



## THE CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA : A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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### Abstract

*With the accelerating process of globalisation, studying abroad has gradually become a common phenomenon. China is the world's largest source of international students, and Chinese students' adaptation to a foreign country has always been the focus of scholars. Although Chinese students have become the second-largest group of international students in Malaysia, few studies concentrated on the cross-cultural adaptation of this group in Malaysia. This literature review further confirms this situation. From 2010 to 2021, only 14 articles were obtained through both Google Scholar and Scopus databases and manual search. Among the limited literature, 4 articles took Chinese international students as samples. In other research, the samples were international students from all over the world, and Chinese students only accounted for a part. Moreover, most of the studies only selected samples from one location, affecting the results' representative. In addition, the research topic was relatively unitary; the 14 studies mainly discussed the factors affecting the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia and suggested suggestions to improve their adaptation. In terms of research design, 12 articles applied a cross-sectional survey but only involved independent and dependent variables without moderating or mediating variables; the research framework was relatively simple. However, cross-sectional studies cannot determine causal relationships between variables and are insufficient to show the dynamic process of cross-cultural adaptation. On this basis, some suggestions for future research are put forward.*

**Keywords:** *Cross-Cultural Adaptation; Psychological Adaptation; Sociocultural Adaptation; Academic Adaptation, International Students*

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## INTRODUCTION

With the continuous acceleration of globalisation in the world, assisted by the rapid growth of global communication and transportation systems, studying abroad has gradually become a natural or common phenomenon. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 2017, more than 5.3 million international students were studying globally, compared with only 2 million in 2000 (UNESCO, 2019). As the biggest source country of international students, China has sent a total of 5.5871 million Chinese students to study abroad from 1978 to the end of 2018. As an emerging education hub of Asia (Shafaei et al., 2016), Malaysia has also become a place for Chinese students to study. According to the official figure, 15,000 Chinese mainland students went to Malaysia to start their studies in 2016, making it the second-largest group of international students, rising year after year (Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). 1.345 million Chinese students are studying in Malaysia's higher education institutions, becoming the largest group of overseas students in Malaysia (Hirschmann, 2020).

International students moving to a culturally unfamiliar environment can cause stress and challenges since they have to cope concurrently with two different cultures (Berry, 2006). Scholars suggest that international students should face three aspects of adaptation: psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, and academic cultural adaptation (Brisset et al., 2010; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Challenges encountered by international students in a new environment may result in negative consequences (Shafaei & Razak, 2016). For example, some students choose to give up halfway since they cannot adapt. The high dropout rate of international students has also become a major challenge for international education growth in some countries (Lamb et al., 2011). On the contrary, if international students overcome these difficulties and challenges, they can successfully adapt to the new environment and achieve their goals (Earley & Ang, 2003; Molinsky, 2007). For example, they can get higher diplomas, get cross-cultural experience and improve their language skills. Just as Kim (2001, p. 21) described, "Cross-cultural adaptation is thus a double-edged process, one that is simultaneously troublesome and enriching". Therefore, the issue of international students' adaptation to a new environment is very crucial to concentrate on (Shafaei & Razak, 2015). The increasing number of international student groups and the series of problems faced by international students in host countries have also made the need for research increasingly prominent.

A plethora of research on the adaptation of Chinese students has revealed that this group encounters more challenges in the adaptation process (e.g., Galchenko & Vijver, 2007; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016; Han et al., 2013). An early study in Canada found that compared with French and other English-speaking international students, Chinese international students encountered more difficulties in adaptation, which were manifested in higher anxiety, more prejudice, more adaptation difficulties, lower English language ability, and a lower sense of social support (Chataway & Berry, 1989). This conclusion has been demonstrated in a survey in Russian, the study found that Chinese students are the least adaptable group of all international students (Galchenko & Vijver, 2007). Similarly, the opinion has also been widely confirmed in several studies in recent years. A mental health survey of Chinese students at an American university found that 45 per cent of participants had symptoms of depression, and 29 per cent reported some anxiety symptoms (Han et al., 2013). Chinese students experience greater stress in the adaptation process due to their neuroticism personality characteristics and perception of greater cultural distance (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016). However, the mentioned research mainly studied in Western countries, such as America and Russian, and very few in Asian countries, such as South Korea (Lee et al., 2011; Park & Noh, 2018), Japan (Guo et al., 2014), Singapore (Chen & Yang, 2015). There is a big difference between Asia and Western countries. The findings of this research review can precisely present the adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia and the current research status.

