

**Perceptions of Chinese International Students in
Singapore:
Adjustment Issues and Support**

By

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Abstract

The number of students choosing to engage in international education is increasing. Typically, the United States has been the number one destination for international students but that has declined in recent years (2002 to 2006). This implies that international students choose to study in other English speaking countries or in countries that may be more similar in culture.

The purpose of this study was to explore the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of undergraduate Mainland Chinese international students who were studying at a university in Singapore. The focus was to understand their perceptions of the adjustments issues they faced as international students. Twenty-one (21) students were interviewed using a semi-structured face-to-face technique. A review of the literature was conducted.

The three major areas of difficulty identified were learning to speak English, weather, and food. The most helpful support reported by the Chinese international students was the 'English Bridging course'. Overall, general adaptation to life and study in Singapore

presented no major obstacles for the Chinese international students and this resulted in low utilization of and need for existing support services. The respondents reported that learning to speak English was the most difficult adaptation they encountered due to the widespread use of Mandarin and Singlish by the local population.

Interestingly the issues identified in other research studies such as difficulty with general living adjustment, personal psychological adjustment, social adjustment, and culture shock were not supported in this research. Also, loneliness, homesickness, anxiety, lack of social support, and difficulty with finances were not identified as major issues for this group of Chinese international students. This led the researcher to conclude that the more similar a host country is to the home country in culture and language, the easier the general adjustment of the international student. Also, the researcher concluded that the similarity in language (Mandarin) from the home country (China) to the host country (Singapore) is both a negative and a positive – it can greatly and positively facilitate general adjustment of an international student but it can hinder the English language adjustment and learning. Suggestions for future research were included in this study.

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Chapter 1

Introduction - Background & Rationale

Increasingly, over the past 50 years, and especially in response to globalization and internationalization, post-secondary institutions are expanding to include more and more international students. Paige (1990) defined international students as individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship, in order to participate in international educational exchange as students.

There are quite a substantial number of students engaging in international education. Bohm et al (2002) estimated that in the year 2000, there were 1.8 million international students enrolled in institutions of Higher Education around the world and they predicted that there would be a fourfold increase in this number by 2025.

There are many benefits to having international students. A very popular benefit would be the financial benefit to the institution and economy. International students inject many millions of dollars into their host country. Other benefits of international education include:

- International students provide a vast knowledge base about culture, education, and practices of other countries
- International students help domestic students prepare for a global work life
- International education fosters international trade relationships
- International education can enhance and empower the lives of others by building capacity

- International education can help address labor shortages
- International students on campus can help ensure diversity and multi-culturalism
- International education can create more cultural education and understanding
- International education can attract people to help address immigration concerns

With the number of international students on the rise, their issues with adjustment and transition are getting increased attention. International students and their adjustment issues must be studied and addressed as it is in the best interest of all involved to ensure their successful transition to the host country and institution.

Statement of the Issue

The United States now appears to be the number one destination for international students (NCES, 2005). *Open Doors*, an annual report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), provides information about the movements of International students. *Open Doors 2006* reported that, in 2005-2006, the number of international students enrolled in the United States Higher Education institutions was 564,766.

Perhaps, accordingly, most of the research that has been conducted on international students and their adjustment issues centers on foreign students who enter the United States to enroll in post-secondary institutions. Comparatively, there is a smaller body of research concerning students who do not choose America as their destination for study.

According to *Open Doors 2006* the leading place of origin of international students is Asia, more specifically India, China, Korea, and Japan. Students from these four countries make up 58% of all international students studying in the United States. Bohm et al (2002) support the increase in Chinese international students when they state that Asia will dominate the global demand for international higher education. These authors predict that by 2025, Asia will represent 70% of total global demand. Within Asia, China and India will represent the key growth drivers generating over half of the global demand in international higher education by 2025. Thus, they foresee that more than two-thirds of global demand for international higher education will come from Asia.

Because the United States is the number one destination for international students, a great deal of the Literature on international student adjustment is conducted in the area of international students who have attended an American institution. Much of this Literature focuses on Asian international students. Many studies tend to group all Asians together as if there were no differentiation internally. There is only a small body of research concerning Asian international students, specifically Chinese, who do not choose America as their academic choice. Of this Literature, much focuses on Chinese students in countries such as Australia or the United Kingdom. However, there are certainly Chinese international students in other countries and in other English speaking countries and institutions. Chinese international students in Singapore is such as example.

While we have noted that the United States is indeed the number one destination for international students, an interesting trend has appeared in the past few years that has actually seen the decline of international students in America. Open Doors (2006) reported that in 2003/2004, for the first time since 1954, there was a decline in international student enrolment in the United States. That year, international student enrolment was down by 2.4%. In 2004/2005, there was another decline of 1.3 %. International students numbers in the US remained virtually the same for the 2004/05 and 2005/06 years. If the numbers of international students is on the rise, but fewer of them are entering the United States, this implies that they must be seeking alternative countries. If non-US English speaking countries and institutions hope to attract a larger percentage of these students, they need to focus on adjustment issues and ensure that the institutions are doing everything possible to make students' transition and adjustment as easy and stress-free as possible.

Also, most studies completed in the field of international student adjustment focus on students who are in a host country that is very different culturally than their own. I investigated international students who were in a host country that, in many ways, was very similar to their own culture. One study that was very similar to my research was by Tsang (2001) who studied cultural adjustment by sampling Chinese Academics and students in Singapore. With regard to future research, the author stated, 'While quantitative research enables the researcher to statistically test and compare the magnitudes of the relationships between different constructs, it fails to generate the rich insights that can only be obtained by, say, in-depth interviews with respondents'.

Purpose of the Study

My interest was in the specific area of Chinese undergraduate student adjustment in a non-US, English speaking country and institution – specifically Singapore. I wanted to know what adjustment issues Chinese undergraduate international students who studied in a non-US, English speaking country and institution reported. I wanted to investigate the types of support that these students found to be the most useful in their transition.

This research built upon the knowledge that others have contributed to the field. For example, Jarrahi (2004) reported that Chinese students underutilized counseling services and tended to pursue informal sources of support rather than professional ones. I was interested in finding out what Chinese international students who studied in a similar culture thought about their adjustment. Also, Lin (1998) reported that Chinese international students in the US listed ten sources of help for their adjustment issues – again, I wanted to know if Chinese international students in Singapore would have a similar list? Was language a barrier to the students in Singapore – given that many of their fellow students spoke Chinese?

Tsang (2001) studied Chinese international students in Singapore and summarized his study by saying that ‘even if the host culture is somewhat similar to the home culture, the sojourner still needs to adjust to the host institutional environment that can differ by a great deal from that of his or her home country’. I was curious to see if the results of this research would support Tsang’s earlier findings or if Chinese international students studying in a similar culture would report an easier transition?

Research Questions

My research focused on the following main question: How do Chinese undergraduate international students adjust to living and studying in Singapore?

I focused on the following sub-questions:

1. What adjustment issues do Chinese undergraduate international students studying in Singapore experience?
2. What supports do Chinese undergraduate international students report are most useful/helpful in their adjustment process?
3. How does the adjustment of Chinese undergraduate international students in Singapore compare to the Literature?

I addressed these issues:

1. What are the adjustment issues most reported by Chinese international students?
2. What programs/services does the host institution/city offer that are deemed most helpful by students?
3. Where do Chinese undergraduate international students most frequently seek help from for a) personal matters and b) academic matters?
4. Why do Chinese international students use or not use programs/services of the host institution/city?

5. Who do Chinese international students turn to most often for help with their adjustment issues?
6. What do Chinese international students feel that their host institution/city could/should do to help their adjustments process?
7. What programs/services can the host institution/city offer to better help Chinese international students?

Research Methodology

This study utilized qualitative research methods. I proposed to interview Chinese undergraduate international students (Appendix D) in one institution. If I could not get the desired quota of participants from one institution, then I would approach other institutions – thus taking a staged approach. I only choose to interview undergraduate students who have not completed a prior university degree, as I was interested in how students adjusted during their first time living and studying abroad. This was not a review of a particular university's International Student Office and/or programs.

Data were collected through individual face-to-face, semi-structured interviews during the fall of 2007. The interviews were taped only if the participant agreed.

The students who participated in this study were chosen based on specific demographics from the total population of Chinese international students. Participants were required to be a student who was, at the time of the interview, either an undergraduate in a university

in Singapore or is in an English Bridging course in preparation to enter their university program in Singapore. They could not be graduate students. Also, the participants were not married. I had chosen to only interview unmarried students as married students may have traveled to Singapore with a spouse and thus, would have had a 'built in' support system. Also, another requirement was that this university experience was to be their first time they had entered a university outside of China (i.e. they have not attended a school in a foreign country prior to this experience). The distribution of interviewees was supposed to be equally divided with regards to gender. Also, the participants were students from the People's Republic of China, who were not citizens of Singapore but rather were citizens of China. This study did not include students from Taiwan, Macau, or Hong Kong.

I asked the university for assistance in obtaining participants for this study by emailing a letter (Appendix C) to the appropriate administrative department (e.g. Office of International Relations/Student Affairs) requesting a meeting with the Department Head to discuss their participation in the research. Upon arrangement of a subsequent meeting, there was to be discussion with the Administrator about the study and the steps necessary to obtain the institution's approval. I was willing to subject this thesis proposal to an Ethics review by each institution, if they required it. Upon attainment of approval from the administrator/institution, recruitment and interviewing of students commenced.

I provided the institution with an introductory letter (Appendix A) and asked that they relay this information to students who qualified as potential participants in this research.

This letter, which could be sent out as an email, explained the nature of the research and asked for their voluntary participation. The students initiated contact with me if they wanted to participate in the study. When they agreed to participate, a convenient meeting time and place was arranged. At this meeting, each participant was given an individual letter of informed consent (Appendix B) that they had to sign before the interview could be conducted. I, as the researcher and interviewer, to ensure their full understanding, explained this letter to each person in the initial meeting. Participation in this research was voluntary and I ensured them that all participants who were interviewed would remain anonymous.

With participant permission, each interview was taped. Also, I kept extensive notes of the interviews. Data from the interviews were analyzed and coded. I then looked for trends, categories, and common themes in the data. Tapes and research notes were kept in a secure place for one year after the completion of the Doctoral program, and then they, and all information collected for this research, were destroyed.

One of the assumptions made in this research was that all Chinese undergraduate international student participants expressed their thoughts and feelings honestly and candidly. I developed rapport with the participants to help alleviate any stress they may have had about discussing their feelings with a stranger. I addressed this issue and any other reluctance during the time that I explained the letter of informed consent.

I used the following questions to guide the interview:

Setting up the interview: Introduce researcher (self) and study, explain/discuss the Individual Informed Consent form. Clarify any questions the participant may have.
Gather information (e.g., length of time in Singapore, age)

Interview questions:

1. Why did you choose to come to Singapore to study? (Was it your first choice?
Why did you want to leave China to study)
2. Tell me the most important adjustment issues you or any of your friends have encountered after you came to Singapore. (at least 3 minimum).
3. What programs/services does your institution/city offer that are for international students (specifically Chinese)? How did you become aware that these programs/services were offered?
4. If you do not use the programs/services/people of the institution/city, why?
5. What organizations/groups have you joined or are a part of? What supports do they offer that help you adjust to life/school in Singapore?
6. Where do you live in Singapore? Does this affect your adjustment at all? How?
7. Who are your closest friends here in Singapore? Do you have any Singaporeans as friends? Do you have any family here?
8. What programs/services/people do turn to most frequently for a) personal matters and b) academic matters.
9. What do you think your institution/Singapore could do to help Chinese international students make better adjustments?

10. Are there any programs/services that the institution/Singapore could offer that would better help Chinese international students?
11. Would you recommend studying in Singapore to a friend? Why or why not?
12. What advice would you give someone else who is coming to Singapore to study?
13. When your degree is completed, what are your future plans? What have you learned from being an international student in Singapore that can help you in the future?
14. In your opinion, how 'successful' do you feel you have been in adjusting to:
 - School/academics
 - Weather
 - General life in Singapore
 - Meeting friends who are Singaporean
 - Meeting friends who are international students
 - Customs
 - Food
 - Learning and speaking in English
 - Housing
 - Culture shock
 - Understanding Singlish
 - Understanding the English your teachers use
 - New holidays
 - Transportation
 - Getting health care

- How lonely are you?
- Are you homesick?
- Is money a big concern for you?

(If applicable: on a scale of 1-10: 1 – not adjusting well, 10 – adjusted quite well)

Significance of the Study

The reasons for studying the adjustment issues of Chinese international students were theoretical, practical, and personal.

First of all, the results of this study added to the general theoretical body of knowledge of international student adjustment and institutional support. Specifically, it contributed to the knowledge about Chinese international students who studied at a non-US, English-speaking institution. Typically, when research has been conducted on Chinese international students, the research tended to take on one of two trends. The first is that Chinese international students were usually categorized under the term ‘Asian’. This meant that they were grouped with other students from other countries such as Korea, Japan, and India. This, however, may not have given us clear insights into what adjustment issues and institutional support Chinese students needed. The second trend was that research involving Chinese international students tended, for the most part, to revolve around Chinese participants who were international students in an American school. Studies that focused explicitly on Chinese international students studying at a non-US, English-speaking institutions were and are very scarce.

From a practical standpoint, information gathered in this research may provide helpful information to other non-US English-speaking institutions to create new programs or tailor existing ones to specifically meet the needs of Chinese international students. Although care should be taken to not generalize to the entire population of Chinese students, the results may be of some benefit nonetheless. The information in this study may provide some insights that institutions may use in their quest to create an easier adjustment of Chinese international students.

On a personal note, I have a keen interest in traveling and living in other cultures. While I have not studied outside of my own country, I have experienced living internationally and am well aware of how difficult transition can be and how long it can take. I believe wholeheartedly that travel and understanding is one of the keys to peace in our world and I would love to make that easier for those who are brave enough to venture so far away from home at such a young age. Mark Twain once said, 'Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness'. These young people are our future – I would like to help them feel that they are not only citizens of their own country but also citizens of the world.

Assumptions of the Study

I made the following assumptions:

1. The participants could all communicate their feelings and thoughts adequately using English. No translator was used for any part of this research.
2. All participants expressed their thoughts and feelings honestly and candidly.
3. All international students commonly experienced adjustment problems.

Organization of Thesis

This research is organized as follows:

Chapter 1: General overview of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 4: Findings of the Research

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

Limitations of the Study

In general, qualitative research has limitations intrinsic in its very design, and perhaps the most fundamental limitation is the researcher herself. Because the researcher is the one who collected the data in this research, it is very possible that his/her biases and personal

assumptions may have influenced the results. While it is not possible to totally eliminate the researcher biases, it is important that the researcher be aware of them and constantly monitor herself to ensure, as much as possible, that they do not interfere. As I am the primary researcher in this study, I had to be careful that I did not allow my biases and personal assumptions to influence the results. I have traveled extensively and I have lived in four countries. Each experience was very positive and thus, I have an underlying belief that moving to a new country is a very positive and wonderful experience and adjustment is fairly easy. I had to be careful not to assume that everyone has had such a positive experience and I had to be cognizant of the fact that the participants' situations may have differed greatly from my own.

This study was not intended to be generalized, beyond this specific example, to the entire population of international students or Chinese international students. However, the insights provided in this research may be helpful and/or raise questions for institutions when dealing with Chinese international students.

Definition of Terms

International Student - individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship, in order to participate in international educational exchange as students. (Paige, 1990)

Host Country – the country that the Chinese international student is studying and residing in. In this thesis, the host country will be Singapore.

Domestic students – students who are citizens of the host country. In this thesis, the domestic students will refer to Singaporean students unless it is used in the context of a particular study.

Culture – “the way of life for an entire society”. It includes such things as codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, norms of behaviour, and systems of belief (Jary et al, 1991)

Culture shock – a term coined by Oberg (1960). He states that there are four stages of emotional reactions related to cross-cultural adjustment.

1. Honeymoon stage - characterized by the initial excitement, curiosity, and enthusiasm of the newly arrived individual.
2. Crisis stage - the individual will likely have feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anger, anxiety, and depression.
3. Recovery stage – the individual is better able to function in the new culture due to the resolution of his/her feelings and new cultural learning that has taken place.
4. Adjustment stage – the individual is able to enjoy and function competently in the new environment or culture.

Singlish - Hall (1993) defines Singlish as “...the version of English spoken in Singapore...is a Creole formed from elements of English, Malay, Cantonese, and Hokkien Chinese.’

Adjustment - This definition is from Anderson (1994): Cross-cultural adaptation is a grab bag term that encompasses the commonplace process of learning to live with change and difference - in this instance, a changed environment and different people, different norms, different standards, and different customs. Adjustment is a complex, cyclical, and recursive process of overcoming obstacles and solving problems in present-environment transactions. It is the individual who chooses how to respond, and in so doing creates his or her own adjustment. Cultural adaptation is a continuum. Sojourners exhibit a broad range of degrees, modes, and levels of adaptation. There are six general principles applying to cross-cultural adaptation that flow from the proposed model:

- It involves adjustments;
- It implies learning;
- It implies a stranger-host relationship;
- It is cyclical, continuous, interactive;
- It is relative; and
- It implies personal development.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

International education is not a new concept; rather, it has actually been in existence for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Larbi (1990) discusses the notion that there have been students seizing the opportunity to study at foreign institutions even as early as Before the Common Era (BCE) with the ancient university of India. He discusses the view that ‘dynamism of international education has existed since antiquity’. Basically, this view holds that at different times, and for an assortment of reasons, various countries have been known as the predominant leader for international studies. Ancient India was once considered the advanced society for learning; as was China, Greece, and, in the nineteenth century, Germany. Today, it is the United States.

While there have always been a small number of international students throughout history, as of late, this number has been on the rise. Increasingly, over the past 50 years, and especially in response to globalization and internationalization, more and more people are choosing to engage in studies in a foreign country. It was estimated that in the year 2000, there were 1.8 million international students enrolled in institutions of Higher Education around the world (Bohm et al, 2002). The authors go on to predict that this number will rise to 7.2 million in 2025.

Reasons for international study

With international education on the rise, the question of why so many students choose to leave their home countries to study abroad is an interesting and complex one.

Certainly, some students may choose to study abroad as they have attained great academic achievement and may be actively recruited by foreign schools (Thomas and Althen, 1989). In many of these cases, the foreign schools may provide financial incentives such as scholarships. Thomas and Althen (1989) go on to offer some other interesting suggestions for why some people engage in international studies. They contend that some students may receive enrolment in foreign schools due to their family's influence on the foreign government or sponsoring agent. Also, many families may choose to send their children to a perceived safer foreign country to escape the political unrest and strife in the home country.

Another interesting reason to study in a foreign country is the belief that the education will provide a more global view of the world. This may be supported by the perception that 'the increasing interconnectedness of the worlds' economies places an increased premium on individuals' knowledge of other cultures, languages, and business methods. Higher Education plays a major role in expanding students' knowledge in these areas, especially when this education takes place outside of their native country' (NCES, 2005). Similarly, others may believe that studying in a foreign country can provide a larger variety of educational opportunities than what is offered within their own country (NCES, 2005). Programs that may be more suited to the particular person may not be

offered in their own educational system and thus, a student may need to study in a foreign institution.

Van Hoof & Verbeeten (2005) completed a study with students who participated in student exchange programs between January 2001 and May 2003, both in the United States and other parts of the world. The authors reported the three most important reasons their respondents gave for studying abroad as: (1) 'it is/was a good opportunity to live in another culture'; (2) 'it is/was a good opportunity to travel'; and (3) 'I liked the country my exchange program was located in'.

UNESCO (2006) stated that 'Students leave their countries to study abroad for several reasons, including: the experience of studying and living abroad as preparation for an increasingly globalized world; lack of access to tertiary education in their countries of origin; or the opportunity for better quality education than that offered in their home countries'.

Altbach (1985) gives a very encompassing explanation of the motivations that lead individuals to study abroad. He stated that students are motivated to engage in international studies by a number of reasons that he called 'push factors'....they almost literally push the student to study in a foreign land. These factors include availability of scholarships to study in foreign school, poor quality of education in the home country, lack of research facilities in the home country, failure to gain admission in institutions at home, discrimination against minorities, enhanced value in the market place of a foreign

degree, and politically unpleasant conditions at home. Altbach (1985) also goes on to describe 'pull factors' which are the contributing factors that the host country might possess that would attract prospective students to study there. These pull factors are: the availability of scholarships for international students, good quality of education, availability of advanced research facilities, availability of appropriate educational facilities with likely offers of admission, presence of relatives willing to provide financial assistance, positive political situation in the host country, congenial socio-economic and political environment to migrate, and the opportunity for general international life experience. Although this was written over twenty years ago, these factors seem as relevant today as ever.

Recruitment of international students

Why do countries recruit international students? Surely, each country must have enough citizens that they could encourage to attend Higher Education institutions? Why bother with the complex issue of foreign students when institutes have enough domestic students to fill their seats.

First of all, let us define international recruitment of students. We will use the definition by Galway (2000) but modify it so that it is more general and can apply worldwide.

International recruitment of students refers to the activities that Higher Education institutions undertake to bring international students (those students without resident status in the host country) into their regular institution programs, as opposed to programs designed and offered specifically for foreign students. International students usually pay

international student fees, which are considerably higher than the fees paid by citizens of the host country.

There are many reasons discussed for the increase of recruitment of this population. Perhaps the number one reason would indeed have to be financial. With the shrinking government resources now available, many universities are hoping that International students will represent a much needed alternate funding source. *Open Doors 2006* reported that international students contributed approximately \$13.5 billion dollars to the U.S. economy, through such things as tuition and living expenses. Similarly, in the Ontario college system, Galway (2000) reported that the most frequently reported motivation for the recruitment of international students was the financial revenue for the colleges. Cudmore (2005) reported that for the academic year 2003, the Ontario College Application Services (OCAS) reported that there were 5,856 (3.7 percent) full-time international students. With the tuition fees that were reported by the Committee of Registrars, Admissions, and Liaison Officers (CRALO) in their 2003 Ontario College Fee Survey, this represented \$55.9 million for the Ontario colleges. It is estimated that, in 1996, international students contributed \$2.7 billion to the Canadian economy (AUCC, 2001). In 2006, that number had increased to approximately \$4 billion a year (Workpermit.com, 2006). New Zealand is another country feeling the economic benefit. Smith (2001) reported that 'Foreign students are making a bigger contribution to the economy than the wine industry and are set to provide more than \$1 billion to New Zealand's GDP'. In 2001-2002, 26.2 percent of the total budget for British universities was funded by the fees from international students (Education Guardian, 2004). Similarly, in Australia, the international student market contributed 14% to its

universities' revenues in 2003, up from 6% in 1995 (Bachelor, 2004). These are staggering amounts that are being invested into the institutions, as well as the spin-off revenues in other areas such as the rental market and the food industry.

Another important reason for such a dramatic increase in foreign students is that Higher Education institutions are realizing that international students provide a vast knowledge base about culture, education, and practices of other countries. For domestic students, they are an excellent resource to help them prepare for a global work life, which may certainly involve living and working in other countries and cultures. Galway (2000) reported that the respondents in her study listed 'the opportunity to bring foreign perspectives to the local student body' as the second most commonly cited reason for colleges to engage in international student recruitment. Similarly, the presence of international students ensures that diversity and multi-culturalism is represented on campuses which, in turn, will hopefully lead to more cultural education and understanding. Van Hoof & Verbeeten, (2005) reported that when they asked students what they saw as the greatest benefits of studying abroad, 'by far the most common comments were that it had brought them a greater understanding of other cultures, that it had helped them appreciate their own culture more, it enabled them to learn more about themselves, and that it had enriched them personally'.

The AUCC (2001) stated that recruitment of international students was important to Canada because, 'in terms of long-term interests, international students return to their home countries and become future trading partners and decision makers with an affinity for Canada.' This is supported by Galway (2000) who found that the third most

motivating factor for colleges to engage in international student recruitment was ‘the opportunity to foster international trade links’. In a 2006 *Newsweek* article, Richard Levin stated, ‘The bottom line: the flow of students across national borders - students who are disproportionately likely to become leaders in their home countries - enables deeper mutual understanding, tolerance and global integration’.

Zhao (2006) writes that ‘international students themselves are the best recruiters.’

Therefore, the more international students at an institution, the more that are likely to enroll based on ‘word of mouth’. Students who have a positive experience in an institution ‘will bring a large group of reliable prospective students through their own networks’. Very often word of mouth is the best publicity an institution can get. For example, in one particular study, when students were asked why they had selected the particular institution abroad, the third most popular reason was ‘people I know also go/went there’ (Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005).

Some countries are using recruitment of international students as one means of attracting more people for immigration. The AUCC (2001) reported that, in Australia, for example, the government was actually allowing and encouraging students to apply for permanent residency once they had finished their studies. The fact that they had graduated from an Australian institution was a very positive thing and they were given extra points for this. This research stated that, in 1999, 50 % of new immigrants in Australia in the ‘independent immigrant’ category were people who had formerly graduated from an educational institution in Australia. Similarly, the Canadian government enacted the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. One of the main objectives of this Act is to

ease the entry of students into Canada. CIC (2003) states, 'The new Act also explicitly acknowledges the benefits of a temporary study period in Canada for prospective independent immigrant applicants: persons who have studied or who have a spouse that has studied for two years in Canada can obtain an extra five points under the new selection criteria'. In some of these cases, the international students will opt to remain in the host country and fill vacant positions that cannot be filled by host country nationals, as they are not qualified. Altbach (2004) states

'International students don't just fill seats – they also contribute to the host nation's global competitiveness by swelling the numbers of highly trained people in key disciplines. In some graduate specialties such as engineering, computer sciences, and a few others, foreign students constitute a majority of students at the doctoral level.'

Thus, recruiting foreign students can be very beneficial for the host country in addressing specific labor shortages. Birchard (2006) reported that the Canadian government has recently changed its laws to allow international students who have been in Canada for at least six months to apply immediately for a work permit that will allow them to work full time during academic breaks and 20 hours a week during class terms. This is seen as a positive step to encourage international students to stay on as permanent residents after they graduate and fill the provincial labor shortages.

While many or most of the benefits of recruitment are to the student and the host country/institution, there are also benefits for the 'sending' country. While many of the international students may stay in the host country, many do also return to their home

country. Altbach (2001) reports that ‘foreign educated Chinese and Indian students have had a profound influence on the two countries’. He goes on to say that ‘these returnees not only bring foreign ideas back, they also reinterpret their own culture and society.’ In the foreign country, the schooling they receive, the friends they make, and the culture all influence these students. Altbach’s discussion states that because of the expertise they have acquired in a foreign institution and country, many of the returning graduates ‘frequently achieve positions of leadership in science, higher education, the arts, or in politics or business’, thus, influencing others with their newfound knowledge. These graduates who have returned home ‘serve as a point of ongoing contact and exchange’ between the two countries (Altbach, 2001).

A very important, but perhaps often forgotten, reason is moral purpose. This reason tends to be very often relegated to the bottom of the list as institutions may deem finances and trade relations more important. At a 1998 Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) Annual Conference in Ottawa, Ontario, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) president, Huguette Labelle, spoke to the audience about the Community Colleges participation in national and international education and partnerships. She spoke about the humanitarian side of the community colleges’ involvement and stated,

‘When education and training is accessible to all, it not only improves individual career prospects, it also leads to higher productivity within the economy, creating increased wealth for all. At the same time... (it) helps to enhance democracy and build up people’s empowerment, not only as employers and students, but also as members of the community’.

We must not forget that a prime purpose for educating others is to enhance their lives by building capacity and empowering them. While universities and colleges may financially benefit from this endeavor, they should not negate or forget the fact that it is, simply, ‘the right thing to do’.

Perhaps, combined with moral purpose, the most important reason for international education may be more global and basic. Kofi Annan, in a 2001 speech discussing international education, summed up this reason:

‘Clearly, we need to use education to advance tolerance and understanding. Perhaps more than ever, international understanding is essential to world peace - understanding between faiths, between nations, between cultures. Today, we know that just as no nation is immune to conflict or suffering, no nation can defend itself alone. We need each other - as friends, as allies, as partners - in a struggle for common values and common needs.

