Cultural and Psychological Adjustment of International Students in Thailand

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The study aimed to examine the influence of social support and self-efficacy on cultural adjustment and psychological outcomes of international students in Thailand. The participants in this study included 389 international students enrolled in Thai Universities. The study found that international students possess a moderately high psychological and cultural adjustment. The results also supported the role of personal resources (social support and self-efficacy) that predicted concurrent cultural adjustment, which in turn influenced life satisfaction and psychological stress for students undergoing a cross-cultural transition. In addition, the findings of this study showed that self-efficacy and social support did not have a direct impact on psychological stress. Rather, the effect of self-efficacy and social support on psychological stress was found to be indirect, via cultural adjustment and life satisfaction. The study could increase the level of understanding of cross-cultural adjustment for international students in Thailand in particular, and assist in the creation of programs that could deliver vital improvements in both academic and personal support for international students in the country.

Keywords: cultural adjustment, psychological adjustment, life satisfaction, psychological stress, international student

There are many types of people who travel overseas, including immigrants, refugees, and sojourners, such as tourists, expatriates and international students (Furnham & Erdmann, 1995). Currently, Thai universities are striving to attract international students from other countries, which are seen in the increasing number of international students in the country, such as China. The Office of the Higher Education Commission (2014) conducted a survey on international students in higher education institutions in Thailand, which showed that, in 2008, there were a total of 16,361 international students enrolled in Thai higher education institutions. In 2012, a survey on international students in higher education institutions in Thailand revealed that 20,309 international students from 135 countries enrolled in 103 higher education institutions (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2014).

It is generally assumed that international students bring an important aspect of diversity to the classroom and campus, giving Thai students access to global perspectives without having to leave Thailand. Another benefit of foreign student participation in Thailand is an additional revenue stream to finance higher education (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2014). More importantly, most international students consider that the pursuit of an overseas education will enable them to improve their academic knowledge for future employment opportunities. There is also an expectation that students who study overseas will obtain better jobs with higher salaries and expect to have more occupational mobility, irrespective of whether they return to their home country or remain in the host country (Wang, 2004). In addition, by studying abroad, international students have opportunities to also learn about other cultures and gain international experience that enhances their global understanding (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Doria, 2005; Lin, 2006; Townsend & Poh,

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2008). Moreover, overseas education helps international students to develop their social skills and is perceived as equipping them to be internationally competent (Andrade, 2006; Takeuchi, 2008).

When making the transition from home to the host country, international students deal with a wide variety of adjustment issues throughout their sojourn, known as cross-cultural adjustment (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). They face numerous academic, cultural, and psychological challenges in relation to the process of cross-cultural adjustment (Berry, 1997). Overall, they are required not only to adjust to the host cultural environment, but they also must learn new cultural norms and values in order to adjust to the host culture. The cultural adjustment in an unfamiliar culture may lead to adjustment difficulties, or acculturative stress (Ye, 2005). Among the difficulties confronting many of these students are academic problems, housing issues, economic hardship, social acceptance, homesickness, loneliness and health problems, which negatively influences international students' psychological well-being (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Townsend & Poh, 2008). The difficulties encountered by international students may lead to a stressful condition known as culture shock. Culture shock refers to the psychological distress experienced as a result of loss of the familiar environment and familiar modes of social interaction (Adler, 1981; Bochner, 1982). This distress may result in a sense of alienation, frustration and confusion. Culture shock is thus typically represented as an experience for international students who have traveled to a country where the enrolling university is situated. In particular, they need to adjust and learn, culturally, in the host country in order to be successful in their cross-cultural transition (Cushner & Karim, 2004).

As the number of international students entering Thai universities has increased, as well as Thailand is already an international educational hub in the region (Cochrane, 2014), the need to understand their cross-cultural adjustment to the country becomes more important. Moreover, International students are different in adjusting to the new host culture, some of them adjust easily while others find it very difficult. Thus, it's important in any examination of cross-cultural adjustment to include factors involved in a successful adjustment. However, in recent times, many studies (e.g., Shupe, 2007; Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009) have concentrated on the cross-cultural adjustment and culture shock experience of Asian international students whilst studying in the Western countries. Far less attention in literature has been given to the transition experiences of international students on the study in Asian cultures, such as Thailand. Hence, the study aims to partially fill the gaps in cross-cultural research by investigating the joint impact of self-efficacy and social support variables on cultural and psychological adjustment of international students in Thailand. The practical value of this study revolves around the production of results to provide an important indication for creating programs that could deliver vital improvements in both academic and personal support for international students in Thailand. More importantly, these results could help the university to better understand international students, and could improve the international student services, in order to increase the number of international students in the future.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment

