

**Adjustment Experiences of Non-Indigenous Students Studying a Second  
Language in a Different Country: A Case Study of Chinese Non-  
Indigenous Thai Learners at Mahasarakham University, Thailand**

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**A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology  
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

**2012**

**School of Language and Culture**

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## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Dusadee Smith: Dusadee Smith

Date: 16 November 2012

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

It would not have been possible to write this doctoral thesis without the help and support of various generous people who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the completion of this study.

Above all, I would like to thank my primary supervisor, Professor John Bitchener for his advice, guidance, and patience at all times. His positive feedback encouraged me to overcome hardship through perseverance. The good advice and support of my secondary supervisor, Professor Charles Crothers, has been invaluable to both my theoretical framework and thesis writing, and for this I am extremely grateful.

I would like to thank the following participants: the Chinese students, the lecturers, and the administrators from Mahasarakham University (MSU), for their most helpful participation. Without them, this thesis would not be completed. I thank each of them for their patience, kindness, valuable information and time. Thanks to MSU for providing me with a scholarship and giving me the opportunity to further my PhD study in New Zealand.

Thanks to Teeraparp Predeepoch and Waralak Ueng for their help in translation and thanks to Rattanachote Thienmongkol and Paweena Wanchai for their assistance in processing this thesis.

Thank you to Apiradee Jansaeng and Chanthana Wech-O-sotsakda for being kind consultants at all times.

Last but not least, I would like to give my profound thanks to my parents, Damrong and Arvorn Kongsombut, and my aunt in New Zealand, Saowakhon Johnson for their moral support and encouragement. Most of all, thank you to my brilliant husband, Colin Smith who not only stood by me, but pushed, pulled, and dragged me across the finish line.

Ethics Approval for this research granted by AUTC on 30 August 2009, ref. 09/62

## **ABSTRACT**

Worldwide, there are many students studying in foreign language environments but, to date, not a great deal of literature examining how well they cope. This study explores the adjustment experiences of Chinese undergraduate students who were non-indigenous Thai language learners at Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand.

The adjustment experience is a significant hurdle for international students to overcome, and while some issues are quickly dealt with, others can have influences for a longer period of time. This study covered short and long term adjustment issues affecting students socially and academically. The majority of the issues investigated are relevant to the general consideration of adjustment experiences of students from southern China studying anywhere in Thailand, given the low variability in cultural issues. The implications of a wider range of applicable cultural background issues beyond individualism/collectivism, and the points on teaching and learning styles, apply more widely to international study.

The Chinese students' adjustment experiences were explored with triangulation of multiple methods, data sources and viewpoints. Six students, three Thai lecturers, and three Thai administrators underwent in-depth interviewing, and 22 fourth-year Chinese students completed a questionnaire. Six participants' narrative stories were obtained through interviews and reflective journals.

Existing theory would have predicted that the students would adjust easily, as they were moving to another collectivist culture, similar to their own; however, the study revealed that the students still faced adjustment problems. Three specific groups of issues were reported by the participants: the freedom and flexibility of the lecturers, the punctuality of the lecturers, and the learning approaches employed. Students referred to the freedom and flexibility of the teaching approaches at MSU while stating that the lecturers in Guangxi University of Nationalities (GXUN) taught students by following a textbook only. All students in this study referred to the late arrival of the lecturers in MSU at

times, while it was usual for those in GXUN to be on time. There was a general perception that there were various differences in the learning approaches (e.g. more opportunity to create their own work). These coincided with a study by Dunn (2006), which claimed that the greater the differences between the two educational systems, the more academic adjustment problems international students tend to face.

This study proposes that the differences experienced in academic culture may be a result of the looseness of Thai culture. Hofstede (1980) stated that people in a loose culture have fewer rules and more flexible normative standards. In the current study both the flexibility and lack of punctuality of the Thai lecturers may therefore result from the looser culture producing less regimented teaching styles.

The study's results suggest that though China and Thailand are both collectivist societies there are still significant differences in "culture" to be overcome by the sojourners. In the academic setting, tightness/looseness is proposed as an additional cultural factor which requires adjustment and as one that influences teaching and learning styles significantly. Therefore, "culture" alone does not have the overriding influence on this experience, but rather that intercultural education should be considered as a process, reflecting the students' relationships with their learning environments and teachers.

Although the students did face difficulties, they reported a positive overall experience and adjusted with the help of friends and family, who gave them advice on educational problems and support when they needed it. Sussman (2000) indicated that positive experiences of this type were less frequently reported and these findings therefore demonstrate a significant contribution to cross-cultural transition studies.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This study will follow a group of Chinese students learning Thai language at a Thai university. It will try to identify the issues that they face adjusting to new teaching, social, and cultural environments, and to find out how difficulties can be eased by the host university staff and the students themselves. Previous studies in this area have centred around western host countries and, by looking into the issues found in a Thai university, this study provides an opportunity to identify those issues which apply universally, as well as those which may be specific to Chinese students in Thailand.

This chapter is divided into nine sections, starting with 'background of the study' (section 1.1), followed by 'international students in Thailand' (section 1.2). Then, the researcher will present 'previous research in the area' (section 1.3). Information on 'limitations in previous research and identification of needs' is given (section 1.4). 'Aims of the research' are then identified (section 1.5), followed by the 'theoretical perspectives' utilized in my study (section 1.6). 'Methodology and design of the research' is illustrated (section 1.7). The researcher's intended contributions are outlined (section 1.8) and the final section presents 'organization of the study' (section 1.9).

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The range of international study being undertaken is expanding to include an ever-wider variety of groups of students and faculties as students become more mobile and institutes better able to cater to their needs. Yang (2007) claimed that international education (that is, intercultural and cross-cultural education that transcends the geographical and pedagogical boundaries of a particular nation (Ryan & Slethaug, 2010) has been a major growth industry globally over the past 30 years, with the total number of 'international students' nearly doubling to reach 2.7 million globally (OECD, 2006). Between 2000 and 2004, there was an increase of 41% in the number of international students (Yang, 2007) and that number is predicted to grow to 7.2 million by 2026 (Bohm, Davis, Meares, & Pearce, 2002). This increase has resulted from a general increase in



demand for higher education, an increase in the source countries' household wealth, insufficient tertiary education capacity in some countries and studying abroad becoming more attractive in terms of personal and/or future opportunities (Bohm et al., 2002).

Both policy and research regarding international education is important for all participating countries. Besides the immediate and direct impact financial contributions made by international students and their dependents has on the host institution and country, the wider benefits from the social and cultural interactions which take place form a greater and longer term motivation for educational exchange (Lee, 2008). The exchange gives the host society a greater understanding of the various cultures of the international students and also gives it the opportunity to share its own culture with them. Within educational establishments, the host country's own staff and students gain through the interaction with the international students, broadening their perspectives, forming positive relationships and knowledge exchange and promoting on-going goodwill between the countries involved. The benefits of overseas education include a recognized qualification, improvement of language skills (especially English) by students, the opportunity to live in a different culture, and the chance to experience independence from parents and have new life experiences in general. Though international students bring several benefits to the host country, their experiences are not always successful. That is because these students face various difficulties in their adjustment to a different social and cultural environment and to different learning and teaching styles.

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), international students are defined as those "who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purposes of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin" (Choudaha & Chang, 2012, p. 19). In addition, various definitions of adjustment have been presented by different scholars. Hannigan (1990) defined adjustment as the following: "Adjustment can be conceptualized as a psychosocial concept which has to do with the process of achieving harmony between the individual

and the environment” (p. 91). This can be seen as the changes each person undergoes to adapt themselves to their new environment. Similar to Hannigan’s (1990) definition which emphasizes the harmonious nature of the relation, Ramsay et al. (1999) also stated that adjustment is an interactive process taking place between the person and the environment, and is directed towards an end result of finding a fit between the two. Al-Sharideh and Goe’s (1998) definition is also consistent with that of Hannigan (1990) and Ramsay et al. (1999) as they stated that adjustment can be “viewed as representing a transitional process that unfolds over time as students learn to cope with the exigencies of the university environment” (p. 701). In the context of the present study, adjustment will refer to the specific problems Chinese students encounter in their new academic and social environment setting (Thailand), the coping strategies they use to deal with their difficulties, and the extent to which these students can fit into the new culture.

## **1.2 International Students in Thailand**

In Thailand, there has been a sustained increase in the numbers of international students. The Office of the Higher Education Commission (2010) has conducted a survey on the enrolment of foreign students in Thai higher education institutions since 2003. The results of the survey showed that the total number of international students in 2003 was 4,170 and that this number had doubled to 8,534 in 2006. For the year 2010, Thailand hosted 20,155 international students at 103 higher education institutions, an overall increase in the total number of international students of 5.7% from the year 2009. In terms of funding, more than 80% of international students (16,146) were self-funded.

Among these international students, Chinese students made up the greatest numbers, with the number of these sojourners in 2006 being about one-third (2,698) of the total number of international students (8,534), while in 2010, nearly half of international students were from China (9,329). From 2006 to 2010, the majority of Chinese students studying in Thailand preferred to study in undergraduate Business Administration as well as Thai language courses. Xinhua News Agency ("Growing number of Chinese students study in

Thailand," 2006) reported that Thai language courses appeared to be popular among Chinese students due to the increasing number of Thai tourists going to China each year, as well as growing business connections between China and Thailand.

With the opening up of China's economy from the late 1970s onwards, more and more mainland Chinese look for opportunities in foreign countries (Tsang, 2001), and for many of them Thailand is one of their choices. A probable reason for this is that Thailand and China have many similarities in terms of culture. For example, the Chinese and Thai people share many of the same cultural values of collectivism (Hofstede, 2001c). Compared with Western countries, Thailand might be a country where these Mainland Chinese feel that they can blend into society more easily, and as a result there has been an increasing number of Chinese students coming to Thailand.

The Chinese sojourners' adjustment to their new environment can have a direct and profound impact on both their academic performance and their enjoyment of the experience. For academics, their adjustment may affect whether they can effectively carry out the teaching, research, and administrative duties that the host universities have assigned them. Among the students, the main concern is whether they can achieve the good academic results they desire, which will increase their future opportunities, either for continuing with further studies or for finding more sought-after jobs after their graduation. The Chinese who fail to adapt to the change in social environment may not be able to feel settled there and decide to leave the host country early, while those who cannot fully adjust to the new learning environment may fail to perform at a level where they make worthwhile gains from the experience. In these ways the issue of sojourner adjustment of all kinds can be seen to have a serious personal influence on those concerned, in addition to the wider policy implications.

### **1.3 Previous Research in the Area of Adjustment Experiences**

Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) reported that the mobility of international students involves two main trends: (1) Asian students entering the major academic systems of North America, Western Europe, and Australia, and

(2) mobility of students within the European Union. Researchers have investigated the experiences of these students and have discovered a large number of adjustment issues. When looking at academic adjustment problems, various researchers (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Cho, 1990; Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Morita, 2004; Wan, 2001) found that language proficiency is one of the primary challenges. Student achievement was found to be most affected by proficiency in English, academic skills and educational background.

In addition to the issue of academic adjustment problems, issues regarding the sociocultural aspect of adjustment (e.g. loneliness and homesickness) have also been reported by many researchers (Cho, 1990; Frank, 2000; Franklyn & Butler, 2003; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Lewthwaite, 1996; McClure, 2007; Nicholson, 2001; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Thorstensson, 2001; Wan, 2001; Ye, 1992; Ying & Liese, 1994; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Moreover, some studies have explored international students' decisions to choose a particular study destination (Chen, 2007; Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). For example, Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study discovered 'push' factors motivating the students' decisions to study abroad (e.g. a perception that an overseas course of study was better than a domestic one). Furthermore, pull factors that influenced international students to choose their final study destination were revealed (see more detail in Chapter 2 on page 17).

Other factors relating to students' adjustment have also been studied. Ying and Liese's (1994), Mamman's (1995), and Ward et al.'s (2004) studies found that the demographic characteristics and personality of their participants are dimensions influencing their intercultural adjustment. In addition, Mamman (1995) discovered that the student's socio-biographical background, such as the cultural setting, ethnic background, and linguistic ability, was also an important factor contributing to intercultural adjustment. Another crucial factor associated with adjustment is 'the role of parents'. Wintre and Yaffe's (2000) study results

confirmed that this factor significantly contributed to most aspects of their 406 first-year students' adjustment to university in a large metropolitan Canadian city.

Regarding the related research literature above, though bringing valuable results to the field, some limitations have still emerged which will be presented in the following section (section 1.4).

#### **1.4 Limitations in Previous Research and Identification of Needs**

The primary objective of this study is to explore the adjustment experiences of Chinese undergraduate students who are non-indigenous Thai language learners at Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand. While a number of studies related to the current research have been undertaken in the past (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; J. Wang, 2009; Zhai, 2002), the researchers treated international students as if they were a homogenous grouping. However, these students were from many nationalities, and as such had different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. There remains a need to consider the differences among them and to do so, the exploration of the characteristics of each nationality is essential.

Moreover, a few studies (Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Wan, 2001) involving students from Mainland China had a participant group that consisted of only graduate students, so the findings may not be applicable to other populations such as undergraduate students. Studies are required which include undergraduate students in the sample to find out whether they face the same difficulties as those in graduate programs, or if different issues arise.

Furthermore, most studies completed in the field of international student adjustment have focused on students who are in a host country that is culturally very different from their own, for example Asian students from collectivist countries (e.g. China, Taiwan, India) studying in individualistic countries like Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., and the U.K. (Campbell & Li, 2008; Mamman,

1995; Ward et al., 2004; Ying & Liese, 1994). There have been relatively few studies investigating the experiences of Chinese international students who are in a host country considered more similar to their own cultural values (collectivistic culture) (McClure, 2007).

Concerning this limitation, there should be a study of international students in a host country with a culture that is similar to their own home country to find out whether there are any differences in academic or sociocultural issues that could influence the students' adjustment experiences.

In the present study, Thailand, the host country of the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, is considered by Skinner (1957) as having a similar culture to the students' home country (see more detail in Chapter 2 on page 92). It is interesting to examine to what extent this perception is correct and the importance of the remaining differences in the students' adjustment experiences.

### **1.5 Aims of the Research**

The study will seek to investigate the following issues related to the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners' adjustment experiences:

1.5.1 To explore the students' expectations of coming to study in a different country;

1.5.2 To find how the participants think that the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners' home country background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences;

1.5.3 To determine whether there was a difference between the home-country university (GXUN) and the host-country university (MSU) teaching and learning styles;

1.5.4 To identify and analyse the adjustment problems encountered by the Chinese students enrolled at MSU and to understand the sources of these problems;

1.5.5 To find out what strategies and skills were needed to deal with the students' adjustment problems and the strategies that the lecturers and administrators utilized to develop their methods in order to fulfil their responsibilities with regard to the students' needs; and

1.5.6 To gather suggestions from the participants to help future Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and other international students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programmes.

In order to address the six areas above, the thesis will examine issues related to the students' adjustment experiences at many levels: e.g. from those connected with the individual student to those associated with the national culture. The following diagram (see Figure 1) illustrates how these levels relate to each other, at scales ranging from micro to macro.

Figure 1 shows that the most important levels acting on the student's adjustment experiences are likely to be the university (MSU) and the classroom levels, and these are also where most of the investigated areas lie. My thesis focuses on the experiences of students adjusting academically and socioculturally to the local teaching and learning culture and the local society. The classroom/university level effects have the greatest direct influence on the students' day-to-day experiences: The university and classroom make up their 'academic life' during the time in Thailand. More macro effects are likely to have a less direct impact on the students and will tend to act through those same classroom/university levels.

In order to achieve my goals, the theoretical perspectives presented in the following section (section 1.6) will be applied.

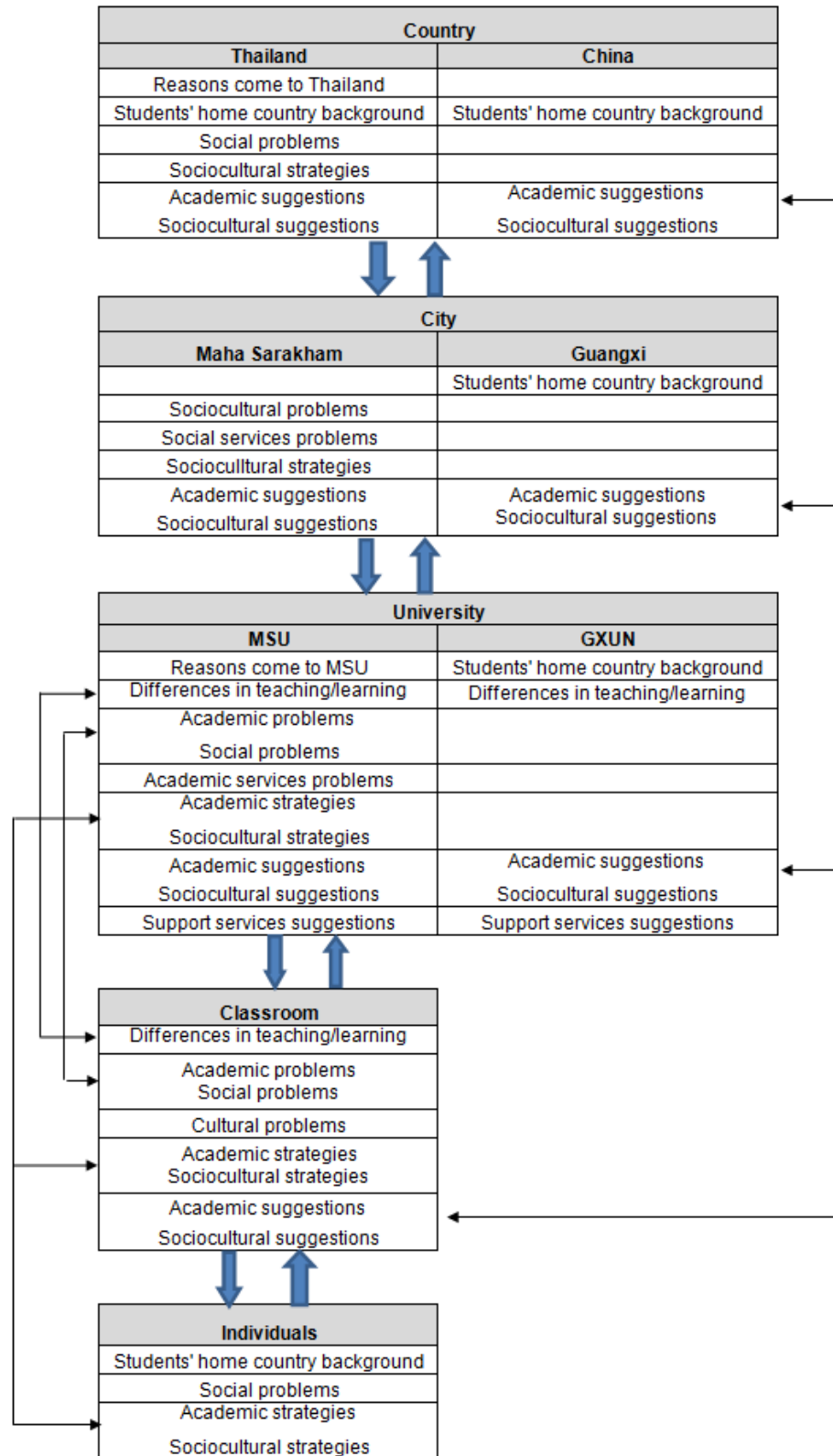


Figure 1: Hierarchy of levels of investigation



## **1.6 Theoretical Perspectives**

With regard to the theoretical framework of the study, there are six theoretical perspectives that the researcher has used to examine the adjustment experiences encountered by non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country.

The first theoretical framework considered here is the push-pull factors which have been used to understand international student flows, decisions and motivation to study overseas, along with the choice of country (Chen, 2007).

‘Factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment’ is the second. Three major factors (skills or abilities, attitudes, and personality traits) were identified by Hannigan (1990) as factors that could help international students to function fully in different cultures. In addition, Mamman (1995) noted that ‘socio-biographical’ background (e.g. the cultural setting, ethnic background, and linguistics ability) is also regarded as being among the most important factors that can contribute to intercultural adjustment.

The third theoretical perspective is ‘social constructionism’. It focuses on the significance of culture and context in comprehending what happens in society, and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Marshall (1998), Stam (2001), and Hibberd (2005) indicated that individuals or groups will make and create the world through their interaction with one another and the objects in a new environment and through that process their social interpretations will have an influence on the values that they come to build.

‘The transition theory’ is the fourth perspective that has been used in my study. It emphasizes the transitions that adults undergo throughout their lives and the means which they use to cope with and adjust to those changes. A transition is defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

The fifth theoretical framework is 'factors in socio-psychological processes.' It is concerned with *Self*, *Self-Concept*, and *Cultural Identity* and has been provided by Sussman (2000). It is useful to help analyse and explain social behaviours and to understand the problems of the sojourners in their cultural transitions.

The last theoretical framework is 'Ward's adaptation model' which is the synthesis of theory and research on cross-cultural transition and adaptation. This model focuses on psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

The relationship of each theoretical perspective is shown in Chapter 2 section 2.2.7 on page 44-46). As an outline this shows the adjustment to the new environment: moving in, beginning to adjust to fit the new environment through social constructionism feedback, moving through and developing strategies through socio-psychological feedback, until the adjustment is complete.

To succeed in applying these theoretical perspectives in my study, the following methodology and research design will be used (see the following section).

### **1.7 Methodology and Design of the Research**

The study involved 22 Chinese students studying in the major of Thai as a Foreign Language at the Department of Thai and Oriental Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, MSU, Thailand, together with three lecturers, and three administrators. A triangulated approach was utilized to collect data by means of multiple methods (questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and reflective journals) and data sources (students, lecturers, and administrators) over a four-month period. By using this approach and integrating a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies the results will provide greater insight into issues surrounding these students and their study abroad experiences.

In contrast, in previous studies, different researchers applied only a single research method. For example, a quantitative research method has been used in many studies (Dunn, 2006; Hacifazlioglu & Ozdemir, 2010; Mavondo et al., 2004; Mounts, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al.,

2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2002; Yeh & Wang, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994; D. Zhang, Wang, Yang, & Teng, 2007; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Moreover, several researchers have utilized a qualitative approach to their studies (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Eder, Smith, et al., 2010; Frank, 2000; McClure, 2007; Morita, 2004; Nicholson, 2001; Philips, Lo, & Yu, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Zhai, 2002). In a few studies, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies has also been applied (Chen, 2007; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Lewthwaite, 1996; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Thorstensson, 2001; Yang, 2007; Y. Zhou & Todman, 2008).

However these studies are not without limitations. When considering previous studies, the use of only quantitative methodology does not provide sufficient in-depth detail. Conversely, where only qualitative methodology is used, the findings obtained lack any statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Though employing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies provides unique advantages in the advancement of knowledge base (Cowger & Menon, 2001) and adds rigour, breadth, and depth to any investigation (Flick, 1992), a lack of data from multiple sources has been a limitation. The use of the triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints has helped the present study produce significant, accurate, and valid results and also expanded its findings in deeper detail compared with previous studies.

## **1.8 Intended Contributions of the Study**

Regarding the overcoming of limitations in previous research, this study will seek:

1.8.1 To contribute additional information to the existing research literature regarding the identification of the students' expectations of coming to study in a different country, how push-pull theory operates for Chinese students studying in Thailand, and whether there are any similarities/differences between their expectations (of studying abroad) and their experiences in a foreign country. Regarding previous research, only a few studies have been carried out that

explore the reasons that international students choose to study overseas (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). Nevertheless, neither these, nor any other study has involved research about why Chinese students choose Thailand (or similar) as their study destination. Further, for Thai universities to attract a better market share of Chinese international students, it is significant that education providers understand why some Chinese students choose to study in Thailand and which factors influence their choice of university.

1.8.2 To add to the existing research literature through its identification of factors playing a role in international students' adjustment experiences. Several studies (Mamman, 1995; McClure, 2007; Mounts, 2004; J. Wang, 2009; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994) have explored factors that influence the adjustment of international students and have contributed various general suggestions beneficial to international students. My study will investigate whether these also influence the adjustment experiences of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners in Thailand and whether any further refinement of the existing theories is required to fully cover the new data presented.

1.8.3 To give a greater understanding of the relationship between the students' reasons for studying abroad (1 above), and their adjustment experiences (2 above).

1.8.4 To test the current literature concerning the 'cultural distance' factor when applied to the Thai situation, and if possible expand on it. According to previous discussions of the cultural distance issue in relation to adjustment (Sussman, 2000), it is likely that the closer the hosts' and the sojourners' cultures, the fewer difficulties the sojourners will experience in adjusting. In my study, China and Thailand are considered by Hofstede (2001a) as sharing the same cultural value (collectivism) and by Skinner (1957) as having a similar culture. Despite the similarity in cultural values, Thailand and China are very different in some other aspects, such as political and economic systems. Therefore, it is likely that Mainland Chinese need to undergo an adjustment process when settling down in Thailand.

1.8.5 To add to the published literature regarding teaching and learning in a Thai university; to provide useful and rigorous information for the staff and faculty, international services professionals, lecturers, and other concerned people who work with international students. This research will assist them to: (a) select appropriate teaching/learning styles, (b) effectively meet student expectations, (c) present concern for Chinese students by learning about them, their perspectives, and their world (Patton, 1990), and (d) avoid intercultural miscommunications.

1.8.6 To provide knowledge which will give assistance to lecturers and administrators in arranging orientation and support services for Chinese students by giving them the feedback from students' suggestions.

1.8.7 To provide through the above valuable in-depth information that can facilitate the academic and sociocultural preparation for non-indigenous students who study in a different country, so that these sojourners will have the ability to perform well or fit more easily into the host culture.

1.8.8 To help to smooth the transition of sojourners into their new academic and sociocultural environment, as my study will explore what challenges (or problems) they faced, how they coped with these difficulties, and what sources of support they used during their transition. Thus, the transition theory and social constructionism aspect need to be enhanced and validated through qualitative studies concerning Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners.

To conclude, these eight intended major contributions of the study highlight that research on the adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country will fill gaps in the existing knowledge and is well worth undertaking.

## **1.9 Organization of the Study**

There are seven chapters in this thesis. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the literature about theoretical frameworks and research concerning the research questions. Limitations in previous research have also been identified.

Additionally, the understanding of sociocultural dimensions of China and Thailand is considered.

The research methodology is presented in Chapter 3. To achieve the study's goal, the triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints has been applied. Chapter 4 – 6 present the research findings first, followed by the discussion. Chapter 4 shows the students' decisions to choose MSU and the way they think that their home country background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences. Chapter 5 presents the differences between teaching and learning approaches of the Thai university (MSU) and those of the Chinese university (GXUN) and the adjustment problems perceived by the participants.

Chapter 6 includes the strategies that the students have used to cope with their adjustment difficulties and the suggestions for ways to help ameliorate these difficulties, made by all of the participants. Chapter 7 summarizes the key findings and contributions of this study, focusing on theoretical and research contributions and also the applications of the study that could apply to MSU and those that could apply in other contexts or more generally. Following these sections, the limitations of the study and the implications for further research have been identified and the thesis is concluded.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction: an Overview**

This chapter highlights the main issues surrounding international and Chinese students' adjustment experiences, particularly the theoretical frameworks concerning push-pull factors, factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment, social constructionism, the transition theory, and factors in socio-psychological processes.