Globalization, migration, economic integration, communication, and travel are bringing different races, cultures, and ethnicities into ever-closer contact with each other. More than ever before, people understand that they are being shaped by many cultures and influences, and that combining the familiar with the foreign can be a source of powerful knowledge and insight.’

Trends in International Student Mobility

The most evident general trend that we see in international students and international education is that the field is set to grow at an enormous rate. Bohm, et al (2002) report

that demand is forecast to increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million international students in 2025.

The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) publishes UNESCO's 2006 Global Education Digest (GED). The UIS is the UN depository for global statistics in the fields of education, science and technology, culture and communication. The state of tertiary education was the focus of the 2006 report. Due to the complexity involved with collecting data on such a worldwide level, the results published are two years old. In this document – which provides a plethora of information and statistics - the term 'internationally mobile students' is used and it defined as 'those who study in foreign countries where they are not permanent residents'. We can equate this to our definition of 'international student' used in this research. The report stated that, overall, in 2004, the numbers of international students had reached an all-time high of approximately 2.5 million. The authors explain that there have been three notable surges in growth of international mobile students in the past 30 years:

Wave #1: Between 1975 -1980, rise of 30% (from 800,000 to just over 1 million).

Wave #2: Between 1989 –1994, rise of 34%.

Wave #3: Between 1999 – 2004, the largest increase of 41% (1.75 million to 2.5 million).

The UNESCO document (2006) also lists a number of global trends; some of which relate to Chinese International students:

- The largest groups of mobile students come from East Asia and the Pacific (701,000 or 29% of the world total) and Western Europe (407,000 or 17%).
- The number of mobile students from Western Europe has stagnated over the past five years, while it has increased in East Asia and the Pacific. As a result, the Western European share in the distribution of mobile students has dropped from 22% to 17%, while the East Asian and the Pacific share has risen from 24% to 29%.
- With 14% of the total number of mobile students, China is the single most important country of origin followed by India, the Republic of Korea, Japan and Germany. Regions and countries also differ with respect to the destination of their mobile student populations. Indicators on student flows show where students from a given region or country go to study.
- 77% of Western European mobile students stay within their region of origin, as does a high proportion, around 40%, from North America and East Asia and the Pacific.
- Language is a key factor determining student choice in destination. For example, Belgium and France are the most popular destinations for francophone students from sub-Saharan Africa.

So, where are all these students coming from?? Bohm et al (2002) state that Asia will dominate the global demand for international higher education. These authors reported that, by 2025, Asia will represent some 70% of total global demand - an increase of 27 percentage points from 2000. They went on to say that within Asia, China and India will

represent the key growth drivers - generating over half of the global demand in international higher education by 2025. Similarly, Altbach, et al (2004) reported that 80% of the world's foreign students will come from Asian countries. While these authors do not agree with each other as to the precise percentage, there is no denying that they both agree that Asia is, and will be, the biggest resource of international students.

The GED stated that, of the 132 million tertiary students globally in 2004, 1.8% of them were international students (2,455,250). Of these international students, 700,999 students, or 28.5%, were from 'East Asia and the Pacific'. The two countries of China and India made up 466,685 of this population – nearly 20% of the total market. By itself, China accounted for almost 14% of the entire population of international students in 2006 (343,126). If these percentages remain stable, and the population of international students meets the forecasted numbers of 7.2 million, then, it is anticipated that China, by itself, will have 1,008,000 students who will be heading to foreign countries to take up their studies.

To sum, in 2004, East Asia and the Pacific had the largest group of students abroad: more than 700,000 or 29% of the global total (UNESCO, 2006). The report goes on to say that in absolute terms, China is the largest country of origin in the world, accounting for 14% of all mobile students. Japan and the Republic of Korea follow as the region's second- and third-most common countries of origin. Notably, 40% of mobile students actually remain in the region. Another 34% travel to North America and 25% go to Western Europe to pursue their education. Very few study anywhere else.

Where are these students going? UNESCO (2006) reports that six countries host 67% of the world's mobile students: the United States (23%), the United Kingdom (12%), Germany (11%), France (10%), Australia (7%) and Japan (5%). Mobile international student populations grew almost three times as fast as domestic enrolment in these host countries, 41% compared to 15%.

Definition of adjustment

The topic of 'adjustment' has been researched quite extensively through the lens of many fields of study – education, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and counseling.

Subsequently, there is a vast body of Literature on this phenomenon. The terms 'adjustment', 'acculturation', and 'culture shock' can, and have, all been used in relation to international students. While adjustment and acculturation can refer to processes, culture shock can refer to a state of being.

While there have been several very popular theories proposed to describe the process of culture shock, perhaps the most well known is by Oberg (1960). He states that there are four stages of emotional reactions related to cross-cultural adjustment.

- Honeymoon stage - characterized by the initial excitement, curiosity, and enthusiasm of the newly arrived individual.

- Crisis stage - the individual will likely have feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anger, anxiety, and depression.
- Recovery stage – the individual is better able to function in the new culture due to the resolution of his/her feelings and new cultural learning that has taken place.
- Adjustment stage – the individual is able to enjoy and function competently in the new environment or culture.

An interesting note is that individuals typically don't necessarily go through these stages in order and they may return to any one of these stages through their development.

Oberg (1960) went on to list six negative characteristics associated with culture shock:

- Strain or stress relating to psychological adaptation;
- A sense of loss or deprivation resulting from the removal of friends, status, role, and personal possessions;
- Fear of rejection by or rejection of the new culture;
- Confusion in role definition;
- Unexpected anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding cultural differences; and
- Feelings of helplessness, including confusion, frustration and depression.

When it comes to defining acculturation, Rudmin (2003), reports that there are 126 different taxonomies. One of the more prolific researchers and writers, Berry (2005), summarizes acculturation as, 'the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members...(it) involves various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups'. Berry

also proposed one of the best-known models for acculturation, known as Bidirectional Acculturation. In this model, he states that an individual adjustment to a new culture can take place in four ways:

- Integration – this is an individual’s desire to belong to the majority culture
- Assimilation – the extent to which a person feels he/she has acculturated into the majority culture at the expense of his/her own culture.
- Rejection/separation – the tendency to reject the majority culture and to maintain one’s own culture.
- Deculturation/marginalization – the extent to which an individual feels that he/she cannot identify with either their own culture or the majority culture.

Because of the volumes of research completed in this area, there is no consensus on a single definition of adjustment. There are an almost unending number of definitions of adaptation or acculturation or culture shock. However, the construct of adjustment that the author chooses to employ is from Anderson (1994). This definition was chosen because of many factors. First, it refers to adjustment as a process – something that is ongoing in nature. Secondly, it conveys the idea that adjustment is unique to the individual – one has to go through his or her own process, which can be quite different than someone else’s adjustment process. Another reason why the author chose this definition is that it explains that each individual may exhibit a broad range of behaviors or levels of adaptation - again, emphasizing the individual nature of the process. Finally, the six general principles allow us to see that this is not a quick one time ‘state’ that a

person finds themselves in and there is only one road or one solution – adjustment is a continuum of responses and feelings/behaviors.

Anderson's (1994) definition states:

Cross-cultural adaptation is a grab bag term that encompasses the commonplace process of learning to live with change and difference - in this instance, a changed environment and different people, different norms, different standards, and different customs.

Adjustment is a complex, cyclical, and recursive process of overcoming obstacles and solving problems in present-environment transactions. It is the individual who chooses how to respond, and in so doing creates his or her own adjustment. Cultural adaptation is a continuum. Sojourners exhibit a broad range of degrees, modes, and levels of adaptation. There are six general principles applying to cross-cultural adaptation that flow from the proposed model:

- It involves adjustments;
- It implies learning;
- It implies a stranger-host relationship;
- It is cyclical, continuous, interactive;
- It is relative; and
- It implies personal development.

Adjustment issues of international students

The idea that international students experience transition and adjustment difficulties when engaging in international education is not new. There has been research in this area for some time. For example, as early as 1963, researchers were conducting studies on attitudes and social relations of foreign students (Selltitz et al, 1963). International students face a myriad of change and may have difficulty adjusting in a wide variety of areas. Although there are great differences individually, many students must deal with a number of monumental changes. Zhai (2004) reported that international students in his study listed adjusting to academic stress, cultural differences, and language challenges within the U.S. Higher Education system as their three most significant challenges.

In an excellent article by Maureen Snow Andrade entitled, '*International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors*', the author provides an overview of research with respect to the adjustment and academic achievement of international students. She notes that most of the studies reviewed were published between 1996 and 2005 and came from the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. In her article, Andrade (2006) states that there are several significant insights into international students' challenges and successes at English-speaking universities. I have chosen to highlight and summarize a few of the author's insights:

- (1) International students have greater and different adjustment challenges than domestic students; however, they may be more academically engaged. In general, they have difficulties with English language and culture and experience more

- anxiety, stress, homesickness, and loneliness, and have less social support than domestic students.
- (2) International students may need different types and levels of support depending on such factors as years in school, level of study (graduate or undergraduate), immigration status, age, gender, country of origin and educational background.
 - (3) The process of adjustment appears to be gradual.
 - (4) Faculty often misinterpret the behaviors of international students and need greater understanding of their academic, social, emotional, and psychological challenges. Faculty can make pedagogical adjustments to support the learning needs of international students.
 - (5) International students are academically successful, often due to compensating strategies related to academic skills, motivation, and effort. International students are generally satisfied with their experiences in English-speaking universities, but possibly more so with academic aspects than social aspects.

As most of the Literature is based upon foreign students (non-native English speakers) coming to English speaking countries (specifically, the United States, and to a lesser degree, the United Kingdom and Australia) to study, not surprisingly, English language proficiency has been rated as one of the most common difficulties. This is further

impacted by the fact that 58% of all international students enrolled in the United States are from Asia. They are from countries such as India, China, Korea, and Japan – countries whose mother tongue is not English (Open Doors, 2006). Although most international students have taken an English proficiency test, usually the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), before being admitted to an American college or university, many still have difficulty with the language. Birrell (2006) studied the results of the English tests required of graduated international students who obtained Australian permanent residence visas in 2005–2006. These tests revealed that at least a third scored below the level normally required for employment as professionals in Australia. The Literature has been very consistent in stating that this area is a huge concern for international students.

Lin & Yi (1997) stated that international students ‘may have difficulty adjusting to the various accents of the instructors and understanding class lectures....often require extra time to read their text books....and are often unable to articulate their knowledge due to their limited vocabulary’. In another study, international students listed English Language as their third biggest concern, noting that they would like more help with pronunciation (Fitzgerald, 1998).

An obvious and huge area of concern for international students is academics. Andrade (2006) stated that, ‘academic adjustment problems for international students tend to focus on language issues’. Zhai (2004) reported that ‘meeting academic demands was the most overwhelming difficulty for international students during their adjustment stage.’ He

went on to say that while language proficiency was the most frequently investigated concern, students in his group felt it was not as stressful as the stress of academics.

International students also have to adapt socially as well, and many find this difficult. Abe et al (1998) found that Asian students had more difficulty adjusting to campus life than international students from non-Asian countries. Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) found that international students experienced less social support than domestic students, most likely because their family and friends were not close and visiting them was difficult and infrequent. Rajapaksa and Dundes (2003) discovered that international students felt more lonely and homesick than domestic students. International students who feel socially connected and who are satisfied with their social networks are less likely to experience acculturative distress (Yeh et al, 2003).

Finances are another major stressor for international students. Lin & Yi (1997) stated that international students must assume a full-time student status while enrolled in school and thus working becomes very difficult. In another study, international students listed finances as a major cause of concern, along with English Language and living/dining (Fitzgerald, 1998).

Thomas & Althen (1989) completed a Literature Review and stated that, based on the articles and studies they had looked at, the international students can suffer from a variety of adjustment issues, which can include:

- Depression

- Helplessness
- Hostility toward the host country
- Anxiety
- Over-identification with the home country
- Withdrawal
- Homesickness
- Loneliness

Lin & Yi (1997) supported this Literature when they stated that, 'Many Asian international students experience the following: pressure from academic demands, language barriers, financial concerns, performance anxiety, depression, loneliness, homesickness, relationship problems, non-assertiveness, individualism and bicultural conflicts, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and paranoia. They often worry about social and political situations in their home country. In addition, they are concerned about the well-being of their families. Also, they worry about securing employment upon graduation. Finally, they may have anxieties about readjustment if they are planning to return to their country'.

Tseng and Newton (2002) summarized the key adjustment problems faced by international students into four categories: 1) general living adjustment, 2) socio-cultural adjustment, 3) personal psychological adjustment, and 4) academic adjustment. General living adjustment include such areas as adjusting to weather/climate, transportation systems, paying bills, health care systems, food, and housing

arrangements. Although these may seem like small details, they can consume much of the students' time and energy. Socio-cultural adjustment refers to experiencing culture shock, discrimination, and getting used to new values, norms, holidays, and customs. Depression, loneliness, feelings of isolation, homesickness and frustration make up the issue of personal psychological adjustment. Academic adjustment is probably the most well known of the four. As mentioned previously, students have difficulty with learning a new educational system, lack of language proficiency, and acquiring new learning strategies.

Lu (2001) found that the main problem areas for international students when they first arrive in the US were 1) communication/language, 2) social/cultural, 3) psychological/personal, 4) financial, 5) housing, 6) food and health areas. After being in the US for 6 months, the same respondents listed the following as their major adjustment issues 1) health, 2) financial, 3) social/cultural, 4) housing & food, 5) communication/language areas.

How international students cope

Most, if not all students who enter Higher Education institutions experience adjustment issues. To help with these transition concerns, institutions have developed help mechanisms that each student can avail of. Such resources may include, but are not limited to, Student Counseling centers, orientation packages & activities, Academic Advising centers, Health center, Student Advisors, Writing Centers, student groups,

Career Centers, International Student Advisor, tutoring, Learning Strategies courses, Math help centers, just to name a few. Because all students have access to help, there is a common belief that they should cope equally and that transition should be smooth and fairly fast. This however, is not the case. Senyshyn et al. (2000) established that Western Europeans and Canadians adjusted more easily than Asians when enrolled in American schools and overall, that males were more satisfied and confident and had fewer difficulties than females.

Although international students have a myriad of adjustment issues and there are numerous institutional resources available to them, many don't avail themselves of these services. Sandhu (1994) reported that many international students would rather suffer with psychological difficulties than speak to a professional counselor due to stigmas associated with mental illness and personal competency. Similarly, Harik-Williams (2003) reported that 'students from Asia endorsed significantly less willingness to seek counseling than did European and African studies'

So, where do international students go for help if they don't use the resources made available by the Higher Education institution? Zhai (2004) reports that with respect to seeking help for personal issues, international students listed friends and family as their preferred sources and that 'In general, international students did not use student services frequently and most of them were not aware of available student services on campus.' He continued to explain that 'most of the students in this study stated that they usually consulted their fellow international students regarding their personal concerns because

their fellow international students spoke the same language, shared the same culture, and had similar adjustment issues; therefore, they were the best people to provide advice.’ Lu (2001) reported that most international students were not aware that many of the institutional services were in existence or were available. She also went on to say that it takes about two terms for international students to become aware of the existence of some services.

Prior research has supported the idea that international students do not avail of the institutions’ resources when dealing with personal issues. For example, Hayes & Lin (1994) stated that international students in their research often rely on the informal social support resources (e.g., family members and friends) instead of using more formal mechanisms (e.g. counseling centers) to address their mental health concerns. Johnson (1993) reported that one group of international students did not use the services provided to them and listed two reasons: 1) perceptions that the staff did not care about their problems and 2) they simply preferred to keep their problems to themselves and seek help from family and friends. Even in the area of academics, Al-Mubarak (1999) reported that the students in his study would rather turn to friends for help than a professor.

Zhai (2004) did point out that, in his study, international students used the Office of International Education (OIE) most frequently ‘for such student services as visas, traveling, legal problems, or financial difficulties, but not for personal issues.....and that OIE advisers are the most trusted university staff for international students’. Fitzgerald (1998) noted in her study that international students named the program co-coordinator or

the international student advisor as the most sought out resource when they needed help with their problems.

Chinese international students

Although we cannot group all Chinese international students into one category and assume that they are a totally homogeneous group, we can look at some overall characteristics that may help us to understand them better. As the trend of foreign study continues in China, the 2006 UNESCO Global Education Digest reports that the top five destinations of choice for Chinese International Students were U.S.A., Japan, United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany.

Why do so many Chinese choose to pursue international study? Situ et al (1994) found that the predominant factor that enticed Chinese students to undertake foreign study was the unwavering desire to pursue a graduate level degree.

The Chinese have a strong and well-defined set of cultural values that may affect some Chinese international students and how they adjust to a new culture. This is not to say that all Chinese follow and/or practice these values, but they are a very strong part of the Chinese culture. Kim et al (1999) organized Asian values into 14 value domains. While this was based on Asia as a whole, after much research on the topic, I felt that this is a good general summary of Chinese cultural values – if we can indeed assume that they can be summarized. While individuals may vary from these values, it is an overall picture of what is important in Chinese society as a whole. These values are:

- **Ability to Resolve Psychological Problems** – One should be able to resolve psychological problems on one’s own using one’s inner resources and willpower.
- **Avoidance of Family Shame** - Family reputation is a primary social concern.
- **Collectivism** - Individuals should think about the welfare of the group before their own welfare.
- **Conformity to Family and Social Norms and Expectations** - It is important to follow and conform to the expectations that one’s family and the society have for one.
- **Deference to Authority Figures** - Authority figures are deserving of respect.
- **Educational and Occupational Achievement** - Educational and occupational achievement should be an individual’s top priorities.
- **Filial Piety** - Children are expected to obey their parents.
- **Importance of Family** - Obligation to the family as a whole and a commitment to maintaining family well-being.
- **Maintenance of Interpersonal Harmony** - In a disagreement, one should overlook differences in an effort to maintain harmony.
- **Placing Other’s Needs Ahead of One’s Own** - An individual should consider the needs of others before considering his or her own.
- **Reciprocity** - An individual should repay another person’s favor.
- **Respect for Elders and Ancestors** - Ancestors and elders should be viewed with reverence and respect.
- **Self-Control and Restraint** – One should exercise restraint when experiencing strong emotions.

- **Self-Effacement** - It is important to minimize or depreciate one's own achievements.

Chen (2004) further supported these broad values by listing Chinese values based on relationships, intrapersonal, and family. These are:

Relationship oriented values

- group-oriented,
- virtue based,
- altruistic,
- peace-based (seeks to avoid conflict),
- interdependent,
- defers to authority figures,
- maintains harmony and values cooperation, authority, conformity,
- places the needs of others ahead of one's own.

Intrapersonal oriented values

- self as a part of a group
- value social external expectations
- big self (Public Self)
- integral part of cosmos
- value Zen philosophy
- values self-control, restraint; self-effacement

- non-assertive
- self-sacrifice as a virtue
- collective identity
- “We” consciousness
- looser boundary of “personal” privacy
- self-criticism

Family oriented values

- obedience to parents and filial piety
- seek elderly advice
- males and females w/ different roles
- value duties and obligations to family

Adjustment of Chinese international students

While the Literature has an abundance of studies on international student adjustment, most of the research that includes Chinese international students has them grouped into a category called ‘Asian’. This group usually contains students from such areas as Korea, India, Japan, and China. In the Literature, there are many fewer studies focused only on Chinese international students and even less again focused solely on Chinese international students who study in a non-US English speaking country. While there is no doubt that all international students may share some common challenges, ‘treating international students as a homogeneous group ignores issues of gender, culture, and

power, and places individuals at greater risk for marginalization within our institutions of higher learning' (Popadiuk, 2004). A study of the Literature in the area of adjustment issues and Chinese international students finds that there has been only a small amount of research in that area.

Feng (1991) found that there were four principal areas of concern with Chinese international students: (1) financial difficulty; (2) cultural differences; (3) academic concerns and (4) language ability. These four broad categories were supported by Xu (2002) who found that Chinese international students experienced difficulties caused mainly by a language deficiency and a lack of awareness of the differences in teaching and learning between their home institutions and their institution in the US. Such difficulties included differences in expectations and in student performance assessment for courses. Sun et al (1997) also reported on the difficulties in lack of language proficiency, the deficiency in cultural awareness, and academic achievement. The findings in this study suggested that the academic difficulties were produced by the differences between Chinese and American teaching and learning styles. The subjects also had difficulty handling the environment of an American university.

Lin (1998) reported that the Chinese international students studying in the United States in her study perceived these adjustment issues:

1. Academic adjustment problems – including language difficulties; problems due to differences between the educational systems of China and the US; problems concerning curriculum/program relevance, changing of academic majors, and

- completing school work; and problems in interacting with classmates & professors.
2. Socio-cultural adjustment problems – including language & financial difficulties, cultural segregation & racial discrimination; food & health problems; religious problems, and difficulties with housing, transportation, international student advisement, security, marital/dating, religious, taxes, insurance, and shopping.

Ingman (1999) indicated that Chinese students experience lower social adjustment and higher levels of social anxiety. Chinese students were rated as having lesser overall social skills (as defined by American norms) than their American counterparts. Another study compared Chinese-descent international students studying in the United States with American students (who were also studying in the U.S.) and Chinese descent students studying in Taiwan. They found that the Chinese students studying in the United States reported significantly higher social alienation than Chinese students in Taiwan or American students, and significantly higher social loneliness than Chinese students in Taiwan (Hsu, Hailey, & Range, 1987).

Wang et al (2006) stated that many Chinese international students experience an internal conflict between keeping their Chinese culture identity and aspiring toward the American political and economic systems.

Holmes (2005) stated that, 'Chinese students entering educational institutions in New Zealand face challenges resulting from the education, socialization, and communication

they have experienced in their first culture learning environments'. In this study, the participants were 'ethnic Chinese' who were from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, or Taiwan. He reports two key findings:

1. 'Chinese students encountered considerable differences in communication with New Zealand students in the classroom, especially in the contexts of asking and answering questions, giving opinions and expressing ideas, managing interpersonal skills in cooperative learning contexts such as group work, and in interaction with teachers. Further, much of these differences...were strongly influenced by Chinese - New Zealand cultural differences in interpersonal communication patterns'.
2. 'Participants ...demonstrated considerable reconstruction of their intercultural communication patterns in light of their communication experiences with New Zealand students and teachers'.

In one of the very few research studies looking at Chinese international student adjustment in Singapore, Tsang (2001) studied Chinese students and academics in regards to seven factors. These factors include prior international experience, pre-departure knowledge, language competence, self-efficacy, extroversion, association with locals, and social support. His hypothesis was that each of these factors 'is positively related to (a) general adjustment and (b) interaction adjustment'. The results showed that, 'With the exception of prior international experience, the other six factors significantly affected general and/or interaction adjustment for at least one of the samples.....pre-departure knowledge and social support were relatively significant

factors, among the seven, in affecting adjustment'. Tsang summarized by saying that 'even if the host culture is somewhat similar to the home culture, the sojourner still needs to adjust to the host institutional environment that can differ by a great deal from that of his or her home country'.

When discussing future research, the author states that, 'While quantitative research enables the researcher to statistically test and compare the magnitudes of the relationships between different constructs, it fails to generate the rich insights that can only be obtained by, say, in-depth interviews with respondents'.

How Chinese international students cope

Chinese students tend to follow the trend of many international students in regards to using the resources that an institution has put in place. Jarrahi (2004) reported that Chinese students underutilized counseling services. They tended to pursue informal sources of support rather than professional ones. The author went on to list the barriers to counseling as consisting of:

- lack of knowledge about the counseling center's existence on campus
- lack of knowledge about the function of a counseling center
- lack of advertising/ no word of mouth about the counseling center
- a perceived lack of need – students believed that they would be able to successfully deal with their problems on their own.
- concerns about loss of privacy

- lack of affordability
- low interest in pursuing counseling
- anxiety about language and cultural barriers.

Interestingly, Lippincott et al (1995) concluded that Asian students are much more likely than American students to report somatic complaints to a physician as a result of this denial of a psychological problem.

Some Chinese international students cope by developing social networks – either through traditional methods or by using online ethnic social groups. Ye (2006) completed research on the relationships between cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States and the support that they perceive they receive from traditional support networks and online ethnic social groups. Her results suggested that ‘perceived support from interpersonal networks in the host country and from online ethnic social groups was negatively related to social difficulties, while perceived support from interpersonal networks and long-distance networks in the home country was negatively associated with mood disturbance. The study also found that, compared to those who had lived in the United States for a longer period of time, new arrivals reported higher perceived support from online ethnic social groups’.

Lin (1998) reported that Chinese international students in the US listed the following ten sources of help for their adjustment issues: 1) self, 2) professors, 3) Chinese friends, 4) Chinese student organizations, 5) Americans in general, 6) other international students, 7)

family, 8) church, 9) Office of International Services (OIS) and 10) internet. The author also reported that two general attitudes came through: 1) active participation/approach and 2) passive escape/acceptance.

Singapore

As far as history goes, Singapore is a fairly new nation: only becoming an independent sovereign nation in 1965. This city-state, made up of one main island with 63 surrounding islands, has a population of almost four million – consisting of approximately 77% Chinese, 14% Malays, 8% Indians, and 1% Eurasians and people of other descent (Uniquely Singapore, 2006). While there are four official languages in Singapore: Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English, English is the language of business and administration while Malay is the national language.

Singapore has few natural resources and thus, it has concentrated on its people. As a response to globalization and as a means to position itself as a hub for Asia, Singapore has set out to advance itself as a ‘knowledge based economy’. As Sanderson (2002) stated, ‘Singapore is on a mission to develop a knowledge-based economy which will transform it into a global hub of knowledge-driven industries with world-class capabilities’.

The Economic Review Committee (ERC), located in the Ministry of Trade and Industry Department of the Singapore government, has released a number of reports and

recommendations. One of these reports, '*Panel recommends Global Schoolhouse concept for Singapore to capture bigger slice of US\$2.2 trillion world education market*' quoted a Senior Minister: "The global education market is estimated to be worth US\$2.2 trillion. Singapore, with our strong academic reputation, excellent infrastructure, business hub standing and cosmopolitan society, is well-poised to tap the growing education market. Education will continue to present a great business opportunity for Singapore." This report goes on to say that, 'based on the latest Department of Statistics data (2000), the education services sector contributes 1.9 per cent of Singapore's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With a concerted long-term approach in developing the education industry in Singapore, the industry has the potential to contribute 3 to 5 per cent of the GDP, which would be comparable to established education hubs such as the UK and Australia. The growth is expected to come from the increases in spending by institutions as well as the spending of full-fee paying international students and executive trainees.

One main method of achieving this increase was the 'Global Schoolhouse Project'.

Sidhu (2005) outlined the 3 steps of this strategic plan:

- First, world-class universities will be solicited to establish a base in Singapore. These well-established and respected universities are expected to 'attract students from Asia, bring in for foreign talent, raise the intellectual and educational standards of Singapore, and establish industry-university links to increase the potential for commercialization of new technologies and new industries'.
- Second, recruitment of international students

- Third, to encourage local universities towards an entrepreneurial American mindset while also, at the same time, strengthening the local, private higher education for-profit sector.

Sidhu (2005) goes on to state that the end goal of the Global Schoolhouse strategic plan is to increase Singapore's 'competitiveness by expanding its economic space beyond its geographical boundaries'.

In 1997, Singapore's Minister of Education issued a press release. In it, it stated that the Singapore universities will 'attract bright foreign students, who should fill 20% of their intake by 2000'. In 2002, a government economic review panel, understanding the forecasted rise in international student population, urged Singapore to increase its presence in the world education market (Singapore Education Development Board, 2006). The panel felt that Singapore could draw in brand-name institutions as well as international students. The target was set: to attract 150 000 international students to Singapore by 2015. The article goes on to say that Singapore's international student intake has increased from less than 50,000 international students in 2002 to 72,000 international students in 2005.

