

# Cultural Adaption of Asian Students in China

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## ABSTRACT

It's wise for more Asian students to choose China for study. Asian students face many challenges when adapting. Effectively managing group projects with Chinese and international students, addressing academic challenges and managing interpersonal relationships. This study examines the adaptation of Asian students in China using Ward's model. The research proposes 9 statements to explore student adaptation to a new environment. To conduct research, individuals from Asia and China, including students and teachers, were interviewed and analyzed. The impact of academic and psychological factors on cultural adjustment of Asian students, particularly language proficiency, personality, and communication skills, is significant. Additionally, other unaddressed factors are relevant. Self-assurance, drive for success, personal worth, and other qualities. We provide valuable guidance to Asian students on integrating into Chinese culture.

### Introduction

The Chinese are arriving. A significant influx of Chinese students can be seen in Sweden's higher education system. China's Ministry of Education reported that over 280,000 Asian students, most of whom were self-funded, entered China in 2018. Asian students prefer the US, UK, and Australia as their top choices for studying abroad. There is no doubt that Asian students who desire international education are a highly profitable market. This has led numerous foreign universities to capitalize on this opportunity, turning it into a major industry. As a result, China has also entered the race to attract these students by offering financial incentives. Since China implemented tuition fees in 2011, there has been a significant decline in the enrollment of international students [1].

China's international master degree students have been greatly affected by the Bologna system, which the country's universities worked for many years to align with. China's universities were becoming significant global players in postgraduate education through their English language instruction. To increase the number of highly talented international students, specifically in economically significant disciplines like science and engineering, the Chinese government has introduced the One Belt and One Road scholarships as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative. There are numerous scholarships available within the Belt and Road scholarship program. In fact, the United States has long viewed the education of international students as a form of commerce. Put differently, higher education is being turned into a globalized product that is treated as a valuable resource in the context of economic globalization. However, there is a different narrative within Chinese universities. Foreign students are highly valued as Chinese companies primarily have global ambitions and rely on these international students to represent China when they go back to their home countries or work abroad. In summary, the challenges of a language barrier, lack of participation, underperformance in discussions, exam failures, and personal problems contribute to various difficulties during the transition process. This ultimately leads to Chinese students experiencing difficulties with their academic, psychological, and sociocultural adjustment. In conclusion, the aforementioned cross-cultural occurrence can be attributed to the concept of cultural adaptation. Asian students will keep adding to the diversification, internationalization, and overall competitive advantages of the university [2].

### Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the experiences of Asian students while they are residing and attending school in China. The focus is on identifying the challenges they face in adapting to the local culture, both personally and within educational institutions. Additionally, factors that influence this process of cultural adaptation will be investigated. This research seeks to present recommendations for enhancing the cultural adaptation of Asian students and offer suggestions to universities on how to support them during this challenging process. This thesis will utilize Ward & Searle's adaptation process model to analyze the obstacles and struggles faced by Asian students during their cross-cultural adjustment.

### Research Questions

- In China's university cross-cultural adaption, the main questions to investigate
- What factors influence Chinese students' cultural adaptation?
- What challenges do Chinese students face psychologically, socio-culturally, and academically?
- What strategies do Chinese students use to overcome challenges?

### Theoretical Background

In the year 1950, China initiated its acceptance of foreign students, including individuals from both Asia and Eastern Europe. China, which has now hosted the Olympics and joined the World Trade Organization, has significantly advanced in terms of integration and appeal to foreign countries after almost six decades. China has seen a significant increase in the number of foreign students due to its rapid economic development and expanding global impact. Since the 1990s, the number of Chinese students has been increasing steadily at a rate exceeding ten percent per year. According to reports, the total number of international students in China had reached 195,503 by 2007. These students are engaged in various forms of programming education, with the Chinese language being the most widely sought-after subject. Acknowledging China's global influence and their desire for language and cultural proficiency, the prospect of collaboration with local businesses and trade serves as a crucial incentive for students to pursue their studies in China [3].

### Culture

Culture consists of four parts

- Material aspect, like houses and artifacts, is the foremost expression of culture.
- The spiritual aspect of culture includes politics, economics, morals, and beliefs. These are key aspects of spiritual culture.
- Language aspect.
- Social organization focused on individual needs over society. Malinowski believed cultural concepts stem from cultural functionalism. When individual needs are met, society's needs are met. For Malinowski, understanding people's emotions and motives was vital in understanding society's functioning.

### Cultural Adaption

Cultural adaptation primarily pertains to individuals or groups adjusting to external requirements when transitioning from their own country to the host country. Enhancing adaptability levels among people helps them successfully navigate and respond to the demands of a new cultural setting. This adjustment could potentially enhance or have no effect on the compatibility between a person and their surroundings. Consequently, adaptation does not solely refer to individuals who conform to their environment, as they may also exhibit resistance or attempt to alter the surrounding conditions.

**Asian students' Cultural Adaption-why is it important?**

Considering that most challenges experienced by international students arise from cultural disparities, it is justifiable to infer that the main hurdles encountered by Asian students stem from the divergent cultural aspects present in their respective countries. However, it has been proven through research that Asian students undergo stress even within regions where cultural similarities are observed.

#### **Model of Adaption Process-thinking outside of original's box**

The foundational concept of the thesis is established upon the "model of adaption process". Ward and his team developed a novel theoretical model that incorporates the concept of cultural shock into the process of social culture acquisition. In the theoretical framework section, Ward and his colleagues contend that two consequences of the adaptation process should be considered: psychological adaptation and socio-cultural adaptation. Ward's "acculturation process model" is applicable to foreign travelers and sojourners, encompassing a broader scope than just international students.