The research literature on the students' adjustment experiences is divided into four major parts. Part One presents the push-pull factors influencing the students' decisions to study abroad, while Part Two surveys the factors contributing to and hindering adjustment. Additionally, Part Three shows adjustment problems of both international and Chinese students, and finally, Part Four reports where the students can get support services. The content of each part is presented comparatively. The first section reviews research on general international students' adjustment problems and then the literature on Chinese students' adjustment experiences is presented. This will be followed by a conclusion about each comparative issue. In addition to the theoretical perspectives and the relevant research literature, 'understanding the sociocultural dimensions of China and Thailand' will finally be presented.

### **2.2 Theoretical Frameworks**

According to the research questions, six theoretical perspectives are appropriate for understanding the adjustment experiences encountered by non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: the push-pull factors, factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment, social constructionism, the transition theory, factors in socio-psychological processes, and Ward's adaptation model. The push-pull factors have been used to understand international student flows, the decision to study abroad, and the choice of a country (Chen, 2007), while factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment have been associated with intercultural effectiveness (Hannigan, 1990). Social constructionism emphasizes how

students make and create meaning through their interactions with one another and the objects in their environment while attending a university in a different country, whereas the transition theory focuses on the transitions that all people undergo throughout their lives and the means with which they cope with and adjust to those changes. Factors concerning socio-psychological processes provide a detailed micro-level perspective on self, self-concept, and cultural identity. Finally, Ward's adaptation model emphasizes psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

### **2.2.1 Push-pull factors**

Push-pull factors are components of a push-pull model which is widely accepted as an analytical framework for investigating the issues concerning cross-border mobility of students (Li & Zhang, 2011) and is one of the most commonly known theoretical migration models (Parsons & Smeeding, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) stated that a combination of 'push factors' in students' home countries and 'pull factors' in host countries shape individual student's decisions to study abroad and also their choice of destinations.

The "push" factors function within the source country and influence a student's decision to undertake international study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Some push factors are positive and some are negative in nature (Chen, 2007). In contrast, "pull" factors operate within a host country to make that country be relatively attractive to international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Chen (2007) views these factors as, in general, positive as they attract international students to the destination. The decisions, motivations, and international student flows, in essence, are "a function of the combined 'push' and 'pull' factors as affected by intervening obstacles" (Sirowy & Inkeles, 1984). While the push factors had strength regarding the initial reasons for studying abroad, the pull factors dominated the choices, particularly the attractiveness of program availability (Chen, 2007).

Li and Bray (2007) indicated that the behaviours of actors and the choices they make are affected by a variety of external push and pull factors, with the actor's individual characteristics determining the actual influence of each one. These



personal characteristics include socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivation, and aspiration.

#### **2.2.1.1. The composition of push and pull factors**

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified that “push” factors include lack of access to higher education, perceptions of the quality of the tertiary education system, and the availability of technology-based programs. “Pull” factors encompassed: (1) the commonality of the language, (2) the geographic proximity of the host country, (3) the institution’s reputation for quality, (4) the range of courses and promotion and marketing efforts, and (5) the staff’ knowledge of international opportunities. In addition to those “push” and “pull” factors, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that there were six factors that influenced the decision of international students to study overseas.

*(1) Knowledge and awareness of the host* - This factor was measured through the availability of information on the host country as a study destination and the ease with which students could obtain the information. Moreover, the destination’s reputation for quality and the recognition of its qualifications in the student’s home nation formed a part of this factor.

*(2) Recommendations from friends or relatives* - This was associated with personal recommendations or referrals from parents, relatives, friends, and other “gatekeepers” prior to making the final decision.

*(3) Cost issues* - These included the cost of fees, living expenses, travel costs and social costs, namely crime, safety and racial discrimination. The authors added that the presence of students from the student’s country (social cost) and the availability of part-time work (financial costs) formed part of this factor too.

*(4) Environment* - This related to climate, lifestyle, crime, safety, and racial discrimination in the host nation.

*(5) Geographical proximity* - This factor included the importance of geographic proximity to a destination country.

(6) *Social links* - This is related to whether a student has family or friends living in the destination country and whether family and friends have studied there.

The above six “pull” factors are a significant framework for understanding the influences that motivate a student’s selection of a host country. These “pull” factors work in association with the “push” factors indicated earlier to create the demand for international education.

### **2.2.2 Factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment**

This theoretical framework was chosen to help identify and draw out the detailed factors contributing to cross-cultural adjustment and factors that have inverse relationships to cross-cultural effectiveness. These factors were identified by Hannigan (1990) who summarized various publications about factors associated with Intercultural Effectiveness and factors that have a negative correlation which are presented below.

#### ***2.2.2.1 Factors contributing to cross-cultural adjustment***

To be successful in intercultural adjustment, Hannigan (1990) highlighted three major factors that could help individuals to function fully in different cultures: skills or abilities, attitudes, and personality traits. However, Mamman (1995) noted that in addition to those three main determinants, the ‘socio-biographical’ background (e.g. the cultural setting, ethnic background, and linguistic ability) is regarded as among the most important factors that can contribute to intercultural adjustment. The following sections, therefore, present ‘skills or abilities’ in section (1), followed by ‘attitudes’ in section (2), personality factors in section (3), and end with ‘socio-biographical background’ in section (4).

##### **(1) Skills or abilities (open-mindedness) (Hannigan, 1990)**

Skills or abilities refer to interpersonal and communication skills such as listening skills, the ability to enter into a meaningful dialogue with other people, to initiate interaction with a stranger, to effectively deal with communication misunderstanding and different communication styles, as well as linguistic ability in host cultures and interaction management.

## (2) Attitudes (a non-judgmental, noncritical perspective)

In successful cross-cultural functioning, attitudes of the sojourner are also continually referred to as a significant factor (Hannigan, 1990). To be able to adjust to a new environment, an individual should have a positive attitude towards the host culture, that is, respect for and interest in the customs, traditions, and people of the new environment. The sub-factors of attitudes consist of:

*2a. Orientation to Knowledge* -Ruben (1976) defined this term as the way one perceives beliefs, values, and knowledge as being applicable to everyone, or as being applicable only to the holder of the beliefs, values, and knowledge .

*2b. Third Culture Perspective* - Hammer et al. (1978) use the “Third Culture Perspective” term to describe how effective sojourners observe and understand their culture and the host culture. Individuals should be non-judgmental and should have respect for the host culture. Hawes and Kealey (1981) and Haney (1976) emphasized that an attitude of respect for the host culture is considered as vital for cross-cultural effectiveness.

*2c. Cultural empathy* - This term is also mentioned frequently. Ruben (1976) explained that empathy means an individual’s ability to distinctly project an interest in others and to gain and reasonably manifest the thoughts, feelings and/or experience of others.

## (3) Personality factors

Kim (1988) indicated that ‘*openness*’ (an individual’s ability to accept new information, new ways of doing things, and minimal resistance to change) and ‘*resilience*’ (an individual’s ability to ensure success in the face of novel and difficult situations) are the two global personality factors that are most relevant to adaptation. These factors include the following traits (Hannigan, 1990):

*3a. Persistence with flexibility* - It is a must for the sojourners to be able to accurately size up their environment so that they know when it is time to follow through on a task and when it is time to be sensitive to host culture priorities.

*3b. Self-confident Maturity*- An individual should have self-confidence, principled responsibility, optimistic realism, and persistence with flexibility.

*3c. Intercultural interaction*- This means that one interacts with local people and makes local friends, learns the local language and nonverbal communication, and demonstrates factual knowledge about local culture, politics, history, current events, economy, etc.

As personality is one factor influencing students' adjustment, it is important to specifically understand Chinese personality traits in order to analyse which personality traits are likely to contribute to, or hinder, their adjustment. The following section is about the Big Seven dimensions of the Chinese personality proposed by Wang et al. (2005) and Zhou et al. (2009).

#### *The Big Seven structure of the Chinese personality*

Before the Big Seven structure of the Chinese personality emerged, the Big Five dimensions of Western personality model and its corresponding measures had been a major topic in personality research (D. Wang et al., 2005). The model was proposed by Costa and McCrae (1985), Costa et al. (1987), McCrae and Costa (1987), Goldberg (1990), and John (1990). They identified that this model consisted of:

*1. Neuroticism.* Puher (2009) considered neuroticism to be a tendency for someone to experience negative emotions and mood swings. Students with high neuroticism are likely to demonstrate emotions such as anger, anxiety, irritability, and frequent mood swings (Costa & McCrae, 1995).

*2. Extraversion.* There are two compositions of extraversion: social skills (e.g. gregariousness and self-confidence) and positive emotions (e.g. happiness and optimism) (Costa & McCrae, 1995). The characteristics of students who have a

high level of extraversion are: enthusiasm and a tendency to search for stimulation and the company of others (Puher, 2009).

3. *Openness to Experience*. This refers to the appreciation of adventure, creativity, and new experiences (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Students high on openness possess the interest and skills necessary to succeed in university coursework; they typically demonstrate critical thinking skills and tolerance for diverse perspectives (Clifford, Boufal, & Kurtz, 2004).

4. *Agreeableness*. This is the trait that allows individuals act compassionately and cooperatively with their goals to obtain social harmony (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Those who are high on agreeableness will try to befriend others by being considerate, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise.

5. *Conscientiousness*. A person high on conscientiousness presents characteristics such as preparedness, thoroughness, and orderliness. These people are characteristically responsible, hardworking, and persistent. They also tend to set goals for themselves which are achieved through precise planning and persistence (Gough & Lanning, 1986).

Though some scholars believe that individuals have a similar personality structure no matter which culture they originate from, others have argued that cultural differences lead to differences in personality. For example, McCrae and Costa (1997) found that the personality structures of their participants were considerably similar to the Big Five personality structure in a large American sample. Hence, they confirmed that the Big Five personality structure is universal and can be applied to all individuals. However, Shweder (1991) stated that cultural differences could result in personality differences because people in different cultures face different tensions. Regarding cultural differences, Wang et al. (2005) and Zhou et al. (2009), therefore, pointed to a '*seven-factor model of Chinese personality*' created by Wang and Cui (2003), which they claimed is applicable for Chinese. This model consists of:

1. *Extraversion*. It is used to describe those who are active, initiative, sociable, optimistic, and exhibit ease in communication (having coordination skills).
2. *Kindness*. It is defined as the 'good person' in Chinese culture who is honest, kind, forgiving, friendly and caring about others, trustworthy, and affectionate.
3. *Behaviour styles*. This refers to the way individuals behave and their attitude. Those with high scores are serious, thoughtful, clear about goals, obedient of rules, and cooperative.
4. *Talents/Intellect/Positive Valence/Conscientiousness/Diligence*. This is the ability to make a decision and the work attitude of an individual. One with high scores is not afraid of difficulties, is persistent in work, involved with work, and dares to undertake difficult assignments.
5. *Emotionality/Emotional Volatility*. It is the stability of one's emotions in working and interpersonal situations. An individual with high scores is impetuous, impulsive and unable to control his/her emotions easily.
6. *Human relations*. Individuals with high scores in basic attitudes toward human relations are friendly, generous, mature, and easy to communicate with.
7. *Ways of life/Dependency/Fragility*. It is defined as the fundamental attitude of individuals toward life and career. Those with high scores have clear visions of the future, are assertive about life, and work actively toward goals.

These seven dimensions have been used as the theoretical framework to specify the personality of Chinese students. Then, their personality traits have been analysed in association with adjustment experiences.

#### (4) Socio-biographical background

Mamman (1995) stated that the 'socio-biographical' background is noted to be among the most significant factors that can affect intercultural adjustment. He gave examples of some of the associated factors that can have a vital influence on intercultural adjustment as follows:

*4a. The cultural setting-* Dinges (1983) and Koester and Olebe (1988) indicated that individual intercultural effectiveness and general adjustment will vary with the 'environment'. 'Cultural Toughness' is one of the environmental factors influencing individual intercultural effectiveness. Black et al. (1991) stated that it would be more difficult for individuals to adjust to a host culture where the differences between the hosts' and the individuals' cultures were greater.

*4b. Ethnic background* – Fishman (1977) defined ethnicity as an aspect of group self-recognition and its recognition in the eyes of outsiders. Both the 'inherited' and the 'acquired' attributes are included. The 'inherited' attribute means biological origin which relates to descent, while the latter one is associated with the group members' behaviour and actions to express their membership, such as language, mode of dressing, and other forms of behaviour.

*4c. Linguistic ability-* Black et al. (1991), Dowling and Schuler (1990), and Stening (1979) identified that linguistic ability is also related to individuals' intercultural adjustment. These authors postulated that if people could understand and speak the host language they would be able to adjust effectively.

With regard to the socio-biographical background mentioned above, it is necessary to consider it as an important factor contributing to intercultural adjustment because in the current study, Thai and Chinese cultures are regarded as having similarities in some points (e.g. cultural values and language) (see 2.7.4.3 Hofstede's analysis for China vs. Thailand on page 92 for more detail).

#### **2.2.2.2 Factors that have inverse relationships to cross-cultural effectiveness**

This part focuses on personality traits showing negative correlations with cross-cultural effectiveness. These traits are: perfectionism, rigidity, dogmatism, ethnocentrism, dependent anxiety, task-oriented behaviour, narrow-

mindedness, and self-centred role behaviours. Perfectionism, rigidity, and dogmatism are traits that do not assist individual's ability to perform well in an intercultural environment. To understand the characteristics of each trait, the following definitions have been identified:

Perfectionism – Frost et al. (1990) defined perfectionism as excessive concern over making mistakes. It also includes high personal standards, the perception of high parental expectations, and the perception of high parental criticism.

Rigidity –refers to behaviours that individuals are unable to change such as their habits, sets, attitudes, and discriminations (Chown, 1959). In addition, if they are required to adjust their behaviours to a new environment but they fail to do it, this also means that they have rigidity.

Ethnocentrism - focuses on a universal tendency to perceive individual's ethnic group or its social standards as superior to others ("Ethnocentrism," 2009). Wiseman et al. (1989) stated that ethnocentrism may decrease intercultural communication competence by diminishing culture-specific and culture-general understanding.

If they have the above personality traits, individuals will not be able to adjust to their new environment effectively. In the current study, the factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment of Chinese students have been explored through their home country background information.

### **2.2.3 Social constructionism**

The definitions of social constructionism are presented in section 2.2.3.1, followed by 'How my research approaches will develop and adopt this theory' (section 2.2.3.2).

#### **2.2.3.1 What is social constructionism?**

Many scholars (Hibberd, 2005; G. Marshall, 1998; Stam, 2001) have provided definitions of social constructionism. Marshall (1998) presents that social constructionism can sometimes apply to theories that focus on the socially created nature of social life. Marshall refers to the work of William Isaac



Thomas, the Chicago sociologists, the phenomenological sociologists, and philosophers such as Alfred Schutz, all of whom emphasize the idea that human beings actively and creatively produce society. In addition, they demonstrate that the world is made or invented rather than given or taken for granted. Social worlds, in their opinion, are interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups.

A study by Stam (2001) does not directly mention the meaning of social constructionism. Stam points out that social constructionism is sometimes called a movement while at other times it is referred to as a position, a theory, a theoretical orientation, and an approach. However, many psychologists are still not sure about its status. The author adds that social constructionism serves as a label indicating a series of positions. After the publication of Berger and Luckmann's influential work in 1966, these positions have been expressed clearly.

Unlike Stam (2001), Hibberd (2005) puts forth that the meaning of social constructionism is quite clear. It refers to (i) the assembling or arranging of parts, in discrete states, into larger structures for a certain purpose, and (ii) that such arranging is social in origin. Hibberd states that concepts, theories, scientific practices, and bodies of knowledge are all items that may be socially constructed. She also adds that nothing can be fixed or inevitable because some things, namely events or processes, are social in origin, and not given or established by nature. Therefore, social groups can create new conventions, theories, ideologies, practices and bodies of knowledge to replace the old ones.

Considering the above definitions given by Marshall (1998), Stam (2001), and Hibberd (2005), the meaning of social constructionism can be concluded to be that there is no meaning in the world until individuals or groups construct it. Moreover, people do not find meaning, but they make and create it through their interactions with one another and the objects in their environment. This meaning they make will be influenced by social interpretation.

To adapt the definition of social constructionism to the educational field, it can be concluded that the most optimal learning environment is one where a dynamic interaction between lecturers, students and tasks gives an opportunity for learners to create their own truth because of the interaction with others. Therefore, social constructionism focuses on the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding.

#### ***2.2.3.2 How my research approaches have developed and adopted this theory***

I have used social constructionism as the framework of this research. The nature of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, their learning processes and the role of lecturers and administrators will be examined in more detail through the perspective of social constructionism, which helps us think about the way in which the students interact with others during their adjustment experiences.

#### **2.2.4 Transition theory**

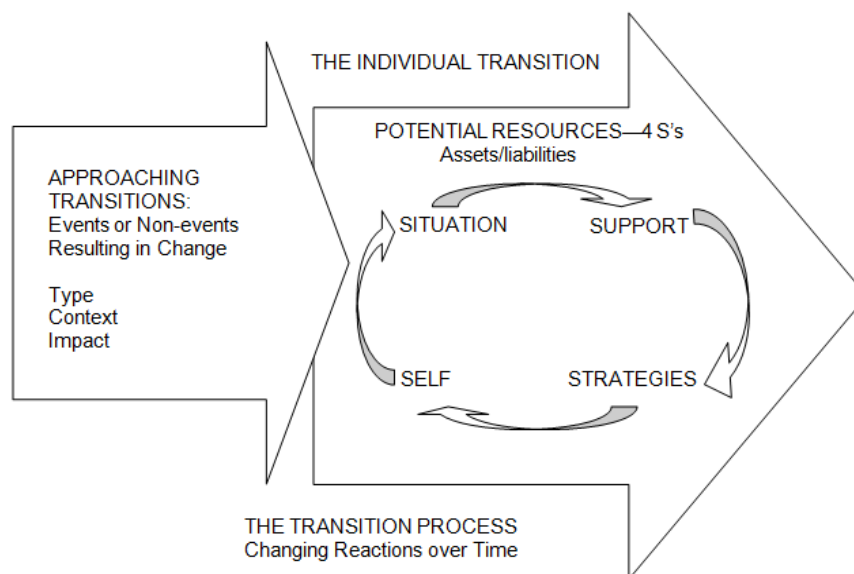
Transition Theory focuses on the transitions that adults undergo throughout their lives and the means they use to cope with and adjust to those changes. A transition is defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27). Although transitions are viewed as a time of crisis or as a developmental adjustment, they demonstrate a unique opportunity for growth and transformation (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Levinson (1986) as cited in Goodman et al. (2006) stated that transitions have been positioned within a developmental framework. Theorists define them as turning points or as a period between two periods of stability. To move through a transition, an individual needs to release aspects of the self and former roles and learn new roles. Within a developmental framework, transitions are considered as occurring in stages. Each stage relates to the next for adaptation and successful adjustment.

Three perspectives are presented below to promote a better understanding of transition theory: the transition model (section 2.2.4.1), the transition process – an integrated model (section 2.2.4.2), and factors that influence transitions (section 2.2.4.3).

#### **2.2.4.1 The transition model**

Each person's transition model differs as each individual is different, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable. The transition model has three major parts as follows: (1) Approaching Transitions: Transition Identification and Transition Process, (2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System, and (3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources



**Figure 2: The Transition Model (individual in transition) (Goodman et al., 2006)**

To summarize Figure 2, '*Approaching Transitions*' helps identify the nature of the transition and provides perspective to aid in putting it in context. Transition Identification is concerned with what modification is impending. The Transition Process locates where a person is in the transition and reactions to any transition change over time. In addition, these reactions depend on whether an individual is *moving in, through, or out of* the transition. '*Taking Stock of Coping Resources*': The 4 S System provides a way to present the potential resources an individual possesses to deal with the transition. The 4 S's mean the person's

*Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies*. According to these resources, each person deals with the transition process differently, no matter where he/she is or what the transition is. '*Taking Charge*': Strengthening Resources identify the new strategies usage. Although some transitions are out of one's control, one can control the way he/she copes with them—he/she can strengthen his/her resources by using the 4 Ss.

Goodman et al.'s (2006) transition model mentions insights into factors involved with transition: the individual, the environment, and the degree of impact a given transition will have at a certain point in time. The authors defined this theory as a theory of adult development. It also supports the facilitation of coping and strategies that can be utilized to assist individuals experiencing modification.

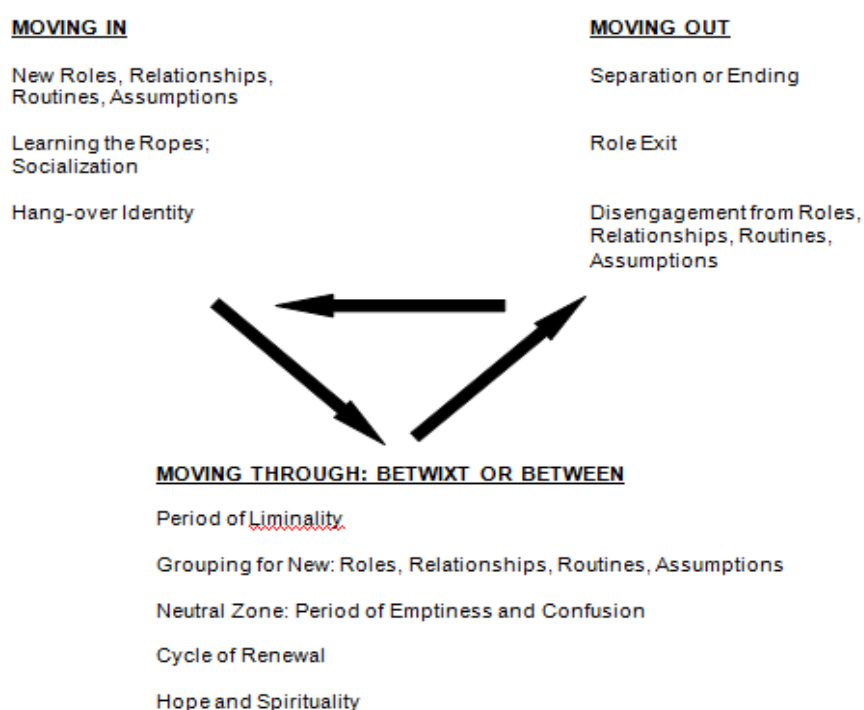
#### **2.2.4.2 The transition process—An integrated model**

Transitions are defined as an integral part of a person's development and a challenge to personal transformation and growth. Goodman et al. (2006) viewed transition as causing risks and being associated with fears, and the strategies for moving through as relating to the outer world. The transition process is active and requires energy, strategies, and courage on the part of the person.

Bridges (2004), Ebaugh (1988), Van Gennep (1960), Hudson (1991) and (1999), and Bloch and Richmond (1998) are all transition theorists. They have agreed that a person reacts individually in how he/she moves through the phases of the transition. The successful results are considered as dependent on the individual's perceptions of the transition, their resources and limitations, and their overall ability to cope with the transition. In addition, these theorists have also agreed that in fact, transitions are a time of opportunity. They have the potential to be resolved either constructively or destructively.

According to this integrated model in Figure 3, either *moving in* or *moving out* is conceptualized to be the first stage (Goodman et al., 2006). Individuals moving into a new situation (e.g. an educational environment) have some common agendas and needs. It is important for them to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms and expectations of the new system. Therefore, institutions

need to devote a large amount of time to orientation and a process designed to assist people to know what is expected of them.



**Figure 3: Integrative model of the transition process (Goodman et al., 2006)**

While adults are in a new situation they encounter a number of issues, namely how to balance their activities with other parts of their lives and how to feel supported and challenged during their new sojourn. Applying this model to adult learners, Goodman et al. (2006) stated that the *moving through* period starts when learners know the ropes. Learners may require assistance to maintain their energy and commitment because their *moving through* period can be a long transition.

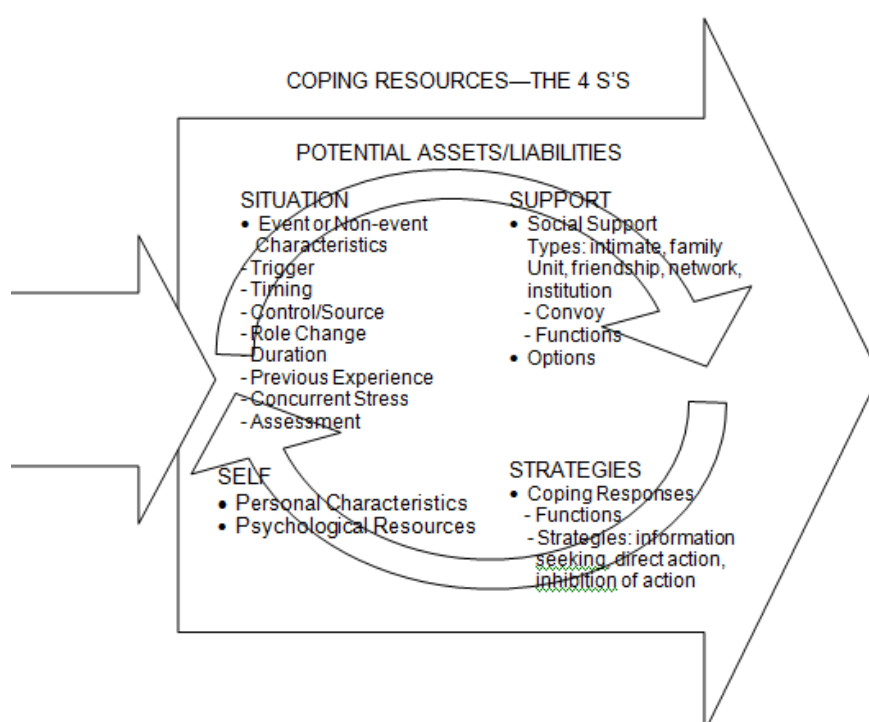
*Moving out* is viewed as ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next. When an individual leaves the familiar environments and people or ways of functioning and interacting to which he/she has become accustomed, he/she experiences disequilibrium. Changing jobs, moving, and returning to university are examples of transitions in which one grieves for the loss of former goals, friends, family, and structure.

Goodman et al. (2006) presented another crucial point of the transition process. They indicated that the larger the transition—either good or bad--the more it spreads through a person's life. For example, at one point a person graduates. Then, a period of disruption follows. The change of old roles, relationships, assumptions, and routines ensues and new ones develop. After that, finally and gradually, the awareness of having graduated becomes only one of the various dimensions of living—the transition has been integrated.

#### **2.2.4.3 Factors that influence transitions**

Goodman et al. (2006) identified four major sets of factors influencing a person's ability to cope with a transition (see Figure 4): (1) The *Situation* variable—What is happening?, (2) The *Self* variable—To whom is it happening?, (3) The *Support* variable—What help is available?, and (4) The *Strategies* variable—How does the person cope?

These four factors are called the 4 S's—a system designed to assist individuals in understanding change (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995).



