.65 ; which means Chinese students have cross-cultural difficulties in the aspect of Integration, and the expectation of Integration is better than the actual situation of integration. Chinese students have difficulties in integrating biculturalism. These results are explained by Berry's theory [1]. When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the assimilation strategy is defined.

Individuals prefer to shed their heritage culture and become absorbed into the dominant society. When individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the separation alternative is defined. Individuals turn their back on involvement with other cultural groups and turn inward toward their heritage culture. When there is an interest in both maintaining one's heritage culture while in daily interactions with other groups, integration is the option. In this case, there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, and at the same time, as a member of an ethnocultural group, seeking to participate as an integral part of the more extensive social network. When there is a little possibility or interest in heritage cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination), then marginalization is defined [1].

The cross-cultural adaptation faced by Chinese students studying abroad is a complex process and is influenced by many variables, including the internal factors of the students themselves and the external environmental factors during their studies. Malaysia's colleges and universities accepting Chinese students should further strengthen the research on the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students, and teach them by introducing relevant theoretical knowledge, help them realize the intercultural psychosocial adaptation process. In a hope that more and more Chinese students could spend a productive and meaningful study life in Malaysia.

Many studies have found that international students with different life experiences, knowledge, and skills will adapt better in future cross-cultural life. As an international student, it is very useful to have a certain level of foreign language and life skills before going abroad, such as cycling and driving. Besides, the different cognition and evaluation methods of life-changing cross-cultural contacts, coping strategies, and humorous strategies are used in conjunction with psychological adaptation. The correct expectation of studying and living abroad can help people to evaluate new environmental pressures, build confidence and reduce anxiety. All of these affect the cross-cultural psychosocial adaptation.

The results of the study showed that the students who planned to go abroad have higher expectations for cross-cultural interpersonal communication than those who have gone abroad. The students who planned to go abroad expected to

have a lower level of intercultural interpersonal difficulties than those who have gone abroad. The degree of difficulty; the time proportion that students who are going abroad will spend time with locals is significantly higher than the actual time proportion that students who have gone abroad spend with locals.

The results of these horizontal comparisons indicate to some extent that the expectations of international students for cross-cultural exchanges vary before and after going abroad, and there is a gap between their expectations of studying abroad and their actual experiences, especially in cross-cultural interpersonal relationships. They have not been able to achieve an ideal state after going abroad. They plan to spend most of their time with locals or international students from other countries, but in actual overseas life, they spend most of their time with Chinese compatriots.

Since there is no accurate prediction of the difficulties and obstacles in cross-cultural interpersonal communication after leaving the country, the students of the project may experience large cultural shocks and cognitive disorders in their interaction with local people, resulting in Psychological stress. This stress prevents them from adapting to local cultural practices and building long-term and deep friendships with local people.

Chinese students before going abroad tend to adapt to English daily communication within certain time estimation so they can communicate better with the locals. However, the time needed to fully adapt to the local life while studying in Malaysia will be more than expected, and the communication with the local people is not as easy as they imagined. Going abroad to study away from their parents and friends will make the students feel lonely without sufficient preparation. Facing the strange new environment without any experience and having to adapt to the local life within a short time estimation at the same time, brought burdens for the students in adapting to social and cultural life in Malaysia.

These are the difficulties encountered by Chinese students due to insufficient preparation to study in a new environment. Based on the integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation, adaptation is the transformation process of new travelers' experiences when they come into a new environment [3]. According to this theory, communication skills have an important role. Miscommunication issues will lead immigrants to feel alienated, homesick, and face difficulty in expressing their feelings.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study, the results of the qualitative and quantitative research method showed that the differences between expectation and actual situations faced by the Chinese students were caused by some obstacles, such as the English skills, psychological preparation, and participation in local social life. English skill is vital to make academic life more comfortable. Psychological preparation and participation in local social make cross-cultural psychosocial adaptation faster. Furthermore, based on their cross-cultural difficulties, it is technically crucial to provide some countermeasures and

suggestions for improving the cross-cultural adaptability of Chinese overseas students.

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