This study systematically reviews the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia from 2010 to 2021. By identifying literature gaps in the following aspects, namely publishing time, sample characteristics, research topics, research methods, and theory, the review aims to inspire more research to enrich future research

achievements in this area. This paper mainly answers the following two questions (a) What is the research status (quantity, sample characteristics, topics, theories, and research methods) of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students studying in Malaysia from 2010 to the present and (b) What are the gaps in the literature on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in Malaysia from 2010 to the present.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sources***

Current literature review using both electronic search and manual search methods. Electronic retrieval is mainly conducted in Google Scholar and Scopus databases, while manual retrieval is mainly to search for literature in previous studies, such as previous literature reviews. The main reason for choosing Google Scholar and Scopus is that these two databases contain a large number of articles of different types, such as journals, books, and conference papers, and cover a wide range of subjects, thus providing as much literature as possible. Manual searching of relevant literature in the process of reading literature can compensate for the omission of electronic search.

### ***Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria***

According to the questions of the current review, the selected articles must meet the following criteria: (a) include a sample of Chinese international students in Malaysia, (b) investigate cross-cultural adaptation, including psychological, sociocultural, and academic adaptation, (c) research articles published in journals between 2000 and 2021, (d) published in English. In establishing screening criteria, some literature review articles have also been referenced. For example, "review papers, books, preprints, book chapters, series, theses, and conference proceedings" are excluded (Tang et al., 2021, p.4). Since China has special national conditions, China includes mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao. Therefore, the current review can include articles involving the above samples.

### ***Search Procedure***

Chinese students, cross-cultural adaptation, and Malaysia are the focus of the current review, and all possible combinations and derivations related to the three words are searched as keywords. Specifically, search terms were used to identify articles focusing on Chinese international students, including Chinese students, Chinese sojourners, international students, and sojourners. Since the terms "adaptation", "adjustment", and "acculturation" are often used interchangeably in research (Gurieva & Kinunen, 2019), all three are listed as keywords. Besides, Intercultural adaptation is also listed as a keyword because it is used as a synonym substitute for cross-cultural adaptation in some studies (Peng & Wu, 2019). To obtain more literature, life satisfaction, happiness, depression, and well-being, which are associated with the process or results of cross-cultural adaptation (Ng et al., 2017; Wang & Quan, 2013), are also searched as keywords. Therefore, cross-cultural adaptation, adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, psychological adaptation, psychological adjustment, sociocultural adaptation, sociocultural adjustment, academic adaptation, academic adjustment, life satisfaction, happiness, depression, and well-being were used to identify articles that related to cross-cultural adaptation (see Table 1). In addition, articles also were manually searched from previous relevant studies. All searches took place in September 2021.

After an initial search, 210 articles, 50 articles, and 3 articles were retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, and additional sources, respectively. After manually deleting some irrelevant and duplicate documents, a total of 90 articles were identified for full-text review. Thoroughly reading the title, abstract, and full text of all the articles, 14 articles were identified that meet the inclusion criteria. The article selection process is shown in Figure 1, and specific information on the selected articles is presented in Table 3.