Sanderson (2002) states that, with regard to international students in Singapore, 'there are two features of the international student program which are most striking. The first is that the international students (who come mostly from other ASEAN countries) pay only 10 per cent more for tuition than Singaporeans. The second striking feature of

Singapore's international student program is that all students who take advantage of the Government subsidy (called a Tuition Grant) are bonded to stay and work in Singapore for three years after completing their study.'

So serious is Singapore about international education that, in 2003, the Singapore government launched 'Singapore Education' - a multi-government agency whose aim was to 'establish and promote Singapore as a premier education hub and help international students make an informed decision on studying in Singapore' (Singapore Education, 2006). According to this website, there are many agencies involved, such as the Educational Services Division of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB), the International Enterprise Singapore (IE), SPRING Singapore, and the Ministry of Education Singapore (MOE).

Singapore has positioned itself as the educational hub of Asia. Sanderson (2002) mentioned that most of the international students come from surrounding ASEAN countries. However, there are increasingly more and more students from other parts of the world who are choosing Singapore as a study destination. The Institute of International Education (2007) states that 'Currently more than 80,000 international students from more than 120 nationalities are studying in Singapore. These students are mostly from China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and Myanmar.'

Currently there are three Singaporean public universities: Nanyang Technological University (NTU), the National University of Singapore (NUS), and the Singapore

Management University of Singapore (SMU). The Institute of International Education (2007) states that ‘In the 2006 World University Rankings conducted by the Times Higher Education Supplement, the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University were ranked 19 and 61 respectively out of the top 200 universities worldwide. The Singapore Management University (SMU), which opened its doors in 2000, is modeled after the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business and aims to groom outstanding business leaders and creative entrepreneurs capable of excelling in a rapidly changing and dynamic world.’ In 2008, plans to open a fourth Singaporean public university were announced.

Besides the Singaporean public universities that exist in Singapore, there are also many other foreign universities that have chosen Singapore as place to set up a branch campus.

While there is no definitive list available, the universities include:

- University of New Brunswick
- INSEAD
- The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business (Chicago GSB)
- New York University Tisch School of the Arts
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration
- S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research Center of Management
- James Cook University

Many other universities also have offshore programs in Singapore. Again, there is no definitive list but these include:

- University of Bradford, UK
- University of Wales, UK
- Edith Cowan University, Australia
- Grenoble Graduate School of Business
- Oklahoma City University, USA
- Southern Cross University, Australia
- Ottawa University, USA
- University of Western Australia, Australia
- University of Nottingham, UK
- University of Wollongong, Australia
- University of Newcastle, Australia
- University of London, UK
- California State University, Long Beach, USA
- Loughborough University, UK

Cultural similarities & differences between China and Singapore

As previously mentioned, approximately 77% of Singapore's population is ethnic Chinese and thus, one would expect it to be very culturally similar to China. After all, cultural aspects such as language and festivals are similar. However, this may not be the case. In his article, Tsang (2001) compares two prior studies: a 1980 study by Hofstede

and a 1987 study by Shenkar and Ronen. Here, the cultures of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan were assessed and the result was that these three societies were more similar to each other than they were individually to China.

Tsang comments further on the similarities and differences between China and Singapore by stating 'it is reasonable to say that the two cultures are closer together than they are separately with cultures of most other countries. It is also reasonable to expect convergence, instead of divergence, of the two cultures'. He also states, 'Despite the cultural similarity, Singapore and China are very different in some other aspects, such as political and economic systems'.

What can institutions do to help international students?

The adjustment and transition issues of international students have been researched quite extensively and thus, there is a fairly clear picture available of what concerns they have. A number of researchers have made suggestions as to what Higher Education institutions can do in order to allow international students to make a successful transition.

Zhai (2004) recommended several practices/programs in order to alleviate the adjustment issues faced by many international students when entering the United States. These are summarized:

1. Enhance academic orientation

- Implement an effective orientation program stressing the academic aspects of the US. University personnel should discuss academic demands in U.S. classrooms and strategies to cope with academic stress because they should recognize that academic achievement is the highest priority for most international students. Provide information about the US before the international student leave their home country. This is to prepare them for differences they might encounter.
2. Improve international student counseling
 - Counselors should take the initiative to find out if international students need any help and help them make better connections with the Office of International Education (OIE). Provide more assistance in dealing with the cultural shock and adjustment to the U.S. academic demands.
 3. Strengthen language support
 - Help strengthen the language of international students. Possible suggestions include: providing “conversation partners” programs to more international students, or organizing workshops that focus on different aspects of communication (e.g. American sayings, slang, body language), or even having the ESL department design an effective curriculum for international students.
 4. Increase interaction with American students.
 - Create programs that enhance interaction between local American students and international students.

5. Establish social connections for international students

- Promote contact among fellow international students. They can act as mentors to new international students. Institutions must be persistent in reaching out international students and must ensure that they explicitly inform international students of the student services and other resources available to them.

Similarly, a 2005 study by Mehdizadeh offered policy recommendations to universities to aid in the transition of international students. These recommendations included:

- Send more detailed pre-arrival information for the students about childcare facilities, housing opportunities, ethnic minority communities' activities, and financial considerations. Universities should try to encourage better planning and try to develop a more realistic picture of students' expectations about university life.
- Offer multicultural training workshops to those who come into contact with international students.
- Create awareness about dependent and independent learning methods and encourage home students to have more interaction with international students.
- Assist the international students in the best ways they (the university) can.
- Providing assistance to international students requires taking into account cultural and religious restrictions, particularly in providing social and official receptions and leisure activities in the university to suit all students' needs with different backgrounds. An institution receiving international students should take overall

responsibility for the well being of their students during their stay....universities should provide students with opportunities for temporary' employment to overcome their financial difficulties.

Another article in the Literature suggested that Higher Learning institutions place foreign ESL students in separate English courses that will 'provide a sheltered environment to ESL students, allowing them to develop a sense of community with their peers' (Braine, 1994). Here, international students can get early intervention that may alleviate some of their distress around language programs while not feeling anxious or intimidated.

Improved language skills may lead to increased academic success. Wan (1992) reported that 'students with stronger language skills were less likely to view academic situations as stressful and believed they were more able to cope with the stress they did experience'.

Lin and Yi (1997) studied Asian students' adjustment to American schools and gave examples of how the Higher Education Institution and the community could address the adjustment issues of international students during the four stages of adjustment. The following is a summarized version of their suggestions:

Stage 1: Pre-Arrival Adjustment Stage

The main goal is to prepare any necessary information before students' arrival to reduce their anxiety and possible cultural shock. Information about the adjustment process, the new culture, the geographic environment, the new education system, financial requirements, and housing information should be sent out to all prospective students.

Stage 2: The Initial Adjustment Stage

This starts with students' arrival and lasts for six months. The main goal is to continue orienting students and reducing cultural shock. Many ongoing activities were suggested, such as picking up students in the airport, assisting students with moving in or finding housing, helping orient to the community (e.g., food shopping, transportation system) and holding a welcoming gathering. Provide much information about the new culture and traditions, language and university adjustment, stress management, sexual and racial harassment, financial planning resources, banking system, health care system, counseling services, university rules and regulations. Also, helping students network (e.g., on and off campus organizations) may be beneficial.

Stage 3: The On-going Adjustment Stage

This starts after the sixth month and lasts until their graduation. The main goal is to help international students to achieve a balance between participating in the new culture and maintaining their own cultural identities. Networking in this stage is very important – both with domestic students and with other students from the home country. This will help the international student achieve a balance and will help them learn the social skills of the host country, provide companionship, practice their English. Also, provide the international student with resume writing and job hunting strategies.

Stage 4: Return-Home Adjustment Stage

This starts upon graduation and lasts for six month after returning home. The main goal is to help students to anticipate the return home readjustment process, prepare for employment opportunities, and reduce return home anxiety.

Instructors in Higher Education institutions can, individually, can do much to help ease the transition of an international student. Lin & Yi, (1997) remind us that it is very important that institution personnel be knowledgeable and sensitive to the issues of the particular international students that they are serving. Ladd & Ruby (1999) make several suggestions for instructors. First, instructors can enhance understanding by lessening their use of idioms-forms of speech that cannot be understood from the individual meanings of their elements. Second, at the beginning of the term, they can meet after class with the international students specifically to discuss methods of teaching, expectations, class rules, and so forth, as well as the students' concerns about the system. Other suggestions include telling international students that it is acceptable to disagree with the instructors and then prove it by responding positively when students challenge their ideas. Also, the instructor should speak directly to the students about common classroom practices inherent in the host country, such as cheating, plagiarism, attendance, tardiness, and self-directed learning. Finally, the instructor should explain his or her expectations to the students and then offer to help them accomplish their goals. Any programs developed should be designed to be as comprehensive as possible so as to cover all of the adjustment issues. Also, institutions may wish to continue programs over several years, as the process of adjustment is gradual and may even plateau in the second year (Andrade, 2006).

To aid international students with their transition, many institutions now have developed a new position that provides a lifeline to many. This position is called the International Student Advisor (ISA), although the actual title of the position may vary from institution to institution. The International Student Advisor's role is to provide programs and services to international students, such as assisting students with immigration matters, providing orientation sessions, organizing airport reception, assisting with finding living accommodations, and helping students during their adjustments to their new environment (Parsons, 2000). The International Student Advisor is also usually the students' initial contact person while they are in their home country and continues to be a source of assistance and support for the duration of the students' time at the foreign institution. Many times, this position is often an advocate for the international student and the issues that they face.

Institutions and counsellors should develop programs that build community and connections for international students (Yeh et al, 2003). Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) found that the more international students interacted with host nationals, the greater their adjustment. They suggested that 'the type of social support may be even more important than the amount of social support. Specifically, among international sojourners, it appears that contact, friendship, and support provided specifically by host county nationals may be more important in the long run for facilitating better adjustment and reducing strain.' Abe et al (1998) found that, of the international students that participated in their study, those who participated in the International Peer Program (IPP)

showed significantly higher social adjustment scores than the nonparticipatory international students. Similarly, Wan (1992) stated that students who believed they had a stronger social support network perceived themselves to be more capable of coping with stressful academic situations. Westwood et al (1990) conducted a study over a four year period and revealed that overall achievement rates are higher and drop-out rates were lower for those first-year students who participated in a peer program with host national students. Kashima et al (2006) found that international students with more local ties were psychologically better adjusted and had greater knowledge of the host culture. Thus, building relationships with the local residents seemed important for international students. This has important implications for institutions as they try to enhance transition for foreign students. Given this data, institutions may wish to make more opportunities for international and domestic students to socialize as well as work together in groups, thus helping to build relationships.

Summary

International education and students have been in existence for centuries but, today, the numbers of students choosing to study outside of their homeland is at an all time high. Recruitment is on-going and very active. International education provides many benefits for the host country, the individual institution, domestic students, and, of course, the foreign students. It also means that there are huge adjustment and transition issues faced by these students. International student adjustment is high on the radar now of most institutions that seek to attract them. Much research has been completed in this area and

many suggestions put forth on how post-secondary institutions can ease the transition. China is, and is predicted to continue being, the number one source of international students. Their specific adjustment concerns are the focal point of this research. With the increase in the number of international students expected, specifically the increase of Chinese international students, adjustment issues and services needed to alleviate these concerns, will remain a serious concern to Higher Education institutions.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to address how this research study was conducted and to provide a description of the methodology used. A qualitative approach was used to explore the thoughts of Chinese international students on their adjustment to studying in a university in Singapore. Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in the fall of 2007.

Design of the study

This study explored the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of Mainland Chinese international students who were studying at a university in Singapore. The focus was to understand their perceptions of the adjustment issues they faced as international students. There are many critical elements that I feel made the qualitative approach the best method to study the topic of Chinese international students' perceptions of their adjustment to living and studying in a university in Singapore.

The purpose of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, experience, role, group, or interaction (Locke et al, 2000). The authors go on to say that the focus of qualitative research is to draw attention to the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The explanations they give, the feelings that they express, and what they say they believe are treated as reality. Lichtman ((2006) states that the main purpose of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience. Similarly, Merriam (1998) states that qualitative research helps us to

understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. She also goes on to say that qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. In this research, I wanted to understand what adjustment issues Chinese international students faced as they studied in a foreign country. I encouraged them to describe their feelings and thoughts about these phenomena to me.

Merriam (1998) states that there are several key characteristics of all forms of qualitative research. First, the key concern is ‘understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s’. I endeavored to elicit as much information and as many opinions from the participants as possible so that I could better understand and be able to describe their struggles as much as possible. Another key characteristic is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This study is no exception – I was the person who conducted the interviews, collected all of the data, and engaged in analysis of these data. A third characteristic is that collecting qualitative data usually involves fieldwork. In order to elicit their most honest and frank thoughts, I physically went to the participants to talk with them in their own setting, where they were most comfortable.

Thus, based on the purpose and characteristics given for qualitative research, I felt that it was the best method to use when ascertaining the opinions and thoughts of Chinese international students.

Qualitative research is actually a general type of research that is made up of four types/approaches – phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded study. I chose to take the phenomenological approach. When conducting a phenomenological research study, Johnson et al (2004) state that ‘a researcher attempts to understand how one or more individuals experience a phenomenon. The goal is to enter the inner world of each participant to understand his or her perspectives and experiences’. Johnson et al (2004) further explain this approach. There are in-depth interviews with up to 10-15 people. Listing significant statements, determining meaning of these statements, and identifying the essence of the phenomenon completes the data analysis. Also, there is rich description of the common characteristics (essence) of the experience.

Interviews

According to Patton (1990) the main purpose of a qualitative interview is to obtain a special kind of information – what is ‘in and on someone else’s mind’. Patton goes on to explain this further:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the word and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those

things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective [p. 196].

Similarly, Rubin et al (1995) suggest that qualitative interviewing is 'a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds'. Kvale (1996) states that the qualitative research interview 'seeks to describe and understand the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say'.

I felt that conducting interviews was the most appropriate and effective way to glean information from the participants. I believed that talking to the Chinese international students face-to-face during an interview would help me to understand better their experiences and perceptions.

Merriam (1998) describes three types of interviews. On one end of the continuum is the highly structured interview, which is questionnaire-driven and very similar to an oral form of a written survey. At the other end of the spectrum is the unstructured interview, which has almost no structure and takes on open-ended conversational formats. The third format is the semi-structured open-ended interview format, which is halfway between the highly structured and the unstructured interview. In this interview type, there is specific information to be obtained and this is guided by a set of questions. However, the questions can change order and/or wording and the interviewer can respond and inquire about new topics that come to light during the interview. Lichtman (2006) elaborates to

say that the general structure is the same for all participants being interviewed but the interviewer can vary the questions as the situation demands.

Upon further investigation into the characteristics of semi-structured interviews, Mason (2002) describes these as core features:

1. There is an interactional exchange of dialogue.
2. There is a relatively informal style – more like a face-to-face conversation than a formal and answer-questioning format.
3. There is a theme or topic-centered approach – the researcher wants to elicit specific information.
4. The job of the interviewer is to ensure that the relevant information is brought into focus.

I chose to collect the data through the semi-structured, open-ended interview technique as I felt that it was the most appropriate method for obtaining the information that I was interested in. I wanted to guide the conversation between the participant and myself and I wanted to make sure that I obtained the information I set out to investigate and that I discussed the same topics with each participant. However, I also wanted them to feel free to answer in their own words and to elaborate on anything they were passionate about. I also wanted the flexibility to delve deeper into any issue that might unexpectedly come to light. Thus, I determined that the semi-structured, open-ended interview technique was the most appropriate for my research.

Based on a review of the Literature, a set of questions was developed in advance and this served as an interview guide (Appendix D). This interview guide helped make the interview more consistent across the many participants but allowed for open and spontaneous dialogue.

Data collection

The original research design procedure was to approach one university to obtain all participants. I had met with a senior administrator at a university and explained my research. When I was ready to begin the interviews, I re-established contact. He was very helpful and told me that he would distribute my letter (Appendix A). From that, I received only two responses. Because the response rate was very low I decided to contact other universities.

Originally, my research design was to contact senior administrative personnel who worked with Chinese International Students, and request a face-to-face meeting. When I approached the second university with this request, I was told that the administrator was very busy and perhaps a telephone call would suffice. I telephoned the person and explained my research and my request. I then followed this up with an email that contained information about my research – including an overview of what I was studying, the introductory letter to students (Appendix A), and the Ethics approval letter that I had received from the University of Toronto.

The third university experience was similar. I was told that I could indeed make an appointment to have a meeting with the administrator but it could not be in the near future as she was very busy for the next week or so. I inquired as to whether she would have the time on the telephone and was able to have a conversation with her and explain my situation and research needs. Again, I followed this up with an email that contained the information about my research. As this procedure worked very well, I decided to adopt it for the remainder of the universities that I contacted. I offered to meet face to face with the Administrator and/or to present my study to the students, should it be a possibility.

In each telephone call, I was careful to explain the purpose of my study and my research needs. I provided the institution with an introductory letter (Appendix A) and asked that they disseminate this information to their Chinese International Students in the most appropriate manner. This letter explained the nature of the research and also explained that the participation from the students was voluntary. Students who were interested and wanted to be interviewed could contact me via email and a convenient meeting time and location would be arranged.

At this meeting, each participant was given an individual letter of informed consent (Appendix B) that they signed prior to the interview being conducted. To ensure their full understanding, I explained this letter to each person in this initial meeting. I stressed the fact that participation in this research was voluntary, they could choose to quit at any

time, they could refuse to answer any of the questions, and that they would remain anonymous.

During the interviews, I kept extensive notes – as I wanted to try to capture as much of what the respondents said as possible. With individual participant permission, interviews were audio taped. However, only seven (7) interviews were recorded as the majority of the participants refused. Those who refused to be taped stated that their English was ‘bad’ and they did not want it on tape. They appeared to not have much confidence in their English speaking ability. Even though I assured them that I would be the only person who would hear it, they still refused. Those who allowed the taping were typically more senior students who had been in Singapore for some time. Their English was very advanced and they appeared to have more confidence when they spoke. None of the participants alluded to any concerns of confidentiality or privacy. Tapes and research notes were kept in a secure place for one year after the completion of my Doctoral program, and then all information was destroyed.

When each of the participants agreed to be interviewed, a convenient location was chosen. I interviewed sixteen of the respondents on their university campus. Of these, six were interviewed in a campus cafeteria/student center while ten were interviewed in an empty classroom. Three students were interviewed at the city library and two of the respondents were interviewed at a local off campus coffee shop – a location of their choosing that was close in proximity to their school. All appeared very comfortable with

the location that they were interviewed in. In total, 21 students from three different institutions were interviewed.

The English proficiency of the respondents ranged from good to excellent, in my opinion. Typically, and as expected, the longer the student had been in Singapore, the better their English was. I simplified my language when needed and there were occasions when a particular word would have to be explained (e.g., homesick) but overall, I felt there were no major issues of cross-cultural/language communication difficulties. Interestingly, if a student had any minor difficulty understanding what I was asking, they could understand the written question on my interview sheet guideline, as their reading comprehension skills appeared to be quite good.

Rapport was very easy to build with these students. They appeared genuinely interested in helping me with my research and appeared relaxed throughout the discussion. Often, the discussion continued after the audio session or ‘official’ interview session had ended. They smiled frequently and appeared comfortable. Although they were informed that they did not have to answer any question that they did not wish to, no one refused any question.

Sample selection

While some of the participants were recruited through the letter (Appendix A) that was presented to Chinese international students, I also used purposeful sampling and the

snowball technique to obtain participants. Those who responded and met the criteria were interviewed.

Patton (2002) states that qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth. In purposeful sampling, participants are selected for inclusion because they are information rich and they offer useful insights into the phenomenon. Locke (2000) points out that only rarely are samples of participants created by random procedures – rather they are more likely to be purposeful. I purposely tried to select participants who were in different years/stages of study within their programs. I felt that these participants could illuminate the issues from different perspectives and would make the data more rounded and complete.

I also used the snowballing sampling technique. Johnson et al (2004) describe this as relying on some the participants to identify others who might wish to be interviewed. Many of the participants in my study were asked if they knew of anyone who would like to be interviewed.

When to end the collection of data is not an exact science in qualitative research. Rather, it is a determination that is very specific to the individual research. Lichtman (2006) discusses this point by stating,

‘Unlike statistical analysis, qualitative analysis has no defined end. You do not create statistical tables or statements about hypotheses. Rather, the process you follow seems to reach a logical saturation point. You collect

your data and analyze your data at the same time. At some point you complete collecting data. That point is often dictated by time or availability of people to interview or scenes to observe. I believe that you will know when you have sufficient data. Glaser (1978) refers to this as theoretical saturation. You find that you are not learning anything new.' [p. 165]

Lincoln and Guba (1985) give four criteria on which to base your decision of when to stop. They include:

1. Exhaustion of sources – no one left to interview
2. Saturation of categories – continuing with the data collection produces tiny increments of new information in comparison to the effort expended to get them
3. Emergence of regularities – the sense of ‘integration’
4. Over-extension – the sense that any new information that is being unearthed is very far removed from the core of any of the categories that have emerged and does not contribute in a useful way to the research.

I chose to end the data collection after I had interviewed twenty-one participants. First of all, I felt that this was a logical saturation point. Many of their stories were very similar and each seemed only to corroborate the other. I felt I was not learning any new information, was not developing any new categories, and that all of the new data could fit easily and logically into already existing categories. Also, the number of students who originally volunteered for this study was low. Through the snowball technique, I was able to recruit and interview twenty-one students in total but that was through effort.

In this research, I chose to focus on undergraduate students only, as this group is well represented in university programs in Singapore. On a personal note, my background is in education and counseling and I was very interested in how these young people adjusted to a new country and a new educational system. I did not target any specific degree programs from which to draw prospective respondents. I wanted to get different perspectives so I chose to interview students from any program and in any year of study. All students in this study were not, and had never been, married. I had chosen to only interview unmarried students as married students may have traveled to Singapore with a spouse and thus, would have a 'built in' support system. Also, for all participants, this university experience was their first time living in and attending school in a foreign country.

Originally, the distribution of participants was to be equally divided with regards to gender. However, in actuality, this was not possible. More females volunteered than males. Even with purposeful sampling and asking participants to recommend specific genders, I was not able to get an equal number of males and females.

The participants were students from the People's Republic of China. This study did not include students from Taiwan, Macau, or Hong Kong. I wanted only students from the People's Republic of China as I felt that students from Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan may not have had similar cultural and educational backgrounds as the PRC students and this might affect how they perceived living and studying in Singapore. The objective of this research was to interview Mainland Chinese students – it was not to interview

individuals from different populations within China. I interviewed anyone who met the criteria and volunteered to be interviewed. In doing so, I was able to interview individuals from a variety of locations in China – some rural, urban, North, South, East, and West – and get a variety of perspectives from them.

The number of original volunteers for this research was relatively low but this was neither unexpected nor surprising. In my experience, people seldom volunteer for anything unless it is very meaningful for them. While I may believe that this population would find this research meaningful, that may not always be the case. Also, I believe that completing an interview in English may have been perceived as an intimidating task for some students and that this perception might have been a factor in why they did not volunteer. I suspect that if I were doing the interviews in Mandarin, I may have had more volunteers.

Data Analysis

The goal of qualitative analysis is to take a large amount of textual data that may be cumbersome and without any clear meaning and interact with it in such a manner that you can make sense of what you gathered (Lichtman, 2006). This is no easy task and there is no one definite ‘right’ way of doing this. I had read Lichtman’s (2006) ‘Three C’s of Analysis’ and tried to follow his process when analyzing the data. In this method, the three C’s stand for Coding, Categorizing, and Identifying concepts.

Coding is the process of marking segments of data (usually text data) with symbols, descriptive words, or category names (Johnson et al, 2004). These codes give meaning to the data that one has collected in the interviewing process. Codes were decided upon after consulting the Literature. No computer software analysis was used in this research. With each successive interview and review of the data collected in that interview, the codes were again reviewed. It was an on-going process.

I then began to group the codes into categories, which is step two of the Lichtman's three C's approach. With each interview, I revised and revisited the categories – always trying to remove the unimportant and make the categories clearer. These can be found in Chapter 4. I was very mindful of Merriam's (1998) important guidelines around forming categories. These are:

1. Categories should reflect the purpose of the research – they are, in essence, the answers to your research questions.
2. Categories should be exhaustive – all the data you think is important should fit into one of the categories you have developed.
3. Categories should be mutually exclusive – each piece of data should fit into only one category
4. Categories should be sensitizing – the names of the categories should give some sense of its nature.
5. Categories should be conceptually congruent – the same level of abstraction should characterize all categories at the same level.

The third category is to develop concepts from the list of categories. These concepts are basically the meaning that one gets from the raw data – in essence; it is the common themes of the data. These can be found in Chapter 5 of this research. While the process and explanations of Lichtman's three C's approach appear very clear in text, implementing it correctly or effectively wasn't always easy. However, it was a good reference and guiding point that did help keep me on track. I was fortunate in that the rich reserve of Literature in the area of adjustment supplied me with many ideas for categories and concepts.

In this study, the final question of the interview asked participants to verbally rate themselves – on a scale of one to ten – on how successful they felt they had been on a number of areas. These ratings were then averaged and compared/contrasted. If the averages showed a difference of two, I deemed this to be a difference worth noting. This tactic was used as a means of verifying or testing my interpretation of what the student said during the interview. For example, if a student stated that he/she found the food to be 'terrible', this rating system verified and further defined what 'terrible' meant as my definition and interpretation of terrible might not have been the same as the interviewee's definition.

While this is a qualitative study, it does include the use of numbers, which, to some, may indicate that it is either a quantitative study or a mixed method study. I would argue that it is qualitative in nature and that the minimal use of numbers is allowable in this type of

study. Glesne & Peshkin (1992) list a number of factors that characterize the qualitative mode of inquiry:

Qualitative Mode of Inquiry

Qualitative mode
<p>Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality is socially constructed • Primacy of subject matter • Variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure • Emic (insider's point of view)
<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualization • Interpretation • Understanding actors' perspectives
<p>Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ends with hypotheses and grounded theory • Emergence and portrayal • Researcher as instrument • Naturalistic • Inductive • Searches for patterns • Seeks pluralism, complexity • Makes minor use of numerical indices • Descriptive write-up
<p>Researcher Role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal involvement and partiality • Empathic understanding

With regard to this list, my research meets all the criteria outlined and thus, fits perfectly within the realm of qualitative research. It is interesting to note that, in this list, the authors state that the qualitative mode ‘makes minor use of numerical indices’. They go on to say, ‘Although some social science researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1989) perceive qualitative and quantitative approaches as incompatible, others (Patton, 1990; Reichardt & Cook, 1979) believe that the skilled researcher can successfully combine approaches. The argument usually becomes muddled because one party argues from the underlying philosophical nature of each paradigm, and the other focuses on the apparent compatibility of the research methods, enjoying the rewards of both numbers and words. Because the positivist and the interpretivist paradigms rest on different assumptions about the nature of the world, they require different instruments and procedures to find the type of data desired. This does not mean, however, that the positivist never uses interviews nor that the interpretivist never uses a survey. They may, but such methods are supplementary, not dominant....Different approaches allow us to know and understand different things about the world....Nonetheless, people tend to adhere to the methodology that is most consonant with their socialized worldview.’ (p. 9)

Seale (1999) supports this stance, and in the conclusion of his chapter ‘Using Numbers’ he states that ‘Through numerous examples, I hope I have shown that it’s possible to maintain a commitment to qualitative work and to use numbers to improve its quality. To exploit fully the potential of numbers in qualitative work, I believe that we need to dispense with the view that researchers can be divided into these two great camps.’

Furthermore, Sandelowski (2001) wrote ‘As in quantitative research, numbers are used in qualitative research to establish the significance of a research project, to document what is known about a problem, and to describe a sample. But they are also useful for showcasing the labor and complexity of qualitative work and to generate meaning from qualitative data; to document, verify, and test researcher interpretations or conclusions; and to represent target events and experiences.’ Dey (1993) states that using numbers to displaying information can allow patterns to ‘emerge with greater clarity’.