**Figure 4: Coping resources—the 4 S's (Goodman et al., 2006)**

## **The 4 S system: A detailed view**

### ***Situation***

There is a difference in each transition event or non-event. The same person can encounter various situations such as getting divorced, becoming a grandparent, or losing a job. Each of these transitions will be different in terms of the following (Goodman et al., 2006): What triggered it?, Was it at a good time in the individual's life?, Did the individual initiate the transition or did it happen to him or her?, Is the individual experiencing stress in other areas of life?, Does the individual assess the transition as positive, negative, or benign?.

### ***Self***

Goodman et al. (2006) reported that every individual has both assets and liabilities/resources and deficits. Besides the Situation itself, Goodman et al. looked at what each person brings to the transition. They pointed out that though it is complex to get a handle on the Self, the following characteristics relating to individuals as they cope with change have been identified:

*Personal and demographic characteristics.* Each person's personal and demographic characteristics-- socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/culture, age and stage of life, and state of health—bear directly on how he or she perceives and assesses life. For that reason, these variables need to be explored.

*Psychological resources.* Pearlin and Schooler (1978) defined psychological resources as the “personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats” (p. 69). These include ego development, optimism, self-efficacy, commitments, values, and spirituality and resilience. Goodman et al. (2006) mentioned that people approach the same transition from different frames of reference. For instance, if there were 50 21-year-old students enrolled in the same educational program, they would each react according to their own frame of reference and their maturity level.

As people bring different assets to a transition, the following are some ways to assess them: Are they able to deal with the world in an autonomous way? Can

they tolerate ambiguity? Do they blame themselves for what happens? Do they feel in control of their responses to the transition?.

These questions have been used as a theoretical frame to investigate the research participants' adjustment experience. The researcher has adapted these questions from Goodman et al. (2006) to ask the participants about their self-adjustment.

### ***Support***

Social support is usually identified as the key to coping with stress. However, support needs to be defined operationally due to its many sizes and shapes and its trend for being for better or for worse. Goodman et al. (2006) classified the types of support individuals receive according to their sources, which are intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the individuals are a part. Lowenthal and Weiss (1976) viewed intimate relationships as being a crucial resource during stressful transitions. For the factor of family units, Levine (1976) stated that people who have received parental support for their move can adapt better to the new situation than do those whose parents have disapproved of their action.

An individual's network of friends is another important social support system. Loss of the friends' network can lead to transition difficulties (Lowenthal & Weiss, 1976). Conversely, the presence of friends can help an individual recover from his/her hardship. Daniels (2005) stated that students can master concepts and ideas that they are unable to understand on their own with assistance from adults or friends who have more advanced knowledge.

In conclusion, to take stock of the individuals' support, the following questions can be asked: Is this person getting what he or she needs for this transition in terms of aid?, Does the person have a range of types of support—partner, other close family or friends, institutions?, and Has the person's support system been interrupted by this transition?,



## ***Strategies***

Pearlin and Schooler (1978) indicated that coping strategies are related to people's "psychological resources of self-esteem and mastery" (p. 5). The question arises as to which strategies are best in different situations. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) proposed that there are many alternatives for individuals to use in every area of their lives and that strategies decrease stress in certain role areas. However, they reported that a person coping has the greatest chance of being effective with interpersonal problems rather than work-related problems. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicated that there are two major coping orientations—changing the situation or relaxing oneself—and suggested four possible coping modes: direct action, inhibition of action, information seeking, and intrapsychic.

## ***Conclusion***

Regarding the knowledge of transition theory, it can be concluded that this theory is typically classified as a theory of adult development. It supports the facilitation of coping as well as strategies that can be utilized to help people experiencing change. Goodman et al. (2006) demonstrated that the transition models consisted of three major parts—Approaching Transitions, Taking Stock of Coping Resources, and Taking Charge. Then, they proposed the integrated model of the transition process, followed by the proposal of four major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition—Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. For the reasons outlined above, the transition theory presented here by Goodman et al. (2006) is a useful theoretical framework for examining the changes students experience when moving to a new environment and for that reason the researcher has utilized it in this study.

### **2.2.5 Factors in socio-psychological processes**

This theoretical framework was used to help identify and draw out the detailed factors in socio-psychological processes. A detailed perspective on self, self-concept, cultural identity, and cultural transition will be presented on the following issues: 'Perspective of self, self-concept, and cultural identity' (section

2.2.5.1), 'Self-concept and cultural identity' (section 2.2.5.2), 'Cross-cultural transitions' in section 2.2.5.3, and 'A new model: cultural identity and cultural transition' in section 2.2.5.4.

#### **2.2.5.1 Perspective of self, self-concept, and cultural identity**

Sussman (2000) provided theoretical writings on self, self-concept, and cultural identity to aid in understanding the sojourners' problems and contribute to an emerging social psychological analysis of cultural transitions. She pointed out that an individual's culture forms a mental framework through their ontological definition, motivation and selection of their behaviours, and their judgment and evaluation of the actions of others. Culture provides both a frame of reference for self-definition and a frame of reference for ordering social relationships (Berry, 1980).

To better understand the relationship among the self, culture, and behaviour, Triandis (1989) presented an insightful and integrative analysis. He proposed a structural framework of the self and divided it into three aspects according to what individuals perceived: (1) 'private' (what do you think about yourself? E.g. "I am a good student"), (2) 'public' (what do other people think about you? E.g. "People think that I am a good student"), and (3) 'collective' (what do people in your group think about you? E.g. "My family and friends think that I am a good student"). The probability of referencing each aspect of self is mediated by *cultural variation* in three cultural dimensions: *cultural complexity*, *individualism and collectivism*, and *tightness and looseness*. Triandis gave an example of the link among the self, culture, and behaviour within tight, individualistic cultures. In such communities, more elements of the private self, and therefore a greater sampling of the private self, and less of the public or collective self can be found. As a result, social behaviour is activated through the different sampling of the private, public, or collective selves that have been affected by the cultural dimensions of complexity, individualism and collectivism, and tightness and looseness.

### **2.2.5.2 Self-concept and cultural identity**

Sussman (2000) revealed that people hold multiple beliefs about themselves—that is, many self-schemas which include personal attributes about the self (e.g., traits, characteristics, dispositions) and thoughts about membership in social groups such as those formed around gender, ethnicity, social class, and culture. Lewin (1948) commented on the relationship between the self and the collective. He pointed out that to develop a sense of well-being, people need a firm sense of group identification.

Later, Tajfel (1981, 1982) and colleagues expanded this notion, developing a social identity theory in which identification with a social group adds to individual's positive self-concept. Tajfel (1981) described the collective self as an “aspect of one's self-concept which develops from his knowledge of his membership in a social group as well as the value and emotional importance attached to that membership” (p. 255). Therefore, not only are our personal traits and characteristics reflected by the content of our self-perceptions, but also by the meaningful social groups to which we belong. One element of the collective self-concept is developed from membership in a cultural group described as one's cultural identity but owning properties different from other collective identities.

Considering the psychological counterpoint to national identity—the identity that defined the cultural self in content, evaluation, and structure---, cultural identity is often conceptualized as sharing a border with national identity (i.e., thinking of oneself as Chinese or American). For instance, Triandis's (1989) definition of culture includes geographic localization as a basic element together with shared language and shared notions of the self. In the current study, the students thought of themselves as Chinese.

### **2.2.5.3 Cross-cultural transitions**

Among the largely descriptive sojourner literature, Sussman (2000) asserted that researchers have focused on individual difference and cultural variation factors. To categorize cross-cultural transitions and cultural-adjustment research, she used the system of chronology of experience as follows:

*(1) Antecedent variables (those that temporally precede the cross-cultural encounter).*

These variables include personality variables, behavioural skills, previous overseas experience, organizational variables, cultural distance, cultural knowledge and cultural identity, and discrepancies between expectations and experience overseas (Sussman, 2000).

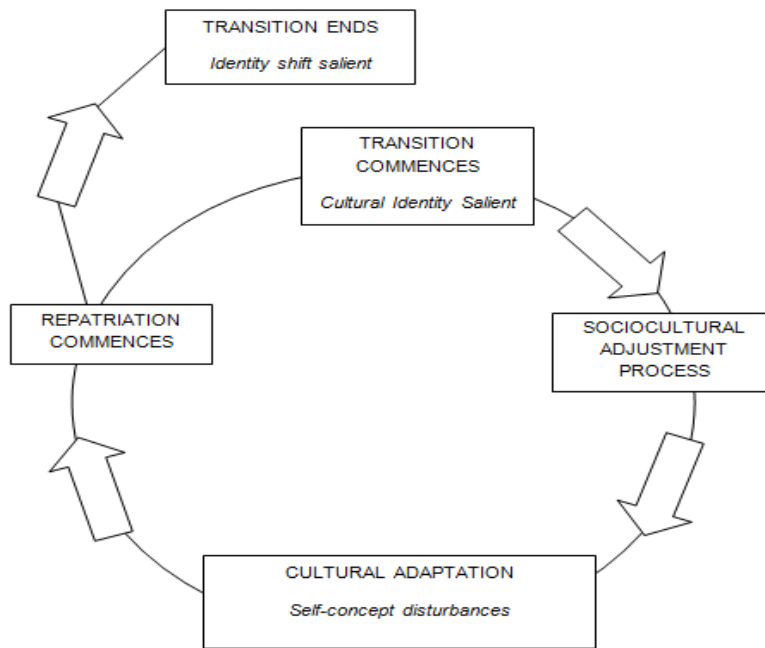
*(2) Consequent variables (those that describe consequences of cultural adaptation)*

Consequent variables that result from cultural transitions include negative ones, namely personal shock, loss of personal intimacy, role shock, or to a less frequently reported result, positive experiences leading to personal growth (Sussman, 2000).

In my study, both variables have been defined to analyse whether they contributed to or hindered the Chinese students' adjustment experiences in Thailand.

#### **2.2.5.4 A new model: cultural identity and cultural transition**

Sussman (2000) proposed that the critical mediating factors in explaining and predicting psychological responses to the cross-cultural transition process are self-concept disturbances and subsequent shifts in cultural identity throughout these transitions. This explanatory model (Figure 5) presented below argues for three fundamental elements: identity salience, sociocultural adaptation, and self-concept-cultural identity changes. These elements interact within the larger cyclical framework of cultural transition to predict results for the transition process made evident during repatriation.



**Figure 5: Shifts in cultural identity throughout the cultural transition.**

### *Identity Salience*

This model (Figure 5) explains that while self-construal, emotion, and motivation might be formed by the cultural context, few people acknowledge culture's influence. Sussman (2000) claimed that culture might be part of the self, but cultural identity is clearly unrecognized. Although the impact of the culture surrounding an individual is rarely a noticeable feature of one's self-concept, one seldom recognizes the imprint of his own culture and its common nature. The presented model predicts that one situation in which individual's cultural identity will occur and become salient is during the cultural transition commencement. Wrapped in a new social environment where behaviour and thinking differ from an individual's familiar cultural context, awareness of the profound effect of one's culture on behaviour starts to grow.

### *Sociocultural adaptation*

To follow the cultural reaffirmation phase, the model postulates that sojourners recognize the discrepancy between their cultural selves (and the goals that direct behaviour and thought) and the new cultural context. For the adaptive

benefits of improving the person-environment fit, sojourners' self-knowledge is pursued. Sojourners change their behaviour, cognitions or both and, consequently, their cultural identity because their sets of cultural cognitions and behaviour are no longer proper within the new cultural context. When sojourners transpose to a new culture, they encounter a continuum of adjustment choices—between maintaining their cultural self and behaviour and changing to a new behaviour and cognitions (going native) or somewhere in between.

#### *Self-concept—cultural identity changes*

The proposed model (Figure 5) presents that when sojourners succeed in adapting to the new culture by changing behaviours and social thought, their cultural identity is also modified. Individuals will find that the new cultural scripts they have now employed and that have helped them fit more properly into the host country are not appropriate in their home culture (Sussman, 2000). Sussman added that sojourners can experience the most severe level of stress at this time than at any other time during their cultural transition.

This cultural identity model suggests that as a result of the interaction of identity salience, the adjustment process, and adaptation outcome and self-concept changes, four clear categories of identity shift might emerge (Sussman, 2000). These cultural identity shifts are *subtractive*, *additive*, *affirmative*, and *intercultural*. For the *intercultural* or *global* identity shift, sojourners can hold multiple cultural scripts simultaneously and draw on each as the working self-concept requires. The sojourners are aware of their cultural identity in this transition cycle. Their adjustment process is triggered by the recognition of the cultural discrepancies between the sojourner's home cultural values and behaviours and those of the host culture. Adjustment facilitated by low cultural centrality and high cultural flexibility leads to high adaptation. To succeed in adaptation to the new sojourn site, the sojourners define their self-identity as world citizens who can interact properly and effectively in many countries.

In my study, the model of cultural transition process had been used as a theoretical framework to investigate the students' transition to the Thai academic and sociocultural environment and also to uncover the students' adjustment problems and the strategies that they utilized to move through their transition. The study focused on the students' transition in Thailand only, without considering their repatriation experience.

### **2.2.6 Ward's adaptation model**

Although a large amount of research has taken place over many years on the experience of cross-cultural transition and factors which influence sojourner adjustment, there is still a lack of agreement over the process of adapting to a new culture and how the adjustment proceeds over time. The widely known stage theory of cross-cultural adaptation was proposed by Lysgaard (1955) after his study of Norwegian Fulbright students in the U.S. This found more adjustment difficulties reported by sojourners when 6-12 months into their period living abroad, compared to when they had been overseas for less than 6 months or more than 18 months.

Oberg (1960) reported a similar cross-cultural adaptation process in his description and development of "culture shock." Oberg believed that sojourners move through various stages of culture shock and, in the end, reach a satisfactory adjustment. In the initial "honeymoon" stage, sojourners begin their adjustment with strong motivation and enthusiasm for the whole new experience. This is followed by a stage where crisis, distress, hostility and withdrawal dominate, then a transition stage, which leads into the final stage of adjustment, integration and enjoyment. These stages of Oberg's cross-cultural adaptation can be represented by a U-curve graph in the same way as Lysgaard's stages.

The U-curve has been at the centre of theory and research on transition and adjustment for more than 30 years, during which time its application has been further extended to include specifics such as social interaction with hosts, attitudes, host culture perceptions, culture-specific knowledge, homesickness and academic performance (Chang, 1973; Davis, 1971; Scott, 1956; Sewell &

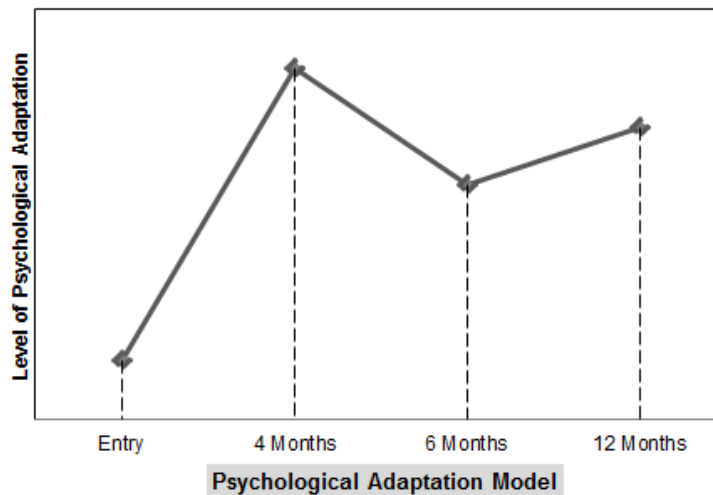
Davidson, 1961; Torbiorn, 1982). Researchers have also extended the graphic representation of the “U-curve” to a “W curve” in order to add the re-entry phenomenon to the framework (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

In Ward et al’s (1998) study, the U- and W-Curve models have been criticized. When the available research in this area is reviewed it appears that there is little support for this hypothesis (Anderson, 1994; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Moreover, Church (1982) claimed that evidence for the U-curve is “weak, inconclusive and over-generalized” (p. 542). Ward and colleagues have discussed the problem of defining cross-cultural adjustment and have tried to propose a theoretical framework for synthesis of theory and research on cross-cultural transition and adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Following this argument, psychological and sociocultural adjustment have been identified and promoted to be an alternative model of adaptation (Ward, 2001a).

#### ***2.2.6.1 Psychological adaptation***

Psychological adaptation is associated with psychological well-being or emotional satisfaction (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). On moving to a foreign country, an individual has to make many personal adjustments: getting used to their new environment, building relationships, and learning how to manage new tasks at work or in study. These adjustments can cause stress, loneliness and a high level of anxiety (Berno & Ward, 1998; Searle & Ward, 1990; Stone Feinstein & Ward, 1990; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999).





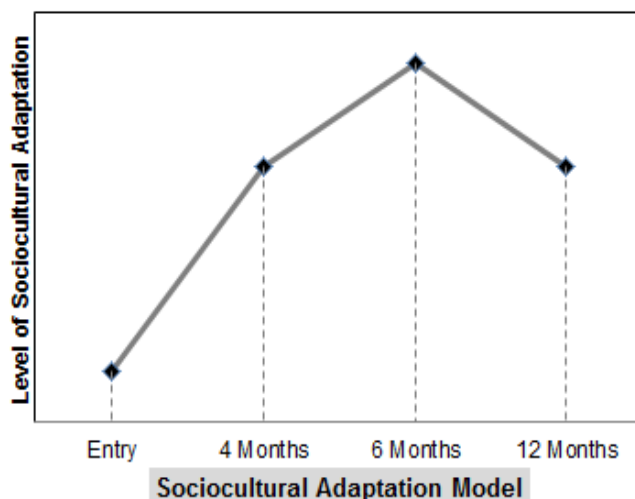
**Figure 6 Psychological adaptation model**

The representation of the adaptation process shown in Figure 6 indicates how a person's level of comfort in their new environment changes over time.

According to Ward's research, sojourners generally experience the least comfort upon arrival, with adaptation then increasing continuously during the first four months of the stay, eventually stabilizing with only minor variation following over the remaining period. This suggests that efforts to help the sojourners in their adjustment should be concentrated more heavily at the beginning of their time abroad.

#### **2.2.6.2 Sociocultural adaptation**

Sociocultural adaptation refers to the visitor being able to "fit in" to the cultural of their new environment and to be able to interact effectively with members of the host culture (Searle & Ward, 1990). This includes gaining culture specific communication and interaction skills, as well as learning or improving spoken language skills where the host language is different from their own and in becoming familiar with the norms and values in the host country or culture.



**Figure 7: Sociocultural adaptation model**

Figure 7 shows that a sojourner's sociocultural adaptation becomes stronger as their time in the host country increases but that after the initial six months, there may not be any additional significant learning and the curve may begin to decrease, as in this model. As with psychological adaptation, this model strongly suggests that efforts to help the sojourners in their adjustment should be concentrated more heavily at the beginning of their time abroad.

Empirical research continues to suggest that psychological and sociocultural adjustment are inter-related but that different variables are involved.

Psychological adjustment is generally affected by personality, life changes, and social support while sociocultural adaptation is related to factors such as the amount of contact with people from the host country, the length of residence in the new culture, cultural identity and cultural distance (Ward & Kennedy, 1992).

As the current study involved the adjustment experiences of Chinese students over the duration of their study in Thailand, Ward's adaptation model was selected as one of theoretical frameworks most suited to focus on both psychological and sociocultural adaptation over an extended period of time.

### 2.2.7 The relationship between theoretical perspectives

To conclude the consideration of the relationship between each theoretical perspective, it can be seen that when people know what behaviour is required of them to fit into the new cultural context, they respond to this in individual ways, and this determines how they move through the phases of the transition. This seems to be an individual process; however, when they face difficulties, they have to find their own strategies to cope with them, and these are related to the outer world. This covers similar factors to those in social constructionism and the socio-psychological processes. Regarding social constructionism, people construct knowledge based on their understanding of the new cultural context, and then the deeper meaning of their social world is formed through the interpretation of their interactions with other people in that environment. Similarly, for the factors which make up the socio-psychological processes, Tajfel (1981) stated that individuals' personal traits and characteristics are not only reflected by the content of their self-perceptions, but also by the meaningful social groups to which they belong. This indicates that the new society which they are part of has influenced their behaviours. Due to this effect, people have to interact with one another to learn and understand how the society functions.

*What the theories in total predict or explain about adjustment?*

When considered in combination, the different individual theories explain the entire adjustment experience (see Figure 8). Before leaving their home country, two vital factors (*push and pull*) motivate the international students to study overseas and attract them to choose the host nation respectively. In this stage, the students have a range of existing home country background variables (e.g. skills, personality traits) before their cross-cultural encounter. When they make a *transition* (moving in) to a new academic and sociocultural environment, students react individually in how they move through the phases of the transition. This process of psychological and sociocultural adaptation starts when students come to know how to create their understanding of the new cultural context, through their interactions with other people in the society, in order to fit into that environment. Not only do the students themselves learn to

adjust to the new environment, there are also other factors which are considered as influencing their cross-cultural adjustment (Goodman et al., 2006; Hannigan, 1990; Mamman, 1995; Sussman, 2000) such as skills or abilities, attitudes, personality factors, socio-biological background, situation, self, support, and strategies (see more detail on page 19-24 and 31-34).

However, in the case where their behaviours are not a good fit in the new cultural context and their adjustment problems are revealed, they have to construct their understanding further. During this stage strategies for moving through are chosen, with the assistance of *support* sources, which help maintain their energy and commitment. After the appropriate strategies are discovered, the students will finally be able to continue their transition and live in the host country.

My study further expands on the theoretical perspectives described above by: (1) exploring how push-pull theory operates for Chinese student studying in Thailand and to find out whether there are any similarities/differences between their expectations (of coming to study in a different country) and their experiences overseas; (2) examining factors which are considered to influence the cross-cultural adjustment of Chinese student studying in Thailand; and (3) exploring what challenges (or problems) they faced, how they coped with these difficulties, and what sources of support they used during their transition. As well as gaining better understanding of the particular issues faced by the students in this study it is expected that the new perspective gained will clarify and refine how the existing theories can be best applied in wider situations.

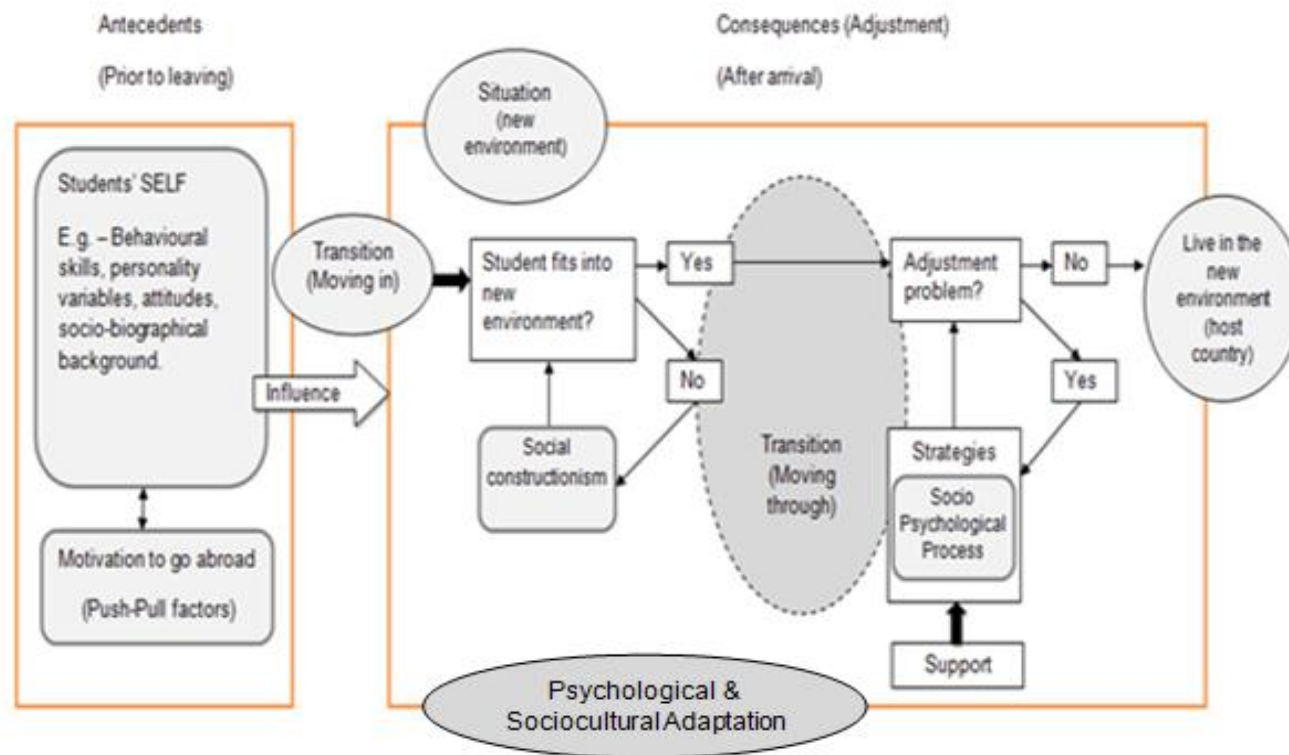


Figure 8: The relationship between each theoretical perspective

### **2.3 Literature Concerning the Decision to Study Abroad**

Various studies have been conducted to explore related factors that influence students' decisions to study overseas (Chen, 2007; Eder, Smith, et al., 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) conducted four country studies of the factors that influenced international students' choice of study destinations. These studies were carried out from 1996 to 2000. A total of 2,486 students from Indonesia, Taiwan, India, and China were surveyed through a translated questionnaire and focus group discussions.

The authors identified that there were four "push" factors motivating the students' decisions to study abroad: (1) a perception that an overseas course of study was better than a domestic one; (2) a student's ability to enrol in local programs (lack of access to higher education); (3) a desire to get a better understanding of the "West"; and (4) an intention to remain in the host country after graduation. They explained that for students in less developed nations, limited access to education in their own nations led to a significant rise in the number of international students studying abroad.

Moreover, the authors found that there were six "pull" factors which influenced the decision of international students to study overseas (see more detail on pages 18-19). Regarding the word-of-mouth referral, they found that it was one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international educational institutions can use. Furthermore, they claimed that the personal recommendations or word-of-mouth-referrals of former alumni were likely to be a key influence on the students' decisions. The six "pull" factors that the researchers mentioned are a significant framework for understanding the influences that motivate a student's selection of a host country. These "pull" factors work in association with the "push" factors indicated earlier to create the demand for international education.

The researchers concluded their study by suggesting host governments and their academic institutions consider the importance of the "push-pull" factors. They gave the example of a trend in government policy among Asian countries (e.g. China, India, and Thailand) that these countries had seen an important

upgrading of the local supply-side of education at all levels. This trend was likely to continue and many host country institutions also participated in this policy by developing their branch campuses in China (Bank, 1992).

The strength of this study includes that a large number of students were investigated. However, since the participants were from various countries and educational backgrounds, this study may not be able to provide information about the specific nationality and education level of the respondents. Thus, exploring the characteristics of each nationality is suggested.

