

A Study on Cross-cultural Adaptation Problems and Countermeasures Research for Malaysian Students in Tianjin

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Abstract. With the development of economic globalization, the number of students studying in China has been increasing in recent years. This has brought opportunities and challenges to the development of international student education. How to improve the cross-cultural adaptation ability of international students and enable them to have a better study life in China is a huge challenge to the receiving institutions, and it also plays a decisive role in the implementation of the national economic strategy. Especially in recent years, in order to strengthen exchanges between China and Malaysia, the Malaysian government has vigorously promoted Chinese cultural education, which has led to an increasing number of students studying in China. This paper investigates the study and life of Malaysian students from 8 universities in Tianjin, and systematically analyzes the countermeasures from the three aspects of psychological adaptation, social and cultural adaptation and academic adaptation, so as to improve the management ability of international students of the universities in Tianjin.

1 Introduction

Thanks to the rapid development of the Belt and Road Initiative and the continuous deepening of economic globalization, the number of students studying in China has increased rapidly in the past five years. Especially, Malaysia, which is strategically important in the ASEAN region, plays a decisive role as an important link of the Maritime Silk Road. Especially in recent years, in order to strengthen exchanges between China and Malaysia, the Malaysian government has vigorously promoted Chinese cultural education, which has led to an increasing number of students studying in China. Through the research on the problems of cross-cultural adaptation faced by Malaysian students in China, we can get a comprehensively understand their study and life in China. However, there are few studies on the group of Malaysian students in China, and the research on the cross-cultural adaptation of Malaysian students needs to be further developed. The author hopes that through the study of Malaysian students in Tianjin, people can analyze the key factors affecting their cross-cultural adaptation and propose targeted strategies to solve them, so as to help the relevant departments of universities to have a deeper understanding, so as to formulate effective policies and improve the management of international students in Tianjin universities.

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2 Formulation of the Question

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Cross-cultural adaptation refers to the process of interpersonal adaptation in the face of the pressure brought by the unfamiliar cultural environment and the impact of a culture different from one's own, and the constant self-adjustment to gradually adapt to the new way of life and eventually form a cross-cultural identity.[1]

In 1955, Lysgaard found through interviews with 200 Norwegian visiting scholars in the United States that those who had been in the United States for less than 6 months or more than 18 months were better at adapting than those who had been there from 6 to 18 months. [2] Based on this, he proposed the U-curve hypothesis, a "contact-conflict-adaptation" process, in which people enter the host culture and, over time, go through a process of high spirits, then a gradual decline, then a rebound, and finally adaptation. Subsequently, Oberg (1960) proposed the concept of "cultural shock" and divided cultural adaptation into four stages: "honeymoon period - depression period - adjustment period - adaptation period". [3]

2.2 Research Background

In 2016, President Xi Jinping presided over the 19th meeting of the Central Review and Reform Group and considered and adopted the *Opinions on Doing a Good Job in the Opening Up of Education in the New Era*, which emphasized the need to improve the teaching and management of

international students in China, enhance the cultivation quality of international students in China, and build the brand of “Study in China”.

According to the data released by the Ministry of Education in April 2019, as of 2018, 259,122 international students received academic education in China, accounting for 52.44% of the total number of students studying in China, of which the proportion of graduate students to the total number of students in China increased by 12.28% compared with 2017. The country of origin of international students is relatively stable, and the number of students from countries along the Belt and Road Initiative continues to increase. China has become the largest destination country for study abroad in Asia, and the attractiveness of studying in China has further increased in line with China's economic strength and comprehensive strength.[4]

2.3 Research Significance

Since 2012, thanks to the Malaysian government's promotion and dissemination of Chinese culture, the number of Malaysian students studying in China has been growing rapidly. Cross-cultural adaptation problems are increasingly prominent, including but not limited to psychological, physical, study and living problems. [5]

If they can be helped to adapt to their study life in China as soon as possible, they will complete their studies more efficiently and have a positive impact on their future life and work. However, since there are relatively few existing studies in this area, there is still more space for exploring the cross-cultural adaptation problems of Malaysian students. I hope that through in-depth research, we can effectively identify the key factors and find out the suggestions to solve them, so as to promote the education of international students in Tianjin universities to a higher level. [6]

3 Questionnaire on Cross-cultural Adaptation of Malaysian Students in Tianjin

3.1 Respondents

In this paper, 102 Malaysian students from eight general higher education institutions in Tianjin were surveyed. These respondents meet the following conditions: 1. currently studying in Tianjin; 2. having lived and studied in Tianjin for more than three months and having more experiences in cross-cultural adaptation; 3. not less than 18 years old.

