

Study on Cross-cultural Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang Universities and Colleges

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Keywords: Southeast Asia, international students, cross-cultural adaptation, influencing factors.

Abstract: With the development of international students education in China, the international students' education and management have to be reformed and innovated so as to keep up with the changing situation. By means of distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews in three different Nanchang universities and colleges, the study expounds the current situation and influencing factors on Southeast Asian international students' cross-cultural adaptation, analyzing the relationship among life adaptation, academic adaptation, environment adaptation and psychological adaptation, thus offering some implications and suggestions for Southeast Asian international students in Jiangxi province.

1. Introduction

With the implementation of BRI (the Belt and Road Initiative), countries along the Belt and Road have become the backbone in the program of international students education in China. In 2006, a total of 443,000 foreign students came to study in China, accounting for more than 20% of them were from Southeast Asian countries. The importance of promoting interaction and integration of different cultures and accelerating cooperation through educational exchange and talent cultivation was highlighted in July that year. What's more, encouraging more foreign and domestic students go to study in each other's countries is also an essential item in BRI.

In recent years, the number of international students in Jiangxi has been rising about 10 percent compared to the same period last year. At present, there are nearly six thousand international students in Jiangxi province, with a constant increase of students from Southeast Asia. Due to the fact that cultural differences exist in different countries and cities, for example, there are lots of differences in climate, diet, sense of time, educational system and some other aspects among Nanchang and Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Cambodia and Myanmar. In addition, those students should face many problems such as verbal challenges, academic pressure, difficulties in fitting in with local people, etc. Therefore, studying cross-cultural adaptation of Southeast Asian international students in Nanchang universities and colleges has great realistic significance.

2. Theoretical Background

Cross-cultural adaptation was first put forward by American anthropologist Robert Redfield, the main representatives of American cultural personality, Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovits in the early 20th century. In their views, cross-cultural adaptation is the variant of cultural pattern, which is caused in the process of continuous communication between two different cultural groups. Most of the researches divided it into social adaptation and psychological adaptation. The former refers to the acquisition of cultural skills, the latter stands for the stability and satisfaction in emotions.

According to its complexity, foreign scholars and researchers proposed the following four typical models: Lysgaard's (1955) U-shaped curve theory in cross-cultural adaptation, Kalvero Oberg's (1960) concepts and theories of culture shock, Gullahorn's (1963) W-shaped curve theory in cross-culture and Young Yun Kim's (1995) process and dimensional model in intercultural communication. Taking these models as bases, Ward (2008) summarized the influencing factors of cross-cultural adaptation into two types. The one is language competence, changes in life, the quality of social relationships, cultural distance and value. The other is personal context and subjects'

personality. In the handbook of intercultural training, American scholars Dan Landis, Janet.M.Bennet and Milton.J.Bennet (2009) introduced its histories, concepts and methods, explaining the cultivation of intercultural sensitivity, psychological process of intercultural relation and the training of intercultural competence.

Based on these theories, numerous studies on cross-cultural adaptation were carried out relatively late by researchers in China. However, with the increasing frequency of international students come to China, more and more attention were taken seriously on the topic of cross-cultural adaptation. Zhu Guohui (2011) took international students who have dual roles of “foreigners” and “students” as the breakthrough point, adopting the method of quantitative analysis from three dimensions. Wang Min (2015) explored problems and influencing factors of Southeast Asian international students in Beijing from their adaptation in life, language, psychology and culture. Wang Yifeng and Nong Dongmei (2015) conducted a questionnaire survey about Southeast Asian international students’ intercultural sensitivity and found out they are in the medium level. Among the five elements, interaction enjoyment rank the top, next interaction engagement, then interaction concentration, interaction confidence and acceptance for cultural differences in order.

Although the above foreign and domestic researches have made some achievements, there are fewer studies on cross-cultural adaptation of Southeast Asian international students in Jiangxi. Thus, the present study aims to do more in-depth studies in this field and provide some suggestions for helping Southeast Asian international students to solve their intercultural inadaptation and enhancing their intercultural competence.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The subjects in this study are 102 international students with approximately equal proportions of men and women from three different universities in Nanchang, Jiangxi (Nanchang University, Jiangxi Normal University and Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine). Table 1 gives a brief introduction of subjects’ basic information.