In the current review, the theoretical aspect of cross-cultural adjustment specifically in relation to international students is leading to the acculturation model, proposed by Ward and colleagues (Ward, 1996; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The acculturation model

suggests that moving into a new cultural environment involves significant life changes. These changes include adjusting to unfamiliar surroundings and engaging in new forms of intercultural contact. At the same time, the unfamiliarity of many situations is likely to increase stress and create awareness of skill deficits in the sojourners (Ward et al., 2001). Ward and her colleagues further suggested that the outcomes of cross-cultural adjustment can be broadly divided into psychological and cultural adjustment. The acculturation model is applied as a basic concept of international adjustment in the current study. Furthermore, international students are considered justifiable as sojourners in the same way as expatriates. It is assumed that the literature and research on the expatriate adjustment can apply to international students adjustment. Thus, intercultural adjustment based on McEvoy and Parker's (1995) also applied to a cross-cultural adjustment in the current study. McEvoy and Parker further developed a model that was forwarded by Black and Gregersen (1991), they proposed a model that considered three stages of adjustment, causes of adjustment, followed by adjustment and then the consequences of adjustment. They also distinguished between individual and contextual antecedents that may influence the expatriate's work, general living, and interactions in the host country. However, Parker and McEvoy (1995) did not carry out any empirical research on the issue of psychological outcomes. Thus, the psychological outcome in the current study is related to Ward and her colleagues (2001) acculturation model. The model of cross-cultural adjustment adopted in this study is displayed in Figure 1.

Psychological Adjustment

Psychological adjustment concerns the affective or emotional outcomes from life changes. Lack of psychological adjustment is generally referred as acculturation distress (Berry & Sam, 1997), and is frequently measured along both positive and negative dimensions, including psychological distress, well-being, and personal life satisfaction (Cieri et al., 1991; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Ward et al., 2001). In this perspective, it has been noted that in order to understand individual well-being, the two approaches are needed to be considered; subjective well-being and psychological well-being (Robbins & Kliewer, 2000). Subjective well-being is related to an individuals' current evaluation of their pleasant and unpleasant affect which refers to individual life satisfaction (Diener, Biswas-Diener, & Oregon, 2003; Diener et al., 1985). Furthermore, psychological well-being is defined as positive psychological functioning of individuals (Wang, 2004). From the previous studies concerning with cross cultural transition, particular on the studies conducted by Ward and her colleagues (2001) is utilized the psychological well-being to justify the psychological adjustment of international students, which refers to a set of internal psychological outcomes such as mental health, psychological or emotional distress, anxiety and depression. Although, the conceptual of psychological adjustment is viewed by the distinction of life satisfaction and psychological well-being, it is argued that these two psychological constructs are related. Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor (1999) propose that life satisfaction is expected to associate with psychological well-being during the cross-cultural transition. Therefore, it is necessary for the current study to further investigate the possibility relationship between life satisfaction and psychological well-being as a functional of psychological adjustment dimension.

Cultural Adjustment

Cultural adjustment refers to one's progress in becoming fully effective in new cultural environment, as well as the ability to deal with the difficult situation or problems

encountered by the sojourners (Aycan, 1997). Cultural adjustment is also concerned with the ability to "fit in" or negotiate interactive aspect of the host culture. In line with previous research, cultural adjustment is theoretically embedded in a social or cultural learning perspective with focus on the knowledge-based resources such as acculturation attitudes, conational cultural maintenance, host acculturative experience and language competency (Neto, 2002). Black and Gregersen (1991) further mention that the distance in cultures, rules, and social norms between home and host culture are significantly concern in the cultural adjustment. It is difficult for individuals to adjust themselves into the new culture, particular if the host culture is different from the home culture. Numerous studies have shown that sojourners may experience difficulties adjusting to a new culture. For international students, moving across different cultures requires learning new cultural norms, values, and ways of thinking and behaving (Church, 1982). However, when individuals experienced greater levels of cultural conflict and encounter with difficult situations, their behavior or attitude may change. These evidences are considered to be a cultural adjustment problematic (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Kim, 2001). Cultural adjustment employed in the current study is divided into five factors relating to cultural learning approach; academic, physical & mental health, interpersonal relationships, local culture, and living environment.