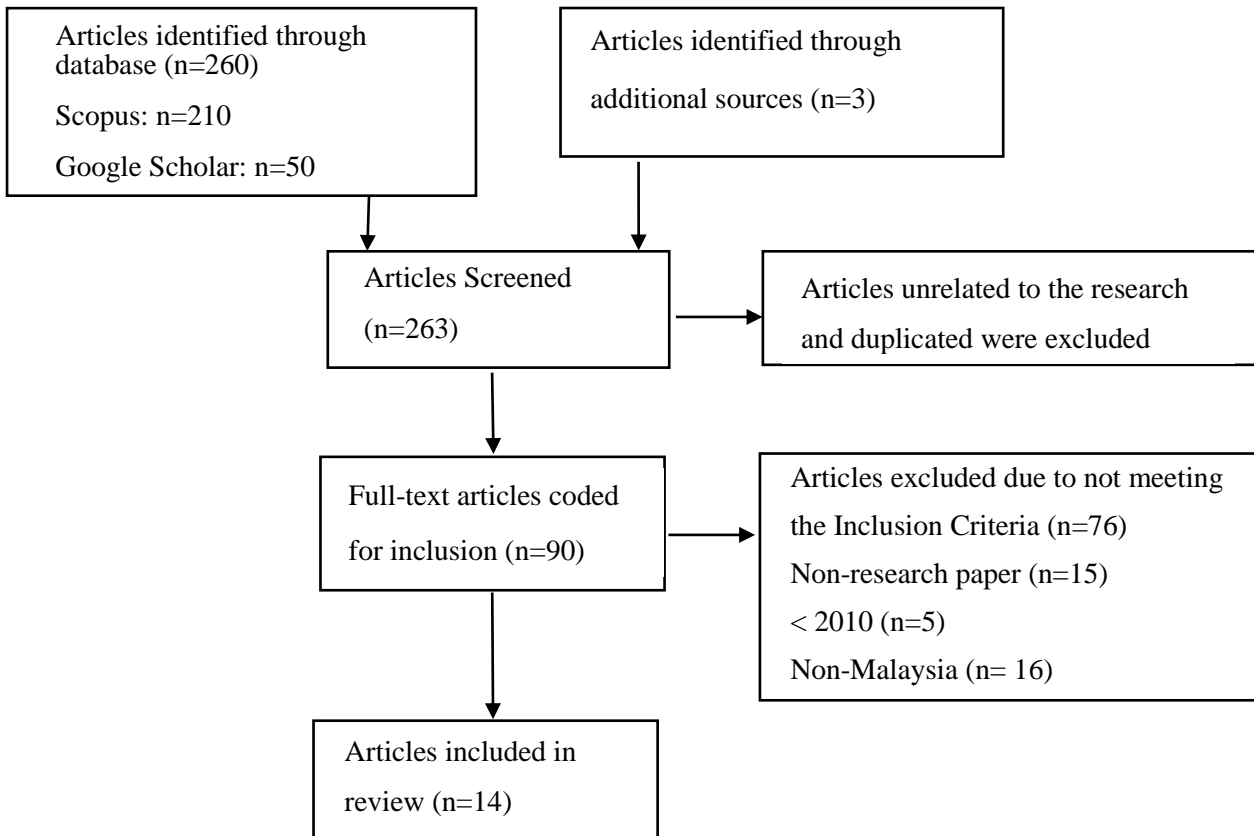


Figure 1: Flow diagram for the process of article selection.

Table 1: Keywords of article retrieval

Database	Search Keywords
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY “([Chinese OR “Chinese student*” OR “Chinese sojourner*” OR “international student*” OR “college student*” OR “university student*” OR sojourner*] AND [“cross-cultural adaptation” OR “cross-cultural adjustment” OR “intercultural adaptation” OR adjustment OR adaptation OR acculturation OR “psychological adaptation” OR “psychological adjustment” OR “sociocultural adaptation” OR “sociocultural adjustment” OR “academic adaptation” OR “academic adjustment”] OR depression OR happiness OR “satisfaction with life” OR “well-being” AND [Malaysia])
Google Scholar	allintitle: Chinese OR sojourners OR students OR adaptation OR adjustment OR acculturation OR “cross-cultural adaptation” OR “cross-cultural adjustment” OR “psychological adjustment” OR “psychological adaptation” OR “sociocultural adaptation” OR “sociocultural adjustment” OR “academic adjustment” OR “academic adaptation” OR Malaysia

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2010-2021	<2010
Literature Type	Research paper	review papers, books, preprints, book chapters, series, and conference proceedings
Language	English	Non-English
Research Site	Malaysia	Non-Malaysia
Research Object	Chinese students	Non-Chinese students