Table 1. Statistics of Interviewed Students

| | Grade | | | | Gender | | Cultural Training | | Overseas Experience | | Religious Belief | | | Total |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------|--------|-------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|------------------|--------------|----------|-------|
| | First Grade | Second Grade | Third Grade | Fourth Grade | Male | Female | Yes | No | Yes | No | Islam | Christianity | Buddhism | |
| Number of Students | 28 | 23 | 25 | 26 | 38 | 64 | 16 | 86 | 19 | 83 | 48 | 18 | 36 | 102 |
| Proportion | 27.5% | 22.5% | 24.5% | 25.5% | 37.3% | 62.7% | 15.7% | 84.3% | 18.6% | 81.4% | 47.1% | 17.6% | 35.3% | 100% |

As shown in Table 1, the percentage of participants in the questionnaire was relatively even, ranging from 27.5%, 22.5%, 24.5%, and 25.5% from first to fourth grade, respectively. In terms of gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 62.7% of the total number of respondents. In addition, the results of the questionnaire showed that 84.31% of the Malaysian students interviewed had not received systematic cross-cultural training. In terms of overseas experience, 81.40% of the students had no overseas experience. As for religious belief, 47.06% of the respondents believe in Islam and 35.29% believe in Buddhism.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

Although there are some cultural similarities between Malaysia and China, there are still significant differences. The questionnaire of this study is based on the social and cultural adjustment scale used by Ward & Kennedy (1994) and designed with the characteristics of Malaysian students.

Before designing the questionnaire, the author chatted with some Malaysian students to find out what the students found difficult and challenging about studying and living

in Tianjin, so as to compare the cultures of China and Malaysia, and thus design a questionnaire suitable for this study. [7]

The questionnaire was divided into four parts: personal information, psychological adaptation survey, social and cultural adaptation survey and academic adaptation survey. After designing the questionnaire, the author entered the questionnaire content in “So jump” and distributed the questionnaire online through WeChat, and encouraged students to fill out the questionnaire by giving red envelopes. 102 valid questionnaires were collected.

4 Analysis of Cross-cultural Adaptation of Malaysian Students in Tianjin

Yang Junhong divided the study of cross-cultural adaptation into three aspects: cross-cultural psychology, cross-cultural communication and comparative education.[8] However, at present, there are few research results in comparative education. In this paper, we will systematically study from three aspects of cross-cultural psychological adaptation, social adaptation and academic adaptation, taking into account the characteristics of Malaysian students.

4.1 Psychological Adaptation Analysis

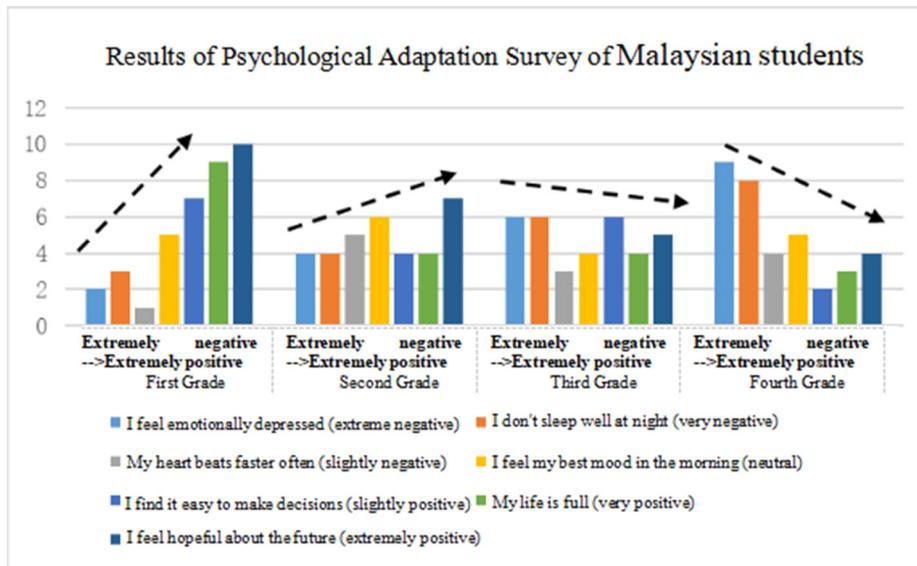


Fig. 1. Results of Psychological Adaptation Survey of Malaysian Students

For the field of cross-cultural psychology research, it is related to the perceptual, linguistic, and cognitive directions of the research subject.[1] Facing different cultures, the emotional changes of Malaysian students are closely related to their academic performance. The higher the grade level, the heavier the academic load and the more stressful it is. The final year students also expressed concerns about their future jobs. They were keen to have a wide range of career options and abundant employment opportunities, and many students expressed their desire to stay in China.[9]