In this research, the use of numbers was minimal and there were no intricate statistical analyses performed upon them. The interview and discussion with the participants made up almost the entire interview with this last question being a very small aspect of the conversation. I used the numbers to verify my conclusions, to represent the experiences of the participants, and as a means to supplement the verbal answers of the participants. Thus, while this study does employ numbers, it is a qualitative piece of research.

Use of Theory

Upon reading the current Literature on the topic of theoretical frameworks, there seems to be two distinct positions maintained by those in the research field with relation to the use of theoretical frameworks within qualitative research: those who believe theory has no part in qualitative research and those who believe that theory must absolutely play a part in qualitative research. Many believe that a researcher should use a theoretical framework at the beginning of a study and that this theoretical framework frames all

subsequent parts of the study such as methodology and data collection. Here, the theoretical framework is explicit.

Others believe that it is possible to use theory, but use it implicitly in a study. This means that it is not divulged at the beginning of the study but develops from the results.

Creswell (2003) stated that you could have ‘qualitative studies that contain no explicit theoretical orientation, such as phenomenology, in which inquirers attempt to build the essence of experience from participants.’ Creswell (1994) also stated that in research that is phenomenological in nature, ‘no preconceived notions, expectations, or frameworks guide researchers.’ He went on to state that ‘in a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify. Instead, consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase...’. The inductive model of thinking is described in Creswell (2003) on page 132 as a 5-step process. First, the researcher gathers the information. Then the research asks open-ended questions of the participant and/or records field notes. Thirdly, the research analyzes data to form themes or categories. Next, the research looks for broad pattern, generalizations, or theories from the themes/categories. Finally, the researcher creates generalizations or theories to past experiences and the Literature.

When completing this study, I chose purposely not use explicit theory at the beginning of my research to frame the study. I followed the inductive model of thinking as described by Creswell. There was very little information available about how Chinese international students adjusted in Singapore and thus, one of my goals in this research was to actually

gather information about their adjustment by delving into their thoughts and perceptions. I did not want to set up a theoretical framework at the beginning of the research, as I would then be obliged to prove/disprove when I did not really know what to expect from these students.

However, I did use theory implicitly in this research. I did purposely allude to culture as a factor relating to adjustment by mentioning it early in and throughout the study. I also referenced several authors who have written on the area of culture influence on adjustment. However, as I mentioned, I used this ‘theoretical framework’ in an implicit manner, as I did not want it to control or frame my research.

Validity and Reliability

When qualitative researchers speak of research validity, they are usually referring to qualitative research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible (Johnson et al, 2004). Firestone (1987) discusses the notion that validity and reliability mean different things in qualitative research than in quantitative research. In qualitative research, the research is valid if it provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the conclusions make sense.

Internal validity, according to Merriam (1998), deals with the question of how research findings match reality – are researchers measuring what they think they are measuring, do

researchers' findings really capture what reality is? Merriam further suggests many strategies to enhance internal validity, of which I used the following:

1. Researcher's biases – clarifying the assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study. I was very clear about my worldview and my thoughts/feelings toward the issue of adjustment and studying in foreign countries. I was careful to constantly monitor myself so as to not let my own prejudices be reflected in the research.
2. Member checks – as my interviews progressed, I would get a participant's opinion/input about a comment or quote that another respondent had made. At times in the interviews, the participant and I discussed, in general, any thoughts I had about the data that were collected up to this point. I continually asked them their opinion on the plausibility of the categories I had developed or tentative 'results' I had derived. I found this very helpful – both as a way to increase internal validity and as a sounding board for my own benefit.

Reliability traditionally refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 1998). However, this is problematic in this qualitative research because behavior and thoughts are constantly changing. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested that we view reliability more as the 'dependability' or consistency' of the results. This means that the researcher wants the reader to agree that the results of the data collected make sense and that they are consistent and dependable. So, the real issue to look at is 'are the

results consistent with the data collected?'. Merriam (1998) suggests many strategies to enhance reliability, of which I used the following:

1. Audit trail – I explained, in detail, how the data were collected and how decisions were made throughout the research. This allows the reader to understand how I arrived at my result – even if they are unable to replicate the research.
2. The investigator's position – I have explained any and all assumptions and theories that I used in this research. I have explained how the participants were selected, a description of them, any biases that I may have had throughout the research. It was my hope that by doing this as transparently as possible, it helped enhance reliability.

External validity is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations – i.e., how generalizable are the results? I did not set out to produce a research study that is generalizable to all international students or to, specifically, all Chinese international students. Rather, my original intention was to describe the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of one particular group of students. However, it is natural, and perhaps expected, that readers who are in a similar situation will wonder if these results can be generalized to their specific situation. Merriam (1998) offers some strategies to help with this, of which I have used the following:

Rich, thick description – I have provided a rich description of participants and setting in this research so that any reader will have enough information to determine how closely their situations resemble this research situation and whether or not they feel the findings can be transferred.

Researcher assumptions, orientation and bias

The researcher serves as the filter through which information is gathered, processed, and organized. It is influenced by his or her experience, knowledge, skill, and background (Lichtman, 2006).

In this research, I made some assumptions that must be noted. First of all, I assumed that all participants could communicate their feelings and thoughts adequately using English. Therefore, no translator was used for any part of this research. Also, I assumed that all participants expressed their thoughts and feelings honestly and candidly. To help ensure this, I spent some time at the beginning of each interview talking with the participant to ease any trepidation they might have had. Also, discussion of the consent form was a tool to further ease any tension that may have existed. Furthermore, audio taping of the interview was only completed if the participant felt completely at ease with it. I was cognizant of the fact that many participants may be less willing to share their feelings if they were being taped. I also assumed that international students, in general, experienced some adjustment issues.

Because the researcher is the primary collector of data, it is very possible that her biases and personal assumptions may influence the results. Johnson et al (2004) state that researcher bias tends to result from selective observation and selective recording of information and also from allowing one's personal views and perspectives to affect how data are interpreted and how the research is conducted. While it is not possible to eliminate the researcher biases totally, it is important that the researcher be aware of them and constantly monitor herself to ensure, as much as possible, that they do not interfere. In my case, I have traveled extensively and have lived in four countries. Each experience was very positive and thus, it is possible that I had an underlying belief that moving to a new country was a very positive and exciting experience and that adjustment is fairly easy. I had to be careful not to assume that everyone had had such a positive experience. Also, I had to be cognizant that the situation and circumstances surrounding my relocation may be quite different than that of the participants. Also, I believed that lifelong learning and being a student is a very enjoyable time in a person's life. Again, this may not have been the case for all students. Another bias that I had was my opinion about Singapore. I felt very strongly that Singapore was a wonderful country and I had to constantly remind myself that not everyone shared my opinion.

A strategy that I used to help understand any bias that I may have had was reflexivity. Johnson et al (2004) defined this strategy as one where the researcher actively engages in critical self-reflection about potential biases and predispositions. Through this technique, I became more self-aware and it helped me to monitor any biases that I might have had. However, this was an on-going process as opposed to a one-time event. I continually

questioned any thoughts I had – especially when those thoughts led to assigning reasons for statements or explanations for why something had happened. This was something that I constantly had to monitor but I discovered that I became quite good at self-reflection over time.

Limitations and Generalizability

Generalizability is typically not the major purpose of qualitative research (Johnson et al, 2004). Two major reasons exist for this. First of all, participants in qualitative research are rarely ever randomly selected – they are usually chosen by the researcher or they volunteer for the study. Secondly, many qualitative researchers are more interested in documenting ‘particular’ findings rather than ‘universal’ findings. This study was not intended to be generalized, beyond this specific example, to the entire population of undergraduate Chinese international students. However, the insights provided in this research may be helpful for institutions when dealing with Chinese international students depending on their similarity to this specific research setting. This is a decision that the reader will have to make – it is not my intention.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to address how this research study was conducted and to provide a description of the methodology used. A qualitative approach was used to explore the thoughts of Chinese international students on their adjustment to living in and

attending a university in Singapore. Twenty-one students were interviewed through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in the fall of 2007. Each of these interviews was conducted on their school campus or at an external location that was chosen by the participant. There were no major issues of cross-cultural communication or language difficulties and the respondents appeared comfortable and at ease during the interviews. In the upcoming chapters, I will present the findings of the research and provide some discussion around these findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate Chinese international students with respect to their adjustment to living in and attending a university in Singapore. Undergraduate Chinese international students who were studying in a university in Singapore were interviewed using a semi-structured, face-to-face technique. This chapter presents analysis of the data and findings of the study. It also describes the demographic information of the twenty-one (21) interviewees.

Research Questions

The central purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate Chinese international students with respect to their adjustment to living in and attending a university in Singapore. With this main purpose in mind, I addressed the following sub-questions:

- 1 What adjustment issues do Chinese undergraduate international students studying in Singapore experience?
- 2 What supports do Chinese undergraduate international students report are most useful/helpful in their adjustment process?

- 3 How does the adjustment of Chinese undergraduate international students in Singapore compare to the Literature?

Interview Questions

The data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The questions that were the basis of these interviews are found in Appendix D.

Participant Demographics

There were twenty-one (21) Chinese international students interviewed in this study. These participants were volunteers and were enrolled in three institutions in Singapore. After submitting a request to the institutions to pass along my 'introduction letter' (Appendix A) and information to the students, I received some replies. From there, I used the snowball technique to get more participants. I asked each person I interviewed to identify one person they thought might like to share their experiences with me. I then gave that person my contact information and asked that their friend contact me if they would like to be interviewed. Some of the students did contact me while many more did not.

Gender and Age

The participants in this study consisted of thirteen (13) females and eight (8) males. The average age of the participants was 21.3 with an age range of 19 to 27. The average age of the female students was 21.4 with a range between 19 to 27 years; while the average age of the male students was 21.3 with a range of 19 to 24 years.

Academic Classification

The respondents were either in an English Bridging course (13) in preparation for entering their university program or enrolled in their university program (8). At the time of the interview, the current or intended majors of these participants included Engineering, Business, Sciences, and Arts.

Marital and Family Status

All of the students who participated in this research were single, never married, and had no children.

Length of time in Singapore

The length of time spent in Singapore varied greatly - from 2 months to 6 years.

Living Arrangement

Seven (7) of the students who participated in this study lived in a university dormitory. All had roommates that spoke Mandarin. Of the fourteen (14) who lived off campus, three (3) lived alone while nine (9) had roommates who could speak Mandarin. Only two (2) respondents said that they spoke primarily English at home (had roommates that could not speak Mandarin). No one had a Singaporean roommate.

Family members/Relatives living in Singapore

Of the participants, only two (2) had relatives living in Singapore. One student had an uncle who he reported he rarely saw. The other student had a cousin living in Singapore, which she did see frequently. One student reported that his sister lived in Singapore when he first arrived but she moved back to China after his first month of school.

First Language and Prior English Learning Experience

All of the respondents reported that Mandarin was their first language. All students reported that they began to first learn English in school in China – ages ranged from nine (9) to fourteen (14) years.

As an editorial note, the quotations that are used in this research were taken from the interviews I conducted with the Chinese international students who graciously agreed to be interviewed. Some were captured on audio while others were written down as I was

taking notes. I have presented the quotations in almost the exact same form as they were said as to preserve the meaning. However, I have removed some of the ‘ah’s’, ‘mmm’s’, repetition of words, and other breaks in the speech for the sake of the readers’ continuity and readability. For those interviews that were not audiotaped, I have endeavoured to repeat the quotations as close to verbatim as possible. I will include at least one quotation from each of the twenty-one (21) respondents.

Findings from the interviews

Question: Why did you choose to come to Singapore to study? (Was it your first choice? Why did you want to leave China to study)?

These questions elicited much discussion, as the reasons for choosing Singapore as a study destination were wide and varied. The questions of ‘Why did you choose to come to Singapore to study’, and ‘Why did you want to leave China to study’ were usually answered as if they were the same question. Very few of the respondents differentiated reasons for each question. Thus, the most common reasons cited for both of the questions were:

- Learn/improve English
- Degree from Singapore would provide ‘more opportunities’/further career development/gateway to other countries
- Received full scholarship
- Personal development
- Parents wanted them to come to Singapore

- Lack of perceived education opportunities in China
- Word of mouth
- Lower tuition fees
- Could get foreign degree in Singapore
- Singapore, the country

Six (6) of the respondents reported that they had received full scholarships from a university in Singapore so, for them, there was really no choice. Having their education paid for was viewed as a wonderful opportunity and one that they could not refuse. Similarly, one (1) of the students received a partial scholarship, which greatly influenced her decision to move and study in Singapore.

All twenty-one (21) students agreed that one of the main reasons why they came to Singapore was to learn and/or improve their English. All students responded that a driving force in their decision to come to Singapore was that it was the only country in Southeast Asia that offered all university education in English. Most felt that the acquisition of English would lead to a better job or would increase their opportunities for future study/work in another country. For those who wanted to return to China after their degree, they felt that being able to speak English would be a benefit in their careers and would help them obtain employment.

Four (4) of the students stated that Singapore was a 'gateway' to other countries that they would not necessarily be able to move to directly from China. Six (6) students raised the

idea that living and studying abroad would allow for more opportunities for them. They stated that, in general, the Singapore education system was credible and well known, and that it would ‘open doors’ for them should they desire to get into other countries. Hence, by obtaining a degree and learning to speak English in Singapore, it would be easier for them to gain admission into a Western country. Thirteen (13) students commented that they would like to move to an English speaking country (i.e. United States, Canada, or United Kingdom) to work, live, or continue with their schooling. Eight (8) students specifically mentioned that studying in Singapore would further their career development. They felt that in this global world, speaking English would be a great asset and skill to have. Also, as mentioned, learning English in Singapore would be beneficial for helping them gain access to another university in an English speaking country. A second year female respondent remarked,

‘Singapore, I think, you can first study here and improve your English and then and slowly, slowly adapt to speak English and then you can chose another country to further study. If you straightly go to England or USA, you will be so strange when you first speak there because everything is different, every people is strange, and everything you hear is different.’

Three (3) respondents specifically mentioned personal development as an impetus for studying abroad. Studying in Singapore would give them more exposure to the world,

other cultures, and people from other countries. Some believed that leaving China to pursue their study would help develop their interpersonal skills and personal development. In China, these respondents explained, the chances of meeting foreigners from different cultures were very limited. In Singapore, however, they would get an opportunity to learn new things, meet more people from a variety of origins, and discover aspects of themselves. A student who had been in Singapore for five years remarked,

‘I feel in China you won’t have a chance to really know about yourself...you don’t have a chance to try new things out. You can’t know how well you can perform – how good you can be. You don’t know your ability if you stay in China.’

Another reason given for international study was parental influence. Six (6) of the respondents admitted that it was their parents’ wish that they go to Singapore to study. The students explained that their parents liked the fact that Singapore was close to China so they could visit often. Also, the students reported that their parents perceived that, if you learned to speak English and obtained a degree in Singapore, there would be more opportunities to move and/or work in other countries. Parent influence was again cited as a reason for leaving China. Many parents encouraged their children to study internationally as they felt it would lead to greater opportunities. Also, some parents (and students) felt that studying in Singapore would be easier than studying in another foreign

English speaking country as Mandarin was widely spoken in Singapore and it would be an easy place to live.

Lack of perceived educational opportunities in China was one factor that motivated students to come to Singapore. The interviewees explained that, in China, there are a number of top universities (which they all consistently referred to as ‘good’ universities). Gaining admission to either of these top institutions was seen as very prestigious and would mean that a person would obtain a very lucrative job after graduation. The other universities were consistently called ‘bad’ and to graduate from one of these was not particularly career enhancing. Eight (8) respondents perceived that it was better to go overseas to get a degree than get a degree from a ‘bad’ university in China. These students reported that they would not be able to get into a ‘good’ university, as the competition was severe so they opted to study abroad. The students suggested that there was a very clear hierarchy of degree credibility, if you will. The best was a degree from a top Chinese institute. If this was not possible, then the next best thing was an overseas degree, and finally, the least prestigious was a degree from a so-called ‘bad’ Chinese university. One first year male commented that,

‘In China, the competition is very, very...make me pressured.... make me stressful...there are so lot of students. So, among the too many students, I think I cannot be a success.... because in China too many people, too

many students. So, at that time I get a chance [to go] to Singapore.

Another first year male student reported that he did not do well in the exam that is written at the end of High School in China so he couldn't get into a 'good' university in China. Thus, he decided to go to Singapore to study. The notion of fierce competition for positions in top China universities due to the large population was regularly mentioned. For those who could not get into the 'best' universities, they were destined for a 'bad' university, which would not lead to a 'good job'. Studying overseas was seen as a better alternative than attending a 'bad' university in China. Others confirmed that obtaining a foreign degree presented them with an advantage when they returned to China to work over those who possessed a degree from a lower status Chinese university.

Two (2) students commented that word of mouth influenced their decision to study in Singapore. For one student, a close friend of his had come to the same school in Singapore and had very much liked it. Another student stated that she knew 'a lot of people who came to Singapore to go to school'. This student declared that it was quite common for Chinese students to move to Singapore so she had known that it was an option for some time.

Reasonable tuition fees were another reason cited for the move to Singapore. Participants believed that the school tuition fees were quite a bit cheaper than those in the United States or the United Kingdom. Five (5) of the interviewees felt that, while the tuition fees

were higher in Singapore as opposed to China, they were relatively cheaper than they would be in other English speaking countries.

Two (2) students liked the fact that they could obtain a university degree from a US, UK, or Australian university but could do that while living in Singapore. They felt that this was very convenient and an excellent compromise.

Singapore itself was a draw for six (6) of these international students. Many commented that they felt very safe while in Singapore. Also, it's proximity to China made for easy travel and visits back home to family and friends. Some reported that Singaporeans were very friendly and that the country was highly developed, beautiful, and a garden country. All interviewees commented that China and Singapore were very similar in culture and language and that this was seen as a benefit for them. A second year female student remarked,

‘The environment and surroundings is more similar to there in China and I would not be so resistant to the new surroundings. You need to adapt to the new society...and here I can speak both in Chinese and English. So, if I really cannot explain myself well in English I can still use my language of Mandarin....’

When asked if Singapore was their first choice of a country to study in, eight (8) reported ‘yes’. Six (6) of these were recipients of full scholarships from Singapore and admitted

that there was really no choice once they were offered the scholarship. Twelve (12) of the students reported that they would have rather have gone to a university in the West but it was not possible. The countries of choice were the United States or United Kingdom, followed, to a lesser extent, by Europe and Canada. Reasons given as to why they could not attend a university in their most desired country were: English levels weren't at a high enough standard, the high expense of the tuitions, and the fact that they did not have a study permit/green card/Visa to enter the county. Only one student reported Australia as the destination of choice.

Question: Tell me the most important adjustment issues you or any of your friends have encountered after you came to Singapore.

Again, there was much discussion in response to this question. Respondents appeared eager to talk about their transition to living and studying in Singapore. In the interest of not repeating answers, I will address individual adjustment issues in depth towards the end of this chapter. Here, however, I will simply list the most frequently answered adjustment issues cited.

- Learning English
- Food
- Weather
- Singlish
- Making friends at the beginning of their time in Singapore

Question: What programs/services does your institution/city offer that are for international students (specifically Chinese)? How did you become aware that these programs/services were offered?

Six (6) of the respondents were Chinese international students who had come to Singapore on a full scholarship. Of these six, four (4) were part of a program from the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) called SM2. The students in this group explained this program stating that it recruits Chinese students who are in high school and brings them to Singapore at the age of approximately 16-17 years. This group then undergoes a rigorous 20 month 'Bridging program' whereby they learn English, complete Science and Math courses, attend a local Junior College for 3 months, and basically prepare for university in Singapore. A male student who had been in Singapore for six years through this program commented,

'I thinkit really shows that the Singapore government is caring for us. They really wish us to adapt to Singapore so that's where they came up with all of this program for us.'

This student went on to elaborate,

'MOE takes care of us quite well. They will visit our dormitory to talk to us...occasionally plan trips to the place of interest in Singapore.... during that period of time we are quite taken care of. I think that they assume that after this Bridging course.... you should have the ability to

survive alone. So, after coming to university, MOE are no longer taking care of us. They are keeping an eye on us – on our academic results – but not in regards to the daily life.... ’

Another male student who had come through this program confirmed this. He stated,

‘Actually, MOE organized a very systematic program for us’.

The remaining two (2) students who were studying on a full scholarship were part of another program offered by the Singapore Ministry of Education called the SM3 program. These two students explained that in this program, Chinese students are recruited directly from Chinese universities at the age of approximately 17-19 years of age. This group undergoes a six to eight month English Bridging course and then enters a Singapore university. In both of these programs, the student is offered a full scholarship. However, as the students further explained, as part of this offer they are ‘bonded’. This means that they are obliged to work either in Singapore or for a Singapore company for a specific period of time after graduation.

The transition of those Chinese international students in the SM2 and SM3 groups was arranged and directed by the Ministry of Education. Their housing was set up in advance, they were taken on outings around the county, and some were put in situations where they could meet local Singaporeans. For these students, student orientation and other activities were specifically designed to ease their adjustment to Singapore. They

were provided access to many programs and services. These respondents in this study who were members of SM2 or SM3 groups reported that they did not encounter any major obstacles during their transition.

Of the remaining fifteen (15) interviewees, one (1) student came on a partial scholarship while fourteen (14) of the students were funded by their parents. Most attended an English Bridging course. This course, completed before the student enters into his/her first year at university, is designed to ensure that Chinese international students are at a particular standard of English language proficiency when they enter an English speaking university. During this time, they are in class daily, learning English, with other international students. There are no Singaporeans in these classes. Focus is solely on learning English with a large emphasis on speaking. English Bridging courses can vary depending upon the institution that offers it. Length of the course can depend on a number of factors including the abilities of the individual person, the level of language ability they come into the course with, and the institution that offers the course.

When asked what programs were most helpful for Chinese international students in adapting to Singapore, students mentioned the English Bridging course as they felt that the Bridging course would be helpful for new international students. As mentioned, during this first period of time in Singapore, many of the Chinese international students attended class with the same individuals for months while learning English. All of whom were either fellow Chinese international students or international students from other countries. While the actual learning of English was obviously beneficial, friendships

were established as well. Many of the students commented that they had developed trust and friendships with these classmates and that they could and would seek out these friends in times of trouble or for help with problem solving.

Six (6) of the non-scholarship students in this study hired a company in China to help them with their relocation to Singapore. It was reported that this company helped them with application forms, arranged Visas, and generally coordinated the transition. Upon arrival in Singapore, some students reported that the International Student Office organized outings for them as part of orientation activities.

Six (6) of the students reported that their specific university offered exchange programs whereby they could spend time in another English speaking country attending a partner university. Four (4) of these students had spent one semester in the UK, the United States, or Canada. This opportunity to live in and learn English in a Western English speaking country was seen as invaluable for these Chinese international students.

No interviewee reported experiencing difficulty upon moving to Singapore and entering his or her new school. Fourteen (14) interviewees confirmed that there were university offices, such as Student Services or International Student Office available to provide assistance. This included orientations, meeting them at the airport, organizing activities, or being an information source. While several respondents declared that they had availed of a number of these services, they did qualify their statements by stating that they only

used them at the beginning of their time in Singapore. Use of any of these offices was now very infrequent as no respondent expressed any major current problems.

Three (3) of the students interviewed reported that they found a significant amount of information about their school and Singapore on the Internet. This information could be obtained in both English and Mandarin. Additionally, it was commented that it was quite common for Chinese students to study in Singapore. Two (2) of the respondents stated that they knew other students who studied previously in Singapore.

Question: If you do not use the programs/services/people of the institution/city, why?

With the exception of the English Bridging course, usage of programs/services offered by and in Singapore was not high with the respondents. There were few explanations given for this. Most respondents assured me that they did not need any assistance, as they were not experiencing any major problems but instead were adapting well. They reasoned that if they did need help, they *would* consult someone or some program but, in general, they did not have the need.

Question: What organizations/groups have you joined or are a part of? What supports do they offer that help you adjust to life/school in Singapore?

Eight (8) of the respondents shared that they joined a club or society when they arrived in Singapore. These interviewees explained that the supports they derived from the group

were useful when transitioning to Singapore. It was frequently mentioned that it was an avenue to meet other students and that it provided an excellent opportunity for networking. One respondent admitted that she would seek assistance quite often from the senior students in her university. She explained that the seniors were very knowledgeable about how the university worked and could provide good support for her. Another benefit reported was that it was a good way to practice English.

For the remaining thirteen (13) students who did not join any club or organization, the main reasons cited were 'no time', 'no interest', and that they felt their English was not good enough when they first arrived in Singapore to join a group.

Three (3) students from one particular university emphasized that, at the beginning of each year, there was a large club/society fair where each of the societies on campus had a booth where it conducted promotion and recruitment of new members. This event was very popular with the student body as it provided a great deal of knowledge and awareness of the various associations on campus.

Question: Where do you live in Singapore? Does this affect your adjustment at all?

How?

Seven (7) of the students who participated in this study lived in a university dormitory and had roommates who spoke Mandarin. Of the fourteen (14) who lived off campus, three (3) lived alone. Nine (9) had roommates that could speak Mandarin while only two

(2) spoke English at home (i. e., had roommates that could not speak Mandarin). No one had a Singaporean roommate.

Those students with mandarin speaking roommates admitted that they almost exclusively spoke only Mandarin with them and thus, they did not practice their English. One first year male interviewee commented,

‘It helps learn English is you live with different people from different countries. When they put Chinese international students together in a hall, they can easily speak Chinese. [Living in a hall] can help you meet people – especially if you get a roommate from another country.’

Those who lived in a dormitory acknowledged that they had wider access to other students and more opportunity to meet a range of people from different countries. Therefore, they used their English more to communicate, as it was the only common language.

One male student, who had been in Singapore for five years, commented that living in a dormitory might help accelerate the adjustment to Singapore. He stated,

‘I think yes, students adjust faster.... if you stay in residence. If you stay outside of campus, you probably

don't have a chance to talk to local people.... Chances are higher'

Another student explained that, at her university, on-campus housing is guaranteed to all first year students. However, starting in the second year and continuing in subsequent years, residents have to earn points in order to remain living on campus, as there is not enough on-campus housing to meet student demand. Points are earned when residents become involved in the dormitory and in the activities around campus. As a third year female student put it,

'We are forced to involve in and to adjust....we meet many people because we join groups even when we do not want to...even when we do not like it'.

Although this student did not particularly favor this system, she did, nevertheless, admit that it did help ease her adjustment to Singapore. She divulged that it allowed her to take part in activities and that without this impetus, she may not have been involved with the activities. She also admitted that she had established some very close relationships through participation in these activities. She reluctantly agreed that it would be beneficial for international students but stressed that she, herself, still did not like it.

Question: Who are your closest friends here in Singapore? Do you have any Singaporeans as friends? Do you have any family here?

Every student interviewed in this research said that their closest friends were fellow Chinese international students or friends who still lived at home in China. One senior student did report that he did form a close friendship with a Singaporean as they were on a student exchange together.

The thirteen (13) students who were in the English Bridging course at the time of the interviews reported that they did not know any Singaporeans through their classes as they consisted only of international students. Some had met Singaporeans through other friends, however. The remaining eight (8) students reported that they had many opportunities to meet Singaporeans, through their classes, but also in the dormitory or in university clubs. Generally the respondents stated that they had some Singaporean acquaintances/friends but, for the most part, the majority had no really 'close' Singaporean friends.