Table 3: Specific information of the articles selected for analysis

Author/Year	Sample Characteristics	Focus	Theory Framework	Research Design	Analytic Method	Main Findings
Alavi & Mansor (2011)	n=135, Iran (n=117), Arab (n=10), China(n=8).	cross-cultural adjustment	Maslow theory	cross-sectional survey	descriptive statistical analysis	Social and recreational problems and curriculum and method of teaching problems are most difficult to adapt.
Chan et al. (2021)	n=124 China (79.8%), Brunei (8.2%), Indonesia (5.3%), other countries (6.7%)	cross-cultural adjustment	Anxiety and uncertainty management (AUM) theory	cross-sectional survey	PLS-SEM	Support from lecturers and host country nationals facilitates cross-cultural adaptation
Malaklolunthu & Selan (2011)	n=250 Middle East (33.2%), Southeast Asia (26.4%), others (40.4%, including China, India, other religions)	cross-cultural adjustment	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	descriptive statistical analysis	Academic, religious, personal, and social adjustment problems were most difficult.
Mustaffa & Ilias (2013)	n=135, China (14.1%), Indonesia (36.3%), Middle East (20%), other countries (29.6%)	cross-cultural adjustment	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	T-test ANOVA regression analysis	Demographic and Adjustment factors contributed to cross-cultural adjustment
Nachatar Singh (2018)	postgraduate students, n=55 students from China (3), India, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Nigeria.	academic adaptation	Not listed	semi-structured interviews		The support of educational institutions and individual characteristic

Author/ Year	Sample Characteristics	Focus	Theory Framework	Research Design	Analytic Method	Main Findings
						s play a role.
Shi et al. (2019)	n=200, Chinese students	psychological adaptation social adaptation	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	regression analysis	English ability and attitude towards Islamic culture positively influence adaptation, experience in the Islamic harms psychological adaptation.
Shi et al. (2020)	n=200 Chinese students	cross-cultural adaptation	Acculturation theory	cross-sectional survey; in-depth-interview focus group	regression analysis, T-test	English barrier, psychological preparation, and participation in local social life are factors to influence sociocultural adaptation.
Shi & Ek-Iem (2020)	n=200, Chinese students	psychological adaptation social adaptation	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	regression analysis	Life satisfaction has a positive effect on psychological adaptation; friends, ability to make friends, and networking have a positive influence on sociocultural adaptation.
Thangiah (2010)	n=221(survey) East Asia (33.9%, included China), Middle-East (25.3%), Central Asia (16.1%), others (24.8%) n=21(interview)	sociocultural adjustment	Not listed	cross-sectional survey, focus group interview	descriptive analysis	International students experience a high level of sociocultural adjustment difficulty.
Yusoff (2010)	n=93, undergraduate	sociocultural adjustment	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	T-test ANOVA	Demographic factors (age

Author/ Year	Sample Characteristics	Focus	Theory Framework	Research Design	Analytic Method	Main Findings
	students China (51.6%), Indonesia (16.1%), other countries (32.6%)					and length of stay in Malaysia) contribute to the adjustment process
Yusoff (2011)	n=185, China (48.1%), Indonesia (14.1%), Finland (10.3%), other countries (24.3%)	psychological adjustment.	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	multiple regression analysis	Self-efficacy and support from friends and significant others) are significantly related to psychologica l adjustment.
Yusoff (2015)	n=185, China (48.1%), Indonesia (14.1%), Finland (10.3%), other countries (24.3%)	sociocultural adaptation	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	multiple regression analysis	Social support and self-efficacy are factors to sociocultural adaptation.
Yusoff & Othman (2011)	n=185, China (48.1%), Indonesia (14.1%), Finland (10.3%), other countries (24.3%)	psychological adjustment	Not listed	cross-sectional survey	multiple regression analysis	Perceived social support is significantly related to psychologica l adjustment.
Yakin & Totu (2018)	Chinese students n=46 (Focus groups) n=10 (in-depth interviews)	cross-cultural adjustment	Acculturatio n theory Cross-cultur al adaptation theory	participant observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews.		Chinese students encounter many difficulties, but most of them have a good adaptation in Sabah.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Publication Date*

Overall, there have been only 14 studies on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia since 2010, with an average of only about one article per year, which does not match the situation of a large number of Chinese students studying in Malaysia. Specifically, 4 articles were published in 2011. This has to do with the rapid increase in the number of Chinese students studying abroad since 2010 and the development of higher education in Malaysia. According to data released by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2019, the number of Chinese studying abroad increased from 60,000 to 265,000 from 2001 to 2010, the number increased by 200,000 in ten years (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). In

terms of overseas choice, Western countries such as Britain, the United States, and Australia have always been favoured by Chinese students in the past. At the beginning of the 21st century, Malaysia attracted more and more Chinese students since Malaysia has become one of the emerging education hubs (Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010). Besides, the cultural proximity between the two countries, low tuition fees, and an English learning environment all make higher education in Malaysia attractive (Shi & Ek-Iem, 2020). With the implementation of “the Belt and Road policy” by the Chinese government in 2013 and the increasingly frequent exchanges between China and Malaysia, the increasing number of Chinese students has attracted the attention of some scholars in recent years (Emang et al., 2015; Shi & Ek-Iem, 2020; Nachatar Singh, 2018; Yakin & Totu, 2018).