Yang's (2007) research studied the push and pull factors leading Chinese students to Australian higher education. Her study examined the factors that influenced Mainland Chinese students' choice of Australia as their study destination. The author applied both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to her research. To begin, the researcher approached 200 students considering studying overseas and 65 respondents completed the survey. She also interviewed 30 students who were currently studying at Central Queensland University, Australia to find out the reasons why students had selected Australia.

The results showed that some of the most important factors motivating the participants to study in Australia were future migration opportunities after graduation, Australia's high quality of education, and competitive lower tuition fees and cost of living. The research results from Yang's study can be categorized into push and pull factors as follows: (1) the push factors were an increased demand for higher education, low education capacity in China, improved skills for the future, and a good education; (2) the pull factors were the reputation of the country or the institution, recommendations from friends and family, geographic proximity, and environmental issues (e.g. a sunny climate).

The strength of the study by Yang (2007) includes its combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The limitations of this study are that the findings may not necessarily generalize to other Chinese students because

the sample size was small and the author did not clearly specify the place of origin of those 200 Chinese students she approached.

Regarding Yang's (2007) study, it supported the study by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) on some points. For example, when looking at the issue of "lack of access to higher education" in the push factors of Mazzarol and Soutar's study, two points in Yang's study related to their research—an increased demand for higher education and a low education capacity in China. In addition, Yang found the same four pull factors as Mazzarol and Soutar—the reputation of the country or the institution, recommendations from friends and family, geographic proximity, and environmental issues.

Eder et al.'s (2010) study supports Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) and Yang's (2007) findings that two major pull factors attracting international students are college/university issues and physical geography. Eder et al. investigated why and how international students chose their final study destination. Thirteen female and eight male foreign undergraduate students (both former and current) at a midsize Southern university were randomly chosen and interviewed for the study. This research utilized a contemporary qualitative approach to the analysis of interview transcripts in order to determine choice factors and their importance.

The research results identified three push factors (personal growth, language, and future career) and three pull factors (college issues, physical geography, and the U.S. culture) that influenced their choice of country and institution. Regarding the issue of the U.S. culture, Eder et al. (2010) indicated that 'culture' could be considered either a push or a pull factor. They gave the reason their participants mostly mentioned the U.S. culture as a resource that attracted them to study in this country by stating that culture can be realized through the behaviour of the people of a country. Moreover, the participants had an opportunity to experience the behaviour of American people while interacting in an academic environment. In addition to those push and pull factors, Eder et al. claimed that the majority of their respondents (16 out of 21 students) based



their decisions on the recommendations and experiences of their friends or former students at the institution.

Correlating with the studies by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Yang (2007), and Eder et al. (2010), Chen's (2007) study also identified the same pull factors—academic and environmental issues. Her study aimed to explain why and how international graduate students from East Asia chose to come to Canada to pursue advanced education. Quantitative data received from 140 paper-based mailed survey questionnaires were utilized and in-person interviews with 23 international graduate students were the methods used to gain qualitative data. The research subjects included students from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan enrolling in two large universities in the city of Toronto—the University of Toronto and York University—in the academic year of 2003-2004.

The research findings revealed the strong pulling factors that attracted international students: the perceived high quality of Canadian graduate programs at a competitive cost and the diverse, multicultural, and tolerant Canadian environment. Limitations of Chen's study include that this study only showed results mirroring the total population in terms of country of origin. There was no additional information available on the population concerning gender, age, and the field of study.

The findings of these studies (Chen, 2007; Eder, Smith, et al., 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007) provide several new insights to institutions. For instance, the institute's academic staff and administrators can acknowledge the push and pull factors impacting on international students. Then, they will be able to develop proper strategies to attract more students. However, what these scholars have found still cannot provide all of the answers regarding the experiences of specific nationalities of overseas students. Thus, it is essential to discover some other new answers to overcome the limitations of the previous research.

## **2.4 Literature Concerning Factors Contributing to and Hindering Adjustment**

In order to succeed in intercultural adjustment, many factors are considered significant in assisting individuals--skills or abilities, attitudes, personality traits (Hannigan, 1990), and 'socio-biographical' background (Mamman, 1995). Various studies have explored whether those factors are related to effective adjustment (Mamman, 1995; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al., 2004; Ying & Liese, 1994).

Ying and Liese (1994) developed a multidimensional model of adjustment to examine the initial adjustment of 172 Taiwanese students during their first months in the U.S. A follow-up questionnaire was used to obtain data. Their findings showed that seven out of nine dimensions significantly contributed to cross-cultural adjustment: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) personality, (3) number and severity of problems experienced, (4) adequacy of pre-arrival preparation, (5) social support, (6) language competence, and (7) adequacy of financial resources. Regarding the financial issues, the authors further reported that students who prepared well for their overseas study had higher levels of adjustment.

Limitations of this study (Ying & Liese, 1994) include that it is not clear whether the majority of overseas Taiwanese students come from middle- or upper-middle-class backgrounds or whether this is a bias of the sample. Therefore, the authors concluded that these research findings could not be generalized to non-middle-class Taiwanese students. In addition, only a quantitative research method was utilized which cannot provide in-depth detail.

As in Ying and Liese's (1994) study, which results indicated that demographic characteristics and personality are the dimensions influencing participants' adjustment, Mamman's (1995) and Ward, Leong, and Low's (2004) studies also emphasized the important of these two issues. In Mamman's paper about the relevant variables affecting intercultural adjustment, he reviewed research literature and argued that besides behavioural, attitudinal, cognitive, and personality traits factors, the 'socio-biographical' background such as the

cultural setting, ethnic background, and linguistic ability was regarded as among the most important factors that can contribute to intercultural adjustment. This is because some people may be effective or ineffective by chance or birth (Mamman, 1995).

In contrast to Mamman (1995), Wang's (2009) study results found background variables to be less important in adjustment problem areas. Wang's study investigated relationships among resilience characteristics, background variables, and adjustment problem issues. The Organizational Development Resources' Personal Resilience Questionnaire and the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory were used to obtain her research data at a major southern state research university. The findings showed that background variables were weakly related to adjustment problem areas. A limitation of Wang's study includes that only quantitative methods were employed. Using qualitative interviews may add more detail to the students' adjustment experience (J. Wang, 2009).

While Mamman's (1995) study focused on the importance of the 'socio-biographical' background, Ward et al.'s (2004) study about personality and sojourner adjustment emphasized that personality is associated with cross-cultural adjustment. They investigated the relationship between the Big Five personality dimensions and the cross-cultural adjustment of two samples of sojourners and hosts in Australia and Singapore. The Australia-based samples were comprised of 165 Singaporean students in Brisbane and Melbourne and 139 Australian students, whereas the Singapore-based samples included 244 Australian expatriates and 671 Chinese Singaporeans. The questionnaires were used to obtain the measures of personality and cross-cultural adjustment. The research revealed that four of the Big Five personality factors were significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment. For both samples, neuroticism and extraversion were associated with psychological and sociocultural adjustment, while agreeableness and conscientiousness were related to psychological wellbeing in both sojourning respondents and to sociocultural adjustment in the Singaporean group. Limitations of Ward et al.'s (2004) study include that they

used various types of sojourning samples (for example students and expatriates) and relied solely on self-report.

In addition to the above studies (Mamman, 1995; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al., 2004; Ying & Liese, 1994) mentioning skills, attitudes, personality traits, and the 'socio-biographical' background as the factors associated with adjustment, 'the role of parents' was found to make a significant contribution to international students' adjustment (Mounts, 2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Wintre and Yaffe (2000) explored whether parenting style, current relationships with parents, and psychological well-being variables contributed to first-year students' adjustment to university. They collected data from 406 first-year students studying at university in a large metropolitan Canadian city. Their study's results confirmed that 'the role of parents' significantly contributed to most aspects of the participants' adjustment to university. A limitation of Wintre and Yaffe's study includes that they focus on quantitative methods (e.g. Parental Authority Questionnaire) which cannot establish causality (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000) and cannot provide in-depth detail.

Similarly, Mounts' (2004) research findings confirmed the relationship between the role of parents and students' adjustment. The role of parental support was one of three ecological contexts that Mounts examined to see whether they contributed to 319 African American and White college freshmen's transition to college. Her study employed questionnaires regarding these participants' experiences with the transition. The findings showed that for both groups of freshmen, higher levels of parental support were associated with lower levels of loneliness and depression. This means that in the transition process of the students, parental support plays an important role in contributing to their adjustment. Limitations of this study include that parental support data was obtained only from a questionnaire with open-ended questions. Mounts (2004), therefore, suggested that it would be better to further assess parental support through various data sources. Moreover, further research could use Asian students as the sample for the assessment of the transition to college experiences.

The findings of these studies (Mamman, 1995; Mounts, 2004; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al., 2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994) can benefit international students in a number of ways. For instance, Ying and Liese's study identified the significant predictors of adjustment, which is practical for student orientation programs and useful for providing counselling service for international students, while Ward et al.'s study documented the importance of the Big Five personality traits for international student adjustment. Nevertheless, what these authors have discovered still cannot fully provide the answers to questions regarding the adjustment experiences of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners. Therefore, a specific investigation, covering their adjustment experiences, is essential to provide additional information and address those studies' limitations.

Many of the limitations among these studies are found in the research design. Five studies (Mounts, 2004; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al., 2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994) were designed to investigate factors associated with adjustment by using only quantitative research methods, while one study (Mamman, 1995) obtained its findings by reviewing literature. In addition, these researchers derived information from the international students' perspective alone and no consideration was drawn from the lecturers and administrators. Regarding these limitations, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods should be applied and a wider range of perspectives from those related people is suggested to gain valid, accurate, and in-depth results.

## **2.5 Literature Concerning Adjustment Problems**

It is commonly understood that study abroad students are a group of people who spend a short period of time living and studying in a country other than their own in order to achieve their academic goals. They are exposed to different perspectives and worldviews, and experience the need to adjust to the host country's language (Bennett, 1999; Gonzalez, 2004). This experience may act as a catalyst for some students to transform their identities, but all students are likely to gain a new view of their previously held views and beliefs.

Many scholars have given a definition of adjustment. Hannigan (1990) defined adjustment as: “Adjustment can be conceptualized as a psychosocial concept which has to do with the process of achieving harmony between the individual and the environment” (p. 91) and emphasized the balanced relationship between the two. Ramsay et al., (1999) also stated that adjustment is an interactive process which takes place between the person and the environment, directed towards finding a fit between the two.

In the present study, adjustment refers to the specific problems international students encounter in the new academic and social environment and the coping strategies they use to deal with their difficulties. Sociocultural adjustment refers to the extent to which international students can fit into the new culture.

For the purpose of this study, academic adjustment will be defined as the fit between students and the academic environment and will be examined through other issues such as teaching and learning styles, educational background, and culture and language proficiency. Before looking at the literature concerning students’ academic adjustment issues, a brief review of terms is important, particularly teaching styles (e.g. teaching approaches, teaching pace, academic assessment and feedback) and learning styles.

### **2.5.1 Overview of teaching and learning styles**

This section provides the definitions and general knowledge of teaching and learning styles. Teaching styles will be presented first (section 2.5.1.1), followed by learning styles (section 2.5.1.2).

#### **2.5.1.1 Teaching styles**

In this section, the definition of teaching styles will be presented first, followed by the forms of teaching styles and ending with the important components of the lecturers’ effective teaching (teaching approach, teaching pace, academic assessment and feedback, and punctuality of lecturers)

### *(1) Definition of teaching styles*

Heimlich and Norland (1994) defined teaching styles as a teacher's behaviours and beliefs in various educational contexts, including his/her abilities to manage teaching information.

### *(2) Forms of teaching styles*

To understand the different teaching styles, Grasha (1996) created a useful model of teaching styles for teachers in higher education:

*2a. Formal authority:* The teachers determine standards and identify acceptable means of doing things. This style of teaching is generally teacher-centred and content-based.

*2b. Personal model:* The teachers give illustration and direct examples. This teaching style is teacher-centred and focused on demonstration and modelling.

*2c. Facilitator:* The asking of questions, investigation of options, and suggestions for alternatives are guided and directed by the teachers. This teaching style emphasizes activities and tasks and is the most appropriate one for students with an independent learning style. It is student-centred and students are assigned to be involved in a wide variety of tasks.

*2d. Delegator:* This teaching style aims to improve the ability of students to function autonomously. Much control and responsibility for learning is on individuals or groups of students in this teaching style.

Though the teaching styles of teachers should be consistent with their students' learning styles, most teachers prefer to neglect them or worse, are not aware of them. According to Miller and Rose (1975), two truths have to be recognized in classrooms: all students are different and the teachers do not usually perceive how they differ.

### *(3) The important components to the lecturers' effective teaching*

In addition to teaching styles, the following issues are important components of lecturers' effective teaching:

*3a. Teaching approach:* Hoyt and Lee (2002) defined teaching styles as the way several teaching approaches are merged and the “*lecturers’ teaching approach*” was considered to analyse their teaching styles. The *teaching approach*, in this present study, refers to the combination of teaching methods (Hoyt & Lee, 2002). To teach students effectively, teachers are required to write a lesson plan (Stronge, 2002). However, Stronge indicated that flexibility and adaptability are sometimes more desirable than a well-written lesson plan, because classrooms are dynamic.

*3b. Teaching pace:* Eyster and Martin (2010) indicated that pace is a measure of teachers’ ability to keep an activity moving. It must not be a measure of how many quick answers they get. Pace must be adaptable enough to include the reticent and truly thoughtful. In this present study, the students have evaluated whether the lecturers taught at a proper pace so that they could follow what was being taught.

*3c. Academic assessment and feedback:* Hedge (2000) defined assessment as the general process of monitoring or keeping track of the students’ progress. Leaman (2008) indicated that assessment can help the lecturers and the students to decide on and to modify the direction that the learning activities take, in order to reach the final destination. It is part of the whole educational process of teaching and learning (Hedge, 2000). The most important thing the lecturers do for their students is assess their work (Race, 2001). This will give the lecturers’ feedback on how their teaching is going and will enable student progression.

*3d. Punctuality of lecturers:* Eyster and Martin (2010) stated that teachers should make their classroom their space. Particularly, if they are someone who has to teach consecutive periods in far-flung classrooms, it is necessary to plan ahead to get to each class on time. Race (1999) also emphasized that lecturers are required to be punctual, though some of their students are late.



3e. *Giving assignments to students*: At the end of a lecture, the lecturers are required to set a task for all students to complete before the next lecture, or for them to bring along to the next tutorial sessions (Race, 2001).

The above components were utilized as a framework to consider the lecturers' teaching in my study. The Chinese students were required to comment on these components through their questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals.

#### **2.5.1.2 Learning styles**

In the current study, the definition of learning styles identified by Keefe (1987) has been utilized. Keefe stated that learning styles are a mixture of *cognitive*, *affective* and *physiological personality traits* that represent a relatively stable indicator of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment, which serves as a source of knowledge. Tubić and Hamiloğlu (2008) explained that the *cognitive* issues of functioning dominates the way in which perceptions are formed and information is processed, while the *affective* issues refer to factors such as attention, emotion and evaluation, which influence the selection of the approaches to several kinds of content, expectations, anxiety and frustration. The *physiological* issues include the reactions of an organism to the physical and social environment, the health conditions of an individual such as fatigue, eating habits, and difficulties in concentration because of noise or crowds. The coalition of *cognitive*, *affective* and *physiological* issues provides a unique approach to learning that can be identified as "learning styles".

To determine the Chinese students' learning styles in MSU, the participants (students and lecturers) were asked to identify the students' learning styles through questionnaires and interviews.

#### **2.5.2 Academic adjustment problems**

Academic adjustment is one of the biggest problems that international students encounter (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Nicholson, 2001; Thorstensson, 2001). As reported by Choudaha and Chang (2012) "one in five of the world's international students is

from either China or India, with more than 700,000 tertiary-level students enrolled in a higher education system outside their home country” (p. 9) and therefore consideration for the adjustment problems experienced by Chinese students is particularly worthwhile.

Scott and Scott (1953) subdivided academic adjustment into many components: satisfaction with the institution, attendance and persistence, competence in the teachers’ eyes, achievement measures, and teacher-judged adjustment to school. In the current study, all of these components have been considered in the analysis of the Chinese students’ adjustment issues.

To communicate with other people and achieve their educational goals, students are required to have language proficiency. This will help them to be able to fully express thoughts and feelings. It has been suggested by Ward (2001b) that native language fluency in English may facilitate cross-national relationships. In addition, the better their language skills are, the better their social interaction tends to be (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002).

Apart from having language proficiency, international students also need to understand the educational system of the host nation to minimize the problems that can arise from the differences between their original country and the host country systems. While engaging in studying abroad, international students have to try to make academic adjustments to a new place where there are different patterns of teacher-student interaction, classroom atmospheres, academic requirements and assessment and teaching and learning styles (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). They need to put in more effort than local students to fit into the new culture due to their difficulties in adjusting to the unfamiliar culture of learning. The academic adjustment issues of study abroad students, namely language barriers, educational systems and teaching and learning styles, therefore, can become a major distraction and one that can have a negative influence on their academic achievement.

International students’ adjustment may also be hindered by the negative transfer of learning, where the material they have learnt in their home country

does not prove to be entirely correct (Perkins & Salomon, 1994). For example, while students generally benefit from knowledge of a related language, differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax can still cause difficulties. However, Perkins and Salomon (1994) pointed out that this typically causes trouble only in the early stages of adjustment and, with experience, learners correct the effects of negative transfer.

The following sections present research literature regarding: language proficiency (section 2.5.2.1) and academic cultural differences (section 2.5.2.2). The first part of each section reviews research focusing on general international students, while the second part shows the literature on Chinese students' academic adjustment.

### ***2.5.2.1 Language proficiency***

To study abroad, language is one of the areas in which international students, including Chinese, need to have proficiency so that they can interact and share knowledge with others. In other words, they must have the ability to communicate in the second language (Campbell & Li, 2008; Ward, 2001b; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

#### ***(1) International students***

Many studies have concluded that international students encounter a language barrier and report problems with their ability to use the language of the host country (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Kaur, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Nicholson, 2001; Poorshaghghi, 1992; Sun & Chen, 1997; Thorstensson, 2001; Trice, 2003; Wong, 1991; Wu, 1993; Xia, 1992). Eight of these (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Kaur, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Nicholson, 2001; Thorstensson, 2001; Trice, 2003) indicate that English language proficiency is an important variable that needs to be taken into account as an academic challenge for international students. Moreover, it affects the academic achievement and adjustment of international students.

Andrade's (2006) study focused on factors that influenced the adjustment and academic achievement of international students in institutions of higher

education in English-speaking countries. He examined empirical research concerned with the adjustment and successes of international students at English-speaking universities and reported that academic adjustment problems for international students tended to focus on language issues. He underlined that many of the problems experienced by international students were caused by a lack of language proficiency and cultural knowledge. Challenges were related to difficulties with English language and culture, which affected both academic and social adjustment. It can therefore be concluded that language proficiency is a crucial factor that affects students' adjustment.

Brown's (2008) study supports Andrade's findings that international students' academic adjustment is affected by language proficiency. Brown explored the incidence of stress in international students in relation to the requirements of an international master's program. Her qualitative research was conducted by in-depth individual interviews with 13 students during the academic year 2003-2004. In addition, she did an ethnographic investigation of the entire cohort of 150 masters students at a university in the South of England and found that stress related to the academic task was caused by lack of language proficiency and by academic cultural differences. The time it took to accept unfamiliar academic norms and the success of their adjustment varied among individual students. These variations depended on factors such as motivation and linguistic ability. According to this study, it can be determined that language proficiency and ability is one factor affecting students' academic adjustment.

Campbell and Li's (2008) study confirmed previous research findings (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008) that English was one of the biggest barriers to intercultural communication for international students. Their study focused on 22 Asian students' learning experiences in New Zealand. These students were from various nations (e.g. China, Thailand, and India). The research results collected from interviewing the participants showed that language difficulties prevented students from effectively communicating with lecturers and other students, listening to lectures, and doing exams and tests. In addition, they affected the students' perceptions and levels of satisfaction with their learning experiences

at the university. These students had to work hard to adapt to the university's academic life. The researchers suggested that to cope with the students' challenges, the lecturers and host institutions should review and adapt pedagogical practices and realign them to the needs of the students.

Similarly, the findings in Morita's (2004) study emphasized that language barriers caused difficulties to Japanese students. Morita explored the academic discourse socialization experiences of SL2 learners in a Canadian university. The research participants were six female graduate students from Japan and 10 of their course instructors. The author collected data over an entire academic year (1999-2000) by triangulating multiple methods (student self-reports, interviews, and classroom observations). The findings identified that the students experienced difficulties in class participation because they perceived their proficiency in English as limited. The strength of this study includes that the use of triangulating multiple methods, viewpoints, and data sources and the use of longitudinal investigations provided more context for interpretation of students' actions and comments. Therefore, the author suggested that further research should use these methods so that the results will be more able to bring out the complexity, richness and contrasting viewpoints present in multicultural and multilingual academic situations.

Kingston and Forland (2008) replicated the findings in Campbell and Li's (2008) study. Kingston and Forland (2008) researched the experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate students with East Asian backgrounds at London University. The researchers did not specifically mention where the student participants came from and when they collected the data. Besides these participants, the researchers invited academic staff from London University to discuss their experiences in teaching students from East Asia. By using questionnaires and four semi-structured focus groups, the authors found that language was one of many problems that created difficulties for the participants. Besides the authors' research methods which used questionnaires and focus groups, specific and profound detail from students needs to be obtained through in-depth interviews. Therefore, the researcher has added this method to fill this

study's shortcoming in order to gain in-depth information from not only the students and the lecturers, but also the administrative officers.

Despite the negative experiences concerning the language barrier which appeared in the research of Andrade (2006), Brown (2008), Campbell and Li (2008), Kingston and Forland (2008), and Morita (2004), three studies (Campbell & Li, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Swagler & Ellis, 2003) reported that international participants were generally satisfied with their learning experiences and had positive attitudes towards their academic adaptation.

Campbell and Li (2008) (see more detail on page 61) found that Asian students were overall satisfied with their learning experiences in terms of the quality of the education program offerings and effective learning support systems. At an institutional level, the participants reported that they were happy with the practicality of the business programs, which they described as 'practical', 'useful', and 'flexible'. These participants acknowledged that the skills obtained from these programs could be easily transferred to workplaces and real business. Most participants reported having adapted well to the new learning environment, although they still had some difficulties in their learning.

A study by Kingston and Forland (2008) (see more detail on page 62) replicated the results of Campbell and Li (2008). They found that though these students had confronted difficulties, they still had positive attitudes toward the academic administration of the university. For example, they were highly adaptive and grew to enjoy the variety of assessment techniques.

The minor themes found in Swagler and Ellis's (2003) study lend support to Campbell and Li (2008) and Kingston and Forland (2008). Swagler and Ellis investigated the cross-cultural adjustment of 126 Taiwanese students attending graduate school in the United States. Three types of qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used in this research. The researchers interviewed 25 students about their experiences in the United States. Four major themes emerged—language barriers, confidence about speaking English, social contact

with Taiwanese and Americans and cultural differences. Furthermore, the other minor themes showed that the students had had positive experiences while living in the U.S. They appreciated the sense of freedom, the lack of pressure from family, having more physical and personal space, not being judged by their grades, the increased opportunities to express their opinions, the law-abiding nature of U.S. residents, and the cleaner environment. These minor themes appearing in Swagler and Ellis's (2003) study add empirical weight to evidence supporting the studies by Campbell and Li (2008) and Kingston and Forland (2008).

The results of these studies benefit international students and universities in a number of ways. For example, university administrators and academic staff can be more aware of what the main problems of international students are prior to their arrival. Then, the staff or students will be able to find strategies to solve the problems. However, what these researchers have found still cannot provide the answer to the problems or experiences of specific nationalities of international students. Therefore, it is necessary to gather further information to be able to better serve the needs of specific groups of international students.

While considering the research limitations of the studies related to language proficiency, the researcher has discovered two major limitations among them. The first one is about research design. Three studies (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Swagler & Ellis, 2003) were designed to understand the academic adjustment experiences from the international students' perspective alone and no consideration was given to the lecturers and administrators.

Considering the design limitations of the above studies, further research is needed to obtain data from a wider range of perspectives, for example, from international students, lecturers and administrators who can contribute and confirm the value of the research results. Thus, a triangulated approach to the sampling aspects of data collection is needed to achieve this goal.

Another limitation found in four studies is that data collected from international students treated them as if they were a homogeneous group (Andrade, 2006;

Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008). Thus, differences among them should be considered. Though addressing differences among nationalities of students could lead to overwhelming detail, an exploration of the characteristics of each nationality is required.

## *(2) Chinese students*

Similar to the literature on international students in general, many studies have concluded that Chinese international students have problems adjusting e.g. a loss of established social networks, culture shock, differences in education systems, and isolation and loneliness (Wan, 2001; Ye, 1992; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Language proficiency is one challenge that they usually face. It is a barrier not only for communication (Frank, 2000; Wan, 2001), but also for academic adjustment and achievement (Dunn, 2006; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Although Chinese students face language difficulties, they report a high level of satisfaction with their educational experiences and the education system (Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

A study by Frank (2000) found that language proficiency was one of the four principal themes which produced challenges for Chinese students. The researcher investigated the experiences of six Mainland Chinese women in American graduate programs by interviewing them individually. She focused on their life histories, the challenges they faced during their sojourn, the impact of these challenges on their lives, and their future goals. The findings identified four themes: trying to understand the language, culture and the academic milieu; enduring the loss of family and friends; enduring financial difficulties; and trying to be understood in their roles as Graduate Research Assistants and students. The result of this study showed that language is one of many difficulties that challenge the participants' lives.

As with Frank's (2000) study, Wan's (2001) research results indicated that language proficiency was found to be a prominent and influential issue for Chinese students in American Universities. Wan conducted her study at a major university in the eastern part of the United States. One graduate student and his wife were selected as key informants. Both of them were observed and



interviewed in-depth by the author, focusing on cross-cultural learning experiences. This research emphasized the participants' experiences in the following areas: strategies used to cope with language inefficiency, causes of learning frustrations and satisfactions, assumptions of the impact of their learning on their lives, and awareness of cultural differences in the classroom and daily life. The author suggested that lecturers could assist international students by being friends with them and motivating other students to be friends with them. This would help them to be familiar with the host culture more quickly and to a better extent. In addition, the author reported that the differences in language, culture, and the social and political system between China and the United States were the major sources for the students' positive and negative experiences. Though she mentioned this result, a clear picture of positive or negative experiences was not illustrated in her research.

The findings of a study by Dunn (2006) also support Frank (2000) and Wan (2001). Dunn indicated that English language proficiency was one of ten predictors of international students' academic adjustment. She found that language proficiency was significantly correlated with academic adjustment. To obtain this result, she proposed the International Academic Adjustment Model as a theoretical framework and tested it with a population of graduate students from Mainland China enrolled in a major midwestern university in the U.S. during the spring semester of the academic year 2005-2006. An online form of the survey questionnaire was used as a research tool. The results of her study show that English language is an important factor affecting the participants' adjustment experiences.