When asked if they would like to have more Singaporeans as friends, sixteen (16) confirmed that this would be desirable for them. Some reasons given for this were that they can 'show you around', help with networking, 'they are nice people', 'it's good to make friends with people from other countries', they can translate from English to Mandarin if you don't understand the teacher, can help you learn English, and you can learn about Singapore and about Singapore culture from them. One student explained

that Singaporeans could help you learn English but they don't typically speak English to Chinese international students. Usually, they speak Mandarin. Interestingly, this first year female respondent stated,

'Singaporeans speak English, not good English. They speak better than PRC. They speak Mandarin, not good Mandarin. Not better than PRC. They could be teachers to us...they don't teach us. They want to learn Mandarin. We are teachers to them.'

One first year female student commented that she would like to have Singaporeans as friends because they can help her understand her teachers. She said,

'When I cannot understand what teacher say, I can speak Chinese to ask her...and she can understand Chinese and speak [to me].'

Another first year female respondent supported this by saying,

'They [Singaporeans] can help you when you don't understand the teacher – you can speak Chinese to them and find out what the teacher means'.

Three (3) of the first year Chinese international students admitted that they would like to have more Singaporeans as friends but did not know how or where to meet them. One student felt that the Singaporeans were not overly interested in having foreigners as friends. She stated that ‘Singaporeans don’t need friends.’

Two (2) respondents felt that that they already had Singaporeans friends so it was neither an issue nor something that they were striving towards. Two (2) respondents avowed that they did not ‘need’ to have, specifically, Singaporeans as friends. The primary reason for such an assertion was that Singaporeans spoke Singlish and these Chinese international students did not want to learn it. The students felt that it would confuse their language learning if they were to learn a pronunciation and grammar that was not Standard English. In short, Singaporeans could not help them improve their English skills.

One male, who had been in Singapore for five years, reported that he had a close Singaporean friend. He met this person when they both were part of an exchange program where they spent six months in Canada attending a university there. This Chinese international student stated that he and the Singaporean became very close on that trip and felt as though they had a common bond.

The notion of a perceived ‘strain’ between Chinese international students and Singaporeans was discussed by five (5) of the respondents. This strain was attributed to various factors. One female student, who had been in Singapore for six years, stated,

‘Most of the time they are quite friendly, although sometimes, some Singaporeans they will think that China is not a good place.... most of them I find, think China ...they still think China is still like the way it was back in the 1980’s.’

Another third year female student stated her perception:

‘Locals are upset that Chinese international students get jobs after graduation. I don’t understand it. Local companies hire local students first.’

A first year female stated that she felt Singaporeans were not open to meeting people from other counties. She felt that,

‘Singaporeans don’t like talking with foreigners. They don’t need to make friends’.

A first year male commented that,

‘Most Singaporeans don’t like Chinese students. They think the Chinese don’t like them. Singaporeans are closed.’

A male student who had been living in Singapore for 6 years alleged that any difficulty that might exist between Singaporeans and Chinese international students was due to the fact that the Singaporeans may be a little resentful or jealous that Chinese scholars are coming in to Singapore and taking the top spots in the class. At this student's particular university, international students enjoy equal opportunities to Singaporeans. For example, foreign students, at the time of the interviews, were allowed and encouraged to apply for all exchange programs that the university offered. No preference was given to Singaporeans. Most of these programs were merit based and focused heavily on the cumulative GPA scores. As many of the Chinese international students were on scholarships and have very high grade point averages, very often they were chosen for the available spots – many times over the Singaporeans. Also, a great number of the Chinese students attending university in Singapore are there on a full scholarship and have guaranteed employment at the end of their studies. One student stated,

‘I just feel that their [Singaporeans] minds are not open.

They just need to be more open and they need to appreciate other the merits of other nationalities and other countries.

China is no more what they think it is so I think they need to update more about new things.’

Nineteen (19) of the respondents reported that they had no family presently living in Singapore. One student has a sister who lived in Singapore for the first month when he arrived, but she has since left. One has an uncle currently living in Singapore but they do

not see each other often while a third Chinese international student has a cousin in Singapore.

One female student reported that she had a Singaporean boyfriend but that they spoke Mandarin together. He had introduced her to other Singaporeans but that they all mainly spoke Mandarin when they were together.

Question: What programs/services/people do turn to most frequently for a) personal matters and b) academic matters.

For problems of a personal nature, sixteen (16) Chinese international students reported that they would consult their friends and family first for help. Five (5) stated that they would not seek help but would solve the problem themselves. One student divulged that he went to counseling in year two as he was feeling very stressed. He declared,

‘I did that before. I remember it was in year two. At that time I was involved in an undergraduate research program and progress was very slow and I really feel stress and nervous about it and I went to a counselor.’

He explained that Asians, in general, are not open to attending counseling as it is seen as a sign of being weak. He continued,

‘Most of them would not go to counseling because if you go to counseling it probably means that you are sick in your mind or something. I guess that’s what they feel. I feel it is very normal to experience stressand everyone must have this kind of stress and we should find a way to aid ourselves.’

A female student who has been living in Singapore for three years reported that a friend of hers had gone to ‘mental counseling’ but that counseling, in general, is not widely accepted and not popular in Chinese society. She explained,

‘Counseling is not accepted ...not popular. It is not normal to go in China. It is not the custom...no one does it. Chinese do not adjust to new concepts. Younger people are more open to this sort of thing. It is more popular to do in Singapore. In Singapore, to go to counseling is normal so they will go.’

The answers varied a little more when Chinese international students were asked whom they would turn to for help with academic matters. Eleven (11) reported that they have or would go to Student Services for help. Eight (8) reported that they would go to their school, professor, or faculty mentor (in cases where an individual university assigns students a faculty mentor that they have throughout their university career and this is an

option if they have a problem). Two (2) students stated that they would not seek help but would solve the problem on their own as they felt it would be better to be independent. In addition to the aforementioned answers, three (3) students said that they would also turn to their friends and classmates for help.

Interestingly, one first year female student commented that, in the past, when she has gone to Student Services, they spoke in English to her and she didn't always understand the English that they used. To compensate, she used gesturing and body language to facilitate understanding. This was sometimes a barrier for her as it made solving problems difficult and frustrating. She commented,

‘I wish they would speak Chinese for this. This would make it easier. Very frustrating. Just need help but it’s like a lesson’

Another student revealed that she very often sought the advice of the senior students. In her case, it was the senior Chinese international students in the ‘PRC association’ student group that she had joined. She asserted that they were quite knowledgeable and that they could help her a great deal with academic issues.

Question: What do you think your institution/Singapore could do to help Chinese international students make better adjustments? Are there any programs/services that the institution/Singapore could offer that would better help Chinese international students?

The most frequently recommended program for Chinese International students was any program that would facilitate English language learning and specifically, the speaking of English. A student who had been in Singapore for three years suggested an increase in study abroad/exchange programs in English speaking countries. She asserted that participation in these programs would greatly improve a Chinese international students' ability to speak English. She justified her opinion,

'Singapore is not a good place to practice English. You need to go to an English speaking country to practice. Here at *** [name of specific university], we can apply for the *** [name of specific exchange program] program and can spend a sem [semester] in an English country. That would really be helpful to PRC students. We can learn the English here and practice it over there.'

A male who had lived in Singapore for 6 years and had participated in an overseas exchange program to an English speaking country supported this. He confirmed that living in an English speaking country had improved his English speech production and had given him a great deal of confidence. He stated,

‘I think the reason I am not afraid to talk is that I went to the US and to the UK.’

Respondents also recommended any program that facilitates communication and contact between international students and other English speaking groups. A third year male student believed there should be more programs that encouraged people to talk to and mingle with other students. One student said that more interaction with locals was needed ‘to get better knowledge of people, country, and the culture.’

A fifth year male student suggested,

‘Organize more activities that involve local Singaporeans and Chinese student...emphasize on the interaction, instead of having them just sit together, walk together, play games together...basically they need to talk to each other, they need to exchange ideas ...extremely helpful if they can have some achievements together...for example...one Singaporean and one Chinese form a group ...for a competition.... this bond is huge.’

Overall, there were very few suggestions given for programs that could specifically help Chinese international students. Respondents did not cite a lack of programs; rather, they

did not feel that Chinese international students needed any special or specific help to adjust. No interviewee reported any major difficulty moving to and living in Singapore and thus, no one offered any programs that they thought were needed. Reasons for the ease of relocation included the fact that Mandarin was spoken everywhere and the high numbers of Chinese international students in universities in Singapore that could help each other. A female student who has lived in Singapore for five years stated that she did not think there were any specific programs needed to help Chinese international students. She stated,

‘I don’t think there is anything very special for Chinese students...plus, anyway, there’s so many Chinese here that if you don’t feel like talking to a Singaporean, you can always find a Chinese friend here.’

Question: Would you recommend studying in Singapore to a friend? Why or why not?

Reactions were mixed to this question but, for the most part, the responses were favorable. Seventeen (17) of the interviewees stated that they would recommend studying in Singapore to a friend. The areas discussed were very similar to the reasons stated in question number one - ‘Why did you choose to come to Singapore to study?’ Reasons included personal/soft skill development, less discrimination in Singapore than in other countries, good education system, learning English, cheaper than other foreign countries, better opportunities, opportunity to meet new people, foreign degree valued as

more prestigious than a degree from a lower status Chinese university, become independent, make new friends, and you can get experience things that will help you move to another country.

Two (2) students would not recommend studying in Singapore while two (2) stated that it 'depends'. Reasons given included better academic programs in top Chinese universities, the bond that you must repay if you study on a scholarship, and the problems associated with learning English in Singapore.

A male student in his final year of school commented that if a person were highly focused on academic programming then it would be best to stay in China, as Singapore is not as high a standard academically. However, he declared that the personal and soft skills are best learned in Singapore. He explained,

‘ I used to think the hard skills were most important but
now I think soft skills are very important.’

Other respondents supported this idea that the top Chinese universities were outstanding academically and were much better than most universities in Singapore. However, there were varying opinions. As one first year male student put it:

‘I want to go to school in China....I want to stay in
China...but I could not get into a good university. Going to

a bad university will not be good in China. It is better to go away to study. I had to go away. I miss my friends and my family. I want go back to China.'

A third year female student talked about the difference in the educational system in China and in Singapore. She said

'In China, the educational system is very different than in Singapore. In China, the student has to memorize everything. In China, there are all individual assignments. In Singapore, the assignments you do as a group. Working in a group is hard to adjust to. More open-minded in Singapore. Can express opinion here 90%. In China – 10%. Primary school in China is best. High level. In Singapore, you tell your opinion and memorization is not as important. Singapore system is better at university level – not black and white.'

Question: What advice would you give someone else who is coming to Singapore to study?

The respondents offered many suggestions to potential students. Two (2) students specifically recommended that incoming students should focus on interacting and meeting other people. Another two (2) students advised that prospective international

students should strive to be more open and have more cultural awareness. One student who had been living in Singapore for five years suggested,

‘My advice probably would be...I would probably just remind them to be open...okay, sometimes if you want to do well with Singaporeans sometimes you have to, sometimes you have to adapt to change, you have to change yourself. Don’t stick to your own ideas.’

One Engineering male student, who has been living in Singapore for six years, advised that new Chinese international students should not be shy, afraid, or embarrassed but should try to improve themselves. He stated that,

‘If you want to improve your weakness, expose it’.

A second year female would encourage others to ‘meet people as quick as you can’.

Another student advised that prospective students should clearly know what they want and be aware that a scholarship comes with a bonded time. This female, who was nearing the end of her program and on a full scholarship, stated that she was mandated to work in Singapore for a specific number of years as part of her scholarship agreement. She stated,

‘For us, we have to work here for 6 years. We have a bond. We do not have the freedom to go and work and continue our studies.’

Fourteen (14) respondents specifically offered advice on the potential difficulties of learning English in a country that has a large number of people who also speak Mandarin and Singlish. Nine (9) stated that incoming students should try to talk as much English as they can while in Singapore. A second year female offered this comment:

‘I think [Singapore] is an easy place for Chinese students to come to as long as they are willing to talk [English] and not so shy’

These respondents would encourage new students to speak English as much as possible and to take the initiative in doing so. Some of the advice offered was intended at minimizing the communication between Chinese international students and those who would communicate with them in either Mandarin or Singlish. For example, the respondents maintained that new students should not speaking Chinese while in Singapore even though it is very easy to do so. They reasoned that, by speaking Mandarin, it minimizes the amount of English that one acquired. Similarly, they advised not speaking with local Singaporeans who use Singlish, as it might confuse the language learning.

Three (3) interviewees recommended watching American television or listening to BBC radio as this would help with obtaining proper pronunciation. One student recommended talking to English speaking foreigners, as their accent would be appropriate to model. Many cautioned that congregating only with Chinese international students would slow down the learning of English, as there will be a tendency to speak Mandarin. To combat this, the respondents suggested that potential students should make friends with locals who speak Standard English or other international students so that they would be forced to use English to communicate.

Question: When your degree is completed, what are your future plans? What have you learned from being an international student in Singapore that can help you in the future?

Thirteen (13) respondents announced that, after graduation, they would prefer to move abroad for future study, work, and/or travel. Only three (3) definitively stated that they wanted to stay in Singapore. Five (5) reported that they would like to move back to China immediately following their degree. The students who are on a full scholarship are 'bonded' – which is to say that they have to fulfill a mandatory term of working either in Singapore or for a Singapore company. Although this is mandatory, it was not always desirable.

There were a multitude of answers given for the question 'What have you learned from being an international student'. First and foremost, all respondents stated that they had learned and improved their English, which was a tangible skill that they could take with

them forever. All saw this as the main benefit of becoming an international student and living in Singapore.

Sixteen (16) responded that they had learned a vast array of new information about different cultures. Also, they had learned how to communicate with and live harmoniously with people who were from very different places/backgrounds. They had learned a great deal from interacting and dealing with such different people. One student referred to this as 'intercultural communication'. Several asserted that they would not have learned this if they had remained in China to study. A male student who has been living in Singapore for five years offered this comment:

'I feel this is really important...it is really important to know different cultures and to deal with different people because the way we think is really different. And the expectations...there are different expectations by people.....I had to adapt and change very fast. That is what I think. And being an international student provides me with more opportunities..... in terms of what to deal with certain people.

Four (4) students rated 'networks/meeting people' as an important thing that they had learned while living in Singapore. Several of these students commented that they had

met people from all over the world and that could help them in the future – especially in their career.

Twelve (12) students mentioned that they had become more independent and had learned how to rely on their own skills and judgment to deal with problems. They explained that their initial leap from China was scary but now they felt confident that they could move again to another foreign country easily with their newfound independence. A first year female student commented,

‘I didn’t know how to move in China. I hired agency to help me move to Singapore. Now, I don’t need agency...I can move alone.’

Another first year female student supported this. She stated,

‘I have these experiences. I can go to other country easily to live. Not everyone can live in another country.’

Two (2) interviewees specifically stated that they had learned more about themselves – both their strengths and weaknesses. They felt they had matured more than those students who had stayed in China.

Five (5) students mentioned that they had learned career/professions skills that they could take with them in the future.

Question: In your opinion, how 'successful' do you feel you have been in adjusting to:

- School/academic programs
- Weather
- General life in Singapore
- Meeting friends who are Singaporean
- Meeting friends who are international students
- Customs
- Food
- Learning and speaking in English
- Housing
- Culture shock
- Understanding Singlish
- Understanding the English your teachers use
- New holidays
- Transportation
- Getting health care
- How lonely are you?
- Are you homesick?
- Is money a big concern for you?

For this question, respondents were asked to use a 10-point Likert scale to rate how successful they were at adjusting to the above areas. A rating of one indicated extreme difficulty with adjustment while a rating of ten indicated no difficulty whatsoever. Responses were given verbally to this question. The last three areas (lonely, homesick, money concern) were rated on a yes/no answer. This question was very helpful in engaging the respondents in conversation, as they were very eager to talk about how 'easy' or 'difficult' they found each of the topics. Each question can be analyzed through a number of different lenses. We can look at the average of the responses through the lens of females vs. males; number of years spent in Singapore, and age of respondent.

The summary data for this question can be found in Table 1 in appendix E. When looking at this same question through the lens of years in Singapore, I wanted to analyze the ends of the range while providing information about all groups. Thus, I chose to find the mean of the respondents who had been in Singapore for one year or less (n=12), five years or more (n=4), and one-five years (n=5).

We can also separate the data to see if there is any difference based on age. To do this, I found the average of the responses of the nineteen-year-old respondents (n=3), 23-27 year olds (n=4), and 20-22 year olds (n=14).

While I have concentrated mostly on the ends of the range in the areas of length of time in Singapore and age, I will, however, include the average from the middle section of

respondents for comparison. When comparing the averages, I chose a difference of 2 points to indicate a noteworthy difference.

Note: In this section I will also include anecdotal responses from the question: 'Tell me the most important adjustment issues you or any of your friends have encountered after you came to Singapore'.

School/Academic programs

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to school/academic program' was 7.57. Females rated their success at 7.31, while males rated it at 8.00.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 7.08

Five years or more: 8.25

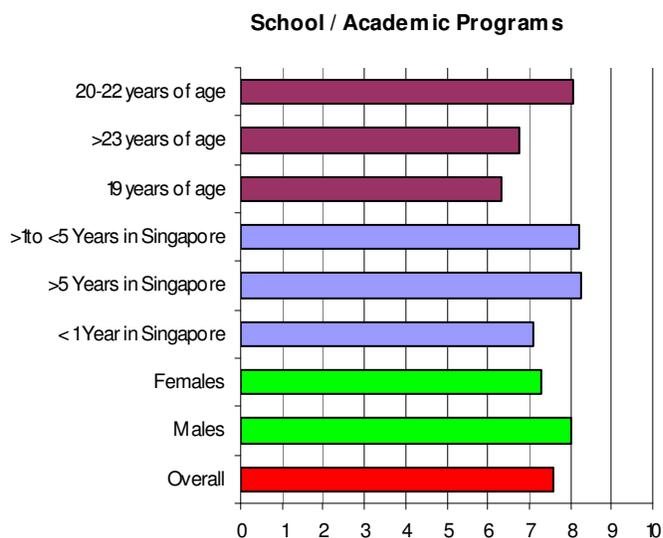
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 8.20

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 6.33

23 years or older: 6.75

Middle section (20-22 years): 8.07



In general, most of the respondents had no difficulty adjusting school in Singapore.

There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time spent in Singapore on this issue.

A common comment made by all of the respondents was that learning English was the most difficult task they faced. Many found that it was intense and ‘speaking’ English was the hardest part in their language learning. One first year female student summed up her thoughts by saying, ‘Speaking English is not easy, school is okay’. They generally agreed that in China, their English classes had focused primarily on reading and writing English but in Singapore, the emphasis was on speaking. Many did not feel confident in that area.

There were some general comments about the difference between Chinese and Singaporean schools but they usually tended to favour Chinese schools being more difficult academically than Singapore schools. With the exception of learning English, many of the respondents stated that they felt their schooling in Singapore was 'easier' than in China. One first year male student said that 'high school in China is very difficult. School here is easy'. A second year female confirmed this,

'Everything is different here in school. It's easier. More understanding, less memory.'

A second year female respondent commented,

'School is different. The teacher doesn't give as much work...more free time in Singapore. It is easier than China school.'

Another second year female explained her perception of the academic challenge of her school but saying that schooling was 'less stress than Australia. School is good in Singapore.' However, this respondent had never studied in Australia before. A first year female student reported that,

'School is different than Chinese school. More equipment here...teacher uses computer.'

A few of the Chinese international students mentioned that there was a difference in school expectations from China to Singapore. It was discussed that, in China, the emphasis was on memorization, individuality, and that opinions were not particularly valued. The difference in Singapore is that there is more emphasis on group work, understanding, and that discussing issues and being able to defend your opinion or stance was encouraged. While they stated that this was a difference in the two school systems and that it took a little adjustment, they did both report that they were adjusting quite well to it.

Weather

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to weather in Singapore' was 6.62. Females rated their success at 6.69, while males rated it at 6.50.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 5.00

Five years or more: 9.00

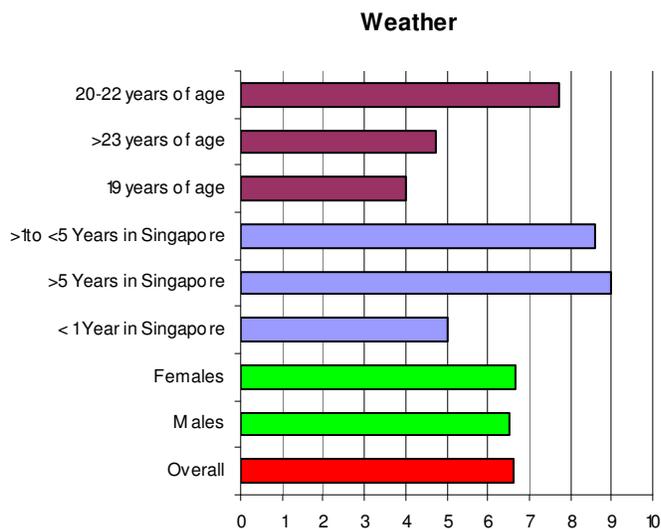
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 8.60

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 4.00

23 years or older: 4.75

Middle section (20-22 years): 7.71



The weather in Singapore was an issue that was met with varying reactions. While there was no difference in their responses with regard to gender; age and time spent in Singapore showed a large discrepancy in adjustment. Students who had been in Singapore for one year or less revealed great difficulty adjusting to the weather and most of the negative comments pertaining to the weather were from this group. However, those respondents who had been in Singapore for more than one year indicated that they had adjusted somewhat to the heat and humidity and appeared much more comfortable with it. Also, the respondents at were nineteen or 23 years or older appeared to have much more difficulty with the weather than the 20-22 year olds.

Respondents noted that the Singapore weather was quite different than the weather in China – even if they were from south of China. Most of the distain stemmed from the high degree of humidity and lack of distinct seasons. A first year female summarized that it was ‘too hot outside, too cold inside’, while another first year female stated,

‘Singapore only has one season; in China we have four seasons. I cannot tell the seasons in Singapore. I do not like it’

Another first year male student compared it as ‘outside it is like a steam box, the inside like a fridge.’ Similarly, another first year female stated, ‘There are four seasons in China...only one season here...very hot’. Only two students commented that they liked it. The students who had been in Singapore the longest also commented that they had grown accustomed to the weather. One student who has been in Singapore for six years reported that the weather was ‘no problem now but I would prefer four seasons’. Another student, who had been in Singapore for six years, said that ‘he didn’t like it but was used to it’.

General life in Singapore

Overall, the mean response to the question ‘How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to general life in Singapore’ was 8.19. Females rated their success at 8.54, while males rated it at 7.63.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 8.30

Five years or more: 7.75

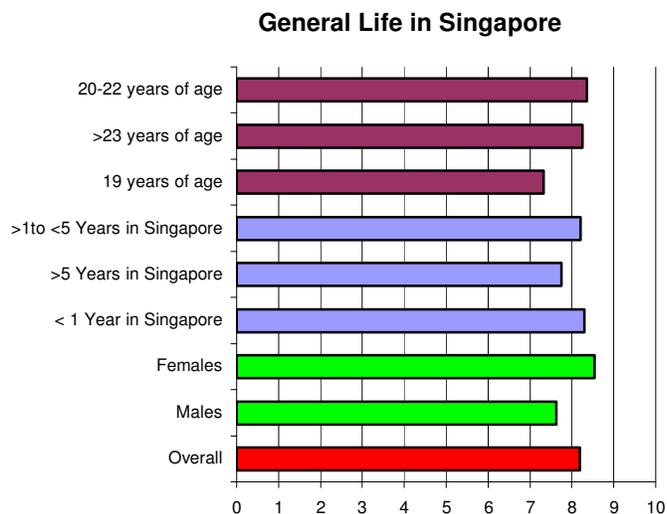
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 8.20

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 7.33

23 years or older: 8.25

Middle section (20-22 years): 8.36



In general, most of the respondents reported no difficulty with adjustment to general life in Singapore. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time

spent in Singapore on this issue. A second year female student stated that living in Singapore was ‘the same as living in China, only safer’.

Many stated that, because Chinese was so frequently spoken (for example: in grocery stores, shopping centers), it was very easy to get along in Singapore. One second year female student remarked that even her mother, who spoke no English whatsoever, found it very easy to be in Singapore. She stated,

‘When my Mom come to pay a visit, she still can living here very enjoyable because she can speak Chinese...she knows nothing about English’

Similarly, another female student in her sixth year of living in Singapore confirmed that her mother found the very same experience. She described her mother’s situation,

‘My mother is a very good example. She speaks no English, not at all, but she came to Singapore quite often, like some years before, they came like four or five times already, and she has no difficulty to go out shopping or to take MRT, she has no difficulty, she can always find somebody who will speak Mandarin.’

A first year male student summarized his thoughts,

‘You can escape from speaking English. You can live easy in Singapore if you don’t want to speak English’.

The respondents stated that while in school they have to speak English, outside of that, they can, and often do, speak Mandarin. A first year female revealed,

‘A lot of people can speak Chinese. The travel agents speak Chinese. In school we speak English but outside we speak Chinese.’

Similarly, a first year female student stated,

‘Singapore is very comfortable for me because you can speak Chinese’

One contributor to the ease of general life in Singapore is the fact that the Chinese international students can be easily understood and can easily understand others through the use of Mandarin. This student went on to say that she found the high degree of Mandarin usage to be very helpful in the adjustment process. She reports,

‘Mandarin.....quite helpful in adjusting here. Quite helpful. Sometimes, first, and even now, I cannot think of

a term to say in English or I cannot quite express myself, I can always say in Mandarin and most of them can understand me.'

One first year male student commented,

'I am from a rural area....not as big as Singapore. I don't like 'city living' but there was no problem moving to Singapore and living here. It is not hard to live here.'

While the adjustment to Singapore appeared to be very easy and effortless, this is not to say that the Chinese international students did not notice some differences. After five years of living in Singapore, a male respondent discussed his perception of the conservative nature of Singapore. He believed that Singapore is much more conservative than China and that that was a difference that he found to be noticeable. However, he did not feel that this was a huge issue. He explained,

'For example, maybe most people would think of China as conservative but I think Singapore is more conservative. Singapore is more conservative than China. That's really what I feel....In China is very open, more Western ideas flowing after 1980's....and do you know there's a period of –they call it cultural revolution in China....basically the

communists, they....a lot of Chinese traditions are extinct...and the generation brought up from that period had the mindset that they only believe in science, they don't believe in religion. Nowadays, more Western companies came into China, the Western culture came into China, there is more religion now. Because of the....the current tradition of religion, people are more easier to adapt to new ideas, therefore the customs and traditions got shift. The Chinese tradition ideas are not deeply rooted. Therefore we are open to new ideas. That's what I feel. In Singapore, the Chinese heritage got preserved.

A first year male student added,

'China is more freedom....Singapore is too [many] laws, too strict and the laws limit everyone. The law is very strict and in China, the law is very freedom. But the freedom don't means you can do the criminals. I mean that you can be open; you can do anything except attack the people, against the government. In Singapore, the law is very strict. Cannot open your heart, cannot freedom, cannot do whatever you want to.'

In Singapore, the price of food and accommodations, as well as the cost to living, is much higher than China and many found this somewhat of an adjustment. Interestingly, many commented that tuition costs were much cheaper than those in the US or UK but it was the general cost of living that posed some difficulty.

Meeting friends

Some Chinese international students noted that establishing friendships at the beginning of their time in Singapore was somewhat of an adjustment. While some of the students arrived in Singapore and could recognize some former schoolmates, most did not know each other well in China. Thus, upon arrived, they had to make all new friends. The interviewees varied their responses with regards to the level of difficulty they had in making new friends. Most observed that they tended to engage other Chinese international students first as they could communicate readily. Following that, they most often established relationships with other international students as they were in the English Bridging classes together. At the onset of the relationships with non-Chinese speakers, communication in English often posed some difficulty as it was in English. However, this difficulty lessened as English proficiency improved and confident increased.