The questionnaire shows that Malaysian students studying in Tianjin generally have good psychological adapt-

ability, no depressive tendencies, and are able to self-resolve the psychological stress arising from studying in Tianjin. Through the interviews, students indicated that the heavy academic load was the main factor causing their psychological burden. In addition, the lack of family companionship and the language barrier also bring about their mood swings. On the contrary, students who are cheerful and good at communicating with teachers and classmates have better psychological adaptation results.[10]

4.2 Social and Cultural Adaptation Analysis

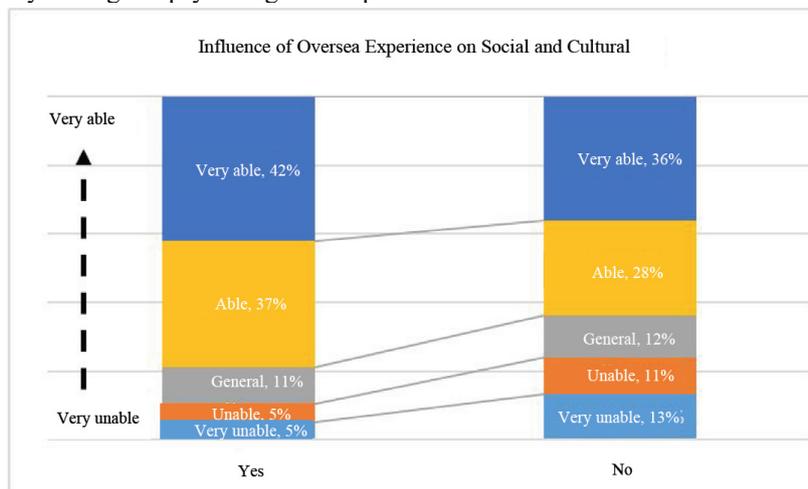


Fig. 2. Influence of Oversea Experience on Social and Cultural Adaptation

As shown in Figure 2, Malaysian students with overseas experience have a better social and cultural profile than those without experience. The overseas experience can enrich the students' life experience and can adapt well to the cultural differences of different countries, thus can well relieve the stress of cross-cultural adaptation brought by studying and living in Tianjin. [11]

The questionnaire shows that Malaysian students in Tianjin have a good social and cultural adaptation and are

basically able to overcome the social and cultural discomfort brought by the change of environment when studying in China, without seriously affecting their social and cultural adaptation habits and norms. Through the interviews, we learned that most Malaysian students can adapt well to the living environment and interpersonal interactions in Tianjin. However, some students indicated that the service mode in Chinese banks and hospitals is very different from that in Malaysia, the service attitude needs to be further improved, and there are difficulties in adapting.

4.3 Academic Adaptation Analysis

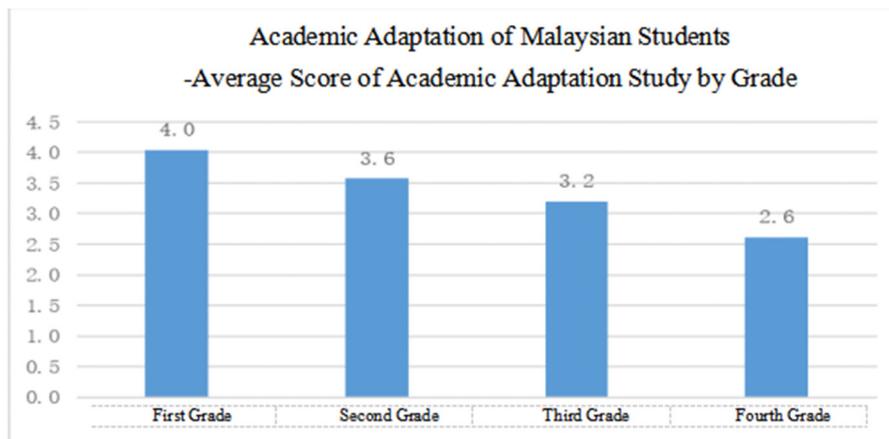


Fig. 3. Academic Adaptation Analysis of Malaysian Students

As shown in Figure 3, the academic adaptability is better in the lower grades than in the higher grades. As the grade level increases and the knowledge learned continues to increase and deepen, academic adaptation suffers accordingly. As they spend more and more time in China, they are less motivated to learn and accumulate more and more problems.