Antecedents of Cultural and Psychological Adjustment

The premise of the cultural adjustment model suggests that individual key factors (self-efficacy and social support) act as an antecedent of cultural adjustment, which in turn, affect psychological adjustment. According to the antecedents of the study, Church (1982) suggested a more fruitful avenue of investigation, in which personal resources may be considered. A key personal resource that has been consistently found to predict cultural adjustment is self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is an indicator of an individual's capability used to overcome specific situations (Vidal, Valle, Aragón, & Brewster, 2007), which refers to the attitude that individual brings to the process of attempting to triumph over the problems (Black & Gergensen, 1991). Moreover, self-efficacy refers to a person's judgment about their capabilities to organize and execute a given course of action, or to solve a problem or accomplish an assignment (Bandura, 1986; 1997). Silver, Mitchell, and Gist (1995) explain that people with high self-efficacy tend to attribute their success to personal abilities, and their failures to temporary situations. During stressful transitions to new living conditions, self-efficacy serves as a personal resource protecting against negative emotional consequences (Bandura, 1997; Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). In examining cross-cultural adjustment processes, self-efficacy refers to the beliefs that individuals bring to the process of attempting to manage problems related to the transition period (Black & Gergensen, 1999). During the transition period, sojourners not only persist despite potentially difficult conditions, but they also search for the most useful strategies for approaching intercultural encounters (Black & Gergensen, 1991). It is likely that individuals with higher self-efficacy will find it easier to adjust themselves with the new environment and have capability to cope with problems experiences.

Moreover, many researchers (e.g. Ward et al., 2001) have identified social support as an important variable in the context of stressful experiences. It may arise from various sources, including family, peers, and faculty. Baba and Hosoda (2014) mentioned that one important personal resource, which international students could rely on when dealing with

stressful situation is social support, because it protects individuals experiencing high levels of stress. With regard to student sojourners, Ward et al., (2001) have claimed that "the social support hypothesis places greater emphasis on the quality and quantity of support than the actual support network, and research has demonstrated that both hosts and co-nationals can provide assistance and contribute to the enhancement of psychological well-being" (p. 150). According to the previous findings (e.g. Brisset, Safdar, Lewis, & Sabatier, 2010; Sümer Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010) social support has been found to be a significant contribution in predicting international students' adjustment during the transitions period. Since social support can be considered as a kind of social resources embedded in social relations, greater social support implies more resources for international students to adjust to a new cultural circumstance (Lin, 2006). Therefore, if international students receive more social support, it is possible for them to have better cross-cultural adjustment.

Research Framework and Hypotheses

The research framework of this study (see Figure 1) is based on an integration of cultural theories and previously research related to many sojourners' adjustment aspects. The study hypothesizes that the antecedent factors (self-efficacy and social support) influence cultural adjustment outcomes. In turn, cultural adjustment component directly influences two aspects of psychological adjustment, namely psychological stress and life satisfaction. In addition, life satisfaction also hypothesizes in predicting psychological stress.
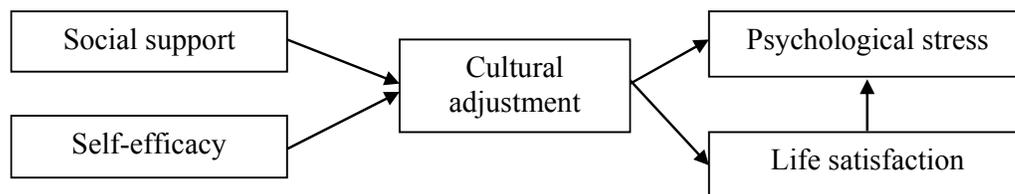

Figure 1. Hypothesized Research Framework.

Method

Participants

The participants used in the study include international students in Thai universities. A stratified random sampling method together with a simple random sampling method were performed to recruit potential participants and to access the participants. Four universities (two public and two private universities), where international students were mostly enrolled, were randomly selected from the Top 20-Universities in Thailand (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2014). Five-hundred self-reported questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 389 questionnaires were returned, which represented a response rate of 77.8 percent.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires were adapted from existing research instrument. This section describes the instrument for each of the variables in the study.