.....who are Singaporean

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in meeting friends who are Singaporean?' was 6.00. Females rated their success at 6.38, while males rated it at 5.38.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 5.75

Five years or more: 6.75

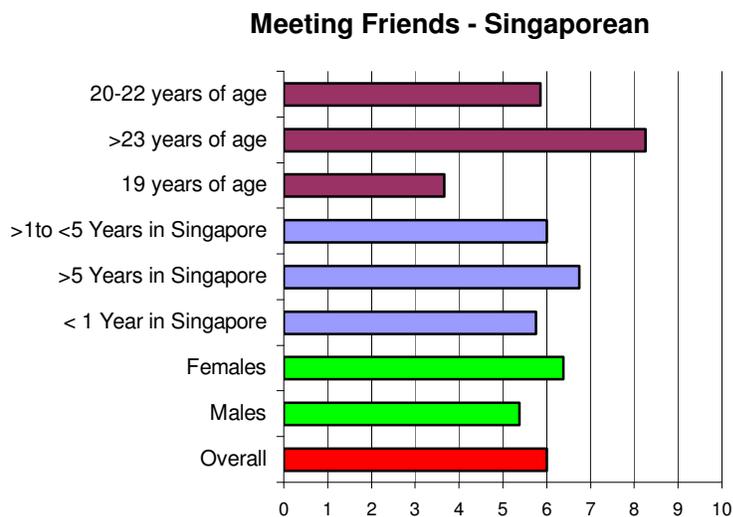
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 6.0

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 3.67

23 years or older: 8.25

Middle section (20-22 years): 5.86



The responses to this question were varied quite a bit. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender and, surprisingly, there was no differences based on length of time spent in Singapore. There were, however, discrepancies based on age of respondents. The group of nineteen year olds reported much difficulty with meeting Singaporeans while the group who were 23 years or greater rated their success much higher. The middle section of respondents rated their success in the medium range.

Some students felt that it was important to have Singaporeans as friends. One second year female summarized,

‘This is Singapore...not China...need Singaporean friends to tell you information about Singapore. Help you learn about Singapore.’

Others reported that they did not feel that they were successful with establishing friendships with Singaporeans. Some Chinese international students admitted that they did not wish to learn non-standard English so they purposely did not pursue relationships with Singaporeans. Those Chinese international students who were in the English Bridging course at the time of the interview explained that they did not have any Singaporeans in class with them, therefore, their access to meeting Singaporeans was limited.

Five (5) respondents did mention that they felt some resistance from Singaporeans, even Chinese Singaporeans. There were different opinions offered for this. One student suggested that Asians are resistant to approach other Asians and are usually not eager to talk with foreign Asians. Another student observed that Singaporeans tended to form their own groups and these groups usually did not include Chinese international students. As mentioned, several of the students perceived that Singaporeans were resentful and jealous of the top Chinese students who came into Singapore to study. Thus, Singaporeans did not want to engage with Chinese international students, and this, in turn, made forming relationships somewhat difficult.

.....who are international students

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in meeting friends who are international students' was 8.14. Both scores were very similar – males: 8.13; females: 8.15.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 8.83

Five years or more: 6.75

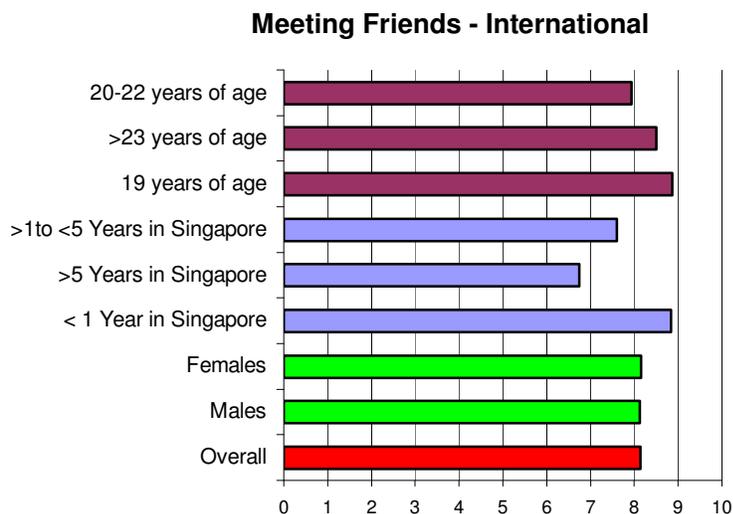
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 7.60

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 8.67

23 years or older: 8.50

Middle section (20-22 years): 7.93



In general, the Chinese international students responded that meeting other international students was easier than meeting local Singaporean students. All interviewees stated that they have international students in their classes and many of the students who were living in a university dormitory said that they could easily meet them in this venue.

While there were no apparent differences with regard to gender or age, there was a difference reported on the basis of length of time spent in Singapore. Those who had been in Singapore for five years or more stated that they were less successful at meeting other international students than those who had only recently moved to Singapore.

Customs

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to Singapore customs' was 8.52. Females rated their success at 8.62, while males rated it at 8.38.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 8.75

Five years or more: 7.75

Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 8.60

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 9.33

23 years or older: 8.00

Middle section (20-22 years): 8.50



In general, most of the respondents had no difficulty adjusting to Singapore customs and this is reflected in the high ratings. No interviewee reported any major difficulty in this area. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time spent in Singapore on this issue.

Learning and speaking English

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in learning and speaking English' was 5.67. Females rated their success at 5.62, while males rated it at 5.75.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 5.08

Five years or more: 7.00

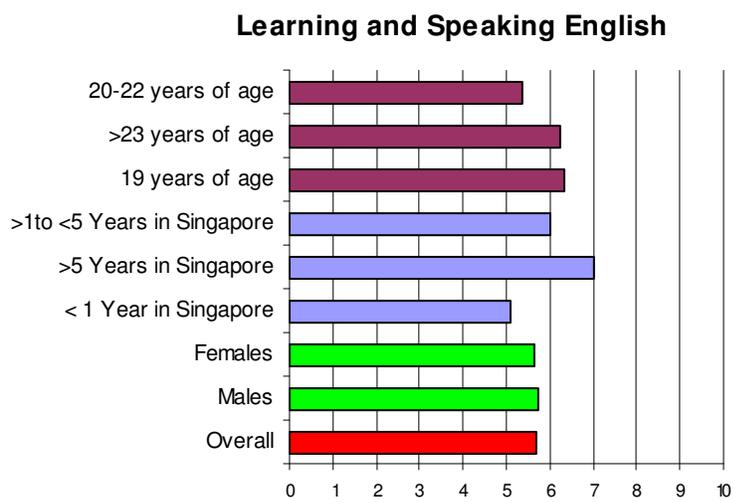
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 6.00

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 6.33

23 years or older: 6.25

Middle section (20-22 years): 5.36



Overall, perceived success with learning and speaking English was rated low. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, nor length time spent in Singapore. Not surprisingly, those students who had spent the longest in Singapore felt that they were more successful at learning and speaking English than did those students who had been in Singapore for one year or less.

Many reported that learning to speak English was their greatest adjustment to Singapore. They commented that English is a very hard language to learn and that it was intense. They also reported that, specifically, it was the ‘speaking’ English that was difficult. Many stated that, in China, their English language education had focused on ‘reading’ and writing’ and that they felt they were very good at that and had a very good foundation. However, they had had limited opportunities to actually speak and use English in China so this area was an adjustment.

Another issue that was raised repeatedly was the idea that Singapore was not a particularly good place to learn English. The respondents claimed that because most Singaporeans can speak Mandarin, the necessity to speak English is diminished and thus, English language learning is slowed. One male student in his final year reported that having locals and classmates that speak Mandarin is not particularly helpful for learning English. He reasoned,

‘It wasn’t really a help. Because we are not immersed in this totally English speaking environment, we have less chance to practice English.’

Another second year female talked about her difficulties with speaking English; she stated,

‘In Singapore [English] is not very important....[I] can speak Chinese a lot. Not really good. Cannot improve English very much.’

Also, conversing with the locals was often difficult as many spoke Singlish. Several of the Chinese international students interviewed stated that they did not want to learn this form of non-standard English so they refrained from talking with the local Singaporeans. As one first year student commented,

‘I don’t talk with Singaporeans. They speak Singlish. It is not real English.’

Many described the situation whereby they tried to speak English but were met with Mandarin. In these cases, the Chinese international students would speak English to the local Singaporeans (taxi drivers, store cashiers) but these people would respond in Mandarin. Many Chinese international students divulged that they tended to speak Mandarin outside of school unless they insisted on being addressed in English – which few of them did. However, these same respondents agreed that it was possible to learn English in Singapore but that it required effort. A first year female stated,

‘I would like to speak English more but it’s hard here. I try to speak English but other people speak Chinese back to me.’

Yet another first year female student stated,

‘Don’t worry. Singapore is similar to China. There is a lot of Chinese spoken here.’

While a third first year female student commented,

‘Learning and speaking English is easier than China. Area can influence you. In China, only speak English in class. Here, you can speak English everywhere if you want. You must try.’

Another first year student commented,

‘If you really want to learn English...can...but must try very much. Students who are going back to China use Mandarin a lot. Very easy to use Mandarin here. Very hard to always try [to speak English].’

Another male student who has lived in Singapore for six years provided the following observation,

‘Over 70% of people here are Chinese, they do speak Chinese, they do understand Chinese. When we came here, we PRC students, we sort of complain that Singapore is not a perfect environment to learn English because people down the streets, people in supermarkets talk to you in Chinese. They don’t even really speak good English sometimes. Chinese is so widely spoken.... undergraduate students.... are educated [in English] but during their free talk or whatever they will just be talking in Mandarin, regardless of whether they are local students or PRC students.’

Respondents discussed the notion that learning English per se was not difficult but using English to learn other university subjects posed some difficulty. A 4th year female student remarked,

‘At first it’s quite difficult, especially when we study the science class. The English course is quite okay, they only teach you English. Then the Science course, the science part is like they use English to teach you Science. At first we find it ‘Wow – oh my God’, cannot understand anything.’

Interestingly, one student commented that the level of Singapore English was not at a very high standard and really needed to be improved in order for it to help international students. He commented,

‘I do feel, I do feel that a lot of Singaporeans need to learn English..... because of their vocabulary. One of the reasons why Singapore is really easy to live is because the vocabulary here is quite small. It’s very interesting. I hear the people and I don’t encounter any vocabulary problems but in the UK and US, different. They spend a lot of time talking words I don’t know. So, because of that, I do believe that the less of vocabulary use, the less mind use you will get cause when your vocabulary is red hot, you think in different ways.... you will excite your mind. Here, it is a problem.’

It was the general consensus of the respondents that Singapore was not overly conducive for learning English for Chinese International students, as the opportunities to speak Mandarin were extensive.

Food

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to food in Singapore' was 5.76. Females rated their success at 6.62, while males rated it at 4.38.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 5.25

Five years or more: 5.75

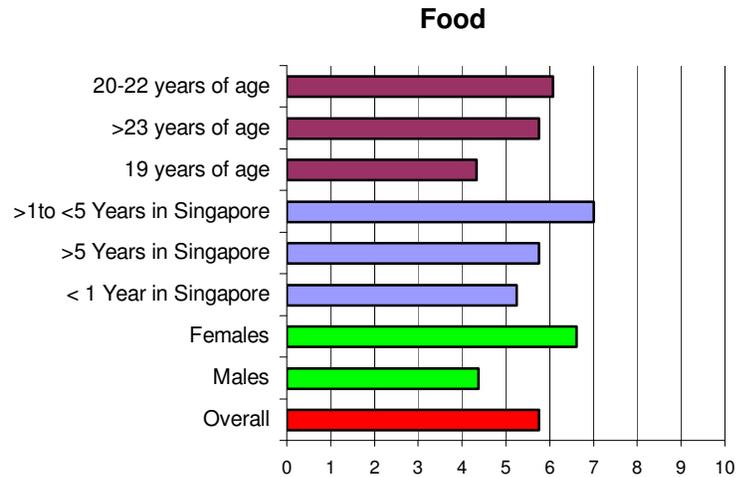
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 7.00

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 4.33

23 years or older: 5.75

Middle section (20-22 years): 6.07



In general, most of the respondents rated their success in adjusting to Singapore food poorly. There were no apparent differences with regard to age or time spent in Singapore on this issue. However, males rated their adjustment to food much lower than females.

Ironically, while Singapore is internationally renown for having wonderful food, the Chinese international students almost all stated that the Chinese food in Singapore was ‘terrible’. One second year female student said that the Chinese food in Singapore was,

‘tasteless...not important.... I don’t eat for taste...I can get better food when I go home.’

Interestingly, most of the respondents reported that they had no difficulty recognizing the food in the restaurants and Hawker Centers in Singapore. Also, they felt that the selection was acceptable and that they could easily order familiar dishes. However, what

consistently came through was that they felt that the Chinese food in Singapore was 'terrible', 'bad', and had 'no taste' and that it 'tasted different than it does in China'. As one first year male student put it,

'It will fill your stomach but it is not delicious'.

A senior student who has lived in Singapore for six year stated,

'Food is quite an interesting issue. My friends, a lot of my friends, complain about food here...no taste...it's just an abomination compared to what we have in China. I am not that particular about food, I can eat everything so it is not a problem for me but I do have some friends who complain a lot at the initial stage. Of course they don't complain now after so many years.'

Housing

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to housing in Singapore' was 7.10. Females rated their success at 7.23, while males rated it at 6.88.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 6.42

Five years or more: 8.5

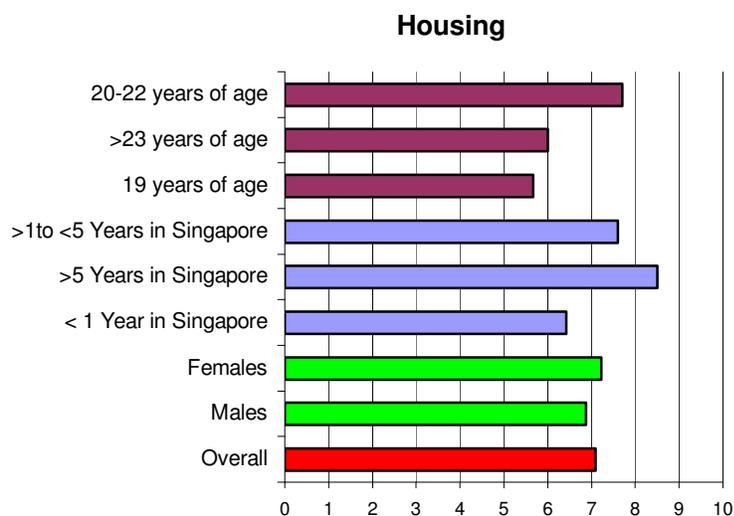
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 7.60

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 5.67

23 years or older: 6.00

Middle section (20-22 years): 7.71



There was no apparent difference with regard to gender on this issue, but age and time spent in Singapore indicated differing levels of adjustment. With respect to time spent in Singapore, respondents who were living in Singapore for five years or more indicated a higher level of adjustment than those who had been living in Singapore for one year or less.

Age of respondent also showed a difference in opinion. Those students who were nineteen years old found adjusting much more difficult than those who were 20-22 years old.

Seven (7) of the students who participated in this study lived in a university dormitory while the other fourteen (14) lived in an apartment. The students who were in Singapore on full scholarships had all of their lodging needs arranged by the Ministry of Education so they did not have experience obtaining housing. The students who lived in apartments commented that it was easy to find accommodations but it was difficult to find a 'good' apartment within their price range. There were several comments on how expensive housing was in Singapore.

Culture Shock

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to culture shock after moving to Singapore' was 8.76. Females rated their success at 8.85, while males rated it at 8.63.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 8.83

Five years or more: 8.25

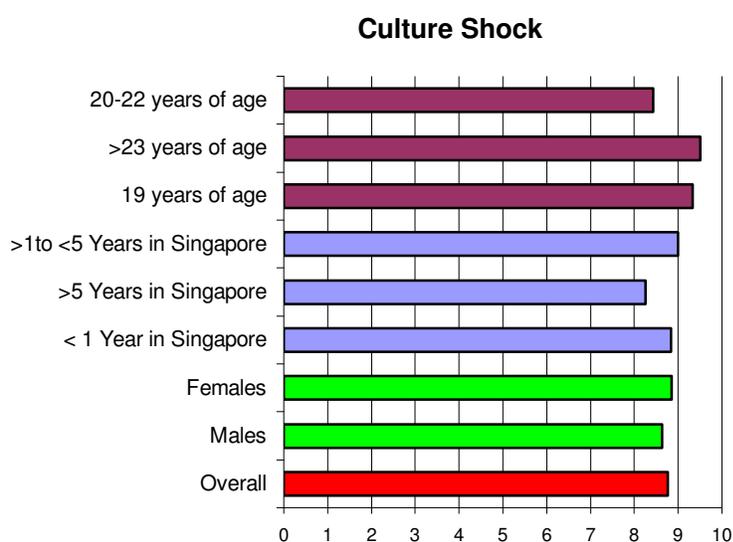
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 9.00

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 9.33

23 years or older: 9.50

Middle section (20-22 years): 8.43



In general, the Chinese international students had no difficulty with culture shock when they moved to Singapore, as reflected in their high ratings. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time spent in Singapore on this issue.

No student conveyed any major difficulty with his or her relocation to Singapore and when they arrived, they did not experience culture shock. Consistently, many respondents noted the similarity between Singapore and China. A second year female student stated that

‘Moving to Singapore is like moving to another city in China’.

Similarly, a first year male summarized his feelings about Singapore culture by saying,

‘Singapore culture is a copy of China. Singapore has no new culture’

Another male student, after living in Singapore for five years commented,

‘I don’t feel that there was a huge gap between me and Singaporeans’.

Another male student in his last year of studies stated,

‘It is much more easier to get used to Singapore than other countries’.

Understanding Singlish

Overall, the mean response to the question ‘How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to and understanding Singlish’ was 5.38. Females rated their success at 5.23, while males rated it at 5.63.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 4.25

Five years or more: 7.50

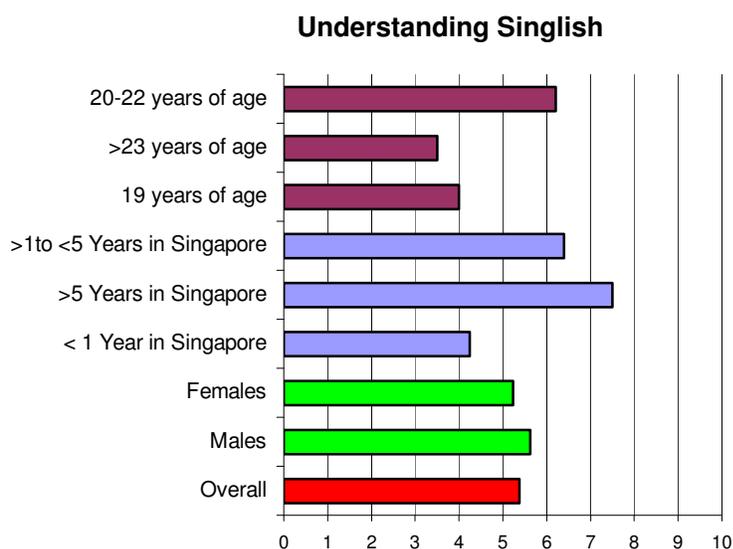
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 6.40

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 4.00

23 years or older: 3.50

Middle section (20-22 years): 6.21



The Chinese international students eagerly discussed the topic of Singlish. While there were no differences with regard to gender, there were differences with respect to age and length of time spent in Singapore. As expected, those who had recently moved to Singapore found Singlish much more difficult to adjust to than those who had lived in

Singapore for five years or more. Interestingly, those students aged 20-22 years indicated more success with Singlish than those older or younger.

In Singapore, the local English dialect, called Singlish, is quite widely spoken. Hall (1993) defines Singlish as:

“... the version of English spoken in Singapore...is a Creole formed from elements of English, Malay, Cantonese, and Hokkien Chinese.’

Singlish tends to be widely spoken by younger, university aged Singaporeans but it is often very difficult to understand, even for native English speakers. Similarly, many Chinese international students found the pronunciation, grammar, and word usage different than Standard English, and thus, difficult to understand – especially at the beginning of their time in Singapore. A first year male student stated,

‘Singlish is hard to understand. I would rather speak real English’

Another first year female respondent said that

‘Many Singaporeans speak Singlish – I don’t know what they say.’

Some students commented that the longer they lived in Singapore, the more they understood Singlish. The female who had lived in Singapore for six years stated that she had adjusted to Singlish during her tenure in school. When asked how successful she felt she was in adjusting to Singlish, she replied,

‘At first cannot get used to it, now can’.

Similarly, a second year female stated that she has been in Singapore for two years and now ‘can understand it’. Another second year female stated that ‘at the beginning it’s hard, but now it’s okay’. Again, another second year female stated that her understanding of Singlish is ‘getting better. The more you listen, the easier it is to understand.’

Most interviewees admitted that, while they were pleased they could understand Singlish, they did not wish to speak in this manner. To them, it was a hindrance and they found it detrimental when learning English. One first year female commented,

‘I can understand Singlish a little but I don’t like it. I want to speak Standard English. Singlish...is confusing when I learn English. Studying English in Singapore is not good.’

A first year male told me,

‘Singlish is not a help. It hurts learning English. It is a bad accent.’

A female respondent, who has lived in Singapore for six years, commented,

‘Some of my friends, actually, do not want to come [to Singapore]. In class we are told this program, everybody knows this program but many of them do not want to come because they know that Singlish is terrible. They want to learn decent English.’

These respondents asserted that they were careful not to learn Singlish but that this required a conscious effort. To combat the overlap from Singlish to their English learning, one respondent admitted that when she conversed with Singaporeans, she spoke in Mandarin. As she put it, ‘No problem. I talk Chinese.’ A first year male summarized his feelings,

‘Singlish is very hard to understand. I don’t want to learn it...it has different sound...it is not real English. I speak Chinese most. I will speak Chinese, not Singlish...it is better.’

Similarly, one first year male student remarked,

‘Better not to speak English with Singaporeans. If you connect with a Singaporean, you better to speak Chinese because the Singlish you never understand.’

Understanding the English your teachers use

Overall, the mean response to the question ‘How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to and understanding the English that your teachers use’ was 8.24. Females rated their success at 7.85, while males rated it at 8.88.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 8.17

Five years or more: 8.50

Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 8.20

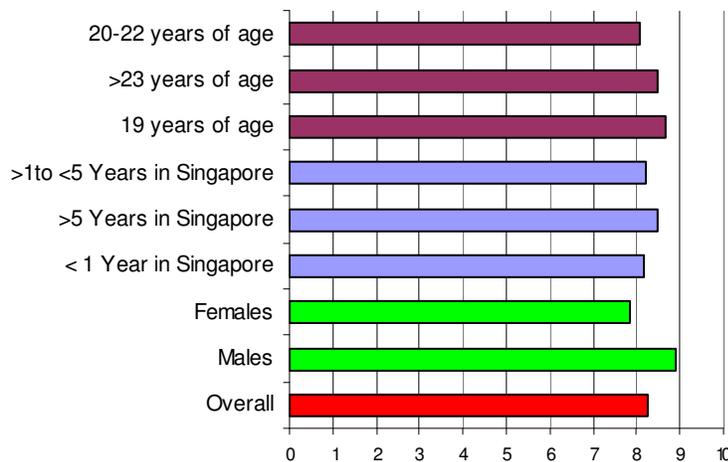
Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 8.67

23 years or older: 8.50

Middle section (20-22 years): 8.07

Understanding the English used by Teachers



In general, the respondents had no difficulty adjusting to the English used by their teachers in Singapore. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time spent in Singapore on this issue. Overall, all respondents rated their success with this at a high level. The general opinion was that the English used by teachers was understood without difficulty. A second year female commented,

‘Our lecturers, they will say, any problem with you and they when they speak to a Chinese student. They will slow down the words and make sure every person in the class understands what they said.’

Several of the Chinese international students remarked that, while there was no difficulty understanding their teachers, they did, at times, find some English accents difficult to understand. For example, a second year female commented that,

‘My teacher’s accent is very difficult to understand. He is Indian. I don’t understand him always. It’s okay because he uses power point.’

Another student commented that, for her, European accents provided her with the most difficulty.

New holidays

Overall, the mean response to the question ‘How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to new holidays in Singapore’ was 9.14. On this question, females’ scored 9.15 while males scored 9.13.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 9.08

Five years or more: 9.00

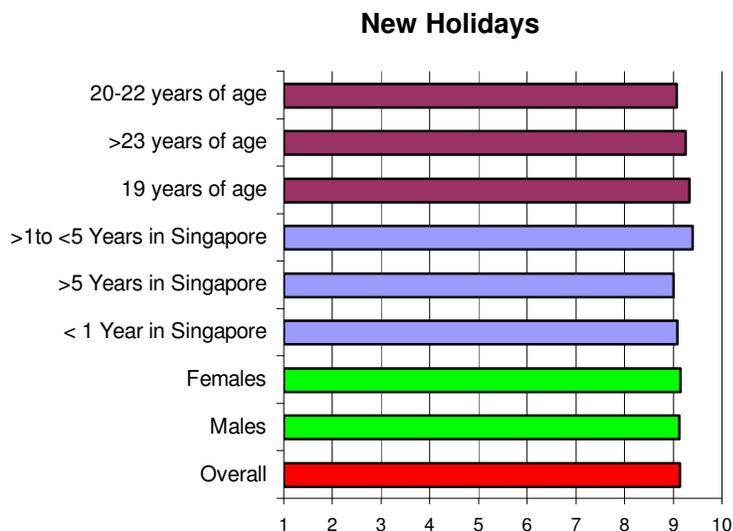
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 9.40

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 9.33

23 years or older: 9.25

Middle section (20-22 years): 9.07



In general, the interviewees had no difficulty adjusting to new holidays in Singapore.

There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time spent in Singapore on this issue. Many joked that they didn't care about the purpose of the holiday, rather that they would take any holiday, regardless of the occasion.

Transportation

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to transportation in Singapore' was 8.95. Females rated their success at 9.00, while males rated it at 8.88.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 8.73

Five years or more: 9.0

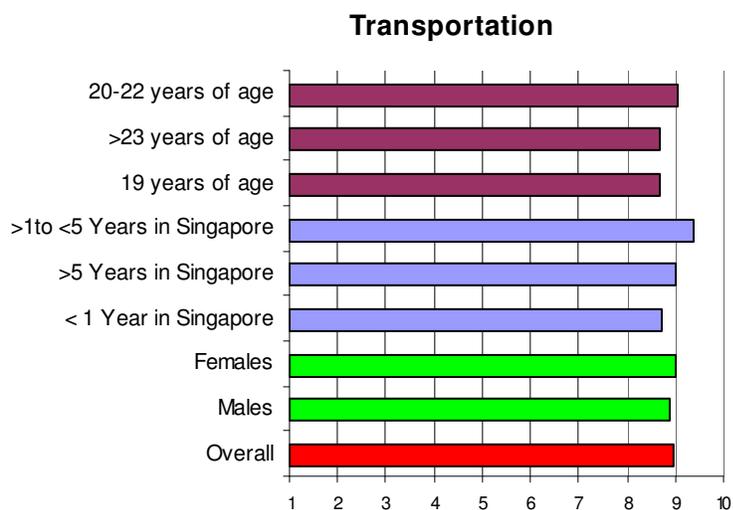
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 9.40

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 8.67

23 years or older: 8.67

Middle section (20-22 years): 9.07



In general, transportation in Singapore did not present difficulty for the Chinese international students. There were no apparent differences with regard to gender, age, or time spent in Singapore on this issue. Only one of the respondents has a personal car and

did not use the public transportation. The twenty (20) students who do use public transportation all reported that adjustment to it was, in fact, quite easy. One student remarked that it was 'even better than China'. Many observed that the ease of use was aided by the fact that the instructions for the public transportation were in Mandarin as well as English.