**Sample Characteristics**

Among the 14 articles, only 4 articles selected only Chinese international students as samples (Shi & Ek-Iem, 2020; Shi et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2020; Yakin & Totu, 2018). The other 10 articles were based on a sample of international students from around the world, with Chinese students making up a portion (e.g., Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011; Nachatar Singh, 2018; Thangiah, 2010). A small sample size can hardly show the adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. Among the four pieces of literature focusing on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia, three articles are part of the dissertation “Cross-Cultural Management for Chinese Students’ Adaptation on Academic and Social Achievements in Islamic Country” (Shi et al., 2019, p.431). These three studies took 200 Chinese students as samples to explore the factors influencing their adaptation in Malaysia (Shi et al., 2019; Shi & Ek-Iem, 2020; Shi et al., 2020). Another study applied qualitative research methods to focus on the problems encountered by Chinese students at Universiti Sabah Malaysia (Yakin & Totu, 2018). Among the 14 studies, 2 focused only on postgraduate students (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Nachatar Singh, 2018). The other studies included a sample of undergraduate and graduate students, comparing differences in cross-cultural adaptation between the two groups.

For research location, among the 14 articles, only one research sample was selected from five universities (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011), and the remaining 13 studies selected samples from one location, namely from a public or private university in Malaysia. Therefore, the comparison of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students from different universities is lacking. Regarding the characteristics of universities, except for 2 studies that did not specifically introduce school information (Nachatar Singh, 2018; Shi & Ek-Iem, 2020), 9 were conducted in public universities, and 3 were conducted in private universities. This may have something to do with the natural advantages that public universities have in attracting international students, such as high ranking in the global education market and lower tuition fees. A large number of students can better meet the needs of research. The specific information on the sample is in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample characteristics of the selected literature

Sample	location	References	No. Of articles
Chinese students	A public university	Yakin & Totu (2018), Shi et al. (2019)	4
	A private university	Shi et al. (2020)	
	A university	Shi & Ek-Iem (2020)	
	A public university	Mustaffa & Ilias (2013)	
Chinese students as one of the samples		Yusoff (2010), Yusoff (2011)	10
		Yosuff & Othman (2011), Alavi & Mansor (2011), Yusoff (2015), Chan et al. (2021)	
	A private university	Thangiah (2010)	
	A university	Nachatar Singh (2018)	
	Five private universities	Malaklolunthu & Selan (2011)	



**Focus Topic**

There are three main themes in these studies. One is to sort out the difficulties encountered by overseas students in Malaysia, the other is to identify the factors affecting cross-cultural adaptation, and the third is to propose recommendations to promote cross-cultural adaptation.

International students will encounter various difficulties in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. An empirical study in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia found that international students in Malaysia would encounter 11 types of difficulties, including health, finances, lifestyle and occupation, social and recreational, and problems with curriculum and teaching methods. The last two questions are the most disturbing for international students (Alavi & Mansor, 2011). Malaklolunthu and Selan (2011) surveyed international students from five universities and found that academic and sociocultural difficulties were the most common challenges. Mixed research conducted by Thangian (2010) sorted out the difficulties encountered by overseas students and divided these difficulties into different degrees according to the questionnaire results, including no adjustment difficulty (e.g., understanding different religious practices), slight difficulty adjusting (e.g., understanding the way of life), moderate difficulty adjusting (e.g., making friends), great difficulty adjusting (e.g., finding suitable accommodation), and extreme difficulty adjusting (e.g., dealing with the climate). Nachatar Thangian (2010) holds that international students in Malaysia experience a high level of sociocultural adjustment difficulty. This idea was disproved in another study.