Psychological stress

A Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) consisted of 21 items, which measure three negative emotional states: Depression, Anxiety and Stress. Participants completing the DASS were asked to indicate their agreement with items on a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree. Higher scores indicated greater levels of psychological stress. Sample items were "I felt that life was meaningless" and "I found it difficult to relax".

Life satisfaction

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) comprises five items, which were scored using a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated higher levels of life satisfaction. Sample items were "I am satisfied with my life" and "In most ways my life is close to my ideal".

Cultural adjustment

The Scale of Cross-Cultural Adaptation for International Students, and the questions were developed based on amendments made to the questions concerning five dimensions (Academic, Physical and mental health, Interpersonal relationships, Local culture, and Living environment) in the Cultural Scale adopted by Uehara (1988). A total of 39 items were used to measure international students' cultural adjustment, upon five-point Likert scale, included statement such as "I can understand the cultural identity of the Thailand people". Higher scores indicate higher levels of adjustment.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was measured using the General Self-efficacy Scale (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992), which is a 10-item scale assessing perceived self-efficacy. Participants were required to rate statements such as "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough" using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (exactly true). Higher scores indicated higher levels of self-efficacy.

Social support

A Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), which was a 12-item scale that measures perceived support from three domains: family, friends, and a significant other. Participants completing the MSPSS were asked to indicate their agreement with items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree. The items included "My family really tries to help me" and "I can talk about my problems with my friends". Higher scores suggested greater levels of perceived social support.

All of the measures demonstrated moderate to high internal consistency reliability, with coefficient alphas ranging from .743 to .909 (see table 2).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through field survey using structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed in English language. The data was collected in a form of a paper-pencil survey using hand-out-hand-back technique. The data collection process of participants was performed after obtaining ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University (August - October 2014). Next, an introductory letter was also sent to the selected universities asking formal permission to collect the data. When the survey questionnaires were collected, the researcher used statistics to analyze all the data. The statistics were used in this study include frequencies and independent t-test. A structural equation modeling was also conducted in determining the significant relationships between variables.

Results

General Information of the Participants

Majority of the participants were female (58.1%) with an average age of 23 year-old (minimum of 18, maximum of 54 year-old). Most participants (77.1%) are undergraduate international students. More than half (75.9%) are from Asian countries, which 31.3% are from China. The length of time spent in Thailand ranged from 5 months to 15 years, with an average length of 2.4 years.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Psychological and Cultural Adjustment Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Level
1. Psychological stress			
1.1 Stress	2.04	.64	Moderate low
1.2 Depression	1.89	.69	Moderate low
1.3 Anxiety	1.96	.67	Moderate low
2. Life satisfaction	4.71	1.04	Moderately high
3. Cultural adjustment			
3.1 Studying	3.54	.68	Good adjustment
3.2 Physical and health	3.37	.60	Moderate adjustment
3.3 Interpersonal relationship	3.35	.66	Moderate adjustment
3.4 Local culture	3.42	.65	Moderate adjustment
3.5 Living environment	3.51	.66	Good adjustment
4. Self-efficacy	2.93	.49	High level
5. Social Support			
5.1 Family support	5.41	1.32	Moderately support
5.2 Friend support	5.18	1.30	Moderately support
5.3 Significant others	4.96	1.43	Moderately support

Psychological and Cultural Adjustment Levels

As can be seen in the table 1, international student reported that they do not experience much stress, depression and anxiety during the transition period. Also, their satisfaction with life was moderately high. For levels of cultural adjustment among international students, the study found that they experienced slight difficulty in cultural adjustment to Thai culture, especially in their "living condition" and "study" adjustment. In terms of their personal resources, international students reported a high level of self-efficacy, and they also agreed that they received social support, mainly family support.

Testing the Prediction the Cross-Cultural Adjustment Model

This section describes the results from the testing structural model of cross-cultural adjustment. The model incorporates self-efficacy and social support factors that hypothesizes the influence of cross-cultural outcomes, namely cultural adjustment, life satisfaction and psychological stress. The two-step approach of structural equation modeling analysis was performed in the study. The measurement part of the model was first developed and tested, following by testing the structural model.