Getting health care

Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to obtaining health care' was 7.29. Females rated their success at 7.00, while males rated it at 7.75.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less: 6.83

Five years or more: 7.00

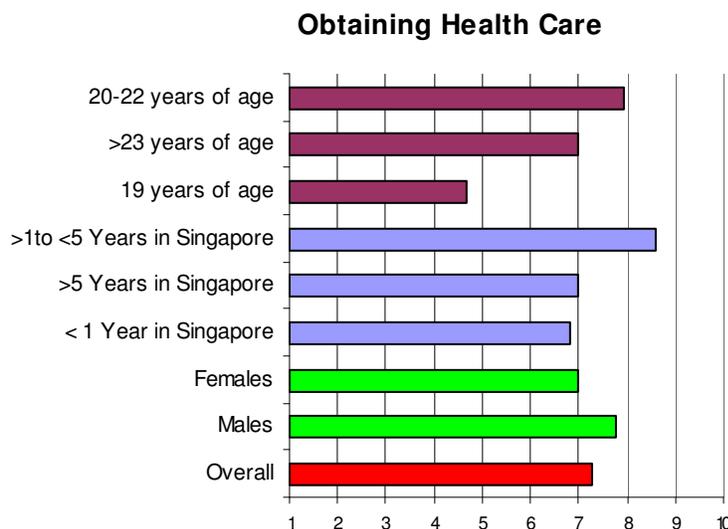
Middle section (>1 year to <5 years): 8.60

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age: 4.67

23 years or older: 7.00

Middle section (20-22 years): 7.93



Perception of success in obtaining health care elicited many interesting responses. While there were no differences with regard to gender or length of time in Singapore, the responses did differ with respect to age of the student. The nineteen year old students interviewed rated their perceived success with obtaining health care much lower than those students who were 20 years and older.

This question was met with a variety of answers. Most stated that the actual act of making an appointment and using the health care system would not pose a difficulty. One student who lived in Singapore for six years reported that it ‘wouldn’t be any problem’. The widespread usage of Mandarin would add to the ease of using the health care. However, expense of health care in Singapore was touted as a mitigating factor for many Chinese International students. Six (6) of the participants confessed that it was common for Chinese international students to bring large amounts of medicines into

Singapore from China so they would not have to purchase them at high Singapore prices. Similarly, a second year female stated that, in some non-emergency cases,

‘It is cheaper for me to go home to China to see a doctor. Easier to fly home if you have a serious problem. Chinese medicine is better, is stronger. The Chinese go home a lot.’

In fact, many of the interviewees admitted that they were aware of students who did this very thing. One scholarship male student who had lived in Singapore for five years disclosed that while his medical services were free, it did not cover everything and thus, returning to China was a way for him to save money. When asked his opinion on whether Chinese international students would go back to China for medical help, he stated,

‘Sometimes yes, because not everything is covered. For example, if you got things wrong and needed a dentist, it costs much, much more here than in China. So, sometimes they may choose to go back to China to take the treatment and most of us, I believe, bring a lot of medicines from China.’

Only two people stated that they did not know where to go to obtain health care. A first year male student stated that he was uncertain about contacting doctors in Singapore. He preferred to go home to China to seek a medical opinion. He commented,

‘I don’t trust doctors in Singapore. I heard a bad story where the doctor was very nervous and made a mistake.’

Two students raised the issue of Chinese Traditional medicine vs. Western medicine. A second year female student commented that she prefers Chinese traditional medicine to the Western medicine used in Singapore and so that would pose some difficulty for her when seeking medical advice. She stated,

‘It’s easy to find a doctor here on campus but I would not go. He would not be able to give advice to me.’

Conversely, one senior male perceived that Chinese Traditional Medicine was practiced quite extensively in Singapore – even more frequently than in China. He preferred Western medicine and so he would return to China where he felt he could obtain it. He stated,

‘First of all, most of my friends prefer Western medicine and if they go back to China, it is not because of the Chinese traditional medicine...in China they are also taking

Western treatment. Very few people are using traditional Chinese medicine....but in Singapore there is, yes, I know. There is some Chinese medicine here.'

How lonely are you?

Overall, most respondents expressed that they were not lonely while living in Singapore. Of the twenty-one (21) respondents, only six (6) reported 'yes' when asked this question. This distribution was fairly even between the genders (females = 4, males =2). Of the two students who responded with 'sometimes lonely', it was equally divided into one (1) male and one (1) female.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less (n=12):

Reported as 'lonely' (Yes) – 5

Reported as 'not lonely' (No) – 6

Reported as 'sometimes lonely' – 1

Five years or more (n = 4):

Reported as 'not lonely' (No) – 4

Middle section (>1 year to <5 years) (n = 5):

Reported as 'lonely' (Yes) – 1

Reported as 'not lonely' (No) – 3

Reported as 'sometimes lonely' – 1

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age (n = 3):

Reported as 'lonely' (Yes) – 1

Reported as 'not lonely' (No) – 2

23 years or older (n = 4):

Reported as 'lonely' (Yes) – 3

Reported as 'sometimes lonely' – 1

Middle section (20-22 years) (n = 14):

Reported as 'lonely' (Yes) – 2

Reported as 'not lonely' (No) – 11

Reported as 'sometimes lonely' – 1

With respect to time spent in Singapore, the group that indicated the highest degree of loneliness was the group that had been in Singapore for one year or less. Of the students who had been here for five years or more, none rated as lonely.

With respect to age, the group aged 23 years or older reported as being the loneliest (it is to be noted that three of the four in this group were in their first year in Singapore). The eight (8) students who stated that they were either lonely or 'sometimes lonely' reported that they missed family and friends most of all. One student observed that the close proximity of Singapore to China was very helpful. She disclosed that she made frequent trips to China and this alleviated her loneliness.

Are you homesick?

In general, most of the respondents (12) rated as not being homesick for China. Of the twenty-one (21) respondents, only seven (7) of the students reported that they were homesick. Six (6) of these were female and one (1) was male. Two interviewees reported as 'sometimes homesick'.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less (n =12):

Reported as 'homesick' (Yes) – 4

Reported as 'not homesick' (No) – 7

Reported as 'sometimes homesick' – 1

Five years or more (n = 4):

Reported as 'homesick' (Yes) – 1

Reported as 'not homesick' (No) – 3

Middle section (>1 year to <5 years) (n = 5):

Reported as 'homesick' (Yes) – 2

Reported as 'not homesick' (No) – 2

Reported as 'sometimes homesick' – 1

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age (n = 3):

Reported as 'homesick' (Yes) – 2

Reported as 'not homesick' (No) – 1

23 years or older (n = 4):

Reported as 'homesick' (Yes) – 3

Reported as 'not homesick' (No) – 1

Middle section (20-22 years) (n = 14):

Reported as 'homesick' (Yes) – 2

Reported as 'not homesick' (No) – 10

Reported as 'sometimes homesick' – 2

There were no apparent differences with regard to time spent in Singapore but it did appear that gender and age showed a difference. Six (6) of the seven (7) interviewees who reported as homesick were female.

With regard to age, the group that was the least homesick was the 20-22 year olds. Both ends of this range were found to be more homesick than that middle range. Interestingly, the respondents who stated they were lonely were not always the same people who stated that they were homesick. Three (3) of the respondents who rated themselves as lonely also said that they were not homesick.

Of the respondents who stated they were homesick, the main reasons were:

- Missed the food,
- Would prefer the four seasons,
- Wanted to attend the festivals,
- Missed family and friends.

To alleviate homesickness, one student reported that he often used the Internet to communicate with family and friends in China. Due to the frequent and relatively inexpensive flights from Singapore to China, all students commented that traveling home to China was easy and relatively inexpensive. One respondent admitted that she went home every three (3) months. The majority said that they either do or plan to go home at least once per year.

Is money a big concern for you?

Of the twenty-one (21) respondents in this research, ten (10) students reported that money was not a big concern. This group contained seven (7) females and three (3) males so

gender did not play a role in this issue. All of the students who were studying in Singapore with a full or partial scholarship (seven in total) were in this group.

Ten (10) respondents (6 females, 4 males) stated that they were concerned with money as their parents were paying for their education. One male student stated that money was 'sometimes' a concern. Five students mentioned that, while going to school in Singapore was expensive, they felt that it was cheaper than going to the United States or the United Kingdom.

Average of responses based on time spent in Singapore:

One year or less (n=12):

Reported that 'money was a concern' (Yes) – 8

Reported 'money was not a concern' (No) – 3

Reported as 'sometimes money was a concern' – 1

Five years or more (n = 4):

Reported as 'money was a concern' (Yes) – 1

Reported as 'money was not a concern' (No) – 3

Middle section (>1 year to <5 years) (n = 5):

Reported that 'money was a concern' (Yes) – 1

Reported 'money was not a concern' (No) – 4

Reported as 'sometimes money was a concern' – 0

Average of responses based on age of respondent:

Nineteen years of age (n = 3):

Reported as 'money was a concern' (Yes) – 3

Reported as 'money was not a concern' (No) – 0

23 years or older (n = 4):

Reported as 'money was a concern' (Yes) – 2

Reported as 'money was not a concern' (No) – 2

Middle section (20-22 years) (n = 14):

Reported that 'money was a concern' (Yes) – 5

Reported 'money was not a concern' (No) – 8

Reported as 'sometimes money was a concern' – 1

In general, concern over money was fairly evenly rated. The younger students and those who had been in Singapore the shortest amount of time indicated more concern with regard to finances.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the thoughts of undergraduate Chinese international students with respect to their adjustment to living in and attending a university in Singapore. These

students were questioned on a number of topics (Appendix D) and the information gathered is presented in this chapter. Overall, twenty-one (21) students were interviewed. The chapter first begins with a description of the demographics of the participants, followed by their answers to the questions presented. Various sections throughout chapter four illustrate the students' perceptions on their adjustment to living and attending a university in Singapore. When appropriate, specific quotations from the respondents are given. The data were analyzed using a number of factors – age of respondent, time spent in Singapore, and gender. Chapter five will provide further discussion of the data and trends found in this research.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

Summary and discussion of study

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate Chinese international students of their adjustment to living and studying in Singapore. The following research questions guided the study:

- What adjustment issues do Chinese undergraduate international students studying in Singapore experience?
- What supports do Chinese undergraduate international students report are most useful/helpful in their adjustment process?
- How does the adjustment of Chinese undergraduate international students in Singapore compare to the Literature?

In order to address these questions, twenty-one (21) Chinese international students were interviewed. There were certain criteria that these students had to fulfill before they could be interviewed. First of all, participants in this study had to be unmarried, as it was felt that married students might be living in Singapore with their spouse who provides much support. Secondly, they had to be from Mainland China (not Macau, Taiwan, or Hong Kong). Furthermore, this school experience in Singapore had to be the first time they attended a school outside of China, and they were to be either in their program or in

an English Bridging course preparing for entry into their undergraduate program. No graduate students were interviewed.

These students were interviewed using a semi-structured face-to-face technique. There was a list of fourteen (14) open-ended questions that guided these interviews (Appendix D). Each individual who participated in this study was interviewed for approximately one hour at a convenient location. If they were agreeable, the interview was audio taped.

What adjustment issues do Chinese undergraduate international students studying in Singapore experience?

The most difficult adjustment issues reported by the Chinese international students in this research were:

1. Speaking English
2. Weather
3. Food

Overall, the most prevalent adjustment issue reported by the Chinese international students was speaking English. While there were no apparent differences with regard to gender or age on this issue, there was a difference based on length time spent in Singapore. Not surprisingly, the longer the students had lived in Singapore, the more successful they rated themselves with regard to learning and speaking English.

Frequently, respondents mentioned that they had learned a great deal of English in China but that the focus was different. In China, their teachers had focused primarily on reading and writing English, while speaking the language seemed to be less of a concern. They spoke English primarily only in the classroom and, outside of that, it was very limited. Understandably, speaking English was mentioned as the biggest adjustment they had upon their arrival to Singapore.

Although this issue stood out as the number one adjustment concern, it, paradoxically, did not seem to cause any really upset or discomfort for the students. Each of the respondents that mentioned English as an adjustment factor was quick to point out that speaking English in Singapore was not essential. They observed that they could live quite comfortably in Singapore with minimal English. It should be noted that Singapore only officially became an independent country in 1965 and has approximately 77% Chinese descent. Most, if not all, of these people will speak a Chinese language, with the majority speaking Mandarin. Also, it should be noted that Singapore has four official languages – one of which is Mandarin. Because of this, information is available in Mandarin. For example, instructions for how to use the local transportation system are available in Mandarin. Also, most businesses will have Mandarin speakers in their employ. One does not need to search far for a native Chinese speaker, as they are readily available in Singapore.

Although the interviewees responded that English was the number one adjustment issue when they moved to Singapore, I do not feel that it was the idea of them having to exist

and communicate in a totally English environment that was the big adjustment. Instead, I think they were referring to the actual act of *learning to speak* English that was such an adjustment. When these students all came to Singapore, they had various levels of English proficiency. However, this proficiency was in reading and writing; while very few could actually 'speak' English with any great fluency. Consistent with language learning theory, comprehension precedes production. Their chief adjustment was learning how to 'speak' English, not communicating and surviving in English. In actual fact, the respondents consistently raised the idea that Singapore was not an exclusively English environment. Thus, they did not feel that they needed to only speak English to exist and thrive. Most felt perfectly at ease adapting to general life in Singapore from a language perspective.

I believe that in the case of Chinese international students studying at a university in Singapore, the issue of learning English is not really the adjustment to the language per se, but rather an academic program adjustment. Learning English in Singapore is a matter of academic program necessity, not necessarily one of survival or communication. Each of the institutions teaches in English and requires a specific level of English proficiency. To achieve this, most of the students entered a 'Bridging course' prior to commencing their degree programs to ensure that they could function well academically in an English speaking university. Essentially, they felt that they could easily communicate in Chinese outside of the school and thus, it was not mandatory that they be exceptionally fluent in English to live and flourish in Singapore. Thus, they felt that

learning to speak English was more important in order to be successful in their academic program rather than for living in Singapore.

Another issue related to language was Singlish. Overall, the Chinese international students reported that adjustment to Singlish was difficult. As stated, Singlish is the local language native to Singapore. It has words originating from English, Malay, Hokkien, and Cantonese. For those not verse in the language, it can be extremely difficult to understand. For those who are learning English, it can serve as an impediment for language learning. As such, the respondents reported that Singlish interfered with their acquisition of English.

The widespread use of Singlish was problematic for the Chinese international students in two ways. First, they had difficulty understanding it and thus, this caused difficulty when trying to communicate with local Singaporeans in English. The students often felt that it was much easier to revert back to Mandarin to make themselves understood. Secondly, the non-standard pronunciation of Singlish proved disconcerting for many Chinese international students. In general, they did not possess a lot of confidence about their speaking ability in English and the pronunciation of Singlish confused them. They viewed it as an obstacle in their attainment of English. Thus, in general, they did not often attempt to speak to Singlish speakers in English, as they feared they would acquire the sayings, sentence structure, or pronunciation of Singlish. They were cognizant that Singlish was not Standard English and that it was of no benefit to them. Even if they

wanted to stay, work, and live in Singapore, they could easily use Mandarin to communicate. Many saw absolutely no need to learn Singlish.

A second major adjustment factor reported was the weather. Singapore has a tropical rainforest climate with no distinctive seasons. It has high temperatures (22 °C to 34 °C) and high humidity all year round. The biggest complaint about the weather was the lack of seasons and the unyielding heat/humidity.

Food, and expressly taste, was the third major adjustment issue highlighted by the respondents. Being dominated by Chinese culture, Singapore, as one would expect, has an abundance of Chinese restaurants and many of the different Chinese cuisines are represented. Obtaining familiar food in Singapore was unproblematic for the respondents. The interviewees had no difficulty with food recognition and they could effortlessly order it (either in Mandarin or in English) as typically, menus very often include Chinese characters. Simply put, their main concern with food in Singapore was the taste; specifically that it was different than what was available in China and that it lacked flavor.

In sum, there were three main adjustment issues identified by the respondents: language – both learning to speak English and adjusting to Singlish, weather, and taste of the food in Singapore.

What supports do Chinese undergraduate international students report are most useful/helpful in their adjustment process?

The 'English Bridging course' was listed as the most valuable and useful support in the respondents' adjustment. As mentioned, this course is completed before the student enters into his/her university program. It is designed to ensure that Chinese and other international students have an acceptable standard of English language proficiency prior to entering an English speaking university. While there are different variations of this course, it can generally be described as an intense English language-learning course. The Chinese international students are enrolled in this program with other international students and there are no Singaporeans in these classes. The exclusive focus is learning English with a large emphasis on speaking the language. The length of the course depends widely on the institution that offers it, the individual person, and the level of language ability each person has when they enter the course.

While this course provided the obvious benefit of learning English, it also provided each respondent with opportunities to meet people upon arrival to Singapore. Many of these students were relatively close in age and were in a similar situation – first time leaving China to attend a foreign university. Camaraderie and friendships are built; some of which will be maintained throughout the university years and even perhaps beyond. Because of the high numbers of Chinese students studying in Singapore, it follows that many of these classes have a large number of Chinese students. This can be both a blessing and a curse. The large circle of potential friends can ease the loneliness of moving to a new country. These newfound friendships can aid with adjustment.

However, because of the similar mother tongue, it is very easy for the students to use Mandarin as the medium of conversation both outside of class and during class breaks.

Hiring an agency was another strategy that the Chinese international students often used to facilitate their move to Singapore. From our discussions, it was ascertained that these agencies are similar to relocation companies except that these companies appear to specialize or at least work in the area of international students. According to the respondents who used this type of company, hiring an agency is quite common as they do a considerable amount of the paperwork (i.e. visa, applications) to help students enter a foreign university. However, as stated, these companies were located in China, not in Singapore.

How does the adjustment of Chinese undergraduate international students in Singapore compare to the Literature?

As reported in the Literature Review, there has been a lot of research undertaken in the area of international student adjustment. However, thesis research that includes Chinese international students tends to group them with 'Asians' who study in an English speaking country such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, or Australia.

Literature specifically pertaining to Chinese international students and their adjustment is not as abundant.

Let us first compare the findings of this study with the general Literature on international student adjustment – focusing on several key findings. To recap, as part of this research, the interviewees were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 – 10, how successful they felt they were at adjusting to a number of factors. The rating of 10 signified successful adjustment while a rating of zero indicated a high level of difficulty with adjustment.

Tseng and Newton (2002) summarized the key adjustment problems faced by international students into four categories:

- 1) General living adjustment,
- 2) Socio-cultural adjustment,
- 3) Personal psychological adjustment, and
- 4) Academic adjustment.

In their research, ‘general living adjustment’ was defined as adjustment to weather/climate, transportation systems, paying bills, health care systems, food, and housing arrangements. ‘Socio-cultural adjustment’ referred to experiencing culture shock, discrimination, and getting used to new values, norms, holidays, and customs. Depression, loneliness, feelings of isolation, homesickness and frustration made up the issue of ‘personal psychological adjustment’. ‘Academic adjustment’ included familiarity with a new educational system, lack of language proficiency, and acquiring new learning strategies.

For my research, I used the factors of weather, food, housing, transportation, and getting health care to equate to Tseng and Newton's 'general living adjustment' category.

Overall, when we take the mean of these five factors, the interviewees in my research rated 'general living adjustment' at 7.14. Of the five factors, weather and food were flagged as the most difficult adjustment (weather = 6.62; food = 5.76). Adjustment to transportation was given the high rating of 8.95 thus signifying that it was not viewed as problematic. In general, the students felt that it was excellent and easy to use. Housing was rated at 7.10 and obtaining health care was rated at 7.29. The main issue cited with both housing and health care was the expense. Students felt that it would be easier in some circumstances to either travel back to China for medical services or bring extra medicines with them into Singapore.

To simply use these five factors to determine adjustment to 'general living' may not give us an accurate picture of the Chinese international student experience. As a separate question, I asked the students in my research how successful they felt they were in adjusting to 'general living in Singapore'. This response indicated an overall rating of 8.19. The mean of the five factors of weather, food, housing, transportation, and getting health care was 7.14. It appeared that, while the Chinese international students may have encountered some minor adjustment issues with certain aspects of life in Singapore, they did not perceive them as severe enough as to affect adjustment to their host country.

In my research, the factors of general life in Singapore, customs, culture shock, and new holidays were used to equate to Tseng and Newton's category of 'socio-cultural'. The

respondents were quite positive about these issues and the overall mean for the ratings was 8.65. They ranked 'successful adjustment to customs' as 8.52, culture shock 8.76, new holidays 9.14, and adjusting to general life in Singapore 8.19. In general, it appeared that adjustment to Singapore was quite straightforward. The fact that Mandarin was so widely spoken made any new experiences in Singapore easy to understand and made any new procedures easy to complete. While there were a few new holidays and customs in Singapore, many interviewees either expressed some familiarity with them or stated that they did not have any real impact for the interviewees.

In my research, the category of 'personal psychological adjustment' was reflected in the factors of: meeting friends who are Singaporean, meeting friends who are international students, how lonely they were, and if they were homesick. Loneliness and homesickness were rated on a 'yes', 'no', or 'sometimes' scale. Respondents rated their perceived success at meeting Singaporeans as 6.0 while success in meeting other international students was rated at 8.14. Meeting Singaporeans was deemed problematic, especially at the beginning of their time in Singapore. However, many explained that this was due to the fact that most of the Chinese international students attended an English Bridging course that excluded Singaporeans. Another interesting aspect noted was that many of the Chinese students were not overly interested in meeting Singaporeans for language learning purposes as they felt their use of Singlish was detrimental to their language learning. Thus, not having many Singaporeans as friends was not seen by many of the respondents as a negative aspect.

Overall, loneliness and homesickness was not prevalent within the respondents. Only twenty-eight percent (28%, n=6) of the students reported that they were 'lonely' while living in Singapore. Ten percent (10%, n=2) were 'sometimes' lonely while the remaining sixty-two percent (62%, n=13) said that they were 'not lonely'. Similarly, only thirty-three percent (33%, n=7) of the students reported that they were homesick. Fifty-seven percent (57%, n=12) reported as 'not homesick', while the remaining two (10%, n=2) reported that they were 'sometimes homesick'.

Tseng and Newton's category of 'academic adjustment' was reflected in my research as the factors of school/academic programs, learning and speaking in English, and understanding the English their teachers used. The overall average rating of 7.16 indicated that there were some adjustment issues, albeit, not major issues. Success in adjusting to a new school and academic program was rated 7.57. While some respondents did note a difference with regard to expectations in the universities in Singapore, these differences were not expressed as negatives. Understanding the English spoken by the teachers rated high at 8.24 indicating that this was unproblematic. Learning and speaking English was rated the lowest at 5.67. Interestingly, learning English grammar was deemed to be an easy adjustment but speaking English was flagged as the difficulty. The respondents found it difficult to speak English in Singapore because many locals spoke Mandarin or Singlish and not, they felt, Standard English.

Lin (1997) stated that international students 'may have difficulty adjusting to the various accents of the instructors and understanding class lectures....often require extra time to

read their text books....and are often unable to articulate their knowledge due to their limited vocabulary'. In another study, international students listed English Language as their third biggest concern, noting that they would like more help with pronunciation (Fitzgerald, 1998). In my research, the Chinese international students reported that they had no difficulty with the accents of their instructors except in the few instances of those instructors who spoke with nonstandard English accents. Some students admitted that they sometimes find it difficult to express themselves in English but speaking Mandarin could easily rectify this. Reading English in textbooks was not mentioned as a difficulty.

Corbeil (2006) also reported that language was an issue for the Asian foreign students in her research. She stated, 'Many of the students in this study report that language is one of the greatest challenges for them in Singapore. Their greatest concern is not with the native Chinese, Malaysian, or Indian languages or dialects spoken in the country, but with Singapore colloquial English, known locally as Singlish.' My research supports Corbeil's findings. The Chinese international students interviewed consistently acknowledged that Singlish posed great difficulty for them in their pursuit of English proficiency.

Hechanova-Alampay et al (2002) found that international students experienced less social support than domestic students, most likely because their family and friends were not close and visiting them was difficult and infrequent. Rajapaksa and Dundes (2003) discovered that international students felt more lonely and homesick than domestic students. Interestingly, the majority of the Chinese international students in my research

did not report being lonely or homesick. Distance from family and friends was not viewed as problematic as it was noted that Singapore and China are relatively close geographically. Isolation was eased by the fact that one could easily visit hometowns, as flights to China were easy to arrange, frequent, inexpensive, and involved a relatively short flying time. Many of the Chinese students that I interviewed stated that they did take advantage of this and went home at least once per year; some returned to China more frequently. Also, some respondents remarked that it was quite normal and easy for their parents to visit them in Singapore.

Finances are typically another major stressor for international students. Lin & Yi (1997) stated that international students must assume a full-time student status while enrolled in school and thus working becomes very difficult. In another study, international students listed finances as their third biggest concern, behind English Language and living/dining (Fitzgerald, 1998). In my research, ten ($n = 10$, 48%) of the students reported that money was not a concern for them, while one ($n = 1$, 4%) student stated 'sometimes'. As expected, scholarship students did not report finances as a concern. Ten of the respondents ($n = 10$, 48%) stated that they were concerned with money as their parents were paying for their education and they were uncomfortable with this.

Thomas & Althen (1989) completed a Literature Review and stated that, based on the articles and studies they had looked at, international students can suffer from a variety of adjustment issues which can include depression, helplessness, hostility toward the host country, anxiety, over-identification with the home country, withdrawal, homesickness,

and loneliness. The Chinese international students in my research did not exhibit or express any of these to any great extent. However, one student mentioned that he had sought counseling for academic stress in his second year and a minority of students reported being lonely or homesick.

Corbeil (2006) interviewed Asian foreign students who studied in transnational programs in Singapore. She reported that some of the students felt that being in Singapore did not cause a great deal of culture shock. Instead, it was very similar to being in China, and not really like going abroad to study. However, the author stated that most of her participants 'did experience initial periods of loneliness, homesick, fatigue, disorientation or stress'. My research was conducted exclusively with Chinese students and did not include other Asian international students. In my study, the general consensus was that Singapore was very similar to China and the respondents did not experience any culture shock. Unlike Corbeil's study, most respondents in this research did not report loneliness, homesick, fatigue, disorientation, or stress. Only 33% of respondents stated that they were homesick and 28% reported that they were lonely.

Now, let us compare the findings of this study with the general Literature on Chinese international student adjustment. Feng (1991) found that there were four principal areas of concern with Chinese international students: (1) financial difficulty; (2) cultural differences; (3) academic concerns and (4) language ability. In my research, speaking English was reported to be the main adjustment in the area of language. Finances were

raised as a concern for approximately half of the respondents. Cultural differences and academic concerns were not flagged as major concerns.

Xu (2002) who found that Chinese international students experienced difficulties caused mainly by a language deficiency and a lack of awareness of the differences in teaching and learning between their home institutions and their institution in the US. Such difficulties included differences in expectations and in student performance assessment for courses. While English was a primary concern for the students in my research, they were mainly concerned with 'speaking' the language. Differences between Chinese universities and universities in Singapore did not raise concern with the overwhelming majority of the students. Most had never attended a Chinese university so they had no firsthand knowledge of standards expected. However, many felt that the education system in China was of a higher standard. Others did note some differences between Chinese and Singaporean universities, but these differences were not seen as negatives. For example, one student mentioned that, in China, emphasis is on memorization whereas, in Singapore, it is expected that students are to form and defend opinions. While she noted this difference, she also felt that, at the university level, emphasis on forming and expressing opinions was a better method.

Sun et al (1997) also reported on the difficulties in lack of language proficiency, the deficiency in cultural awareness, and academic achievement. The findings in Sun's study suggested that the academic difficulties were produced by the differences between Chinese and American teaching and learning styles. The subjects also had difficulty

handling the environment of an American university. Academic difficulties were not a high concern for the respondents in my study as they ranked their success at adjusting to school and academic programs as 7.57. The major language proficiency concern was evident with my participants – particularly in the speaking of English and the focus on learning a Standard English accent. My research does not indicate that the Chinese international students had any lack of cultural awareness. In fact, the mean response to the question ‘How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to culture shock after moving to Singapore’ was 8.76 indicating high success. Similarly, the mean response to the question ‘How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to general life in Singapore’ was 8.19.