Though findings from Frank (2000), Wan (2001), and Dunn (2006) showed that Chinese students reported language proficiency as one problem of their academic adjustment experiences, Zhang and Brunton's (2007) study revealed that Chinese international students demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with their educational experiences and the education system. Their research study aimed to answer questions about the way in which Chinese international students perceived their New Zealand education and how satisfied they were

with both their educational and socio-cultural experiences. The researchers explored the experiences of 140 Chinese international students who were enrolled at a range of education institutions in Auckland, New Zealand. A questionnaire was used to obtain data. The participants identified language abilities as directly influencing both their educational and social opportunities to develop quality relationships with host nationals. However, these respondents expressed that they had high levels of satisfaction with the education system.

The research of Zhong (1996a) replicated the findings of Zhang and Brunton (2007). Zhong's study explored three Chinese postgraduate students' experiences during their adaptation process. These three students living near a large midwestern university in the U.S. were interviewed by the author. The findings indicated that they appeared very positive about their experiences in America and they also claimed that they had a positive attitude toward Americans, as these people were very helpful in both their daily and academic lives. Zhong assumed that an important reason for this attitude was that these Chinese students were relatively different from early Chinese immigrants as they had a high level of education before coming to the U.S. and had prior knowledge of American culture.

In considering the gap in these studies, three design limitations were found. To begin with, two studies' research designs (Dunn, 2006; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007) were merely focused on quantitative research which does not provide sufficient in-depth detail of the students' problems and coping strategies. Therefore, it is important for further studies to collect very detailed information about their difficulties and how they cope with daily living as well as learning aspects. Interviews with Chinese students and other relevant academic staff should be conducted to provide in-depth insights into understanding the process of their academic adjustment. In addition, because the population from which the samples of four studies (Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Wan, 2001; Zhong, 1996a) were drawn consisted only of graduate students from Mainland China, the findings may not be applicable to other populations such as undergraduate students. It is of interest to use these students as a sample to find out whether

they face the same or different difficulties as those in graduate programs. The above design limitations need to be taken into account when considering the overall value of the findings.

To conclude, the gaps among the current studies of international and Chinese students can be seen and need to be filled. To strengthen the value of the existing findings, it is necessary to obtain data from other related people like lecturers and administrators. Moreover, to understand international students deeply and find out the identity of their nations is important so focusing on one national group (Chinese) has attracted my interest. Furthermore, other research methods, namely in-depth interviews, should be applied to collect more detailed information on the adjustment experiences of Chinese students.

#### ***2.5.2.2 Academic cultural differences***

Academic cultural differences are considered to be one problem faced not only by international students, but also Chinese ones (Wan, 2001). Dunn (2006) indicated that the academic culture of the international students' home country can differ immensely from that of their host country. The greater the differences are between the two educational systems, the more academic adjustment problems international students tend to encounter (Dunn, 2006). Adjusting to a new educational system can be difficult (Lieberman, 1994) due to its differences from culture to culture. Thus, apart from facing "culture shock", international students will also encounter "educational shock" (Eland, 2001). Eland stated that while international students were adjusting to a different academic system, they would likely be adjusting to a new culture at the same time. Therefore, facing academic cultural differences is inevitable for international students.

The following section will present academic cultural differences among international and Chinese students. The literature on international students will be illustrated first, followed by that on Chinese students. Research limitations will be discussed at the end.

### *(1) International students*

In this section three issues concerning academic cultural differences are presented: teacher-student relationships, learning styles, and academic conventions.

#### *a. Teacher-student relationships*

Kingston and Forland's (2008) study discussed the experiences of East Asian learners in a London university and their understanding of educational systems. They stated the traditional patterns of Eastern and Western education and outlined the teacher-student relationship. The researchers indicated that in Eastern culture there was a high-power distance between teacher and student relationships while that in Western culture was low. They gave the example that in high-power distance cultures like China, teachers were the only ones who directed the learning process and demanded a high level of respect. At the same time students were expected to be passive in class and were given a chance to speak by invitation only. Unlike in China, in low-power distance countries such as the U.K., students were expected to be independent learners, to think critically, to challenge the teacher, and to be active participants in the class.

#### *b. Learning styles*

Research conducted by Hofstede (1980) indicated that the majority of East Asian students used rote-learning, a learning technique which is sometimes seen in the west as not producing a full understanding of a subject and instead focused on memorization. In addition, Hofstede demonstrated that the traditional East Asian cultures encouraged a conserving attitude toward knowledge that was based on a thorough understanding of the work of a recognized master. The Western traditions, on the other hand, emphasized student-centred learning and an extending attitude to knowledge: students were encouraged to use critical thinking and be questioning (Hofstede, 1980).

Concerning the rote-learning issue, Chan and Drover (1997) proposed that some Western academic staff, students, and researchers believe that East Asian students used rote-learning methods as the only means of learning,

which led to plagiarism, surface learning (the intention to achieve short-term memorisation of the material so that it may be reproduced (Cuthbert, 2005) and a far less effective form of learning. Western observers have also noted that Asian students use predominantly rote-based, low level cognitive strategies, both in their own culture (Murphy, 1987) and overseas (Pearson and Beasley, 1996; Samuelowicz, 1987).

While the Western perception that Asian students rely on memorization is correct, it does not follow that this memorization restricts understanding, or that evidence of memorization corresponds to evidence of a “surface” approach to learning (Biggs, 1998). Chan and Drover (1997) argued that rote learning involves not only learning through memorization, but also used deep learning strategies. Moreover, some learners utilize the process of memorization as a route to deep understanding. Kennedy (2010) added that “memorization has never been seen as an end in itself but as a prelude to deeper understanding—mentally ‘photocopying’ texts, committing them to memory, enabled the ‘learner’ to savour and reflect on them later, and, finally, to integrate them with his/her prior learning and experience” (p. 433). In Confucian heritage cultures learning through repetition is at least complementary to understanding (Marton, Dall’Alba, & Tse, 1996) and has been referred to as “the route to understanding” (Hess and Azuma, 1991). In the same way that musicians rely on repeated practice to gain a true “understanding” of a piece of music, the case can be made that repetition of classroom material can increase the breadth and depth of academic understanding.

### *c. Academic conventions*

Ellsworth (1997) pointed out that pedagogy is context-dependent and value-laden. It is formed by the particular cultural values and ideology appropriate for the society where it originates (Barrow, 1990). When teachers perform their pedagogies, they use the cultural conventions, norms, and canons to convey and support the cultural values embedded in every teaching approach. Campbell and Li (2008) claimed that Asian international students encountered academic adjustment difficulty because they were equipped with little

knowledge of Western academic conventions and norms. The study's findings showed that writing assignments was seen by all participants as being most difficult. This study demonstrated that Asian students' difficulties came from their insufficient knowledge of academic conventions that were not taught in their class, such as writing literature reviews, critical reviews and essays, and business and field reports. However, all respondents reported that they had acquired sufficient research and writing skills in their study though they had been through all the difficulties and hardships.

Limitations in Campbell and Li's (2008) study include that the international students were predominantly from one country, which limits the generalizability of the results. Also, the level of satisfaction with learning experiences relates to academic, sociocultural and psychological dimensions. This research mainly involved the academic dimensions. In addition, classroom intercultural communication involves both students and lecturers. This research studied only the voices of Asian international students.

A study by Kingston and Forland (2008) also indicated the academic convention issue could cause problems (see their research details on page 62). The authors discussed the experiences of international students with East Asian backgrounds and their understanding of educational systems related to their experiences. The findings showed that East Asian educational traditions were gradually becoming more individualistic than in the past when collectivism was considered as the identity of Asians. East Asian learners were becoming increasingly similar to their Western peers. For example, they were autonomous and reflective learners. This is opposed to the Western stereotype that students from eastern culture are passive, obedient, and lacking in autonomy.

Limitations of this study include that the authors did not specify the actual number of participants. They only mentioned that a range of participants with East Asian backgrounds (undergraduate and postgraduate students) were invited to discuss their experiences and understanding of the various educational systems in which they had been involved. In addition, the number of academic staff who were also invited to participate in this research was not

identified. Moreover, the number of distributed questionnaires and their return rate were not presented.

## *(2) Chinese students*

Only two studies by Wan (2001) and Philips et al. (2002) presented the academic cultural differences between Chinese and American learning cultures. The aspects of academic cultural differences included in each study are as follows:

Wan (2001) explored the learning experiences of Chinese students (see her research details on page 65-66). The participants claimed the academic cultural differences as one barrier to their academic adjustment. These differences included the teacher-student relationship, teaching methodology and philosophy and the use of different measuring systems. For example, in the aspect of the teacher-student relationship, in China, teachers would be regarded as a superior whom students should pay respect to. Conversely, the relationship between teachers and students in the U.S. was informal. In class, students could argue with their teachers and had the freedom to express their opinion.

Wan concluded that it is not easy to be a cross-cultural learner. Courage, determination, and persistence are required to succeed. She suggested the U.S. educators work on understanding academic cultural differences and practices and the process of cultural adjustment that international students experience. With this understanding, U.S. educators could tailor instruction in ways to support the culturally different learners and supply students with a number of ways to learn so that the learning of these students would be in harmony with their cultural background. A limitation of Wan's (2001) study is the small number of participants in her study, as there were only two. A strength is that it utilized two data collection methods.

A study by Philips et al. (2002) focused on the teacher-student relationship as Wan (2001) did. They stated that the teacher-student role was viewed as that of parent-son (or daughter), which means, a parent would have authority and be respected by a son. Therefore, being a teacher meant receiving the authority

and respect that would be given to a parent. Apart from the aspect of the teacher-student relationship, Philips et al. (2002) also mentioned similar findings about learning styles as Chan and Drover (1997) found in East Asian students.

Philips et al.'s (2002) study was conducted to help non-Chinese teachers in institutions of Christian higher education in the United States learn the "Chinese way of doing things" in order to decrease the culture shock Chinese international students faced in the teaching/learning environment in North America. The authors explained Confucian values and practices, which have influenced educational theory and practice in contemporary Chinese higher education. The findings of the study by Philips et al. (2002) demonstrated that Confucian thought still affects the educational theory and practice of Chinese. For example, in Confucian tradition, everyone is educable. Confucius would teach any person from any level of society, but he considered they should pay respect to their teachers.

The strength of the study by Philips et al. (2002) includes the easy to understand pattern of explanation. However, its limitation is that the data source is only from reviewing literature concerning educational theory and practices among Chinese. Other sources of data (e.g. students and lecturers) and research methods (e.g. in-depth interviews) should be applied.

In addition to Wan's and Philips et al.'s studies, Flaitz and Eckstein (2003) mentioned particular aspects of the learning style of Chinese students. In Chinese classrooms, students should sit and listen to the teacher and should not interrupt the teacher's lesson with questions (Zhao, 2007). However there is a keen sense of competition in the classroom, and students also generally elect classmates for certain roles (Flaitz & Eckstein, 2003). An elected class monitor (class leader) will frequently approach teachers with advice on how to handle discipline and class management in their particular class collective. He/she also has the authority to keep order when the teacher is absent (Anonymous, 2010). This arrangement may help maintain general good order and stability in the entire academic community, as well as ensuring effective communication between the class and its teacher (Flaitz & Eckstein, 2003). The position of



class monitor will place extra responsibilities and duties on its holder, as well as creating additional pressures on their time from the need to be available to classmates and academic staff.

### *Conclusion*

After comparing a number of points of academic cultural differences between international and Chinese students, it can be concluded that the aspects of teacher-student relationships and learning styles have both been mentioned in international and Chinese students' literature. This is because the majority of international students in this literature are from China. Due to limitations that have been found in previous research (Campbell & Li, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Philips et al., 2002; Wan, 2001) in this section, the following approaches were used in my research: (1) Only one group of Chinese international students was focused on to enhance generalizability of findings; (2) Academic and sociocultural dimensions were investigated to explore all aspects of learning experiences; (3) The researcher studied not only students, but also lecturers and administrators; and (4) The main participants in my research were undergraduate students.

### **2.5.3 Sociocultural adjustment problems**

Sociocultural adjustment emphasizes the cognitive and behavioural components of adjustment, or the process that people learn to reinterpret their environment and increase their ability to function within the new cultural context (Swagler & Jome, 2005). This section is divided into two sub-sections: international students' sociocultural problems and Chinese students' sociocultural problems.

#### ***2.5.3.1 International students' sociocultural adjustment problems***

The importance of building relationships with host nationals was emphasized in the study by Ying and Liese (1994). They found that the participants in their research who were likely to report a poorer adjustment were those who experienced more homesickness and more relationship, cultural, and academic problems. Therefore, Ying and Liese underscored that the most powerful

predictor of poorer adjustment was level of homesickness, followed by cultural problems. This research focused on the initial adjustment of 172 Taiwanese students during their first months in the U.S. The authors developed a multidimensional model of adjustment to examine the participants' adjustment.

Limitations of this study include that it is not clear whether the majority of overseas Taiwanese students come from middle- or upper- middle-class backgrounds or whether this is only a bias of the sample. Therefore, the authors concluded that these research findings could not be generalized to non-middle-class Taiwanese students. In addition, only a quantitative research method was utilized.

Similar to Ying and Liese's (1994) research regarding building relationships with host nationals, Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune's (2011) study explored the overall composition of international students' personal networks--friendships with individuals from their own country, from other countries, and from the host country--and the varying strengths of these friendships. The participants of this study were 84 international students (22 undergraduates, 57 graduate students, and 5 who did not identify their academic status) from a University in Hawai'i. These students were required to complete an online survey. The findings showed that the respondents had a higher ratio of friends from their host country than from their home country.

Limitations of this study include that online surveys have been found to have disadvantages such as response rate issues and technical difficulties that could potentially affect data reliability (Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Lefever, Dal, & Matthiasdottir, 2007). Moreover, the participants of this study had various academic statuses. Regarding these limitations, this current study distributed a questionnaire to the participants in their classroom and collected it back. Therefore, the return rate was assured. In addition, this study explored the friendship network of undergraduate students only.

The findings in Nicholson's (2001) study indicated that social adjustment problems were encountered by 10 Asian students at Western Michigan

University. Their problems involved difficulty in making American friends, transportation, food, and the cold weather. Moreover, three students stated that they felt isolated in the U.S. Though these participants mentioned the transportation issue as one of their problems, the author indicated that it was not the major adjustment problem for his participants. He used a 22-item questionnaire as his research method to interview the students. Limitations of this research include that he did not specify whether the participants were undergraduate or graduate students.

The findings in Swagler and Ellis's (2003) study also revealed that the loss of family, friends, and the general Taiwanese social network led Taiwanese students to have stress in the U.S. (see their research details on page 63-64). The findings showed that social contact with Taiwanese and Americans was one of four major themes that emerged from the participants' experiences.

Similar to Swagler and Ellis's study results, Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) stated that having a social network was an important factor in the adjustment of international students. The researchers compared the adjustment of 182 international students to a comparison sample of American students to determine whether students who came to the U. S. from abroad had greater difficulty adjusting to college life. These participants were required to complete a two-page survey. Twelve Sri Lankan students studying in 12 different colleges and universities in the Maryland-Pennsylvania area were assigned to approach all respondents. The findings of this study indicated that international students are more likely than domestic students to feel lonely, homesick, and as if they have left part of themselves at home.

Limitations of this research include that a lack of English proficiency among the international student respondents may have affected the validity of some of the data. In addition, as the respondents were from a non-random sample, questions could be raised about the validity of the external data. Regarding these limitations, the current study addressed them by having the questionnaire and interview questions translated from English to Chinese so that the Chinese students would not face language difficulties in the study.

The research results in Sawir et al.'s (2008) study also confirmed what Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) found. The authors interviewed 200 international students, resident onshore in Australia, and found that two thirds of them had experienced problems of personal and social loneliness and/or isolation, especially in the early months because of the loss of contact with families and the loss of networks. To deal with these issues, the authors suggested that universities should promote mechanisms that trigger networking, such as student clubs and buddy systems. Moreover, to decrease cultural loneliness and social loneliness at the same time, the authors recommended that the university should arrange for the international and local students to share a common learning setting together. This will help the international students quicken their learning of conversational and academic English and will provide vital learning experiences for local students as well. For instance, they would have an opportunity to learn about the international culture. The authors suggested that investigating the relationship between experiences of loneliness and cultural differences would be useful for further research. Limitations of this study include that the particular mix of services provided by each institution was not studied.

Lewthwaite (1996) discovered and described how international students experience and adapt to their new academic, sociocultural and linguistic environments. The research employed a case study methodology, interviews, and questionnaires as methods of data collection. The research participants included 12 postgraduate international students at Massey University who were studying across a range of disciplines. The research findings demonstrated that the participants had high levels of frustration, stress and even depression. They reported that the obstacles to integration were loneliness, a mismatch of culture, and frustration with the lack of deep integration with New Zealanders. Lewthwaite stated that the loneliness problem was the consequence of interaction deficiency. In addition, the author found that gaps in cultural knowledge and lack of interaction were two major themes that emerged in his study. This emphasized that cultural problems can cause difficulties for international students.

Limitations of this research are that due to the limited sampling and nature of this study, generalizations cannot be made. The researcher suggested that a longitudinal and multi-factorial design with a wider representative sampling should be considered in future studies.

Thorstensson's (2001) study emphasized that cultural problems influence the adjustment experiences of international students. The author found that culture shock, language barriers, and education shock were variables affecting the adjustment of his participants. He focused on examining the academic experiences of Asian international students in an MBA program in terms of the cultural differences. Six Asian international students at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management were chosen as the research participants. Thorstensson utilized various research methods to obtain data—case studies, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and a situational recall questionnaire.

The strengths of this study include that several research methods were used. One limitation is that the observations of two classes and the situation recall questionnaire that the researcher used as his research methods did not yield significant data in this study. Moreover, only two students in the sample contributed to class discussions. Therefore, the researcher suggested that the questionnaire should be developed further in the classroom experiences category.

### *Conclusion*

According to studies by Ying and Liese (1994), Hendrickson et al. (2011), Nicholson (2001), Swagler and Ellis (2003) and Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002), international students perceive forming relationships with host nationals as being very important. It is a crucial factor that can contribute to the adjustment of international students. Regarding Lewthwaite's (1996) and Thorstensson's (2001) studies, it can be concluded that international students encounter cultural problems when they live in a new environment. Cultural differences result in adjustment difficulties among these students. Considering the

limitations of the studies by Lewthwaite (1996) and Thorstensson (2001), the following issues will be focused on by the researcher: using a questionnaire as one research method mixed with other qualitative methods (e.g. in-depth interview and reflective journal) and applying the narrative stories method to illustrate the research results (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004).

#### ***2.5.3.2 Chinese students' sociocultural adjustment problems***

Chinese international students in the U.S. ranked their top problems as racial or religious discrimination, homesickness, separation from family in home country, and unfriendliness of people in the community (Cho, 1990). Many studies have found that Chinese international students reported cultural adjustment problems (Cho, 1990; Frank, 2000; Sun & Chen, 1997; Wan, 2001; Ye, 1992) e.g. culture shock; social, and religious conflicts; cross-cultural and cross-gender relationships; and social isolation during their sojourn abroad.

Frank (2000) stated that there were five main problems that six mainland Chinese women in American graduate programs encountered: culture, homesickness, finance, understanding, and being understood. Frank aimed to describe, interpret, and understand the participants' experiences from their perspective and enable them to make recommendations to the American higher education community about their needs. In-depth interviewing was used to obtain data. The findings indicated that the participants felt disoriented as they faced the hardship of understanding their new environment and the behaviours of new people around them. A limitation of this study is that due to the small number of participants, no generalizations can be made. Moreover, only qualitative research methods were applied.

In relation to Frank's (2000) study, Wan's (2001) study also found that her Chinese participants encountered difficulties in their new academic and cultural environment (see her research detail on page 65-66). Wan identified the major sources for these students' positive and negative experiences were the differences in culture, language, and social and political systems between China and the U.S. She also pointed out that educators can assist these students by becoming aware of their home culture, different learning styles, frustration in

adjusting to school life and overcoming cultural shock, and by helping them adjust to the American educational system and learn about American culture.

Although Wan identified the differences in culture, language, and social and political systems between China and the United States as the main sources for the positive and negative experiences of the participants, a clear picture of the positive or negative experiences was not illustrated in her research.

A study conducted by Ye (1992) in a U.S. university reported that Chinese students experienced discrimination on campus; these students believed that there was a general lack of knowledge about China among the student body. Chinese students were also reluctant to talk to their American classmates and teachers. Additionally, the study found that the American people's value of individualism and tendency to exhibit self-centred behaviour were not accepted well by Chinese students.

Zhang and Brunton (2007) studied the education experiences of 140 Chinese international students enrolled in a cross-section of five education organizations in Auckland, New Zealand. The researchers focused on seeking answers to their research questions about the way in which the participants perceived their New Zealand education and how satisfied they were with both their sociocultural and educational experiences. To obtain data, questionnaire surveys were used. A total of 140 students (58% response-rate) from the People's Republic of China responded to the survey. The researchers analysed the data by using descriptive analysis and quantitative content analysis.

The findings of Zhang and Brunton's (2007) research showed that respondents believed they had fewer chances to make friends with New Zealanders than they had expected before their arrival. In addition, the respondents indicated that quality interaction with host nationals was difficult, as they felt upset and uncomfortable when they misunderstood and in turn were misunderstood by others. Limitations of the study by Zhang and Brunton (2007) include that only a quantitative research method was employed.

In contrast to Zhang and Brunton (2007) who reported that the participants encountered social interaction difficulties, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) found that the majority of their participants had few sociocultural adjustment difficulties. Nevertheless, social interaction with non-Chinese was consistently identified as problematic. The participants of this study were two cohorts of Chinese students who were taking a one-year foundation course in academic English language prior to starting a degree course at a British university. A total of 126 respondents completed a questionnaire. The researchers also interviewed 20 students.

One strength of the study carried out by Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) is that both quantitative and qualitative research methods were applied in this research. However, limitations appear in that while some were mature students who had work experience, others were new university graduates and still others were middle school leavers. Also some were planning on taking a master's degree course, whereas others were planning to further their studies in bachelor degree courses. To avoid similar limitations, my study will only explore the adjustment experiences of undergraduate students.

### *Conclusion*

Regarding the research limitations from literature concerning sociocultural problems of international and Chinese students, my study addressed the potential limitations by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to obtain data and by exploring the adjustment experiences of undergraduate students only. Potential limitations regarding the gathering of data were minimized by distributing a questionnaire to the participants in their classroom and collecting it back, assuring a full return rate. Also, the questionnaire and interview questions were translated from English to Chinese so that the Chinese students would not face language difficulties.



## **2.6 Literature Concerning Support Services**

The literature concerning support services has been divided into two sections: the international students' perspective on the institution support services (section 2.6.1) and the international students' preferences in using support services (section 2.6.2).

### **2.6.1 International students' perspective on the institution support services**

Mavondo et al. (2004) developed a conceptual model for evaluating student satisfaction with universities concerning their resources and capabilities and students' willingness to recommend the university to prospective students. This study was carried out at three campuses at one university. The sample of this study was students in their second or later years at university. The participants were asked to complete a three-page questionnaire. A total of 516 useable responses were gained from a possible 530. The participants were predominantly from South-East Asia, China, Korea, and the Indian subcontinent. The authors found that the international students assessed responded that student services, library services, and the quality of learning influenced their satisfaction with their institutions. Limitations of Mavondo et al.'s study include that they did not specify the location of the participants. In addition, only quantitative research methods were used to obtain data, so that sufficient in-depth detail could not be provided.

The findings of Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) study lend support to those of Mavondo et al. (2004) that the participants perceived facility services from the institutions as an important determinant for their satisfaction with the institutions. Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's study aimed to determine undergraduate students' expectations of universities and explore their perceptions toward university administrators. The researchers developed a questionnaire as a pilot study, and then, they revised it and administered it to their sample group—881 undergraduate students from five universities in Istanbul, Turkey.

The findings showed that the participants' expectations of a counselling centre were lower. Although they needed professional support, they hesitated to ask

for help. In addition, the students determined the nature of the campus setting as one of the priorities in their perspectives. Half of their participants stated that the university campus setting should be developed by the university leadership team, both naturally and socially. For example, the natural campus areas should be increased (52.6%) and social campus settings should be established (51%). Moreover, the participants suggested that they wanted the university to equip all classes with educational technology and that the university should increase the number of places for team and group studies. A limitation of this research is that the researchers only focused on quantitative research, which is not able to provide sufficient in-depth detail of the students' reasons for their expectations.

Just as the findings from Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) and Mavondo et al.'s (2004) studies indicated that the support services from the institutions influenced the international students satisfaction, the findings in Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) appeared to underscore this issue. In their study about the psychological and sociocultural adjustments of two Chinese students at a British university, the interviewees claimed that they had very rarely used the support services at their university. This was partly because they were unclear what services were available, and partly because they were dubious of their value. Several students complained that there were not enough activities to help overseas students mix with local students, and one person (a mature female student) was particularly critical of the student union for failing to play a more facilitative or supportive role in helping students from different cultures get to know each other.

To improve the support services of the institutions, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong suggested that the institutions needed to find more ways of promoting contact between overseas students and the local British community. Moreover, they should inform the students of their opportunities to do voluntary work in the community and encourage them to participate at some point during their studies. Additionally, motivation should be given for more local people to befriend overseas students. This might lead to mutual benefits. Spencer-Oatey

and Xiong further mentioned another possibility that the institutions could hold some 'open' cultural events where people could be put in touch with one another. In addition, there was a need to facilitate multicultural networks by arranging and promoting more social activities.

With regards to limitations from Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) and Mavondo et al.'s (2004) studies, it can be seen that both of them applied only quantitative research methods to obtain their data, which cannot give sufficient detail. Therefore, it is important to further study very detailed information regarding their reasons through the use of qualitative research methods.

### **2.6.2 The international students' preferences in using support services**

Zhai's (2002) study explored international students adjustment issues and social support needs. The author interviewed 10 international students at The Ohio State University and found that they experienced significant difficulties in coping with U.S. education, cultural differences, and language difficulties. The results showed that family or friends were the most preferred resource to seek for help, especially for emotional and psychological problems. The participants suggested that it would be helpful to international student adjustment if their college and department provided academic orientation, improved student counselling, and strengthened language support.

In considering the gap in Zhai's study, two design limitations were found. To begin with, this study only focused on qualitative research, which did not provide precise, quantitative numerical data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). To compensate for weaknesses in the qualitative approach and to measure factors concerning the students' adjustment issues and social support needs, a quantitative research method should be added. Another limitation is that the population from which Zhai's study sample was drawn consisted only of graduate students from various countries and regions. These findings may not be applicable to other populations such as undergraduate students. It is of interest to use the findings of the current study as a sample to find out whether

undergraduates face the same or different difficulties as those in graduate programs.

The findings of Yeh and Wang's (2000) and Yeh and Inose's (2002) study show the same trend of results as Zhai (2002), in which the international students used social support networks as part of their coping strategy. Yeh and Wang's (2000) study is about Asian American coping attitudes, sources, and practices. Their participants were 470 Asian American undergraduate and graduate students from nine universities and colleges from the East and West Coasts. The authors developed a questionnaire to survey the participants' attitudes. They found that the participants were most likely to seek help from their familial and social sources. A limitation of Yeh and Wang's study is that only quantitative research with insufficient in-depth data about the participants was provided.