Table 1. The General Description of the Subjects

N=102		Number	N=102		Number	N=102		Number
Nationality	Indonesia	39	Gender	Female	45	Degree of education	Doctor	1
	Thailand	43		Male	57		Master	18
	Vietnam	5	Age	≤20	15		Undergraduate	56
	Singapore	7		21-24	57		Short-term	17
	Cambodia	6		25-29	23		Chinese language	10
	Myanmar	2		>30	7			

3.2 Instrument and Data-collection

The instrument employed in the study was mostly adopted from the questionnaire in Yang Junhong’s doctoral thesis (2005) and the questionnaire in Zhu Guohui’s doctoral dissertation (2011). Some of them were modified and proofread in accordance with the practical situation. The items in the questionnaire are weighed up by a five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). In terms of life adaptation, academic adaptation, environment adaptation and psychological adaptation, they are adopted to investigate cross-cultural adaptation of Southeast Asian international students in Nanchang. The questionnaire attempts to cover as many factors as possible for the study.

Altogether 110 questionnaires were distributed and 102 valid questionnaires were collected for the study. Eight questionnaires were regarded as invalid because those students didn’t finish them as required. Hence the collection rate is 92.7%. Meanwhile, SPSS17.0 was used to analyze all descriptive statistics and the differences in the results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Life Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

The results in Table 2 reveal that Southeast Asian international students are very satisfied with shopping (mean=3.73) and urban traffic (mean=3.56). Nanchang, as the provincial capital, did well in its construction of commercial layout and urban public transport. The opening of metro line one and line two, to a great extent, makes students' shopping, sightseeing and travelling more convenient. Through questionnaires and interviews, the reason why the mean of local customs (mean=2.87) is the lowest is that most of students are attracted by national scholarship, Jiangxi government scholarship or the recommendation of agencies. For this reason, it's necessary to strengthen Jiangxi's publicity of its unique history and culture, red tourism and green ecology so that more international students are willing to select Nanchang universities and colleges.

Table 2. Life Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Climate	102	1.00	5.00	3.31	0.923
Food	102	1.00	5.00	3.08	0.917
Urban traffic	102	2.00	5.00	3.56	0.925
Accommodation	102	1.00	5.00	3.25	0.934
Shopping	102	2.00	5.00	3.73	1.012
Local customs	102	1.00	4.00	2.87	0.855

4.2 Academic Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

From Table 3, there is a high satisfaction in extracurricular activities among Southeast Asian international students (mean=3.89). Many students reflect that the university they are studying attach great importance to their extracurricular activities. The three universities not only make get-togethers for students to let them have more access to Chinese teachers and students and hold galas to show their talents, but also organize their international students to visit Jiangxi Provincial Museum, Nanchang August 1st Memorial Hall, Tengwang Pavilion and Qiushui Square. In general, Southeast Asian international students are satisfied with curriculum setting, teaching contents and methods, but not that with teaching evaluation. It is because many teachers used to focus on students' scores and grades, ignoring their daily performance. Thus, formative evaluation and performance assessment should be improved.

Table 3. Academic Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Curriculum setting	102	2.00	5.00	3.35	0.865
Teaching contents	102	2.00	5.00	3.27	0.921
Teaching methods	102	1.00	5.00	3.31	0.954
Teaching evaluation	102	1.00	5.00	3.03	0.833
Teaching resources	102	2.00	5.00	3.36	0.897
Extracurricular activities	102	2.00	5.00	3.89	0.819

4.3 Environment Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

As can be seen from Table 4, the results show almost every Southeast Asian international students agree that Chinese people have a kind, friendly and hospitable attitude towards them (mean=3.96). It's not hard for them to comprehend Chinese ideas and thoughts, and they have strong intentions of communicating with Chinese people. In the interview, one Thailand student named Wang Yimo from Jiangxi Normal University said, "I like watching Chinese movies and TV series, and I can understand those Chinese jokes and humors on numerous occasions". However, the most prominent problem is these international students need to expand their social circle, not just confining to stay with friends and students from their own countries (mean=3.61). Although they are consciously trying to use

Chinese to adjust themselves to the campus life in Nanchang, but their language skills are not that solid, pronunciation and intonation should be also taken into consideration in enhancing their language proficiencies.