A study of Chinese students at University Malaysia Sabah found that cultural diversity, language and communication styles, food, clothing, lifestyle, and market prices were the reasons for adjustment stress (Yakin & Totu, 2018). The researchers suggested that most Chinese students adapt well to Sabah (Yakin & Totu, 2018). Contrary conclusions were related to the selection of research sites and samples. The former study used a sample of international students from around the world at a private university, while the latter study used Chinese students from a public university as a sample, which also shows that the sample from one place is not enough to generalise the results (Yusoff & Othman, 2011).

Some studies analysed the factors affecting cross-cultural adaptation from three perspectives. Specifically, two studies focused on sociocultural adaptation (Yusoff, 2010; Thangiah, 2010), two articles on psychological adaptation (Yusoff & Othman, 2011; Yusoff et al., 2011), one on academic adaptation (Nachatar Singh, 2018), and seven on overall cross-cultural adaptation (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Shi et al., 2019; Shi & Ek-Iem, 2020; Shi et al., 2020; Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011; Mustafa & Ilias, 2013; Yakin & Totu, 2018). In terms of sociocultural adaptation, demography (Yusoff, 2011), English ability, attitude towards Islamic culture (Shi et al., 2019, 2020), friends, ability to make friends, networking (Shi & EK-Lem, 2020), social support, self-efficacy (Yusoff, 2015) were factors mentioned in the articles. In terms of psychological adaptation, English ability, attitude towards Islamic culture (Shi et al., 2019), self-efficacy (Yusoff, 2011), social support (Yusoff & Othman, 2011; Yusoff, 2011), life satisfaction (Shi & EK-Lem, 2020) played a positive role, while Islamic culture experience had a significant negative influence (Shi et al., 2019). As for academic adaptation, the results of the semi-structured interviews found that a range of support provided by the university for international students was very helpful, including the help of supervisors, the support for student adjustment programs, library services, workshops, and financial support from university officials. Besides, individual independent learning ability and self-discipline were also crucial (Nachatar Singh, 2018).

When it comes to the whole question of cross-cultural adaptation, the factors discussed are more complex. A recent study indicated that support from lecturers and host countries significantly affects cross-cultural adaptation (Chan et al., 2021). Using several qualitative research methods, Yakin and Totu (2018) suggested that Chinese students' language ability, learning difficulties, and the difference in the price level or lifestyle between the two countries impact cross-cultural adaptation. A survey at a university in northern Malaysia found that demography, namely travels experience, level of education, and language proficiency, were factors that contributed to cross-cultural adjustment. Besides, academic performance, Malaysian or university environment, and personal emotions also significantly influenced cross-cultural adjustment (Mustafa & Ilias,

2013). An empirical study at Segi University in Malaysia found that the English barrier, psychological preparation, and participation in social life were the main reasons Chinese students adapt (Shi et al., 2020). Among many factors affecting cross-cultural adaptation mentioned above, language (English) ability and social support were the most frequently mentioned factors.

On this basis, some suggestions to promote adaptation were recommended in the articles, such as improving English skills, establishing social networks, improving communication skills, building good relationships with the local community, taking advantage of the counselling services offered by the university, reducing stereotypes and negative feelings about Malaysia.

Table 5: Summary of factors that influence adaptation in selected articles

	References	Factors
Sociocultural adaptation	Yusoff (2010)	demographic factors (age and length of stay)
	Thangiah (2010)	living adjustment (accommodation, food and climate), language, racism and discrimination
Psychological adaptation	Yusoff et al. (2011)	self-efficacy, social support
	Yusoff & Othman (2011)	social support (support from friends and availability of special person)
Academic adaptation	Nachatar Singh (2018)	support provided by the university  individual characteristics of students (learning ability and self-discipline)
	Malaklolunthu & Selan (2011)	language, deep-seated cultural influences
	Shi et al. (2020)	English skills, psychological preparation, and participation in local social life.
Cross-cultural adaptation	Yakin & Totu (2018)	cultural differences, communication pattern, social relationship, and academic environment
	Shi & Ek-Iem (2020)	life satisfaction, friends, ability to make friends, networking
	Shi et al. (2019)	English ability, attitude towards Islamic culture
	Mustaffa & Ilias (2013)	demographic (travel experience, level of education, and language proficiency) academic performance, Malaysia or university environment, and personal emotion
	Alavi & Mansor (2011)	social and recreational problems, curriculum and method of teaching