Similarly, Yeh and Inose (2002), whose study is about the difficulties and coping strategies of 247 Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant students on the East Coast of America, pointed out that the most frequently reported coping strategy was the use of social support networks. These authors gathered the participants' background data through a demographic questionnaire and then asked about their coping strategies and counselling experiences through only two open-ended questions. The use of the open-ended format of questions creates limitations on the depth of qualitative data that can be obtained and the authors themselves suggested future research should consider using other valid and reliable measures.

Not only did social support networks appear to assist the students, but lecturers were also found to be another source of help for them. In Zhou and Todman's (2008) study regarding the adaptation of Chinese postgraduate students in the UK, their findings revealed that UK teachers adjusted their teaching strategies to international students, particularly when they came in groups. For instance, when the teachers spoke English, they slowed down and motivated the students to speak English in group discussions. Moreover, they designed more appropriate tutoring approaches for their students and also took special care of

them. In addition, the findings showed that one of the good points about the Chinese students coming in groups was that their initial adaptation was likely to be smoother because the selected lecturers were very experienced in dealing with Chinese students.

Zhou and Todman used both qualitative and quantitative data to study two groups of Chinese postgraduate students from two regions of China (Nanchang and Wanli) and the staff teaching them in two Scottish universities (Abertay and Dundee) to investigate the extent of shared perceptions and associated adaptations. These Chinese students studied in three major subjects (Information Technology, Software engineering, and English for Professional Development). A total of 148 students filled in a questionnaire and 26 students who arrived in groups volunteered to participate in one of four focus group discussions. Staff participants included 33 staff members. All of the participants were interviewed. The authors identified limitations in their data analysis. While the study yielded very rich, detailed data it could be seen that (i) the data was the participants' own, subjective, perceptions of their experiences and (ii) the findings reflected the interpretation of the researcher.

In addition to Zhou and Todman's study, various conclusions based on the responses of Chinese students on questionnaires and in follow-up interviews were reported by Ye (1992). She indicated that Chinese students had difficulty in communicating their personal problems. When in trouble, they usually turned to family members or to other Chinese students for help. Moreover, they used international student services the most and seldom used other student services. The students reported that if they had a problem, it could be solved without outside help. Ye (1992) explained that the Chinese culture emphasized that people should not share their personal problems with outsiders; as a result, Chinese students did not utilize the counselling services that were provided by the university.

## *Conclusion*

Regarding the problems of academic and sociocultural adjustment and support services, my study has focused the differences between Thai and Chinese university teaching and learning approaches as reported by Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners. As many studies have indicated that language proficiency and academic cultural differences were issues related to students' difficulties (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Philips et al., 2002; Thorstensson, 2001; Wan, 2001), there could be indications of some differences in teaching and learning approaches between Thailand and China emerging from my study.

## **2.7 Understanding of the Sociocultural Dimensions of China and Thailand**

In this section, general knowledge about the sociocultural dimensions will be provided first, followed by elaborate detail on China and Thailand.

### **2.7.1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions: The 5' D Model**

The study by Geert Hofstede (2001c), an influential Dutch organizational sociologist, demonstrates five dimensions which differentiate cultures. They are Power Distance - PDI, Individualism - IDV, Masculinity - MAS, Uncertainty Avoidance – UAI, and Long-Term Orientation - LTO. Hofstede's 5' Dimensions model presents that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect the behaviour of societies and organizations, and that these are persistent across time. The description for each of Hofstede's Dimensions are listed as follows (Hofstede, 2001c):

**Power Distance Index (PDI)** (*Small vs. large power distance*) is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

**Individualism (IDV)** (*Individualism vs. collectivism*) has on the one side its opposite, collectivism, which is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.

**Masculinity (MAS)** (*Masculinity vs. femininity*) refers to the distribution of roles between the genders, which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found.

**Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)** (*Weak vs. strong uncertainty avoidance*) deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to man's search for Truth. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures.

**Long-Term Orientation (LTO)** (*Long vs. short-term orientation*) deals with Virtue regardless of Truth. Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance, while those with Short Term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face'.

Among these five dimensions, cross-cultural research often emphasizes the differences between cultures that stress individualism and cultures that stress collectivism (Abdel-Fattah E. & Huber, 2003). The following section focuses on these issues.

### **2.7.2 Cultural values—collectivism vs. individualism**

Collectivist cultures exist in most Latin American, Asian, and African cultures, whereas North American and Northern and Western European cultures would be categorized as individualistic (Lemm, 1999). Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Triandis (1989) stated that individuals of Asian ancestry tend to focus on collectivistic identity. They were unable to differentiate their own interests from people in the group (Erez & Earley, 1993). For this reason, they bound their 'selves' to others. Individualism is typically defined as complex behaviour based on awareness of oneself and one's immediate family as opposed to concern for the group (Lemm, 1999). The principle of individualism lies in an individual's moral right to pursue his/her own happiness. This pursuit needs a great deal of independence, initiative, and self-responsibility. Collectivism, in contrast, is typically defined as behaviours based on awareness of others and care for traditions and values.

Although Hofstede's five cultural dimensions can differentiate cultures, Hofstede (1991) stated that these dimensions should not be viewed as the be all and end all for cultural differences. In reality, collectivism and individualism should be considered terms which have only broad definitions, and which require more clarification and elaboration (Parker, Haytko, & Hermans, 2009). More importantly, Rhee, Uleman and Lee (1996) indicated that these cultural values are not the only dimensions of cultural differences. Cultural tightness-looseness is one major meta-difference between cultural groups (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006).

### **2.7.3 Cultural tightness-looseness**

Sussman's (2000) study claimed that cultures vary in their proscription of adherence to cultural scripts. In Triandis's (1989) theory, he indicates that tightness- looseness is an important dimension, and is distinct from other dimensions of cultural variation, such as individualism and collectivism and cultural complexity. Some cultures display considerable latitude toward following norms, values, and behaviours and these cultures are defined as "loose" (Pelto, 1968; Triandis, 1994). In contrast to these loose cultures, other cultures value strict observance of normative behaviours, and behaving differently is discouraged or punished. Pelto (1968) and Triandis (1994) referred to these cultures as "tight".

Hofstede (1980) viewed homogeneous, self-contained cultures as very tight and as placing high value on uncertainty avoidance through adherence to various cultural rules and society laws. China, Japan, Iran, and traditional Greece are examples of tight cultures. In contrast to homogeneous cultures, heterogeneous ones have fewer rules, have more flexible normative standards, and are more tolerant of deviations from cultural norms. Loose cultures usually are located at the geographic intersection of main cultures (e.g., Thailand between India and China), are pluralistic (e.g., United States), or are sparsely populated.

Some cultures have more relaxed or stricter social and cultural norms than others, and consequently acceptance of deviation from the norm occurs in



greater or lesser degrees, even in cultures that are otherwise similar (Caprar & Neville, 2012).

#### **2.7.4 Comparison between Chinese and Thai cultural dimensions**

This section presents the understanding of Chinese and of Thai culture first, followed by a comparison between China and Thailand regarding the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (2001a).

##### ***2.7.4.1 Understanding Chinese culture***

To understand Chinese culture, the following issues will be identified:

- 1) Chinese families and parental style
- 2) Chinese value of education and academic achievement

##### ***(1) Chinese families and parental style***

In Chinese culture, the family unit is regarded as a fundamental Chinese value (Phillips & Pearson, 1996). Hwang (1999) and Mak and Chan (1980) indicated that it is usual for Chinese people to learn to think of family first and to try to maintain a close relationship with their family, with those who show loyalty to their families counted as ideal children by Chinese parents (Shek & Chan, 1999). In addition, Wan (2001) reported that Chinese culture focuses more particularly on an individual's responsibility and loyalty to the country, the family, and the ruler and that Chinese people often feel strong ties to the family and the responsibility to bring honour to the family. Moreover, people in this collective culture are generally considered closer to, and friendlier with, one another than those in an individualistic culture (Zhai, 2002).

Bond (2010) stated that, due to this Chinese cultural emphasis on family mutual dependence, the chances of Chinese adolescent immigrants succeeding in their adjustment to their host countries could increase, and this view is supported by many studies (Florsheim, 1997; E.-Y. Lin, 2008; Mounts, 2004). For example, in Florsheim's (1997) study about factors related to the psychosocial adjustment of Chinese immigrants, his participants (113 Chinese youths who had immigrated to the United States) regarded their families as more organized and

cooperative, and less argumentative, than those of their US-native peers, and the participants appeared to have fewer psychological adjustment issues and lower emotional and acculturative suffering. Florsheim suggested that in further research other groups of Chinese people should be studied in order to better determine whether these findings were generalizable.

### *(2) Chinese value of education and academic achievement*

Chinese collectivist culture, based on Confucianism, values education, human malleability and hard work (Wan, 2001). Bond (2010) emphasized that education is an important way to gain knowledge, ability, and virtues. Regarding Confucianism, it is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher *Confucius* (Wan, 2001). Wan's (2001) findings reveal that whereas Chinese values assist Chinese students to be successful in their academic programs, the deeply-rooted Chinese culture also causes Chinese students more difficulties in their adjustment and adaptation at university.

#### **2.7.4.2 Understanding Thai culture**

The origin of the Thai people has been traced by historians to the old kingdom of Nanchao in what is now Yunnan in China (Embree, 1950). Srivardhana and Cater (2006) indicated that the mixture of Chinese and Indian heritages has brought a cultural uniqueness to the Thai nation. For example, though a Chinese origin is shared by Thailand and Vietnam, Thai culture is markedly different from that of Vietnam, a region with long historic contact with China and under actual Chinese rule for many centuries (Embree, 1950). The Thai draw much of their cultural heritage in religion, literature, and art from India, while the religion of Vietnam is a combination of Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism, with rituals similar to those of China. In addition, Thai culture differs from the Islamic Malayan culture to the south of the peninsula and in Indonesia. Embree (1950) stated that whereas both share Indian influences, the dominant religions in the two areas—Hinayana and Islam—are different. This also includes many aspects of their culture. For instance, the Thai are a land-bound people in

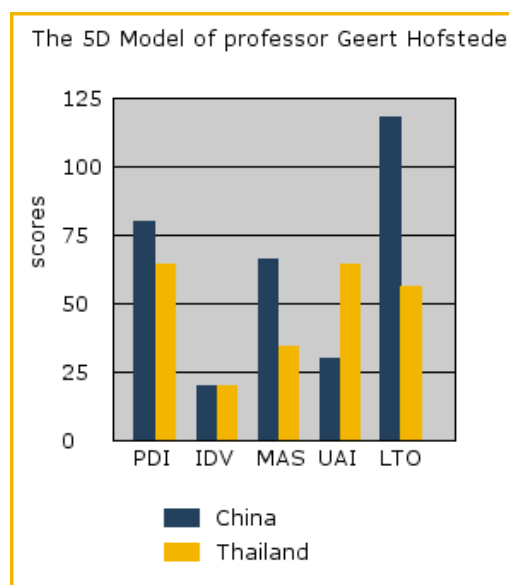
contrast to the seafaring Malays; and the Thai mode of dress differs from that found in Indonesia.

#### **2.7.4.3 China vs. Thailand**

Skinner (1957) indicated that, “The Thai cultural inventory has always had many points in common with that of the Southeast Asian Chinese. The preferred food staples for both peoples, for example, are rice, fish and pork. The Thai commitment to Theravada Buddhism was no barrier to social intercourse or cultural rapprochement in view of the familiarity of the Chinese to another form of Buddhism. In addition, the differences in the physical appearance between Chinese and Thai are relatively slight.” (p. 238).

This section presents the comparison between China and Thailand in two aspects: cultural dimensions and language.

##### *(1) Cultural dimensions*



**Figure 9: Comparison of cultural dimensions between China and Thailand**

Figure 9 presents the comparison between China and Thailand regarding the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (2001a). The Chinese rank much lower than Thai in Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) and higher in three Dimensions- -Power Distance (PDI), Masculinity (MAS), and Long-Term Orientation (LTO)

respectively. The Individualism (IDV) ranking in China and Thailand is equal, at 20. Looking at the aspect of Power Distance (PDI), it can be seen that China ranks not much higher than Thailand (about 5). Conversely, the level of Masculinity (MAS), and Long-Term Orientation (LTO) ranking of China are two times higher than that of Thailand. Interestingly, the Chinese's ranking level on Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) is half lower than that of Thai's one. This indicates that China has a tight social system, while Thailand has a loose one.

In general, Chinese and Thai share the same cultural values regarding collectivism. In collectivist cultures, an individual is defined and acts as a member of a long-term group, namely the family, a religious group, or a profession, among others (see more detail on page 88). My study will examine if these shared qualities help Chinese students adjust more successfully to study in Thailand.

## *(2) Language: The relationship between Chinese and Thai languages*

According to many scholars (Benedict, 1975; Matisoff, 1991; Shafer, 1966), there is a relationship between Chinese and Thai languages. Until recently, those scholars have considered Mandarin Chinese ("Chinese") and Standard Thai ("Thai") to be related because of the many typological features they share. Many phonological, morphosyntactic and semantic characteristics are found in both languages and in many areas the grammaticalization patterns also show striking similarities. Within Mandarin Chinese, the Zhuang language is also considered closely-related to "Thai" as they are both in the same language family called "Tai" (*Thais may originate from China, Chinese ethnologist*, 1998). Research comparing 200 words from the basic Thai and Zhuang vocabulary was carried out by Tan Shengmin (deputy director of the Nationality Institute of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southern China) and led him to conclude that the two languages clearly shared a common root (*Thais may originate from China, Chinese ethnologist*, 1998).

In my study, the Zhuang language is emphasized because of the region of student participants' origin (Guangxi Province which became the Guangxi

Zhuang Autonomous Region in 1966 ["Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region," 2010]"Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,"). Among China's fifty-five ethnic minorities, the Zhuang count as China's largest minority group, with a population of about 17 million (*Zhuang ethnic group*, 2002) mostly living in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in south China. Their language is called the "Zhuang" language, a member of the Tai language family and of Sino-Tibetan stock (Huang, 2007). Zhuang is officially considered one of the 'major minority' languages of China, alongside Tibetan, Mongolian, Uighur and Korean ("Zhuang," 2004). It is closely related to the standard Thai language of Thailand and the Standard Lao language of Laos (Y.-H. Lin & Diamond, 1996).

With regard to the above relationship, it can be concluded that the similarity between the Zhuang and Thai languages may be an important factor that contributes to the Chinese students' success in their Thai studies. Research by Phromsuthirak (2004) reported that Thai and Zhuang languages are ethnically related. Native speakers of both languages have the same methods in naming places in their home regions (e.g. after geographical characteristics of the places, animals and plants commonly found in the regions, and beliefs) and a number of these place names are remarkably similar. Edmondson (2007) noted that although the Thai and the Zhuang live in physically separated regions today, they have shared commonalities in languages. Much of the most common vocabulary is shared: *khaau* 'rice', *lao* 'alcohol', *khwaai* 'buffalo', *mu* 'pig', and *ma* 'dog'; all these agrarian, domestic animal, local industrial terms are identical (Edmondson, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed literature concerned with six theoretical frameworks (push-pull factors, factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment, social constructionism, the transition theory, factors in socio-psychological processes, and Ward's adaptation model) which have been used in my study to examine the adjustment experiences encountered by non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country. In addition, four areas of research literature were investigated: the decision to

study abroad, factors contributing to and hindering adjustment, adjustment problems of learning sojourners, and support services. Moreover, the issues on the sociocultural dimensions of China and Thailand were illustrated to understand more about Chinese and Thai cultures.

The issues of international students' adjustment experiences have been of interest to researchers from time to time. They have analysed various problems that have occurred during students' adjustment to their new academic and social contexts and have also identified improvement strategies. Furthermore, factors influencing their decision to study abroad and their academic and sociocultural adjustment have also been investigated.

However, limitations among these studies were still found. For example, several studies treated international students as if they were a homogenous grouping without considering the differences among them.

This current study is an attempt to overcome these limitations by investigating the adjustment experiences of the Chinese undergraduate students who were non-indigenous Thai learners at MSU, Thailand, which is regarded as having a similar culture to that of the students' home country. This study has been conducted within those six theoretical frameworks and looked at the students' experiences from the time they decided to study abroad to the end of their first semester of study. It also included the students' expectations about coming to study in a different country, the factors contributing to or hindering their adjustment experiences, the differences they reported between home-country and host-country universities' teaching and learning approaches, their academic and sociocultural adjustment difficulties and how they resolved their initial adjustment issues, and their suggestions for how improvements could be made in the course structure, teaching and organization. This study obtained data from not only the students, but also the lecturers and administrators.

## **Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies that together form the philosophical basis of this study and leads on to a discussion of how following those approaches led to the particular choice of methods being selected to gather the data, and why triangulation was considered an appropriate approach for combining multiple methods and data sources. An analysis of the data follows, with an overview of the ethical considerations and the researcher's identity, followed by a discussion of the pilot study and the issues arising from it. The final section presents the conclusion of the chapter.

### **3.2 Methodological Approach**

To prepare a research plan, individuals should identify and make explicit the larger philosophical ideas they plan to adopt (Creswell, 2009). In my study, the social constructivist worldview was used. Creswell mentioned that the goal of the research in social constructivists' perspectives is, "to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). In addition, the researcher is supposed to listen carefully to what individuals say or do in their life settings. Constructivist researchers also emphasize "the specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Furthermore, the researcher's purpose is to interpret the meanings that others have formed about the world. Creswell claimed that these meanings are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives.

With regard to this worldview, the major purpose of this study was to investigate and understand the adjustment experiences of the Chinese students through gathering information from research participants (students, lecturers, and administrators). Interpretation of these experiences was shaped by the

researcher's own experiences and background. The researcher focused on Chinese students studying at MSU, Thailand and aimed to interpret the situations that the participants experienced in the Thai academic and sociocultural contexts. While the social constructivist approach itself does not provide a methodology to follow in this case, consideration of this worldview led the researcher to conduct the research by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches.

In order to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches in an effective manner, the researcher considered all of the relevant characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research. For example, the main characteristics of traditional quantitative research are a focus on deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, standardized data collection, and statistical analysis. Conversely, those of traditional qualitative research are induction, discovery, exploration, theory/hypothesis generation, the researcher as the primary "instrument" of data collection, and qualitative analysis (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research were taken into account and this led the researcher to combine the two approaches and collect multiple types of data using various methods to bring out the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both approaches. Kelle (2006) suggested that as all methods have specific strengths and limitations, the integration of quantitative and qualitative research approaches may be used in order to compensate for their mutual and overlapping weaknesses.

### **3.2.1 Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches**

The use of multi-methods refers to the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in the same study. Cowger and Menon (2001) suggest that the advantages of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches are that the integration not only increases the validity of research findings due to the triangulation of methods, but also provides a chance to take advantage of the strengths of each approach. Reid (1994) supports the latter advantage by saying that both methods are required because the strength of each tends to be



the weakness of the other. Furthermore, the strategy of combining multiple methods in a single study is acknowledged as adding rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation (Flick, 1992).

In my study, the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches was utilized. The researcher wanted to obtain data using a systematic measurement of certain factors considered important and related to the research questions and research literature and therefore, the use of a closed-ended instrument (questionnaire) as a quantitative approach was required. In addition, in-depth detail of the Chinese students' adjustment experiences was needed. To obtain a full range of data each student was interviewed three times, as well as their own perspectives being regularly recorded in a reflective journal, with interviews also carried out among their lecturers and administrators. In this way, the two research approaches (qualitative and quantitative) were combined to complete the research data.

The use of the quantitative approach gives the researcher several advantages. For example, it is useful for obtaining data that allow quantitative predictions to be made and for studying a large number of people. Moreover, it provides precise, quantitative numerical data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Due to their strengths, various researchers have employed only quantitative methods in their studies, with a focus on objective measurements and the usage of numbers and statistics (Dunn, 2006; Hacifazlioglu & Ozdemir, 2010; Mavondo et al., 2004; Mounts, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al., 2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2002; Yeh & Wang, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994; D. Zhang et al., 2007; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

However, the use of the quantitative approach alone is not enough to provide sufficient in-depth detail. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) revealed that their quantitative methods could not establish causality and indicate in-depth detail, while Wang (2009) recommended that using qualitative interviews may provide rich and in-depth detail to the students' adjustment understanding. Mounts (2004) further suggested that various data sources should be applied to obtain data regarding the students' experiences with the transition.

On the other hand, several researchers were found to use only qualitative methodology, which focused on subjective interpretation of results rather than measured factors (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Eder, Smith, et al., 2010; Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004; Nicholson, 2001; Philips et al., 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Zhai, 2002). Two of them (Andrade, 2006; Philips et al., 2002) examined secondary documents, while the rest utilised an interview method in their studies. By using this research methodology alone, the findings are produced without any means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and they are more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Nevertheless, the qualitative approach is valuable for measuring what people want or say they want and for answering why they behave in the certain way (Tenopir, 2003) and is claimed to help understand how people make meaning of their social world (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Moreover, it is useful for studying a limited number of cases in depth and can provide an understanding and description of people's personal experiences of phenomena (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Because of the limitations of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches, the researcher has combined the two in order to overcome those limitations and gain descriptive and rich detail of the Chinese students' adjustment experiences while still allowing for the use of numerical data.

Many relevant studies have applied both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies (Chen, 2007; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Lewthwaite, 1996; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Thorstensson, 2001; Yang, 2007; Y. Zhou & Todman, 2008). For example, in Kingston and Forland's study regarding the transition into higher education of undergraduate and postgraduate students with East Asian backgrounds in the United Kingdom (at a London-based university), they used questionnaires and semi-structured focus groups to collect data.

Using those methodologies together provides unique advantages in the advancement of knowledge base (Cowger & Menon, 2001) and adds rigour, breadth, and depth to any investigation (Flick, 1992). However, some limitations in those studies still emerged. For example, in Kingston and Forland's (2008) study, they used questionnaires and semi-structured focus groups to obtain data. Nevertheless, specific and profound details from the students need to be obtained through in-depth interviews. Regarding Zhou and Todman's (2008) study concerning the adaptation of 148 Chinese postgraduate students in two Scottish universities, they indicated limitations in data analysis because (i) the data was the participants' own, subjective, perceptions of their experiences and (ii) the findings reflected the interpretation of the researcher. To mitigate against these limitations and provide more context for interpretation of students' experiences, Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasized that triangulation of qualitative results is very important.

While combining quantitative and qualitative approaches brings out an opportunity for advancement in methodology, it can also be problematic for researchers (Brannen, 2005). Brannen (1992) argues that both approaches are very different in their theoretical, philosophical and methodological origins and that they cannot be effectively mixed. Moreover, when past researchers combined these approaches, they did not provide a clear rationale for their choice of methods (Bryman, 2005). However, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggested that blending the two types of data together can be valuable because the aim of combining different approaches is to consider the relationship between the data sets obtained from different methods. To carry out the integration of these two approaches effectively, researchers need to have a greater understanding of how to mix them appropriately (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

One way in which researchers can benefit from combining qualitative and quantitative methods is through 'triangulation' (Cowger & Menon, 2001). This approach will be discussed in detail in the following section.

### 3.2.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a combination of multiple methods, data sources, theories, or observers in the study of a single concept (Flick, 2002). Combinations may relate to a single methodological approach (for instance, quantitative or qualitative) or may integrate approaches (quantitative and qualitative) within the research design (Halcomb & Andrew, 2005). Flick (2007) stated that triangulation is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. It provides confirmation and completeness of data by overcoming the biases inherent in a single-investigator, single-theory or single-method approach (Brannen, 1992; Foster, 1997; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991).

In Denzin's explanation of how to use triangulation as a research strategy, he outlines four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation including time, space, and person (the use of various data sources); (b) investigator triangulation (involves more than one investigator in the research process); (c) theory triangulation; and (d) methodological triangulation (the use of multiple methods in the examination of a social phenomenon) (Denzin, 1978). In my study, data and methodological triangulation were used. I followed The participants' adjustment experiences were documented over a four-month period with information gathered from students, lecturers, and administrators' perspectives using an in-depth interviewing method (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004; Seidman, 1991) and narrative stories. Participants' narratives were obtained through interviews and reflective journal reports (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004). The quantitative approach (questionnaires) was utilized to facilitate the qualitative approach (interviews and reflective journals) in my study. The triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints is applied to attempt to improve the results by integrating a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Table 1 presents the three data sources-- students, lecturers, and administrators— that were used. Information from these participants was obtained through three methods—questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals—over semester 1/2010.

**Table 1: Matrix of data and methodological triangulation in this thesis**

<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Students</b>			<b>Lecturers</b>	<b>Admin.</b>
<b>Methods</b>	Questionnaires	Interviews	Reflective Journals	Interview	Interview
Beginning of the semester	/	/	/		
Mid (the end of the second month of the semester)		/	/		
End (the fourth month of the semester)		/	/	/	/

The use of data and methodological triangulation should lead to a single proposition about the phenomenon being studied and a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006), while helping researchers identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of the units of study (Rothbauer, 2008). Torrance (2012) claimed that a fuller and more informative picture gained from two or more methods “will be more rounded, nuanced, and valid than that produced by a single method” (p. 113). In addition, the credibility of research findings should be strengthened and the interpretation produced by comparing the results of different data and methods to a single unit of study should be enriched (Rothbauer, 2008).

Among the reviewed literature related to international students’ adjustment experiences, Morita (2004) is the only researcher who applied data triangulation in her study. She recommended using triangulation because the results would be more able to bring out the complexity, richness and contrasting viewpoints, which are present in multicultural and multilingual academic situations.

Although triangulation approaches appear to bring advantages to researchers, certain limitations have been revealed. Flick (2008) and Flick (2011) pointed out that it is rather difficult to obtain a convergence of findings in triangulation. Moreover, Rothbauer (2008) claimed that different approaches can measure different aspects of research problems and also yield different types of data. Regarding these limitations, Torrance (2012) stated that often these difficulties

and limitations have simply been noted as issues “requiring further investigation”. It is interesting that different accounts can emerge from research and unexpected findings of this type may point to the original understandings being insufficient and, therefore requiring further data and further interpretive activity (Mathison, 1988; Patton, 1980).

To conclude, the triangulation method was identified as the most appropriate for the current study as it provides a way to gather a more comprehensive collection of information and allow a greater overall insight into the students’ adjustment experiences through the use of multiple data sources and methods, with potential weaknesses still being possible to be overcome with thought and effort.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected from three different data sources (students, lecturers, and administrators) and methods (questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals). The following sections present information on: (1) who the participants of the study were and where this study took place (section 3.3.1); (2) what research instruments were utilized to collect data (section 3.3.2); and (3) how the research was processed (section 3.3.3).

#### **3.3.1 Site and participants**

As the goal of this study is to obtain insights into a phenomenon, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling in choosing a site and participants that could maximize understanding of the underlying phenomenon. Patton mentioned that: “individuals, groups, and settings are considered for selection if they are “information rich” (p. 169).

This study was undertaken at MSU, located in the northeast of Thailand, and the participants were all from GXUN in Guangxi, but for the range of issues investigated by this study it is likely that the majority of the results would be applicable to the more general consideration of adjustment experiences of students from the wider region of southern China studying anywhere in Thailand, given the low variability of general cultural issues over those areas.