The study shows that the academic adaptation of Malaysian students in Tianjin is not very well and there are obvious scenarios of academic inadaptation, which affects communication with teachers and academic absorption effects. Through questionnaires and interviews, some students indicated that the inability to use library resources well due to language level limitations has become one of the difficulties in academic adaptation. Entrance education as an important cross-cultural adaptation guiding activity, most colleges and universities adopt English and Chinese lectures, which can be difficult for Malaysian students with poor Chinese language foundation. [12]

As an important part of cross-cultural adaptation for Malaysian students in Tianjin, academic adaptation is closely related to psychological adaptation and cultural adaptation, and all three are indispensable. It can be seen that doing a good job in the academic adaptation of Malaysian students in Tianjin can effectively help them to quickly improve their cross-cultural adaptation in Tianjin, so that they can adapt well to their study life in Tianjin, which plays a pivotal role. [13]

5 Countermeasures to Enhance the Cross-cultural Adaptability of Malaysian Students in Tianjin

5.1 Take multi-pronged approach to let Malaysian students fully understand Tianjin and the schools they study.

During the enrollment publicity, use emails and WeChat to introduce the basic information of Tianjin and the schools they study to Malaysian students through pictures and videos, so as to provide decision support for students

to apply for the school. After admission, the school can let Malaysian students know more about the culture, customs and habits, traffic condition in Tianjin, and general information of the school, accommodation arrangement, course arrangement, and possible difficulties in advance through the Internet. For example, we can inform students that Tianjin has four distinct seasons and they need to prepare their winter clothes and blankets in advance. After the students arrived in Tianjin, we can organize a campus tour for freshmen to familiarize them with the campus environment as soon as possible, organize welcome lectures for freshmen to answer their common questions in Tianjin and tell them how to solve their basic problems in Tianjin, such as food, clothing, housing and transportation, so that they can find a sense of identity in a foreign country and integrate into the Chinese family as soon as possible.

5.2 Further improve the management level of international students and promote the convergence management.

On the one hand, the management department of international students should improve the service consciousness and management efficiency, and pay attention to the management of international students from the thoughts and actions. Improve the working methods and management concepts, improve the management quality and enhance the cross-cultural communication ability of the managers. For example, establish a WeChat group for international students to communicate and improve the cross-cultural psychological counseling service mechanism for international students. On the other hand, formulate regulations to put the management of international students' convergence into practice. Considering the particularity of international students, while incorporating their management into the overall student management of the school, seek common ground while reserving differences and manage scientifically. In this questionnaire, 85.29% of Malaysian students indicated that they are willing to live with Chinese students. Therefore, universities can consider giving Malaysian students the right to choose their own accom-

modation, which can well alleviate their discomfort in various aspects at the early stage of their arrival in Tianjin. In addition, more Malaysian students should be encouraged to participate in the school's work-study job experience so that they can get the same level of participation as Chinese students in all aspects.

5.3 Offer cross-cultural courses for Malaysian students.

Cross-cultural training has a very positive impact on social and cultural adaptation. However, at present, Malaysian students in Tianjin have not received systematic cross-cultural training before coming to China, which requires our universities or relevant government departments to develop cross-cultural training courses for international students. Tend to Malaysian social customs and national emotions, and infiltrate traditional Chinese cultural contents to design cross-cultural training courses suitable for Malaysian students. As the main force of international collaborators, a good education for international students in China is not only to educate their professional knowledge, but also to focus more on the cultural construction of this group, which is conducive to their comprehensive and objective dissemination of Chinese culture in the future. Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts takes advantage of its disciplines and organizes a series of activities of "International Workshop on Traditional Art of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts" for international students from sister colleges in Tianjin every year. In the past few years, it has gradually developed into a bold attempt to innovate the thinking and politics of international students, trying to spread core socialist values and China's excellent traditional culture to international students from five continents and cultivate Chinese known, friendly and loved international talents.

5.4 Academic adaptation has an important moderating role in improving the cross-cultural adaptation of Malaysian students.

This study shows that in the cross-cultural adaptation of Malaysian students, lower-grade students are better than higher-grade students in psychological adaptation and academic adaptation, and academic adaptation in turn plays an important bonding role. In order to further improve the cross-cultural adaptation of senior Malaysian students and motivate them to study, more encouragement should be given to Malaysian students to communicate frequently with Chinese students in their studies and learn from each other, and educate them on career planning, incorporating the Malaysian and Chinese national conditions. Encourage students to extensively participate in cultural exchange activities in school and community to recognize and experience cultural differences and continuously improve their understanding. At the school level, it is necessary to improve the professional level, teaching level and cultural accomplishment of the international students' teachers and the management level of the counselors so that they can have high cross-cultural adaptability, thus helping Malay-

sian students to realize cross-cultural adaptation and cultivating them to be excellent cross-cultural communication talents.

6 Conclusion

With the increasing level of higher education in China, the international influence is also increasing, attracting more and more international students to study and live in China, among which the number of Malaysian students continues to climb. Cross-cultural adaptation is the first problem that international students need to face when they come to study and live in China. Through the study of this paper, we try to find out the factors that lead to the cross-cultural adaptation of international students and propose countermeasures, so that in the future we will be more clear about the characteristics of cross-cultural adaptation of Malaysian students in Tianjin in the future, and better assist the relevant departments of universities in formulating effective policies for the management of international students, thus improving the management of international students in Tianjin higher education institutions.

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