**Theories**

In the above article, six theories were used, namely Kim’s Cross-Cultural Adaptation theory (Kim, 1988), Berry’s Acculturation theory (Berry, 1980), Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory (Maslow, 1968), Social learning theory (Rotter, 1954), Social Psychoanalytic Theory (Fromm, 1990), and Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst, 1988). Among 14 studies, only 4 used theories. Two studies used the Acculturation theory

(Shi et al., 2020; Yakin & Totu, 2018). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, social learning theory, and social psychoanalytic theory were applied in the same research (Alavi & Mansor, 2011).

A qualitative study conducted by Yakin & Totu (2018) applied Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory and Berry's acculturation theory. The cross-cultural adaptation theory was proposed by Young Yun Kim in 1995. The theory holds that people encounter various difficulties when entering a new environment. Interpersonal communication and mass communication are the key ways to improve their adaptability, especially the communication channels of the local country (Peng & Wu, 2019). According to Berry's acculturation theory (1980), individuals entering an unfamiliar cultural environment must balance the differences between family and host cultures, as this may lead to acculturation stress. Different people usually adopt four strategies to adapt: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation.

Assimilation refers to giving up the home culture but developing a sense of belonging to the host culture, while the separation strategy is the opposite, maintaining the original cultural identity and refusing to integrate into the host country's culture. The integration strategy is to maintain the original culture and develop a sense of belonging to the host culture, while the marginalisation strategy is to neither maintain the original cultural identity nor have a sense of belonging to the host country's culture. Through in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, Yakin & Totu (2018) sorted out the common adaptive stress among Chinese overseas students in Sabah and applied the two theories to propose that integration strategy and more communication with local people to establish a good relationship are useful ways to relieve anxiety and improve the adaptive experience. Based on the acculturation theory, Shi et al. (2020) pointed out significant differences in integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation among Chinese students before and after they went to Malaysia based on the survey results. For example, Chinese students' expectations of integration are better than the actual situation.

Mixed research conducted by Alavi and Mansor (2011) applied Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1968), social learning theory (Rotter, 1954), and Social Psychoanalytic Theory (Fromm, 1990) to emphasise the importance of meeting the needs of international students. Maslow's hierarchy of needs holds that human behaviour is driven by different levels of needs. Based on this theory, the researchers suggested that the university should meet the needs of international students, reduce the problems in the adaptation process, and improve the satisfaction of international students. Similarly, Rotter (1954) proposed that human behaviour is based on observation of others in society, but dissatisfaction arises when a person's learning is inconsistent with his psychological needs. Fromm (1990) believes that people's needs need to be met in society, and society should continue to develop to meet individual needs. Alavi and Mansor (2011) summarised 11 kinds of problems encountered by international students in Malaysia through a questionnaire survey, but the function of these three theories only emphasised the importance of solving difficulties and meeting the needs of international students.

AUM theory was put forward by Gudykunst in 1988 and is often used to explain the cross-cultural adaptation of sojourner, which mainly refers to people who live in other cultures temporarily (Gudykunst, 2005), so it is suitable to study the cross-cultural adaptation of international students (Rui & Wang, 2015). The core concepts of this theory are "anxiety" and "uncertainty". Uncertainty refers to sojourners' cognitive difficulties in unfamiliar cultural values and behaviours, while "anxiety" mainly refers to emotional challenges in cross-cultural communication. Sojourners can better adapt to a foreign culture with less uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005). Based on this theory, Chan et al. (2021) hypothesised that social support, especially supports from lecturers and host countries, can improve adaptation. The results of the questionnaire supported this hypothesis. However, the paper does not verify that support from lecturers and host countries helps reduce anxiety and uncertainty and does not establish a rigorous research framework based on theory (Chan et al., 2021).

To sum up, most articles did not mention theory. Even when using theory, the role of theory is not obvious, especially in quantitative research papers. The research framework is not established under the guidance of theory.