The regional language, Zhuang, spoken by some of the students, is an example of a factor specific to this particular study, which may produce results that introduce considerations that are not so generalizable and this issue will be addressed in more detail later in the thesis.

MSU is a public university and one of 103 Thai higher education institutions hosting international students. In northeast Thailand, MSU ranks as having the greatest number of Chinese students of the 17 institutions in the area (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2010).

GXUN is one of 119 universities in the southern area of China (Education, 2012), and is located in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It is the university that contains the most complete Asian Languages faculty in China, and has become the training base for China-ASEAN Expo and China-ASEAN exchanges and cooperation (Nationalities, 2012). GXUN has established friendly cooperative relationships with many universities in more than 10 countries and works together with MSU to promote Chinese language and culture and to increase collaboration between the two.

MSU has a strong aim to gain further international recognition (University, 2012). To facilitate academic collaboration with its overseas partner universities, MSU has signed memorandums of understanding with over thirty universities in various countries, including China. Since 2007 when MSU and GXUN signed a cooperative agreement, Chinese students have become the largest group of international students studying at MSU.

Because of this fact, the Chinese students at MSU were selected as the main participants for this study. Rubin (1995) advised that a researcher should select interviewees so that they match the subject of the project. He stated that if the interviewees are knowledgeable about the subject of the research, they can provide quality responses. I, therefore, asked one of my colleagues who was not teaching the participants in Semester 1/2010 to recruit them for me. Then, I chose the participants. In the beginning of the 2010 academic year, the students were recruited. I decided to recruit participants in this department

mainly because I have some academic and professional background in this area of study and felt that it might be useful in understanding participants' experiences. A second group of participants included lecturers and administrators who were teaching and dealing with the student participants. The participants' details are as follows:

### ***3.3.1.1 Students participants***

It was decided to choose fourth year Chinese students as participants because they have already had one year of experience in Thai academic and sociocultural environments. The participants were able to share their experiences by reflecting on them within the broader context of their life stories (Seidman, 1991).

The participants were fourth year students studying Thai as a foreign language major at MSU. They were on a degree programme where they studied two years in China and then another two years in Thailand. These students studied in a separate Thai language class, specific to their group. The researcher considered the particular issues related to their adjustment experiences as Chinese students coming to study a different language in a different country, rather than those facing general language learners.

The student participants in my study can be divided into two groups.

#### **1) The 22 Chinese students who were studying at MSU**

All of the fourth year students (22 students) were required to fill out a questionnaire in order to obtain an overall picture of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners' adjustment experiences.

These 17 female and 5 male students all came from Guangxi, China, and their ages ranged from 21 to 24. Their first language was Chinese, mostly Mandarin, none of the students had studied overseas before, and they had generally not travelled widely abroad.



2) The 6 Chinese students who provided more detailed information

From these 22, six students who were willing to share their adjustment experiences were selected to be interviewed and to keep a reflective journal.

With specific reference to phenomenological research, Polkinghorne (1989) identified that research participants should have the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of the experience. In addition, they need to have or be able to develop some significant relationship with the phenomenon under investigation (Wertz & Van Zuuren, 1987). Moreover, Darlington and Scott (2002) emphasized that participation in qualitative research requires the willingness to commit to reflection on deeply personal experiences.

It was decided to limit the interviews to six participants because it was believed that this would give sufficient information to build a useful theory, applicable to the related aspects of the general case. Morse (1995) indicated “in qualitative research, the signals of saturation seem to be determined by investigator proclamation and by evaluating the adequacy and the comprehensiveness of the results” (p. 147).

Table 2 presents a summary of the Chinese respondents’ background information concerning their demographic data (age, gender, place of origin, and first language) and overseas experiences (whether they had studied in or travelled to other countries).

**Table 2: Students' background information**

Students	Demographic Information				Overseas experiences	
	Age	Gender	Place of origin	First language	Study	Travel
S1	22	Female	Guangxi, China	Chinese (Mandarin)	Never	1-2 countries
S2	22	Female	Guangxi, China	Chinese (Mandarin)	Never	Never
S3	21	Male	Guangxi, China	Chinese (Mandarin)	Never	Never
S4	23	Male	Guangxi, China	Chinese (Mandarin)	Never	1-2 countries
S5	24	Male	Guangxi, China	Chinese (Mandarin)	Never	1-2 countries
S6	24	Male	Guangxi, China	Chinese (Mandarin)	Never	Never

With regard to the background information of the six interviewees, S1 and S2 were 22 year-old female students, while the rest were male. S3 was the youngest male at 21 years of age, whereas S5 and S6 were the oldest (24 years old). S4's age was 23 years. Apart from their home country and Thailand, half of them had never been to other countries, while the other half had been to 1-2 countries.

### **3.3.1.2 Lecturer participants**

Three lecturers teaching Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners were chosen due to their experiences in teaching and coordinating Chinese non-indigenous students. Experience of the topic under investigation and articulateness are generally considered as essential criteria for the inclusion of participants in qualitative research projects (Darlington & Scott, 2002). According to Polkinghorne (1989), it is a requirement that research participants have the ability to provide full and sensitive descriptions of the experience under investigation. For Wertz and Van Zuuren (1987), participants need to have or be able to develop some significant relationship with the phenomenon.

### **3.3.1.3 Administrator participants**

Three administrative officers were invited to participate in my study. According to their job description, they were the only three administrators who were directly and mainly assigned to be responsible for and to support Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners in various aspects of life—academic, social, and cultural. The reason for interviewing all of them is supported by Morse (1991) and Bowen (2008). Morse suggested that the researcher should choose to interview informants with a broad general knowledge of the topic or those who have undergone the experience and whose experience is considered typical. Additionally, Bowen mentioned that “an ‘appropriate’ sample is composed of participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic” (p. 140).

Working as a program coordinator, particularly for Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners from the year 2006 to 2008, I had a close relationship with all three administrators and knew that their work is coordination. Due to this connection and relationship, I decided to invite them to be my research participants. Darlington and Scott (2002) claimed that a friendly relationship between the researcher and the research participant is important. Like all relationships, the researcher-participant relationship is subject to continuing negotiation and reworking.

These three participants were: two personnel working as general administrators (particularly for Chinese international students) in the International Relations Office and one working as an academic administrative coordinator in the Department of Thai and Oriental Languages.

### **3.3.2 Instruments**

Three different research instruments were used to collect data: (3.3.2.1) questionnaires, (3.3.2.2) interviews, and (3.3.2.3) reflective journals. The rationale for choosing each research tool is presented first, followed by its advantages and its composition.

### **3.3.2.1 Questionnaires**

Following an extensive survey of the literature, a questionnaire was designed to investigate the factors that may relate to the Chinese students. The researcher wanted to obtain data by using the systematic measurement of certain factors considered important and related to the research questions and research literature. Therefore, the use of a closed-ended instrument (questionnaire) was required. A questionnaire was utilized as it is a structured, clearly presented, and systematic approach of collecting data ("Questionnaires," 2004). Two main types of questions were applied to the questionnaire: 'open-ended' and 'closed'. Open-ended questions were used because more detailed responses from the participants could add depth to the survey ("Questionnaires," 2004).

I started collecting data with questionnaires (see Appendix C) that were adapted from "National Survey of International Students" by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand to be consistent with my research questions and the context of MSU. The questionnaire was prepared in English and presented to the Chinese participants in simplified Chinese. To ensure accuracy, this form was also re-translated to English by an independent native Chinese speaker and cross-checked to ensure that the intended meaning of the questions was being maintained throughout the process.

In developing items for the questionnaire, I consulted with the University Postgraduate Centre Adviser. Other items and ideas emerged from the literature and from considering the relationship to the research questions and the academic context at MSU. To make sure that the questions in the questionnaire were clear and not misleading and to check the comprehensibility of the items, an early version of the questionnaire was pre-tested in the pilot study with 34 Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners studying in Thai as a Foreign Language as their major. Taking into account comments and feedback from all of these, the final version was constructed.

The questionnaire was divided into 11 parts (see Appendix C). The Chinese students were asked to respond to 29 statements on a Likert-type scale to measure reported levels of satisfaction about their educational and sociocultural

experiences, for example the learning environment, accommodation, and support services during their time in China and Thailand. There was a mix of Likert scale (1-5) items using the following ranges: not at all to extremely difficult/satisfied/important, poor to excellent, and strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items consisted of ticking the one that the students believed was the most accurate. Open questions were included to elicit written responses. The statements were structured to tap into feelings, experiences, thoughts, and opinions regarding academic and sociocultural adjustment.

### **3.3.2.2 Interviews**

In this research, in-depth interviews provided a framework for the student participants to share their experiences by reflecting on them within the broader context of their life stories (Seidman, 1991). This method allows the researcher to probe the respondents on a one-to-one basis and to elicit more details (Cradall, 1998; Kvale, 1996). In addition, it could give detail and explanation to gain certain results (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006) and to solicit in-depth information that leads to deeper understanding (Cradall, 1998; Kvale, 1996). By using this method, a clearer understanding was gained of what it was like for the research participants to study in a different country and the meaning they took out of their experience.

When conducting the interviews the method used was of in-depth interviewing which Seidman (1991) stated combined life history interviewing and focused in-depth interviewing. Three separate one-hour interviews were conducted with each participant (six students, three lecturers, and three administrators). The following section presents details of interviewing the participants: (1) Interviews with students, and (2) Interviews with lecturers and administrators.

#### ***(1) Interviews with students***

The student participants were interviewed three times, once at the beginning of semester 1/2010, once during the semester (after the second month of the semester), and once at the end of the semester. Morse (2000) suggested that if one is interviewing each person many times, this will produce a large amount of data for each participant. In my study, three-series interviews produced

information-rich data that gave detailed insight into these participants' experiences. These interviews were semi-structured and questions were asked based on an interview guide that grouped topics and questions that the researcher could ask in different ways to different participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The interview questions were divided into three sets according to the time of the interview (see Appendix D). The major purposes of the first set of interviews were: (1) to seek information about the students' personal background, life before and after arriving in Thailand, and reasons for coming to MSU; (2) to obtain data about the courses they were taking and their academic experiences; and (3) to ask for their advice/suggestions for Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, SL2 international students, lecturers, administrators and the university. Regarding the second and third set of interviews, the participants were required to reflect on their studies and life experiences in general, their interaction with course lecturers, and their concerns about academic life and future plans. They were also asked to comment on institutional support and to give suggestions to the institution. The interviews were conducted in Thai and were audio-recorded and transcribed/translated by the researcher, a native Thai speaker. A native Chinese speaking research assistant was presented during the interviews to assist clear communication.

### *(2) Interviews with lecturers and administrators*

At the end of the semester, the researcher interviewed three lecturers and three administrators in Thai, the first language for all involved. Gaining their perspectives was essential because they played an important role in the students' academic and sociocultural transition and they provided another set of perspectives on the Chinese students' adjustment experiences in the Thai academic environment. The interviews were semi-structured and the scope of the questions were: (1) characteristics of the course/the administration and the student group, (2) expectations for and evaluations of the Chinese students, (3) impressions of and interaction with the Chinese students, (4) pedagogical/administrative adjustments, (5) difficulties experienced by

students/suggestions for students, (6) their difficulties in teaching/administrating the Chinese students and their strategies to deal with them, and (7) their advice/suggestions for the Chinese non-native Thai learners, SL2 international students and the university (see Appendix D). Each interview lasted about an hour and was audio-recorded and transcribed/translated by the researcher.

### **3.3.2.3 Reflective journals**

A diary or a reflective journal is one form of document that can be collected and analysed in a qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). It has proven to be a useful tool for qualitative researchers in exploring the 'private' sphere (Harvey, 2011). By using it, individuals can have space to reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their lives. It can also be used as a method for 'logging' the events of daily life (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003).

This research method was chosen for use in the study due to several advantages. Morita (2004) claimed that the writing of reflective journals played a number of vital roles in her study. Firstly, it provided more immediate reactions than the retrospective reflections obtained during the end-of-term interviews. Participants' descriptions in the reports provided a very clear picture. Through this method, she could obtain detailed descriptions, which assisted her in better understanding the students' everyday classroom experiences.

Another advantageous role of reflective journals is that the participant can fully describe the thoughts and feelings they experience each day due to the open-ended nature of the journal (Morita, 2004). In addition, as the students were asked to hand in their reflective journals every week, weekly communication with the students allowed me to better understand their on-going struggles and the variety of strategies they employed over time (Morita, 2004). Through these reflective journals, in other words, I could stay close to the participants' live experiences and gain greater insight into the thoughts and feelings that they may reveal in their journals.

The research questions were used as a guideline to form questions for the reflective journals (see Appendix E). Questions were divided into five areas to

obtain data: (1) general attitude toward your everyday life, (2) perspectives on your study, (3) your personal background, (4) suggestions for administrators and lecturers, and (5) reasons for choosing a university outside of China. The questions were prepared in English and translated into Chinese. The students were free to choose to reply in Thai or Chinese.

### **3.3.3 Research procedures**

To achieve the goals of this research, triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints was required. I documented the participants' adjustment experiences over a four-month period (students, lecturers, and administrators' perspectives) using an in-depth interviewing method (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004; Seidman, 1991) and narrative stories. Participants' narratives were obtained through questionnaires, interviews and reflective journal reports (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004). Each research approach was applied in the following steps:

First: I distributed a questionnaire to all fourth-year Chinese students (22 students) studying in a Thai as a Foreign Language major to obtain data on their adjustment experiences. This was done at the beginning of the first semester.

Second: Three sets of interview questions on the students' perspectives were used for formal interviews with six cases and each interview lasted approximately one hour (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004). Patton (1990) as cited in Frank (2000) indicated that the three-series interviews generates a large amount of information-rich data that told a powerful story of these participants' lives. The first set was conducted at the beginning of the semester. The second set was done after the second month of the semester, while the third was after the fourth month (the end of the semester). Apart from interviewing these cases, lecturers and administrators' perspectives were also explored at the end of the semester (see Appendix D).

Third: The students had to write a reflective journal about their adjustment experiences with regard to the classes they were attending and their



participation in them, their accommodation and their everyday life. They could respond in the language they preferred. I provided them with a set of questions (see Appendix E). It was handed in to me every week.

A summary of the data collection methods has been presented in Table 3, starting with research methods employed in the study, followed by data collection period, and ending with how the research data were obtained.

**Table 3: Summary of database**

Methods	Data collection period (Semester 1/2010: Jun-Sep )			Obtaining the Data
	Beginning (Jun)	Mid (End of July)	End (Sep)	
1. Questionnaires	/			- Distributed to all fourth-year Chinese students (22 students).
2. Interviews with students	/	/	/	- Audio-taped and transcribed interviews. - 18 interviews in total. - Average 1 hour each.
3. Interviews with lecturers and administrators			/	- Audio-taped and transcribed interviews. - 6 interviews in total. - Average 1 hour each.
4. Reflective journals	/	/	/	- Written journals.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study consisted of the analysis of the questionnaires, the transcription of the recorded data from the individual interview tapes, and the reflective journals responses. The researcher conceptualized the analytic procedures in terms of the following modes: (3.4.1) organizing the data, (3.4.2) generating categories and themes, and (3.4.3) triangulating data from different sources and methods. I engaged in these modes of analysis in an on-going, cyclic fashion throughout the research project including the data collection

phase. I have discussed how I engaged in each of the above modes of analysis in some detail as follows:

### **3.4.1 Organizing the data**

A creative act of analysis and decision-making was used during this phase. Before beginning to organize the data, I firstly did a general review of all information as recommended by three qualitative authors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Wolcott, 1994). Creswell (1997) further suggested that one should read through all collected information to obtain a sense of the overall data. Then, I created a separate file for each research tool: the questionnaire, interview, and reflective journal.

Regarding the questionnaire, the researcher used a descriptive analysis of the data, which were collated into Excel and organized depending on the students' personal information and the number of responses in each question. The evaluative statements on the Likert-type scales were allocated into choice responses.

The audiotape recordings of participant interviews were transcribed verbatim and were separated into three different files: students, lecturers, and administrators in order to look for unique characteristics, perspectives, and experiences that made each person a case unto him/herself. The researcher listened to the responses to make sure that what the participants said was transcribed correctly. Then, transcribed data were read and re-read to write a summary of the interpretations and were taken back to the respondents to check for accuracy.

After the participants returned the data with any necessary corrections, the researcher reread the transcription to identify recurrent themes. Data from the reflective journals were collated and grouped into each question.

### **3.4.2 Generating categories and themes**

Another important approach to reducing the data is to develop categories, themes, and patterns and to sort text into categories (Creswell, 1997). The

number of responses in the questionnaire, collated data from open-ended questions in the questionnaire, the transcribed interview, and the grouped answers of each question in the reflective journals were reviewed by the researcher multiple times to obtain the most important themes and tentative categories. Creswell (1997) proposed that a researcher should start to develop a short list of tentative categories that match a text segment, and then expand the categories as he/she continues to review and re-review his/her database.

After the data collection was completed and certain recurring themes were identified, the research questions were used as a guide to form categories. Six major categories were constructed: (1) the reasons for choosing a university outside of China, (2) the participants' perspectives on how the Chinese students' home country background contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences, (3) the differences between MSU and GXUN teaching and learning approaches, (4) the students' adjustment problems, (5) the strategies they used to adjust to an indigenous academic and cultural environment, and (6) the participants' suggestions for the university to help students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme. Under each category, a group of themes were constructed from the participants' common responses with the same implied meaning.

The researcher utilized the 'constant comparative method' to create categories and themes. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) confirmed that this type of analysis is helpful for a researcher to use a whole dataset to identify underlying themes presented through the data. After reading through the entire set of data, the researcher constantly compared units of data, the bits of information obtained from the respondents in the form of comments and expressions, and sorted them into groupings that had something in common (Merriam, 1998). These bits of common information were grouped by similarity, and a theme was identified and documented based on each grouping. Then, the theme was added to the relevant categories.

There are many important guidelines that can be helpful for determining the efficacy of categories gained from the constant comparative method (Merriam,

1998). Some of these guidelines align with this study: (1) Categories should reflect the purpose of the research and should provide the answers to the research questions; (2) Categories should be exhaustive: all data collected from the study should fit into at least one category; and (3) Categories were sensitized, for example by naming the categories to match the content. In my study, categories were formed based on the research questions (see Appendix I). For example the category “adjustment problems” was formed based on the fourth research question that asked the participants what they perceive students’ adjustment problems to be in the first year.

Themes were formed by grouping the responses of the participants, arranging them by common or similar implied understanding of the connected underlying idea and grouping them under the relevant category they belonged to (see Appendix J). For example responses like the difficulties in writing Thai poetry, inability to understand the lecturers, and weaknesses in Thai language skills were grouped together to form the theme “academic problems” because it implied that the participants were talking about the difficulties in education. This theme was placed under the category “adjustment problems” because the participants perceived it as a problem.

### **3.4.3 Triangulating data from different sources and methods**

After grouping data from each research tool, the triangulation approach was utilized to analyse the data. As Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) stated the importance of triangulation that it is “a means of improving the rigor of the analysis by assessing the integrity of the inferences that one draws from more than one vantage point” (p. 579), they believed that the concept of triangulation also should be extended to data analysis tools.

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) indicated that there are two major rationales for using this technique: representation and legitimation. Representation is defined as the ability to extract sufficient meaning from the underlying data by using multiple qualitative data analysis techniques (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007), while legitimation refers to the trustworthiness, credibility, dependability,

confirmability, and/or transferability of the inferences made (Egon, 1981; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004).

This study used multiple qualitative data analyses from the interviews of students, lecturers, and administrators which involved cross-checking for internal consistency or reliability of the data (Jick, 1979). Additionally, the researcher utilized analysed data from the transcribed interviews and those from the reflective journals to check against the questionnaire results. This allows the researcher to use the strengths of each qualitative data analysis tool involved in order to have a better understanding of the students' adjustment experiences and also gave the researcher added opportunity to generate more meaning (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

To sum up, the utilization of the above data analysis procedures allows the researcher to gain valid and rigorous results for the study and understand the students' adjustment experiences to the Thai educational and sociocultural environment.

### **3.5 Data Reliability and Validity**

Reliability traditionally refers to the extent to which research results can be replicated (Merriam, 1998). However, she claimed that this is problematic in qualitative research because behaviour and thoughts are constantly changing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that reliability can be viewed as the dependability or consistency of the results. I have attempted to increase dependability and consistency of this study by giving an explicit description of how the data were collected and how decisions were made as well as my position as the researcher (Merriam, 1998).

The thesis resolves the concerns of confirmability, or "whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another" (C. Marshall & Rossman, 1995) by utilizing two strategies. First, I have made an attempt to explain the theoretical perspectives I mention in my study (Chapter 2), my positions in relation to the research site and the participants, and the basis for choosing the participants and describing who they are (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Second, I gave

many opportunities to the Chinese students to check or confirm my findings every time I interviewed them and also to read the transcript drafts of their answers. The lecturers and the administrators also had a chance to check and read the findings. Moreover, after generating categories and themes, the researcher undertook member checking (Merriam, 1998) with the participants by asking if the themes accurately described their statements (Janesick, 2000; Merriam, 1998), leading to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992). The rigor and trustworthiness of findings can be improved by member checking, which helps to insure consistency in the approach and weightings used by both researcher and participant(s) through a process which has been called "descriptive triangulation".

The researcher used a triangulated approach to analyse the data from the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals (see section 3.4). As data and methodological triangulation were used in my study, the researcher classified the collected data into specific categories based on the research questions. In this stage, the researcher applied triangulation among different data sources and methodologies. Jonsen and Jehn (2009) claimed that the major purpose of triangulation is to eliminate biases and enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Moreover, Merriam (1991) pointed out that, "in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity" (p. 172). Additionally, the use of methodological triangulation can strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness of the research findings by combining the results from multiple forms of data analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

For this reason, triangulation was used in an attempt to more fully draw out the richness and complexity of the students' adjustment experiences by studying them from more than one perspective and by using various methods. It also helped in the process of verification and validation of the qualitative analysis by revealing the degree of consistency of findings that have been generated by different data-collection methods, and also by checking the

consistency of results coming from different data sources while using the same method.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for my research was gained by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (see Appendix G). The letter to the director of the Confucius Institute at MSU (Thai Section) was sent first to ask for permission to collect data with Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners who were under the responsibility of Confucius Institute at MSU (see Appendix H).

In accordance with university ethical guidelines all the participants, including the Chinese students, their lecturers, and administrators, were provided with copies of the Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix A) and Consent Form (see Appendix B). Signed consent was received from all participants prior to the beginning of the study. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and their responses, I followed these steps:

- Participants were allowed to pick their own pseudonyms.
- Student participants were assured that participation or non-participation would not influence their grade or relationship with the university.
- I am the only person who can access the recorded interviews of the participants.
- All materials related to the interviews have been secured safely during the course of the study and after the completion of the study.
- All participants were assured that the information they provided would be used to fulfil the aims of research only.

In conclusion, the above issues were addressed to ensure that the participants' identities remained confidential.

### **3.7 Researcher's Identity**

When choosing to study the adjustment experiences of Chinese students it was clear that there would be elements of cultural and world viewpoint differences to be overcome. Research that crosses cultural boundaries has particular issues of language and communication, power or custom which might separate the researcher and the participant (Ball, 1990; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991). Seidman (1991) suggests that these barriers can be overcome by being sensitive to issues which create mistrust and by showing respect and interest in the participants.

The researcher must also be sure that they understand their own background, viewpoints and biases, before exploring those of others (Agar, 1996; Ball, 1990; Rubin, 1995). Considering my qualifications to carry out the study:

From November 2006 to May 2007, I taught Thai to Chinese students in China and this spurred personal reflection and change as I adjusted to a new culture, and had my beliefs and assumptions challenged. Moreover, I have read widely on the Chinese people, their culture, and modern history and this, together with my experience living and working in China, as well as teaching Thai to numerous Chinese students in Thailand, have given me a good, varied, understanding of issues faced by the Chinese students.

I still remained aware that inherent limitations would mean that I could not have completed understanding of the experiences of my Chinese participants. Fortunately, I had a long-term, trusting, dynamic relationship with a Chinese student who has lived and studied Thai in Thailand for five years, and completed a Bachelor of Arts in Thai language at MSU. She agreed to answer any cultural questions and give insight and input where needed, as well as helping to translate for any communication difficulties.

Finally, as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Seidman (1991), I carried out a pilot study in 2010 before beginning the research study. The pilot study gave knowledge that formed the foundation for the design and method of



this study and I will discuss the pilot study and subsequent development in the following section.

Having considered the above criteria I was confident my background and experience had given me empathy and appreciation for the Chinese students in Thailand and enough self-understanding to succeed in my cross-cultural research.

### **3.8 Pilot Study**

The researcher utilized a pilot study to try out my research instruments. This allowed me to get advance warning about where the main research project could be unsuccessful, where research protocols might not be followed, and whether proposed research methods or instruments were inappropriate or too complicated (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Furthermore, the pilot study helped me develop and verify the final versions of my methods and instruments (Kelly & Denney, 1969).

The pilot study was conducted from 10 August, 2009 to 24 September, 2009. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to examine the students' adjustment experiences.

Before starting to collect the data for my pilot study, permission was obtained from the Faculty Dean and the lecturers of each course. As the researcher had been working with these people since 2004, it was particularly convenient to conduct this pilot study there. AUTECH ethics clearance was obtained and data collection began, using the following tools:

#### **3.8.1 Questionnaires**

Thirty-four questionnaires were distributed to Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners who were studying in the major Thai as a Foreign Language. Before starting to fill in the questionnaires, the questionnaires were explained to them by a colleague.

### **3.8.2 Reflective journals**

Five female students volunteered to participate in the pilot study. They were informed that writing a reflective journal for three weeks was one of the research methods. They were provided with a set of questions to help define the scope for their writing. They could respond in whichever language they preferred. Whereas four of them wrote in Thai, only one student wrote in Chinese.

### **3.8.3 In-depth interview**

Three sets of interview questions regarding the students' perspectives on studying abroad were used for informal interviews with the five cases and each interview lasted approximately 1.30 hour. Two students were interviewed per day because of their available time. Apart from interviewing these cases, lecturers and administrators' perspectives were also explored. Each case took approximately an hour.

### **3.8.4 Class observation**

The student participants were observed in class for three subjects taught by the focal lecturers. For each subject, they were observed three times within two months. The participants' behaviours were recorded on an observation protocol (see Appendix F). The researcher's role in class was a non-participant observer.