In the measurement model, a series of testing on unidimensional-scale items were conducted with a series of CFAs on one-factor congeneric models reflected by their respective scale items. The results from testing the modified one factor congeneric models presented as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Fit indices and Cronbach's Alpha for the Measurement Scales

Measurement Scales	χ^2	*df*	*p*	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Cronbach's alpha
1. Psychological stress								
1.1 Stress	31.182	14	.005	.978	.982	.056	.027	.856
1.2 Depression	52.475	14	.000	.930	.970	.084	.036	.857
1.3 Anxiety	56.187	14	.000	.961	.958	.088	.038	.884
2. Life satisfaction	18.658	5	.002	.982	.965	.084	.028	.842
3. Cultural adjustment								
3.1 Studying	178.250	44	.000	.923	.932	.088	.042	.902
3.2 Physical and health	6.129	5	.294	.994	.997	.024	.020	.743
3.3 Interpersonal relationship	11.416	5	.045	.988	.984	.058	.026	.770
3.4 Local culture	7.263	2	.026	.991	.984	.082	.024	.743
3.5 Living environment	35.096	9	.002	.970	.952	.086	.043	.775
4. Self-efficacy	129.320	35	.001	.938	.930	.083	.045	.873
5. Social support								
5.1 Family support	17.583	2	.000	.979	.983	.100	.022	.891
5.2 Friend support	4.521	2	.104	.994	.998	.057	.009	.909
5.3 Significant others	78.181	2	.000	.905	.931	.100	.050	.891

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlations Results of the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological stress	1				
2. Life satisfaction	-.284	1			
3. Cultural adjustment	-.239	.480	1		
4. Self-efficacy	-.285	.443	.523	1	
5. Social support	-.343	.453	.503	.481	1

Note. p < .05 for all correlations values.

Table 3 displays the correlation for all variables and it was found that there were significant and negative inter-correlations between psychological stress and other variables. While, cultural adjustment, self-efficacy and social support were positively and significantly associated with life satisfaction.
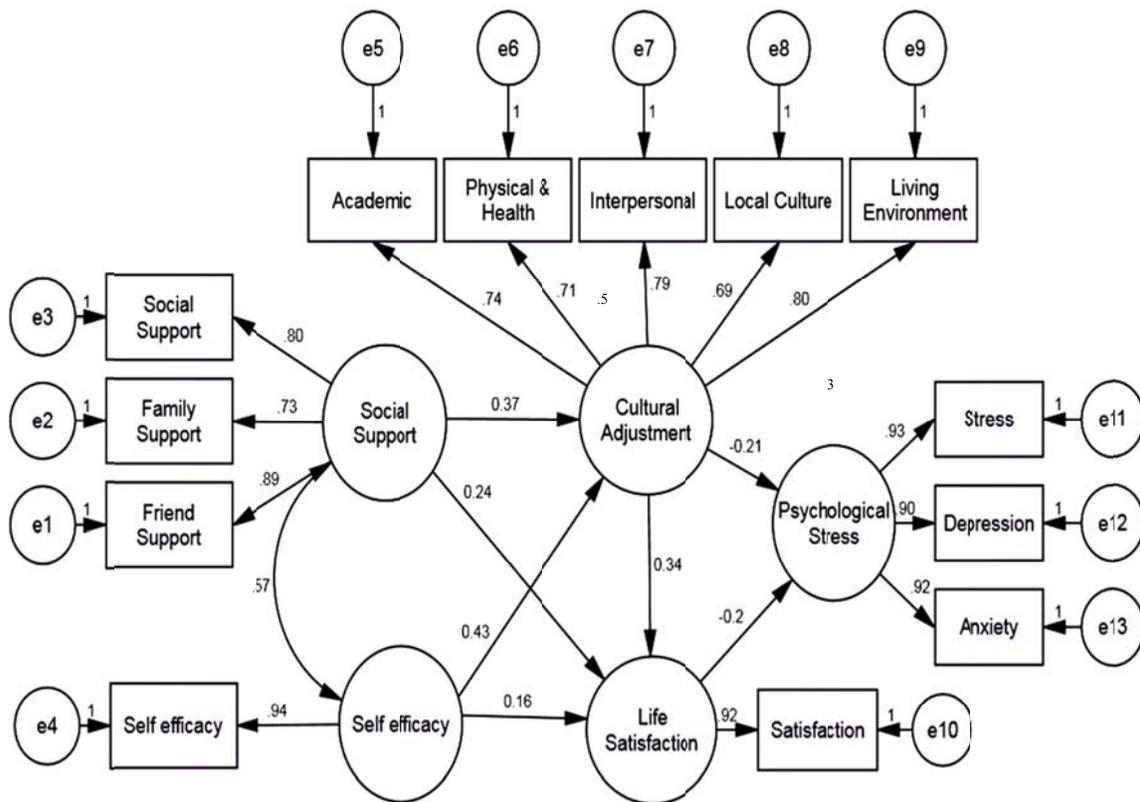

Figure 2. Standardized Parameters Estimates for Cross-Cultural Adjustment Model.