### **Research Method**

Among the 14 research articles, 9 were quantitative research papers (e.g., Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013), 2 were qualitative research papers (Nachatar Singh, 2018; Yakin & Totu, 2018), and 2 applied mixed research method (Shi et al., 2020; Thangiah, 2010). In the quantitative research papers, scholars all selected cross-sectional surveys to collect data at a certain time. In qualitative research papers, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation methods were involved (Nachatar Singh, 2018; Yakin & Totu, 2018). In mixed-method research, survey questionnaires were combined with interviews to obtain richer information.

In terms of analysis methods, most of the quantitative research papers choose SPSS as the analysis software, and one article applied PLS-SEM (Chan et al, 2021). All these papers only have independent variables and dependent variables, lacking the measurement of mediating variables or moderating variables, so the analysis process is relatively simple, T-test and regression analysis have become the most important statistical methods.

### **CONCLUSION**

In general, the number of studies on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia is insufficient. However, in the above-limited studies, only 4 articles focus on only Chinese students, and in the other studies, Chinese students just account for a part, so it is difficult to generalise these studies to all Chinese students in Malaysia. In the context of Western studies, most studies believe that Chinese students have poor cross-cultural adaptability (e.g., Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016; Han et al., 2013). Yakin and Totu (2018) stressed that while some Chinese students have faced a slight cultural strain, most students in Malaysian adapt well to Malaysia. This work again illustrates the importance and significance of researching the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in a non-western context. Considering the current number of Chinese students in Malaysia and the future of Malaysia's international education development, more empirical work is required to find valuable discoveries in this field.

Besides, the vast majority of the samples in these studies were from a single university, and the sample was insufficient to generalise to Chinese students at other universities. Consequently, these studies are very limited in presenting the adaptation of Chinese overseas students in Malaysia. Future studies should expand the sample selection range since the adaptation experience differs from campus to campus (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2011). Future studies can also compare the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students from different universities.

The research topics are not diversified enough. These articles focus on the problems encountered by international students, factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation, and suggestions for promoting cross-cultural adaptation in Malaysia. Most of the articles are explorations in the education, and management field, but scholars of other disciplines rarely involve in them. With the acceleration of globalisation flow, the increasing number of international students, and the benefits of population flow to the development of the economy, social, and cultural development of the world, cross-cultural adaptation has attracted the attention of many disciplines, such as pedagogy, psychology, sociology, communication. These experts provide a rich understanding of cross-cultural adaptation research from different disciplinary perspectives. As a new international education hub, the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia should attract the attention of experts in other disciplines. For example, in the study of cross-cultural adaptation in the Western environment, media use, cultural identity, and cultural distance has been proven to play a very important role. However, these factors rarely appear in the study of the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia, and there are still many gaps in the research.

From the perspective of research methods, most of the studies chose quantitative research to explore the factors affecting cross-cultural adaptation through a cross-section survey. However, cross-cultural adaptation is a

dynamic process, and data collection at a certain point in time is not enough to show the changes in Chinese students' adaptation in Malaysia. At the same time, cross-sectional studies also cannot determine causality between variables (Yusoff, 2011). There is a need for more longitudinal studies to provide a more compelling picture of the adaptation of Chinese international students in Malaysia. In addition, the research design of these papers is relatively simple. However, cross-cultural adaptation is a complex process, and the mechanism of influencing factors is also complicated. For example, social support has a positive impact on cross-cultural adaptation (Yusoff & Othman, 2011), but social support is also a common mediating variable in cross-cultural adaptation studies (Li & Peng, 2019). Future studies should incorporate more factors and develop more complex research models to gain deeper insights.

This review only reviewed 14 articles that were selected by electronic and manual research from 2010 to 2021. Future research reviews can expand literature sources to explore more studies. In addition, the current review only focuses on Chinese international students in Malaysia. Future studies can expand sample sources and focus on international students from different countries in Malaysia. Similarly, this review only focuses on the study of Chinese international students studying in Malaysia. Future studies can compare the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in different countries.

This study reviewed 14 articles on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia from five aspects: publication time, sample characteristics, research topics, research methods, and theory. It is found that the deficiencies of this field are the small number of studies, lack of representative samples, limited research topics and methods, and simple research design. Therefore, scholars in different fields should focus more on this field and enrich research topics. Samples should be selected from different universities through rigorous sampling procedures to improve the generalisation of the results. Besides, more complex studies and longitudinal studies are needed to provide a comprehensive understanding in the future.

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