Wang et al (2006) stated that many Chinese international students experience an internal conflict between keeping their Chinese culture identity and aspiring toward the American political and economic systems. In my research, this was not a concern for the Chinese international students who were studying and living in Singapore. There was an overwhelming consensus that Singapore and China are very similar culturally and that adopting a new culture was not applicable. As mentioned previously, participants rated their success in adjusting to culture shock (8.76), general life in Singapore (8.19), and new customs (8.52) quite highly.

Ingman (1999) indicated that Chinese students experience lower social adjustment and higher levels of social anxiety. Chinese students were rated as having lesser overall social skills (as defined by American norms) than their American counterparts. Another

study compared Chinese-descent international students studying in the United States with American students (who were also studying in the U.S.) and Chinese descent students studying in Taiwan. They found that the Chinese students studying in the United States reported significantly higher social alienation than Chinese students in Taiwan or American students, and significantly higher social loneliness than Chinese students in Taiwan (Hsu, Hailey, & Range, 1987). My research did not support these findings. While the respondents were not without bouts of loneliness or homesickness, there appeared to be no high levels of social adjustment or anxiety. In the case of Chinese international students studying in Singapore, the difference between home and host cultures is minimal.

Jarrahi (2004) reported that Chinese international students, studying in the United States, underutilized counseling services and tended to pursue informal sources of support rather than professional ones. It would appear that the situation is similar with the Chinese international students in my research. Many of the respondents did not use the services offered to them by the university or city; rather, they would turn to family, friends, and classmates first and foremost if they had personal problems. Only two of the respondents ($n=2$, 9.5%) mentioned that they, or their friends, had sought help at a counseling center. However, it should be noted that many of the respondents explained that they didn't have any major problems, thus, there was no requirement for many of the services offered. They mentioned that moving to Singapore was quite trouble-free and they perceived no genuine need to seek help. Many stated that they would go to Student Services if the need arose but, to date, most had no major need to seek help.

In one of the very few research studies that specifically addressed Chinese international student adjustment in Singapore, Tsang (2001) studied Chinese students and Academics who had moved to Singapore in regards to seven factors. These factors include prior international experience, pre-departure knowledge, language competence, self-efficacy, extroversion, association with locals, and social support. His hypothesis was that each of these factors 'is positively related to (a) general adjustment and (b) interaction adjustment'. His results showed that, 'With the exception of prior international experience, the other six factors significantly affected general and/or interaction adjustment for at least one of the samples....pre-departure knowledge and social support were relatively significant factors, among the seven, in affecting adjustment'. In my research, most of the students reported that they had a high level of knowledge of Singapore before they entered the country. Depending on the individuals, the information was derived through various sources. The Chinese international students with full scholarships reported quite high amounts of pre-departure knowledge and social support, provided by the Singapore Ministry of Education. Also, they were provided with ample information upon arrival. Other respondents pointed out that the Internet was an unending source of information. Some commented that their parents and/or friends had been to Singapore and could give them some information about the country. Still others hired an agency in China that provided much pre-departure information. No interviewee reported lack of knowledge as a problem for them. Many stated that they felt that their fellow Chinese international students provide a lot of social support for them.

Tsang (2001), who studied Chinese students and Academics in Singapore, stated that 'even if the host culture is somewhat similar to the home culture, the sojourner still needs to adjust to the host institutional environment that can differ by a great deal from that of his or her home country'. In my case of Chinese international students studying in Singapore, the adjustment to the host institutional environment was not deemed to be a major concern. Overall, the mean response to the question 'How successful do you feel you have been in adjusting to school/academic program' was 7.57.

Conclusions

From this research, we can draw conclusions in the following areas:

- English language learning
- General adaptation to Singapore
- Use of host institution/country services

The first conclusion is that learning to speak Standard English in Singapore is a concern for the Chinese international students interviewed. These students expected that, upon arrival in Singapore, they would have a much greater opportunity to speak English in everyday life than they had in China. This did not prove true for them and they were faced with two major concerns with respect to learning English in Singapore.

It is believed that learning to speak Standard English in Singapore is inhibited by the widespread use of Singlish and the extensive use of Mandarin by the local population.

Simply put, one does not need to be able to speak a very high level of English in order to be able to live in Singapore. Because of the pervasiveness of Mandarin, English learners report that it is often difficult to practice their newly acquired English skills. Added to this is the fear that if they do speak English to local Singaporeans, they will learn Singlish, which many see as detrimental to English learning. Thus, we can conclude that this group of Chinese international students did not find Singapore particularly conducive to speaking English.

Another conclusion we can draw is in the area of general adaptation to a new country. This research presents the notion that adjustment and adaptation are fairly effortless for Chinese international students studying in Singapore. There appears to be several factors that contribute to this ease. First of all, the widespread use of Mandarin as a medium of communication seems to help the transition of Chinese international students. Being able to use their mother tongue extensively to communicate and to access information written in Mandarin in the host country tended to make the transition and the ‘settling in’ quicker and less anxiety producing. Another factor that contributed to the ease of Chinese international students moving to Singapore was that the cultures of the two countries are very similar. Because the main ethnic group in Singapore is Chinese, much of Singapore’s culture is based on Chinese culture, and because many of the holidays, festivals, customs, and celebrations are similar to China, adapting to general life was seen as straightforward. While there are obviously some adjustment issues with the Chinese international students when they move to a foreign country, these adjustment issues tend to be quite minor when the foreign country was Singapore.

Another conclusion we can draw from this research is that this group of Chinese international students did not avail of many of the services available to them in their adjustment process. Many Chinese students depended on family, friends, or classmates for help or solved the problem independently. This, however, is not to say that none sought the services provided. Most reported that, if the need arose, they would feel comfortable seeking help.

It was relayed that the English language bridging course was the most helpful and used program provided. Its purpose is to improve the English language proficiency of the international students in preparation for entrance into a university program. However, another benefit of the course was that it also facilitated friendships. The grouping of students allowed them to create bonds and embark upon relationships that otherwise, they may not have formed. Respondents felt very positive about this type of program and were quick to impart its benefits.

Implications for Theory and Practice

If the number of international students is on the rise, but fewer of them are entering the United States, this implies that they must be seeking alternative countries. If non-US English speaking countries and institutions want to attract a larger percentage of these students, they may wish to focus on their adjustment issues and try to make students' transition and adjustment as undemanding and stress-free as possible. Based on the

findings and conclusions drawn from this research, there may be a number of possibilities open to universities to enhance the adaptation for Chinese international students.

First of all, universities can ensure that English Bridging courses are available for all Chinese international students. In Singapore, programs dedicated to student adjustment may wish to focus specifically on English language learning and speaking rather than general cultural adjustment, as Chinese international students do not appear to have difficulty adjusting to cultural and general life in Singapore. Focus should also be on Standard English pronunciation with some time devoted to Singlish and the differences between the two. This course can increase the English language proficiency of the students in all domains – especially in the ‘speaking’ domain. Such programs can help ensure that students are at acceptable English proficiency levels and this, in turn, may result in less academic stress. Also, English bridging courses can assist students in meeting others, as they are now part of a group with which they share some commonalities. In keeping with this, universities can offer English courses for students beyond their first year to help them continually improve their English language proficiency. Again, perhaps a significant focus of these advanced courses can be on Standard English pronunciation rather than reading and writing.

Another implication of this research is that universities may wish to increase opportunities for Chinese international students to meet and interact with the citizens of the country – especially at the beginning of their time at the host university. In Singapore, care should be taken to help ensure that Singaporeans do not speak Mandarin

or Singlish with the Chinese international students as this may not help the English language learning.

Universities may wish to continue and/or strive to provide Chinese international students with the opportunities to travel to and/or study in English speaking countries/institutions. Exchange and study/work abroad would be very appropriate for this population. While there are many benefits for the students, one main advantage related to this research is that it will provide Chinese international students with the opportunity to practice and improve their English – primarily in the area of speaking.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I did not explicitly use a theoretical framework at the beginning of this research to frame the study. Instead, I implicitly used the theoretical framework of cultural similarity influence on international student adjustment. This means that I did not set out a specific theory at the onset of the research that I tried to either support or not support. Rather, I laid the foundation implicitly by mentioning the framework of cultural influence throughout the thesis and allowing the data collected to form the reality of what these students were facing as international students. From the data, I can now construct generalizations/themes/theories about the adjustment of the interviewees.

Jun et al (2005) state that the cultural similarity theory ‘posits that differences between the home and host cultures for sojourners will relate directly to their difficulties adapting to the host culture’. We would expect that if this theory were correct, international

students who study/live in a country that has a culture similar to their home culture will adapt much more positively and easily. Jun et al (2005) go on to explain this theoretical framework:

Cultural similarity is a reflection of national cultural distance. National cultural distance is defined as the degree to which the cultural norms in one country are different from those in another country (Kogut & Singh, 1988). As culture, in a broad sense, refers to the social context within which humans interact with their environment, cultural distance represents the differences between countries in the ways that individuals perceive and respond to their environment. A high level of cultural distance creates barriers to the knowledge flow between the home and host countries because social skills developed in the home culture do not mesh with the requirements of the host culture. Thus, a high level of cultural distance is likely to lead to cognitive uncertainty in interactions with the host environment; uncertainty here is meant to refer to the ability to predict accurately how others will behave and the ability to explain the behavior of others (Harvey & Novicevic, 2000).

The data collected from the participants in this study supports the conclusion and theory that international students who move to host countries that are similar in culture and language tend to adjust easier and have a smoother transition than those who study in countries that are very different culturally than their home country. The participants in this study all felt that Singapore was very similar in culture to China and that this factor was a huge benefit to them in their general adjustment. In other words, there was very little 'cultural distance' between Singapore and China in their perception. No one reported any major transition issues. This is somewhat different than what is generally found in the Literature as most of these studies have Chinese/Asians studying in the United States (or the UK, Canada, Australia) – countries that are very different culturally than China. Consistent with the cultural similarity theory, the participants in the

Literature tended to have great difficulty with their adjustment to general living. In sum, this research supports the cultural similarity theory. I concluded that the more similar a host country is to the home country in culture and language, the easier the general adjustment of the international student. Also, I concluded that the similarity in language (Mandarin) from the home country (China) to the host country (Singapore) is both a negative and a positive – it can greatly and positively facilitate general adjustment of an international student but it can hinder the English language adjustment and learning.

This research would also support Nancy Arthur's statement that, 'International students from source countries that share common language, cultural norms, and demographic characteristics such as race, are less likely to experience serious culture shock associated with cross-cultural transitions (Arthur, 2003a). Searle et al (1990) reported that their study confirmed the hypothesis that 'the greater the degree of cultural distance, the more likely an individual is to experience sociocultural adjustment problems'. Similarly, Pedersen (1991) stated that, 'the greater the cultural difference, the more complicated the international student's adjustment is likely to be.' Because the participants felt that the Singapore and Chinese cultures were so similar, the amount of adjustment required by the Chinese international students in Singapore was minimal.

In Chapter one, I presented a definition of Culture Shock, taken from Oberg (1960). This theory stated that there were four stages of emotional reactions related to cross-cultural adjustment.

- Honeymoon stage - characterized by the initial excitement, curiosity, and enthusiasm of the newly arrived individual.
- Crisis stage - the individual will likely have feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anger, anxiety, and depression.
- Recovery stage – the individual is better able to function in the new culture due to the resolution of his/her feelings and new cultural learning that has taken place.
- Adjustment stage – the individual is able to enjoy and function competently in the new environment or culture.

Oberg (1960) went on to list six negative characteristics associated with culture shock:

- Strain or stress relating to psychological adaptation;
- A sense of loss or deprivation resulting from the removal of friends, status, role, and personal possessions;
- Fear of rejection by or rejection of the new culture;
- Confusion in role definition;
- Unexpected anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding cultural differences; and
- Feelings of helplessness, including confusion, frustration and depression.

In my research, there was no indication that the Chinese international students entered or were in the 'crisis' stage. No participant reported that they felt inadequacy, frustration, anger, anxiety, and depression. Rather, they seemed to reside in the recovery and adjustment stages. Also, the six negative characteristics mentioned by Oberg did not appear to be present in the experiences of the interviewees. While some of the

participants did report missing family and friends, I did not interpret that as a 'sense of loss or deprivation'. None expressed any confusion in role definition whatsoever nor did any mention that there were cultural differences. In actual fact, the participants all mentioned that the cultures of China and Singapore were quite similar and that adapting or adjusting to life in Singapore was very easy due to this fact.

Limitations of the study

In general, qualitative research has limitations inherent in its very design. Perhaps one limitation of this research is the bias of the researcher herself. Because I am the primary collector of data in this research, it is very possible that my biases and personal assumptions may influence the results. While I cannot completely eliminate these biases, it was important that I was aware of them and constantly monitor myself to ensure, as much as possible, that they do not interfere. For example, I have a passion for traveling, I have traveled extensively, and I have lived in four countries. Each of these experiences was very positive and thus, it is possible that I have an underlying belief that moving to a new country is a very positive experience and that adjustment is fairly easy. Also, I have a very positive regard for Singapore and must not assume that everyone has the same opinion. I have to be careful with my assumptions, as others may have differing opinions and experiences. Other beliefs of mine have to be constantly monitored so that they do not interfere with this research.

As mentioned earlier, generalizability is typically not the major purpose of qualitative research (Johnson et al, 2004). First of all, random selection is rarely used. In this research, volunteers were interviewed. However, I also used the snowball technique to obtain respondents. In this case, each person I interviewed was asked to recommend a friend who they thought might like to be interviewed. Secondly, in this research, I was more interested in documenting ‘particular’ findings rather than ‘universal’ findings. I wanted to explore the experiences of a small number of individuals rather than look at large populations. I do not seek to generalize the findings of this study to the entire population of international students or to the entire population of Chinese international students. However, the insights provided in this research may be helpful for some institutions when dealing with Chinese international students, depending on their similarity to this specific research setting. This is a decision that the individual reader will have to make – as generalizability is not my intention.

When collecting this data, I made two basic assumptions. First, I believed that all participants could communicate their feelings and thoughts adequately using English. I did not use a translator. Secondly, I assumed that all participants expressed their thoughts and feelings honestly and candidly and that they would provide me with sincere answers. Looking back at the respondents, I feel that this assumption was accurate. I felt that all of the volunteers were eager to share their stories and thoughts with me and rapport was easily built.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a plethora of possible future research that has arisen from this research.

First of all, this research specifically targets universities in Singapore. For a broader perspective, one could use a larger sample and include Chinese international students who are attending non-university institutions. Similarly, this study only included student from Mainland China. Future studies could be conducted with students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macau for comparison. Do students from these areas have similar adjustment experiences as the Mainland Chinese students?

This research could be replicated with other international undergraduate students to obtain their perceptions of adapting to living and studying in Singapore. It would be very interesting to delve into the perceptions of other Asian students (e.g. Indian, Vietnamese) and to do a comparison to the perceptions of the Chinese international students. Do they have similar experiences with learning and speaking English given that their mother tongue is not Mandarin? Do they find adapting to general living in Singapore as easy as the Chinese international students in this study did?

Similarly, one could study the experiences and perceptions of Chinese graduate international students and compare how graduates and undergraduates rate their adjustment to living and studying in Singapore. It would be very interesting to compare their responses. Does learning and speaking English play such a big role to graduates in their adjustment?

Another area for future research is to delve more deeply into the specific area of learning and speaking English in Singapore by Chinese international students. One may wish to look specifically at this area to compare how rapidly or easily Chinese international students learn English in Singapore as compared to how rapidly or easily they learn it in other English speaking countries.

Another interesting area for future research is the examination of the English Bridging courses that are available for Chinese international students. One may wish to compare the specific programs that are available to Chinese international students in Singapore. What are the student perceptions of the benefits, strengths, and weaknesses of such programs? What does a successful program entail?

Similarly, one could specifically compare the adjustment of two sets of Chinese international students at the same university in Singapore – those who attended an English Bridging program and those who did not. In depth interviews could focus on how well they feel they adapted to a new country and institution.

Future research could investigate the experiences Chinese international students have had with study abroad programs that have been offered by universities in Singapore. What do they see as the major benefit of these programs? One could investigate the different programs that are available and which ones Chinese international students feel are more conducive to learning and speaking English.

Contributions

So, perhaps a central question of any research is ‘how does this study contribute to the knowledge of a society?’ This research adds to the body of Literature on the issue of adjustment issues faced by students - specifically, Chinese international students’ adjustment issues. The body of Literature that specifically addresses this topic is lacking, as most research on international student adjustment involving Chinese students groups them together with other students to form an ‘Asian’ group. While there may indeed be similarities with this large group, more targeted research is needed to delve into exactly which issues are most prevalent in which populations. This research provides some insights and hopefully allows for a better understanding of the adjustment issues that Chinese international students face when they move to Singapore.

The majority of research on adjustment issues is focused on international students entering the US, Canada, the UK, or Australia. This study also adds to the growing research in the area of international students studying in a foreign country other than these top four. While the international students in these countries may indeed be the largest group of international students studying abroad, it is by no means the only group and research needs to expand to examine the adjustment issues of all groups.

This study also reaffirms the idea that English language learning is indeed a major issue for non-native English speaking international students. Chinese international students strive to learn Standard English as they feel it is necessary for mobility. They seek to

study in countries that can enhance this learning. The extent to which they can learn English is of paramount importance.

Also, this research lends support for the theory of cultural similarity, which puts forth the notion that similarity in culture has a great impact on the ease of adjustment of sojourners (in this case, international students) to a host country. These Chinese international students living in a foreign, yet predominantly Chinese, culture exhibited no serious signs of culture shock, social isolation, loneliness, or homesickness. Their adjustment to living in a host culture that was perceived as being quite similar to their own home culture was regarded as straightforward and unproblematic. Interestingly, none of the students interviewed knew of any Chinese international student who returned to China because they couldn't adjust to life in Singapore.

General observations

In recent years, as we mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the number of international students is increasing and the field of post-secondary institutions is rapidly expanding to include more and more of these international students. Thus, it is no surprise that the adjustment and transition issues of international students are receiving increased attention. If countries desire to attract international students, they need to ensure that their transition is smooth and this, in turn, will attract more international students.

More and more countries are vying to attract international students and Singapore is no exception. It is positioning itself as the educational hub for Asia and has set a mandate to increase the number of international students in its universities. It currently attracts many students from China and, no doubt, will continue to attract many more students as the numbers of Chinese students choosing to study abroad increases. Interestingly, while Singapore has been quite successful in attracting international students, they have largely been left out of research studies and the current body of Literature in the area of international student adjustment. Very few studies focus on this tiny country and its growing body of international students. My research, focusing on Singapore and Chinese international students, contributes to the body of Literature on countries that have been less represented in research. We have been remiss to only focus on the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, or Canada while other countries can provide much useful information. My wish is that more and more of our research focus on international student adjustment in countries outside of these aforementioned popular destinations as I believe we have much to learn from the experiences of the students in these countries.

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Appendix A: Introductory Letter to Student

Hello,

My name is Dawn Steele and, like you, I am a student and I need your help! I am living in Singapore but I am attending the University of Toronto, Canada where I am completing a PhD in Education.

I am presently writing my thesis and I want to interview undergraduate Chinese international students to learn how you feel about your adjustment to Singapore and the services/programs available to help you. This interview will last only about one hour. This is not related to your studies in any way and will NOT affect your grades. I will keep your name confidential and no one will know that you participated in this study. I would like to ask you questions about what you find frustrating or difficult about moving to a new school and country and what has helped you adjust.

My dissertation is entitled: *Perceptions of Chinese International Students in Singapore: Adjustment Issues and Support*. I want to ask you questions about how Chinese international students, like yourself, feel about your adjustment to school and life in Singapore. The research that I have read shows that all international students have adjustment issues. However, because most of the studies are completed with a large group of Asian students, there is not much research that focuses specifically on Chinese students. I would like to ask you for your thoughts so that I can better understand the issues you are facing. I am hoping that by writing about your thoughts and experiences, I can help other people and institutions understand your issues more fully.

I would like to interview you if:

- you are an unmarried student (married students may be here with their spouse who provides much support).
- you are from mainland China (not Macau, Taiwan, or Hong Kong).
- this is your first time attending a school outside of China
- you are an undergraduate international student

If you would like to be interviewed, please email me and we can set up a time for us to meet. We can discuss any questions you have before we begin the interview. Please contact me at kdsteele@hotmail.com.

If I have any further questions about this research, you can contact the University of Toronto (Canada) Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca. My supervisor's name is Dr. Angela Hildyard, University of Toronto, Canada.

Thank you for your time,
Dawn Steele

Appendix B: Individual Informed Consent Form

Title: Perceptions of Chinese International Students in Singapore: Adjustment Issues and Support

Researcher: Kelly Dawn Steele, Doctoral Candidate, University of Toronto, Canada. kdsteele@hotmail.com

Researcher Supervisors:

Dr. Angela Hildyard, University of Toronto, Canada. angela.hildyard@utoronto.ca

Dr. Glen Jones, University of Toronto, Canada. gjones@oise.utoronto.ca

Dr. Julia Pan, University of Toronto, Canada. jpan@oise.utoronto.ca

Brief description of the research:

Kelly Dawn Steele is a PhD student at the University of Toronto and will use this research to write a dissertation as partial requirement for her degree. Chinese undergraduate international students who are attending university in Singapore will be interviewed and asked about their adjustment issues and how they feel about the services/programs available to help international students.

The research shows that international students have adjustment issues. Because most of the studies are completed with Asian students, there is not much research that focuses specifically on Chinese students. The researcher would like to ask for your thoughts so that she can get a clearer understanding of what issues Chinese international students are facing. It is hoped that by understanding the issues, organizations may be better equipped to help their students adjust.

As I have agreed to be a participant in this study, I understand and agree to the following:

- I will complete an interview with the researcher (a convenient time and location will be scheduled). The interview will take approximately one hour and will consist of open-ended questions.
- Participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.
- I know that I do not have to answer any question that I do not want to answer.
- I know I can withdraw my participation in this study at any time without negative consequences.
- I understand that this research does not involve any risk of harm any greater than that of ordinary daily life.
- The researcher will take notes during the interview. The researcher will tape the interview ONLY if I agree to it. All notes and tapes (if applicable) will be kept until one year after the completion of the PhD. At that time, all notes and tapes will be destroyed.

- I understand that the researcher may publish the research or make public presentations based on the research.
- If I would like a copy of this Individual Informed Consent form, the researcher will provide one.
- The researcher may use some direct quotations from the participants.
- The researcher will keep the names of the participants confidential. However, there are limits to confidentiality that may require that the researcher break confidentiality. This would be in instances of child abuse, intent to harm self or others, or a court order.
- If I have any further questions about my rights as a participant in this study, I can contact the University of Toronto (Canada) Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca
- If I would like a copy of the final draft of this thesis, the researcher will provide one.

I agree that I have had the opportunity to discuss this research project and any concerns I have with the researcher and I feel that I have a full understanding of the study and my role in this study. I have read and understood the above points and I want to take part in this interview and research. I know that if I should have any further questions, the researcher will promptly answer them.

Participant (print): _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

I agree to the audio taping of this interview.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Introductory Letter to Institution/Administrator

Hello,

My name is Dawn Steele and I am a PhD (Higher Education) student from the University of Toronto. I am presently writing my dissertation, which is entitled: *Perceptions of Chinese International Students in Singapore: Adjustment Issues and Support*. I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss your potential participation in this research. Enclosed is a copy of my thesis proposal and ethics approval for your consideration.

For my research, I would like to interview Chinese international students to investigate what, if any, adjustment issues they may have as they embark upon international study. I would like to stress that this is not a review of your institution's programs or department. Instead, it is a study based on the perceptions of Chinese international students of what adjustment issues they face.

If I have any further questions about this research, you can contact the University of Toronto (Canada) Ethics Review Office at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca. Alternatively, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Angela Hildyard, University of Toronto, Canada.

I would very much appreciate any assistance that you can give me and I look forward to discussing this research with you at your earliest convenience. I can be reached at 8118-0704, 6400-6766, or at kdsteele@hotmail.com.

Thank you for your time,
Dawn Steele

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Chinese international student

Introduce researcher, study, explain/discuss the Individual Informed Consent form. Clarify any questions the participant may have. Collect information (e.g. age, time in Singapore)

1. Why did you choose to come to Singapore to study? (Was it your first choice? Why did you want to leave China to study)
2. Tell me the most important adjustment issues you or any of your friends have encountered after you came to Singapore. (at least 3 minimum).
3. What programs/services does your institution/city offer that are for international students (specifically Chinese)? How did you become aware that these programs/services were offered?
4. If you do not use the programs/services/people of the institution/city, why?
5. What organizations/groups have you joined or are a part of? What supports do they offer that help you adjust to life/school in Singapore?
6. Where do you live in Singapore? Does this affect your adjustment at all? How?
7. Who are your closest friends here in Singapore? Do you have any Singaporeans as friends? Do you have any family here?
8. What programs/services/people do you turn to most frequently for a) personal matters and b) academic matters.
9. What do you think your institution/Singapore could do to help Chinese international students make better adjustments?
10. Are there any programs/services that the institution/Singapore could offer that would better help Chinese international students?
11. Would you recommend studying in Singapore to a friend? Why or why not?
12. What advice would you give someone else who is coming to Singapore to study?
13. When your degree is completed, what are your future plans? What have you learned from being an international student in Singapore that can help you in the future?

14. In your opinion, how 'successful' do you feel you have been in adjusting to:

- School/academics
- Weather
- General life in Singapore
- Meeting friends who are Singaporean
- Meeting friends who are international students
- Customs
- Food
- Learning and speaking in English
- Housing
- Culture shock
- Understanding Singlish
- Understanding the English your teachers use
- New holidays
- Transportation
- Getting health care
- How lonely are you?
- Are you homesick?
- Is money a big concern for you?

(If applicable: on a scale of 1-10: 1 – not adjusting well, 10 – adjusted quite well)

Appendix E: Table #1: Summary of Participant Responses to ‘How successful have you been in adjusting to...?’

Table 1: Summary of Participant Responses to 'How successful have you been in adjusting to...?'

	Overall	Males	Females	< 1 Year in Singapore	>5 Years in Singapore	>1to <5 Years in Singapore	19 years of age	>23 years of age	20-22 years of age
School/academic programs	7.57	8.00	7.31	7.08	8.25	8.20	6.33	6.75	8.07
Weather	6.62	6.50	6.69	5.00	9.00	8.60	4.00	4.75	7.71
General Life in Singapore	8.19	7.63	8.54	8.30	7.75	8.20	7.33	8.25	8.36
Meeting friends - Singaporean	6.00	5.38	6.38	5.75	6.75	6.00	3.67	8.25	5.86
Meeting friends - International	8.14	8.13	8.15	8.83	6.75	7.60	8.67	8.50	7.93
New Customs	8.52	8.38	8.62	8.75	7.75	8.60	9.33	8.00	8.50
Learning and Speaking English	5.67	5.75	5.62	5.08	7.00	6.00	6.33	6.25	5.36
Food	5.76	4.38	6.62	5.25	5.75	7.00	4.33	5.75	6.07
Housing	7.10	6.88	7.23	6.42	8.50	7.60	5.67	6.00	7.71
Culture Shock	8.76	8.63	8.85	8.83	8.25	9.00	9.33	9.50	8.43
Understanding Singlish	5.38	5.63	5.23	4.25	7.50	6.40	4.00	3.50	6.21
Understanding English of Teachers	8.24	8.88	7.85	8.17	8.50	8.20	8.67	8.50	8.07
New Holidays	9.14	9.13	9.15	9.08	9.00	9.40	9.33	9.25	9.07
Transportation	8.95	8.88	9.00	8.73	9.00	9.40	8.67	8.67	9.07
Getting Health Care	7.29	7.75	7.00	6.83	7.00	8.60	4.67	7.00	7.93

* Scale was 1 – 10.