The hypothesis model of cultural adjustment was initially tested. The results presented that, the hypothesized cultural adjustment model was initially found to fit the data, $\chi^2(61) =$ 147.228, *p* < .001, *GFI* = .943, *AGFI* = .915, *CFI* = .970, *SRMR* = .058, and *RMSEA* = .060 (.048; .073). However, based on modification indices, the model required additional direct pathway in order to obtain a good fit between the model and the data. Three additional

pathways were specified from self-efficacy and social support to life satisfaction, and from life satisfaction to psychological stress (see Figure 2). This re-specified model was re-run and was found to fit the data very well, $\chi^2(59) = 124.706$, $p > .05$, $GFI = .953$, $AGFI = .927$, $CFI = .977$, $SRMR = .049$, and $RMSEA = .054$ (.040; .067). Figure 2, displays the standardized parameter estimates for the structural paths, together with the amount of explained variance in each of the endogenous variables in the model. The model accounted for 50%, 42%, and 13% of the variance in cultural adjustment, life satisfaction and psychological stress, respectively.

The structural path of the model indicates several significant relationships which support previous research. In the cultural adjustment model, the results indicated that self-efficacy ($\beta = .43$, $p < 0.001$) and social support ($\beta = .37$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predicted cultural adjustment which, in turn, positively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = .34$, $p < 0.001$) and negatively predicted psychological stress ($\beta = -.21$, $p = 0.004$). Life satisfaction ($\beta = -.20$, $p = 0.005$) was also a significant predictor of psychological stress. Self-efficacy ($\beta = .16$, $p = 0.024$) and social support ($\beta = .24$, $p < 0.001$) were directly related to life satisfaction. Moreover, self-efficacy presented the strongest predictor of cultural adjustment, while social support was the stronger predictor of life satisfaction than self-efficacy. The results suggested that international students who presented more social support and high levels of self-efficacy would better adjusted to the culture in Thailand and are satisfied with their life, and presented a lower psychological stress.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall most of the finding from the analysis support research hypotheses. The results affirm the role of personal resource (social support and self-efficacy) factors in predicting concurrent cultural adjustment, which, in turn, influence life satisfaction and psychological stress for students undergoing a cross-cultural transition. Findings of the study showed that self-efficacy and social support did not directly impact psychological stress. Rather, the effect of self-efficacy and social support on psychological stress was found to be indirect, via cultural adjustment and life satisfaction.

The study found the self-efficacy factor significantly influenced cultural adjustment and life satisfaction. Arguably, high self-efficacy facilitates successfully adjustment to new and stressful situations. This result suggests that international student who reports higher personal resources, such as self-efficacy, are more likely to adjustment well to new environment during transition periods, which then results in improved psychological well-being. This is because high self-efficacy likely helps international students feeling that they have ability and competence to deal with academic situation, living condition, problems and life stress. This result is in the line with previous studies that investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and cultural adjustment and psychological adjustment (e.g. Li & Gasser, 2005; Townsend & Lee, 2004; Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). Similarly, Hedges (2003) found that self-efficacy predicted general and interaction adjustment, which, in turn, to influence psychological adjustment (i.e., life satisfaction, general well-being). According to this argument, self-efficacy serves as a personal resource protecting against negative emotional consequences (Bandura, 1997; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000), and are likely to predict psychological adjustment when facing new and potentially stressful situations (Berry, 1997; Furnham, 1995; Ward et al., 2001). Self-efficacy presents an

individual's confidence level in how well he/she can perform a task and achieves a goal. According to social cognitive learning (SCL) theory, self-efficacy influences ones' behavior even more than knowledge, skill and previous achievements (Bandura, 1986).