Table 4. Environment Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Chinese are frequently used	102	2.00	5.00	3.22	1.025
Chinese people are kind , Friendly and easy to get along with	102	3.00	5.00	3.96	0.786
Understand Chinese jokes and humors	102	2.00	5.00	3.45	0.881
Usually stay with friends from my own country	102	3.00	5.00	3.61	0.797
Too shy to communicate with Chinese people	102	2.00	4.00	3.13	0.934
Have more foreign friends than Chinese friends	102	2.00	4.00	3.43	0.811

4.4 Psychological Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

From the perspective of cross-cultural psychological adaptation, get homesick (mean=3.74) and often feel lonely and bored (mean=3.46) come top in Table 5. The results point out that international students might suffer a lot from the severe homesickness because it was the very first time they left their hometown, parents and friends. The lack of life experience abroad also intensified their worry and anxiety. Now that most of them are elementary-level international students, they just master some daily expressions for communication. Besides, they are inclined to stay with friends and students from their own countries. It is a common phenomenon, which is almost inevitable among international students, especially the first semester they come to Nanchang. Therefore, more attention should be paid by teachers, instructors and executives, carrying out more effective measures.

Table 5. Psychological Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Nanchang

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Get homesick	102	2.00	5.00	3.74	0.778
Often feel lonely and bored	102	1.00	5.00	3.46	0.827
Eager for care and understanding	102	2.00	5.00	3.21	0.916
Poor sleep quality at night	102	1.00	4.00	3.03	0.945
Care about other's opinions and comments	102	1.00	5.00	3.15	0.863
Not that like the things what they were interested in before	102	1.00	5.00	3.39	0.825

5. Differences in Life Adaptation, Academic adaptation, Environment Adaptation, Psychological Adaptation among Southeast Asian International Students

As mentioned in research methodology, SPSS17.0 was used to analyze all descriptive statistics and the differences in the results. From the data in correlation analysis, there are significant differences among Southeast Asian international students between life adaptation and psychological adaptation ($P=0.000$). Meanwhile, these students exhibit significant differences between life adaptation and academic adaptation as well ($P=0.002$). That means the more the students adapt themselves to the life in Nanchang, the better psychological and academic performance they behave. Furthermore, the differences between environment adaptation and psychological adaptation are significant ($P=0.001$), which demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between environment adaptation and psychological adaptation. That's to say, if Southeast Asian international students get

familiar with the environment both inside and outside the campus, they'll have great self-confidence and do well in their self-adapting adjustment.

6. Conclusion

The study indicates that Southeast Asian international students' major obstacles in cross-cultural adaptation are: they are not familiar with social systems and local customs in Jiangxi, they tend to stay with friends and students from their own countries and find it hard to get involved in Chinese students' social circle, they usually have feelings of loneliness and depression. In order to deal with their intercultural inadaptation and enhance their intercultural competence, the following are some implications and suggestions.

For one thing, universities and colleges should set up the syllabus and content scientifically and rationally, developing Jiangxi characteristic culture in classroom teaching so that international students could have better understanding of Chinese culture, local customs and social etiquette. Moreover, to conquer their fear of unfamiliar culture and obtain sense of identification in foreign culture, interaction and communication should be encouraged between Southeast Asian international students and Chinese students.

For another, the government should increase material and financial input, support international cooperation and exchange, strengthen teaching staff construction, the participation of Southeast Asian teachers in particular, and reform the management system of Jiangxi universities and colleges. To address the problem of psychological adaptation, international student administration should put more emphasis on students' psychological problems in different phases and provide effective consulting and pertinent training. In the meantime, stimulating international students' interests in professional learning and social practice, which help them relieve pressure, complete their studies with outstanding results and realize their self-value ultimately.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Education and Science Research Project in the 13th Five-year Plan of Jiangxi Province "An Empirical Study on Cross-cultural Adaptation of Southeast Asian International Students in Jiangxi Province" (19YB270).

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