#### **Psychological Adaptation**

Psychological adaptation is suggested to rely on emotional responses, specifically regarding how individuals feel and their level of contentment with life during cross-cultural exchanges. When students first arrive in foreign countries, they often experience culture shock. This means that they temporarily forget their own cultural practices due to the new environment and start to embrace the new culture. Eventually, they will reacquire themselves with their own culture, going through a process of psychological adaptation [4].

#### **Influencing factors of psychological adaption**

##### **Social Support**

Social support generally refers to assistance in the form of emotional and practical aid, as initially suggested. One aspect includes a message that engenders feelings of love, respect, and belonging among individuals who identify with a social group and view themselves as responsible for each other. The other aspect refers to the host country's responsibility to offer support, including sharing useful information and assisting with overcoming challenges that immigrants face. These social support factors are seen as a means to alleviate the mental health impacts of stress.

##### **Personality**

Personality traits impact how individuals adapt to foreign environments in relation to stress and coping. Pedersen (1980) argues that personality does not significantly affect adapting to new cultures. Ward and Armes found that sociable English travelers in Singapore were more prone to feeling sad. Researchers have studied the link between geographical proximity and shared genetic ancestry, highlighted by cultural references and traditions that influence personality development.

##### **Socio-cultural Adaptation**

Once students have achieved a basic psychological integration, they start to confront the clash between different social cultures. Sociocultural adaptation refers to the capacity to adjust and assimilate within the native society, encompassing the acquisition and utilization of the host country's knowledge and abilities. Ward and Kennedy developed the concept of socio-cultural adaptation, which connects closely to one's skills and past cross-cultural encounters, cultural differences, expectations, and cultural identification [5].

#### **Factors affecting socio cultural adaption**

##### **Cross-Cultural experience**

There is a common belief that individuals who possess both cross-cultural expertise and a strong sense of cultural sensitivity can effectively adjust to unfamiliar cultural environments. Klineberg and Hull discovered a correlation between prior experience and socio-cultural adjustment. Ward also emphasized the beneficial impact of previous experiences on people's ability to cope with new environments, ultimately decreasing the likelihood of culture shock. Furthermore, it enables individuals to easily adapt to the new educational culture and establish connections by drawing from their prior knowledge.

##### **Expected**

International students have expectations for studying abroad. These expectations may include their perception of the host country and its people, their anticipation of living conditions, and their awareness of potential challenges. When students immerse in a different culture, they instinctively compare their current experience with their prior assumptions. Adapting to a different culture depends on aligning expectations with the actual experience. A smaller difference makes adjustment simpler, while a larger difference makes it more challenging.

##### **Cultural Identity**

In many cases, individuals who grow up in their native culture may not fully recognize their own cultural identity. As people immerse themselves in

various cultures, their distinctly foreign identity becomes more apparent. It stems from one's racial identity and relations between different groups.

#### **Academic Adaptation**

The inclusion of academic adaptation is an added aspect in the Ward and Searle model. Studying abroad poses greater challenges than adapting to psychological and socio-cultural changes. According to Ward and Kennedy, academic pressure often leads to psychological distress and reduced social engagement. Furthermore, they encounter novel professor interactions and potential language barriers. These variables may affect students' academic adjustment [6].

#### **Factors affecting academic adaption: Pedagogic Difference**

Confucianism influences Asian higher education principles. Teachers are crucial in Confucianism's teaching process. They control the instruction method while students receive knowledge passively. Asian students generally lack innovative thinking and independent learning skills. However, the education system in the West focuses on student needs and involvement.

#### **Academic Communication with teachers**

In Bond's research focusing on Asian culture, it was demonstrated that students from Asian backgrounds generally hold their teachers in high regard, on par with the respect they give to their parents. As a result, they will refrain from posing any inquiries to the teacher. Certain academics have analyzed that Asian students perceive the perfect mentor to be an educator capable of offering extensive guidance and assistance. Asian students in western countries frequently find themselves at a loss during the learning process and perceive limited assistance from their teachers when facing difficulties.

#### **Academic Language Proficiency**

The primary challenge encountered by Chinese students during their cross-cultural adjustment is the language barrier. According to research conducted by Fawcett and Brenner in 2017, a significant number of Chinese students in college struggle with communication skills in cross-cultural settings. They lack comprehension of the teachers' anticipated academic standards and requirements [7].

#### **Conclusion**

Asian students at the Chinese academy of Science and Technology, along with Chinese students and teachers, as well as Postdoc teachers from other Asian countries, studied cultural adaptation challenges. Factors influencing the cultural adjustment of Asian students were examined. After investigating sources, it is clear that language is a major obstacle for Asian students. Finding a solution is crucial to address this problem. Language fluency is crucial for adapting to diverse cultures. Language barriers caused depression for many students, impacting their daily life and studies. Our research suggests ways to assist Asian students in adapting to Chinese culture. To embrace cultural sensitivity and adaptation education. Asian students are advised to learn about Chinese culture, customs, communication, and skills beforehand due to significant cultural differences among nations. Improve Chinese language proficiency. Before coming to China, Asian students should understand the importance of language. Being multilingual is crucial for adapting to diverse cultures. Many students were depressed due to language barriers, affecting their daily life and academics. Asian students must pass HSK3 or HSK4 before coming to China. Improve transparency and responsiveness. When students face cultural differences, they should warmly embrace and actively seek to understand them positively. With better preparation, students can adjust to unfamiliar cultural surroundings more efficiently, and the same applies in reverse. A negative mindset hinders cultural adaptation.

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