Another important finding from this study was that cultural adjustment and life satisfaction was predicted by social support. The study demonstrates that the social support coming from friends, family and others people from the host country, is crucial for international students. International students who lack social support from special person are more likely to face difficulty in adjusting and to feel unsatisfied with their life in the new culture. These issues can lead to health problems such as psychological distress as they experience the loss of their social support (Leung, 2001). Further, social support can mitigate the level of acculturative stress, whilst inadequate social support may exacerbate acculturative stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). This is because international students who lack social support, intimate relationships, and feel disconnected with the culture of the host country are likely to have difficulties in adjusting to the new academic system and the living environment; in addition to the psychological distress (Patron, 2014). The effect of the role of social support is consistent with the previous studies (e.g. Finch & Vega, 2003; Gencoz & Ozlale, 2004) which found the relationship between social support and cross-cultural adjustment. Furthermore, the study of Asberg, Bowers, Renk, and McKinney (2008), Cho and Yu (2015), and Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) confirm that social support appears to be an important factor for socio-cultural and psychological adjustment to determine whether individual's lack of satisfaction and functional support results in psychological and physical problems. Thus, this study demonstrates that the buffering effect of self-efficacy and social support has been the subject of many studies and has been found to be crucial for positive psychological well-being and a powerful resource for individuals experiencing significant levels of life stress and stress associated with cultural adjustment.

The findings of this study also suggested that psychological stress has negative effect on cultural adjustment and life satisfaction. International students who are well adjusted culturally and satisfied with their current life situation tend to experience less stress, depression and anxiety. This relationship between life satisfaction and psychological well-being is in line with many studies in overseas adjustments (Christopher, 2000). If individuals consider themselves well-adapted socio-culturally, they experience satisfaction with their life situation, less stress, less ambiguity, and more psychological comfort. In other words, international students who experience less difficulty adjusting culturally to Thai society are likely to be satisfied with life and less stressed. This finding is not surprising. It might be expected that international students who were less skilled socially would have more difficulty learning and understanding new cultural norms and values whilst overseas. This finding is consistent with previous overseas adjustment studies (e.g. Gebhard, 2012). This finding may well be explained by the cultural learning approach (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Difficulty in cultural adjustment seems to arise because individuals have difficulty negotiating daily social encounters.

With regard to cross-cultural adjustment, individuals may have difficulty understanding cultural norms and values. As a result, they may feel isolated from the society, making it difficult for them to adjust socially to the new milieu. Subsequently, they may feel dissatisfied with their life, which may lead to higher psychological stress. This finding was partly consistent with the research by Ward and Kennedy (1999), who propose that cultural adjustment is related to psychological adjustment of sojourners. The findings from this

research have tapped into an interesting issue for cross-cultural studies on psychological adjustment outcome in that cultural adjustment strongly predicted psychological adjustment when psychological adjustment is measured by life satisfaction, rather than psychological stress. The relationship between cultural adjustment and life satisfaction observed in this study is consistent with previous studies (Mohr & Klein, 2002). Accordingly, individuals who have more pleasant experiences or who are better adjusted to their cultural environment would be expected to report a relatively higher level of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985; Hofer, Busch, & Kiessling, 2008).

Findings also suggested that life satisfaction influences international students' level of psychological stress. The result may also be interpreted in terms of cognitive evaluations aspect (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995). Life satisfaction could be identified as a person's evaluative reaction to personal specific life domain or their current life situation, which affecting the reaction of their emotional states (stressed, depressed and anxious). Evidence from previous studies (Christopher, 2000; Herleman, Britt, & Hashima, 2008; Sam, Vedder, Ward, & Horenczyk, 2006; Tamini & Kahrazei, 2010) has shown that life satisfaction does predict psychological well-being and also found to be the strongest predictor of the psychological distress levels of sojourners.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made, in light of this study, with regard to future behaviors of international student departments of Thai universities. The results indicate the significant influence of self-efficacy and social support on cultural and psychological adjustment. In order to resolve the difficulties adjusting to the new culture, international students would need to concentrate on their personal resources to assist their coping strategies in order to deal with the stressful period of cultural and psychological adjustment. This would probably help international students to overcome their adjustment problems, such as academic stress, living condition difficulties and physical health problems.

Moreover, the findings may assist organizations, such as universities, to develop ways to encourage and raise awareness about how to minimize adjustment problems for international students in the new culture. The findings enhance our understanding of the cross-cultural and re-entry adjustment of international students, which enable us to better accommodate international students. Furthermore, the department of international students in universities should be aware of relates to issues such as loneliness, the sense of losing the familiar environment, and culture shocks. These issues need to be addressed during the orientation period, particularly in the early stages of arrival in host country.

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