### **3.8.5 The main findings of pilot study**

The key results are summarized in Table 4 as follows:

**Table 4: Pilot study's key results**

No.	Research question	Answer
1	Why do some students choose MSU, which is in a diverse multilingual population, with social and cultural conditions so unfamiliar to the majority of international students? Larger (less selective) numbers choose universities in a big province like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Chonburi.	The students chose MSU because of the quality of education, international recognition, good environment and accommodation, and friends/relative suggestion.
2	What differences do Chinese non-native Thai learners report between Thailand and Chinese university teaching and learning approaches?	The differences between Thailand and Chinese university teaching and learning approaches that they reported are teaching style, learning style, classroom regulation, load of assignments, period of study, punctuality of lecturers, and academic evaluation.
3	What do they perceive as their adjustment problems in the first year at MSU?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- They are not satisfied with access to the internet in their dormitory.</li><li>- Most of their educational activities are slightly difficult.</li><li>- The computer services at the university are poor.</li><li>- It is difficult to make friend with Thai people.</li></ul>
4	What strategies do they use to adjust to a Thai academic & cultural environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Financial issue -&gt; The students budgeted their expenses.</li><li>- Academic issue -&gt; Though the lecturers taught them something they found difficult, they still obeyed the lecturers' instructions and attended the class as usual.</li><li>- Social issue -&gt; The students have tried to make a new Thai friend.</li></ul>
5	How do they think their Chinese background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Though most of student participants' parents did not play any role in their selection to study Thai, they always support their children to get a higher education and to concentrate on their study as much as they can. They believe this will help their children to get a good job and have a happy life in the future. The financial status of all students' families allows them to support the students' education very well.</li></ul>

No.	Research question	Answer
6	What suggestions do they have for administrators to help them overcome their adjustment problems and for improving the program?	<p>- Whenever the students come to the administrators' office to contact them about their business, they often pay respect to the administrators and treat them like their senior lecturers. This action, sometimes, is opposite to that of Thai students. They do not pay respect to the administrators because they think that these people are not a lecturer. They are just a university staff. - The Chinese students are more diligent and have are more determined than Thai students. Thus, they are rarely absent from class.</p> <p>- The lecturers and the administrators should help the students find more Thai friends.</p> <p>- The administrators should help students when they face a problem in the dormitory.</p> <p>- The faculty should handle the registration process faster.</p>
7	What implications emerge from these responses in regard to the administration of such programs?	<p>- MSU should improve the computing access so that the students can access the internet.</p> <p>- If other Chinese students would like to study Thai at MSU, they should be able to find more information concerning the content of study by themselves.</p> <p>- The curriculum of Thai as a foreign language needs to be improved and some courses altered to match the demands of the students and the employment market.</p>

After doing the pilot study, I found that some parts of the research questions, questionnaire, interview questions and questions for reflective journals were redundant and repetitive. Therefore, before doing the main study, some wording and content of the research questions and research tools needed to be changed. Table 5 presents a summary of what needed to be changed and the reasons for changing it.

**Table 5: Information needed to change**

No.	What needed to change?	Why?
1	Some wording in the research questions	To cover all the research tools used in collecting data and the suggestions of the students, lecturers and administrators
2	Some choices and content in the questionnaire and interview questions for the students, lecturers and administrators	To answer all research questions
3	Observation protocol will not be used in this research because the class observation method seemed to be unnecessary and too specific to the student participants' academic adjustment. Gaining research data from the questionnaire; in-depth interviews with students, lecturers and administrators, and the focal students' reflective journals was deemed sufficient for answering the research questions.	After observing three classes three times, I could not find any interesting issues concerning their academic adjustment. Being a non-participant observer, it was quite difficult to observe just their physical behaviour. Due to the number of students and my sitting position, it was also hard to investigate all focal students.

To conclude, the pilot study allowed the researcher to not only develop a research question and research plan (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002), but also to improve and verify the completed research tools and methods before using them to collect data.

### **3.9 Conclusion to Methodology**

This chapter has presented the research design and illustrated the data collection procedures in detail. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches was utilized to take advantage of the strengths of each approach and overcome the limitations found in previous studies. A triangulation strategy was adopted to draw benefit from combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The data and methodological triangulation was applied to add rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to the research data and to contribute

to the verification and validation of data analysis. Ethical considerations were included to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Having described the research methodology of this study, I will present the findings in the next three chapters. First, Chapter 4 will show key findings and discussion regarding the students' decisions to choose MSU and the way they think that their home country background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences, and then Chapter 5 will present the findings and a discussion regarding the differences between the teaching and learning approaches of the Thai university (MSU) and those of the Chinese university (GXUN) and the adjustment problems perceived by the participants. Finally, Chapter 6 will illustrate the strategies that the students have used to cope with their adjustment difficulties and the suggestions, as made by all participants, for ways to help ameliorate these difficulties.

## **Chapter 4 Reasons for Choosing a University Outside of China and How the Students' Home Country Background Contributed to or Hindered Their Adjustment Experiences**

This chapter provides the results and discussion concerning the information students had before they came to Thailand. This information is divided into two major sections:

4.1 The reasons for choosing a university outside of China for their undergraduate studies.

4.2 The participants' perspective on how the Chinese students' home country background contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences.

### **4.1 The Reasons for Choosing a University Outside of China for their Undergraduate Studies.**

#### **Results**

This issue was probed using the research question, "Why do students choose a university outside of China for their undergraduate studies?" which was raised to explore the students' expectations of coming to study in a different country. In order to understand these expectations, the following subsidiary questions were investigated: (4.1.1) The reasons the Chinese students decided to come to Thailand, and (4.1.2) The reasons they chose to study at MSU instead of other Thai universities.

The in-depth interview method was utilized to answer the first subsidiary question, and then, question 4.1.2 was considered using the replies given through both the questionnaires and interviews.

#### **4.1.1 The reasons the Chinese students decided to come to Thailand**

The six respondents were asked in their interviews at the beginning of the semester about their reasons for undertaking an education overseas. Data from the students' interviews revealed that the students had predominantly decided

to undertake an education overseas because of the opportunity to travel and the benefit for their future careers.

S1 replied that she would like to study abroad to broaden her worldview. Coming to study in Thailand would let her have more opportunity to speak Thai than living in China. S1 indicated that she wanted to learn Thai because she felt that Thai language was important for her future career in China because China and Thailand have been doing business together. Learning Thai would help her to be able to work in a Chinese-Thai company in China or start her own international business with Thai people.

S1: I want to further my study abroad because I would like to *broaden my worldview* more than I would by just staying in China. (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S2 identified that she decided to come to Thailand because she would like to study there. Her lecturers in China recommended MSU because it provides a good quality of teaching. She stated her reasons for learning Thai were that she liked studying the language very much. In addition, there were many Thai people doing business in Nanning city where she lived and learning Thai would therefore benefit her future employment in China as well.

S2: I decided to come to Thailand because of the *quality of education*. My lecturers in China suggested that MSU was a *good quality institution*. I feel that the Thai *language* is important, so, I want to learn Thai. Nowadays, Thai and China are doing more and more business together. Studying Thai will be useful for me to get a *job in the future*. (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

Similarly, S3 liked studying the Thai language. He preferred speaking several local dialects in his hometown where there were six dialects altogether. Therefore, his parents suggested that he should study a language. Of the language courses available at his university, Thai and Vietnamese were the options considered most useful in a business career and he felt that learning Thai would be more advantageous for his future because only a few people in his hometown could speak Thai, whereas many local people could speak Vietnamese. Studying Thai would give him more employment opportunities



when returning to his hometown. Therefore, he wanted to learn Thai instead of other languages.

In contrast to those three students, S4, S5, and S6 said their main reasons for studying in Thailand were to travel around the country and learn about Thai culture. S4 stated that while he was studying in high school in China, he watched a television program about Thai tourism and felt that Thailand was very beautiful. Thus, he wanted to learn Thai so that he could travel to Thailand.

S4: I like the idea of *travelling* around Thailand because of all the beautiful places there, so I chose to study Thai language and come to Thailand. (Transcripts 26/09/2010)

Similar to S4, S5 read some textbooks and saw beautiful pictures of Thailand. This motivated him to learn Thai in order to have an opportunity to travel around Thailand. S6, who also stated the same reasons as S4 and S5, pointed out that he wanted to learn Thai not only because of an opportunity to travel, but also its popularity among Chinese students. Moreover, he felt that Thai pronunciation was nicer and Thai language seemed to be easier than other languages he knew. These caused him to choose to study Thai language and decide to come to Thailand.

Overall, the students' reasons to come to Thailand reflected their beliefs that they could gain both a personal (e.g. travel opportunity) and a professional advantage (e.g. future employment).

#### **4.1.2 The reasons they chose to study at MSU instead of other Thai universities**

The questionnaires' findings from all students showed that 17 students (77%) chose MSU as their first choice, while five students (23%) mentioned that they had first chosen other universities. The students were asked to rank how important the reasons they chose to study at MSU were. Figure 10 presents the ranking priority that the students gave for their reasons. The evaluation scale ranges from 1 (not at all important) to 6 (extremely important). The mid-point range of 3 therefore represents factors of moderate importance.

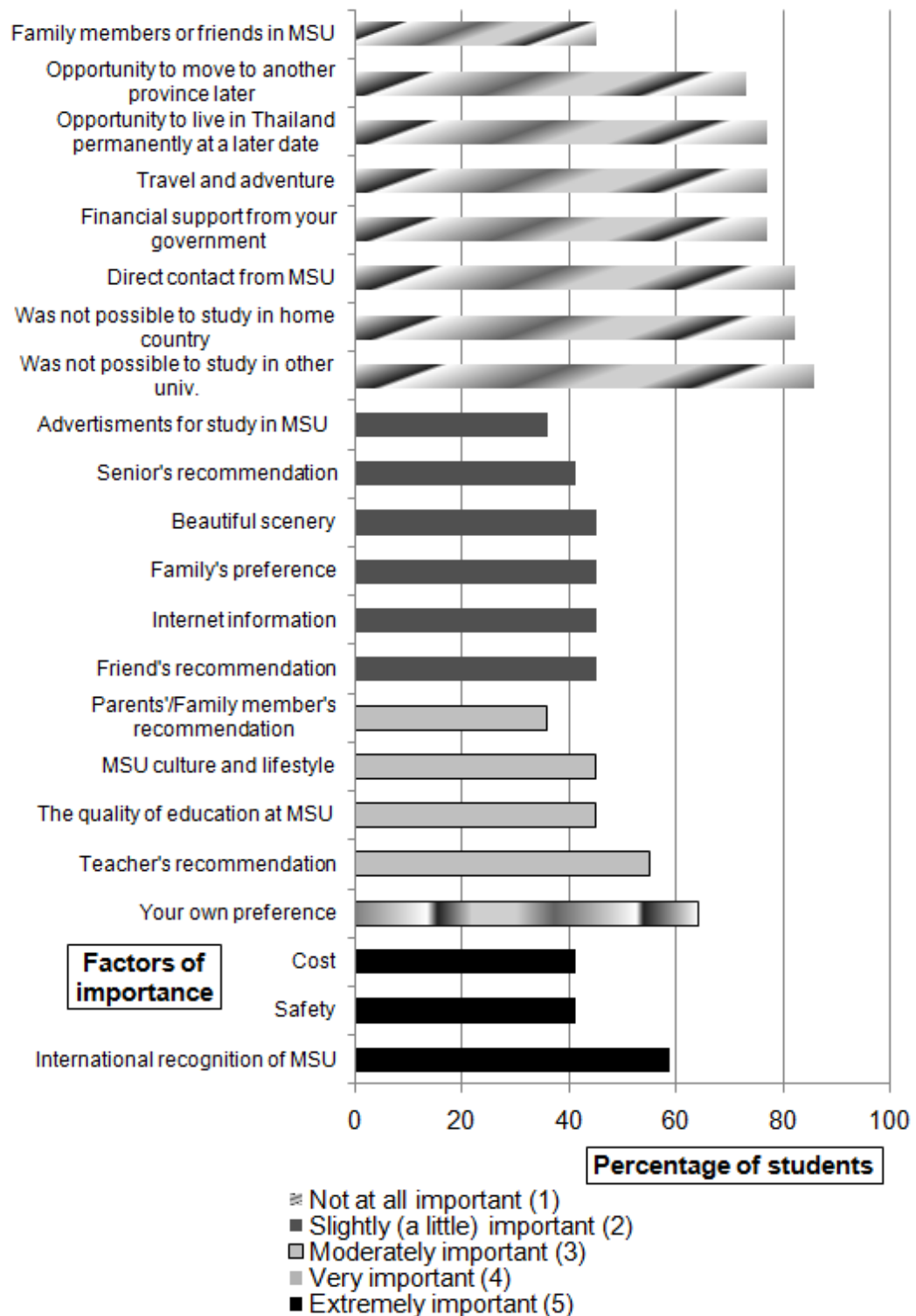


Figure 10: Ranking priority the students gave to each of their reasons

*International recognition of MSU* was ranked by 59% of students as an 'extremely important' reason for choosing to study at MSU, followed by *cost* (41%), and *safety* (41%). *Your own preference* was rated as 'very important' by 64% of students, while another four 'moderately important' reasons were *teacher's recommendation* (55%), *MSU culture and lifestyle* (45%), *the quality of education at MSU* (45%), and *parents'/family members' recommendation* (36%).

In addition to the questionnaire results, all students (S1-S6) added more detail in their interviews. S1, S3, S4, and S5 mentioned the lifestyle at MSU. S1 said that she felt the weather in Bangkok would be hot and the traffic would be busy and that this would make people hot-tempered. She did not want to study in this environment. Moreover, there were many shopping opportunities in Bangkok, which she felt could distract her while studying. Therefore, she said would like to come to a quiet place like MSU where she understood that the environment would make her life calmer.

Similarly, S3, S4, and S5 replied that they chose MSU because it was close to Bangkok. They did not want to live in Bangkok because of its traffic jams and crowded nature.

S3: MSU is close to Bangkok. I couldn't live in Bangkok because I don't like traffic jams. I like the *environment at MSU*. (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3 also added that MSU was located in the north-eastern part of Thailand where there were only a few Chinese people and this environment would give him more opportunity to practice his Thai language skills than if he lived in Bangkok where there were a large number of Chinese. Moreover, people in Maha Sarakham (MHK) would pay more attention to him than those in Bangkok. In addition, S3 and S6 said that the cost of living at MSU was low and the tuition fees at MSU were cheaper than that at other Thai universities.

S2 mentioned the recommendations from lecturers and senior students in China. They suggested that she study at MSU because of its comfortable

accommodation and its convenience in commuting to and from the campus. While MSU arranged good accommodation for students, they had to find their own accommodation if they studied at other Thai universities. In addition, the accommodation would also be located far from the campus at other universities.

While S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 chose MSU as their first choice, S6 indicated in his questionnaire that he had chosen the 'University of Thai Chamber of Commerce'. He replied that the lecturers at this university took their responsibilities seriously and that the university's reputation was also very good and that its environment was also conducive for studying. However, when S6 was interviewed about the reason he chose MSU, he stated that his lecturers in China suggested it to him. They indicated that if he wanted to make good progress studying Thai and concentrate on his studies, he should come to MSU. It could provide him with a good quality of teaching and he would pay lower tuition fees at MSU than at other Thai universities.

All three lecturers viewed the low cost of living expenses as one of many reasons the Chinese students chose to study at MSU. L1 added that at MSU, the students could have more freedom because other universities may have stricter rules than this university. Similar to the students' opinions, L2 indicated that the students chose MSU due to the suggestion from their lecturers in China. They suggested that MSU was the most suitable place to live. Moreover, the Chinese lecturers who used to study at MSU were impressed in the quality of teaching and learning and its environment.

*L2: The Chinese students' lecturers and senior students who had been studying in MSU were impressed in the quality of teaching and learning and environment at MSU, so, they recommended MSU to other students. (Transcripts 27/09/2010).*

In addition to this reason, L2 replied that the personnel of MSU took good care of the Chinese students. This could be the reason that the senior students recommended MSU to their juniors. Besides the cheaper cost of living, L3 raised the safety of MSU as one reason why MSU was selected by the students.

L3: The important factors that influence the Chinese students to choose MSU are *safety and the cheaper living expenses*. (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

Considering the reasons given by the administrators, A1 indicated that the senior students suggested to the Chinese students that if they would like to truly concentrate on their study, they should come to MSU because there were few factors to distract them from studying.

A1: The students used to tell me that their *senior students recommended MSU* to them. Those senior students said that if they wanted to concentrate on their study, they should come here. (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

A2 gave the same reason as S6 that MSU provided a high quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, A3 stated a different reason, which was that the Chinese students who had graduated from MSU suggested that graduating from MSU would allow their juniors to get a job and a salary according to their qualification. A3 also added that MSU personnel did public relations at their university (Guangxi University of Nationalities [GXUN]), so, this could be the reason why the Chinese students chose MSU.

A3: One of many reasons is that MSU and GXUN had signed a cooperative learning programme and then MSU's officers *came and advertised this programme* to the Chinese students. (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

Considering the ranking priority the students gave to each of their reasons together with the interview results, the participants' reasons to study at MSU can be summarized as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Reasons they chose to study at MSU instead of other Thai universities**

No.	Reasons	Students	Lecturers	Admin.
1	MSU culture and lifestyle	45% Interviews: S1, S3, S4, & S5	L1	
2	Cost	41%, S2, S5, & S6 Interviews: S3 & S6	L1, L2, & L3	
3	Teacher's recommendation	55%, S2 & S4 Interviews: S2	L2	A1
4	The quality of education at MSU	41%, S2 Interviews: S6		A2
5	Safety	41%, S2, S5, & S6	L3	
6	Advertisement for study in MSU	36%, S3		A3

Table 6 shows that some of the reasons the Chinese students, lecturers, and administrators stated were similar. For example, S6 and A2 replied *the quality of education at MSU*, while the students and all lecturers mentioned *cost*. *Teacher's recommendations* appeared to be the only single reason that all participants gave. However, the data gained from the lecturers and administrators' interviews added extra reasons to the students' questionnaires and interviews as well (*safety* from L3 and *advertisement from MSU* from A3).

In addition to those rankings, more than three quarters of students indicated that the following reasons were 'not at all important' for them to choose MSU as their study destination: (1) *No possibility to study in other universities* (86%), (2) *No possibility to study in home country* (82%), (3) *Direct contact from MSU* (82%), (4) *Financial support from your government* (77%), (5) *Travel and adventure* (77%); and (6) *Opportunity to live in Thailand permanently at a later date* (77%).

Overall, it can be concluded that the students did not anticipate immigrating to Thailand in the future. In addition, they still had the option to study in other universities in Thailand or in China if they did not choose to study at MSU.

### **Conclusion of the results**

Considering the similarities and the differences in the reasons given in the two reporting methods—the questionnaires and the interviews, it can be seen that in the students' interviews, they answered with broadly similar reasons to those given in their questionnaires. However, differences appeared in their interviews when they gave further explanation of the reasons they stated in their questionnaires. In relation to the students' responses, the lecturers and the administrators stated some reasons that were similar to those given by the students; however, they also added more reasons that the students had not mentioned.

To sum up, the answers of questions 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 related to the students' expectations of coming to study in a different country showed that at first they chose Thailand as their study destination in order to gain a personal and a professional advantage. Then, they chose MSU to be their study institution because of its international recognition, cost (cheaper expenses), and safety (environment). The low cost of tuition fees and living expenses appeared to respond to their expectations to travel as they could save money to achieve this goal, while the international recognition of MSU could benefit their future careers.

### **Discussion**

This research question relates to the Push-Pull model as it dealt with the international students' decisions to study abroad. This model has been utilized to understand international student flows, the decision or motivation to study abroad, and the international student's choice of country (Chen, 2007).

To understand the reasons for their decisions to come to Thailand, the interview method was applied. The reasons MSU was chosen were examined through the questionnaires and the interviews to get both general and in-depth answers from the Chinese students.

#### **4.1.1 The reasons they decided to come to Thailand for an overseas education**

The findings regarding the reasons the Chinese students decided to come to Thailand for their overseas education showed that most students made a decision to come to Thailand because of its culture and tourist attractions. Half of the six interviewees (S4, S5, and S6) stated that they wanted to travel and learn about Thai culture, while the rest of the interviewees looked forward to broadening their worldview (S1); studying in a good quality institution (S2); and gaining benefits for their future career (S1, S2, and S3).

Concerning the findings mentioned earlier, *the Thai culture* appears to be one of the major reasons that pulled the Chinese students to come to Thailand. While they were studying in high school in China they had the opportunity to watch a television program about Thai tourism and had seen beautiful pictures of Thailand in some textbooks, giving them the motivation to learn Thai so that they could travel around Thailand. This indicated that *the Thai culture* was the main reason that attracted them to come to Thailand. The findings were supported by Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) and Chen's (2007) statement as they identified that 'pull' factors make a host country attractive to international students.

Additionally, the findings appear to support Eder, Smith, and Pitts's (2010) study where the culture of the United States was regarded as a pull factor. Eder et al. (2010) stated that culture can be realized through the behaviour of the people of a country. Their participants had an opportunity to experience the behaviour of the American people while interacting in an academic environment. Therefore, they mostly mentioned the United States culture as a factor that attracted them to study in that country. Similarly, in the current study, the researcher regarded *the Thai culture* as a pull factor because it attracted the Chinese students to come to Thailand.

In addition to *the Thai culture*, *the importance of personal growth, language, and future career* were mentioned by the respondents in my study. S1 replied that studying abroad would broaden her worldview and benefit her future



employment opportunities. S2 and S3, who liked studying language and saw how Thai was important, wanted to come to Thailand to learn Thai language so that it could be useful for their future career. These findings lend support to Eder et al.'s (2010) results, where push factors were related to the importance of personal growth, language, and future career. Personal growth was mentioned by several respondents as the only reason for studying abroad. They stated that studying abroad was good for their worldview and for learning how to get along in a completely new environment. Additionally, language was ranked as the Number 1 reason why students chose the United States in Eder et al.'s study. The respondents claimed, "English is the most important language in the economy" (p. 239). This statement may be comparable with S3's reasons in choosing to learn the Thai language that it was an important language that could give him greater opportunity for employment in his hometown. This also related to the importance of future career as the respondents in my study believed that studying abroad could contribute to their future employment opportunities.

With regard to the findings, in both the current study and in Eder et al.'s (2010) study concerning the reasons that the international students decided to further their education abroad, there is evidence of both 'push' and 'pull' factors, as proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). They claimed that the 'push' factors function within the source country and introduce a student's decision to undertake international study, while the 'pull' factors operate within a host country to make that country be relatively attractive to international students. In the current study, the importance of personal growth, language, and future career appeared to be a 'push' factor, whereas the Thai culture was regarded as a 'pull' factor.

#### **4.1.2 The reasons they chose to study at MSU instead of other Thai universities**

A set of reasons for choosing MSU was determined by the researcher for the students to rank in level of importance. The findings of this ranking priority showed that *international recognition of MSU* (59%) was ranked as an

‘extremely important’ reason for choosing MSU. The findings appear to support Eder et al.’s (2010) results that issues concerning the importance of college recognition were reported as the Number 1 reason to choose the host university in their study.

*Safety* was another ‘extremely important’ reason ranked by 41% of all students. It could be classed as ‘the environment’ (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) or ‘physical geography’ (Eder, Smith, et al., 2010). *Safety*, together with *the environment* mentioned earlier by the majority of students choosing MSU as their first choice, seemed to be the most important reason attracting students to MSU. They may be considered as the pull factors associated with the characteristics of the host country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These findings appear to support those of Mazzarol and Soutar’s (2002) , Eder et al.’s (2010), Yang’s (2007), and Chen’s (2007) studies in which ‘the environmental issue’ was stated as one of the pull factors that made that country or institution relatively attractive to international students .

However, the findings of this current study do not fully support the results from Mazzarol and Soutar’s (2002) , Eder et al.’s (2010), and Yang’s (2007) studies. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) stated that their respondents perceived the importance of environment as a low influence reason compared to the other influencing reasons like knowledge and awareness of the host, recommendations from friends and relatives, and cost issues. In addition, Eder et al. (2010) indicated that the importance of physical geography of the United States was not ranked as one of the most important factors. Moreover, Yang (2007), whose study is about the push and pull factors of Chinese students to Australian higher education, identified that lower level of racial discrimination in the Australian environment as the least significant reason for her respondents.

It is possible that though the ‘pull’ factor in the present study and the ‘pull’ factor in Mazzarol and Soutar’s (2002) study initially appear to correspond exactly, the actual degree of influence that this factor carries may vary in different contexts. Another possibility is that the participants in those studies came from various countries, educational backgrounds, and age groups--Mazzarol and Soutar’s

(2002) study surveyed Indonesian, Taiwanese, Indian, and Chinese students bound for secondary schools, vocational education and training programs, English language intensive courses for overseas students, and undergraduate and postgraduate studies; Eder et al.'s (2010) participants were from both European and Asian countries with different major areas of study; and Yang's (2007) respondents' age divided into two age groups--23 and over (90%) and 19-22 years (10%), with 70% postgraduate students and 30% undergraduate students. This would make the findings of the current study not directly comparable with those of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Eder et al. (2010), and Yang (2007), since the students had different personal characteristics (Li & Bray, 2007). *Cost* was also ranked by 41% of all students as an 'extremely important' reason for choosing MSU. This finding lends support to the results of Yang's (2007) study that the competitive lower tuition fees and cost of living is one of the most important factors motivating her participants to study in Australia.

S1 and S4 added more detail about this issue in their interviews. S3, who did not give any answers in his questionnaire, replied through his interview that MSU was chosen because of its environment (or lifestyle at MSU).

*The cheaper expenses and the lecturers' and senior students' recommendations* were also mentioned during the students' interviews. In addition, the interviews of lecturers and administrators added reasons not provided in the students' interviews. While L3 indicated *safety* as one reason the Chinese students chose MSU, A3 answered *advertisements from MSU*.

The findings of the students' reasons for selecting MSU seemed to focus on the importance of the lecturers and the senior students' recommendations because this was mentioned by all three sources of data (see Table 6 on page 135). Out of all the students, two gave replies in their questionnaires indicating that the lecturers and senior students in China suggested MSU to them. S2 also identified that those two groups of people recommended MSU to her in her interview. While L2 said the same as S2, A1 only mentioned the senior students as people who had an influence on the Chinese students' decisions.

Thus, this appeared to reveal that the lecturers and senior students in China may be an important source that could influence the Chinese students' decisions.

These findings were supported by Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) and Eder et al.'s (2010) results. Mazzarol and Soutar studied the factors that influenced international student choice of study destinations. They found that word-of-mouth referral was one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can utilize. Parents and relatives graduating from a particular university and enjoying the experience were likely to suggest it to their children, other family members, or friends. Therefore, the authors claimed that the personal recommendations or word-of-mouth-referrals of former alumni were likely to be a key influence on the students' decisions. Furthermore, Eder et al. (2010) claimed that the majority of their respondents (16 out of 21 students) based their decisions on the recommendations and experiences of their friends or former students at the institution. Regarding this issue, it may be useful to examine the extent to which students communicate with these people about their experiences studying abroad and it may be necessary to formalize the process by which lecturers and senior students share information about their experiences with international students. This may help the international education institutions find strategies to attract prospective students.

In addition to those rankings of reasons, more than 80% of students responded that the reason of 'was not possible to study in home country' was 'not at all important'. This finding does not lend support to the findings from Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) and Yang's (2007) studies. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identified 'lack of access to higher education' as the 'push' factor that influenced people's movement, while Yang (2007) stated 'low education capacity in China' as one of the 'push' factors motivating her student participants to study in Australia. It is possible that the participants in those studies were from a less developed country than their chosen destination for studying abroad. For students in less developed nations, limited access to education in their own

nations led to a significant rise in the number of international students studying abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Another possible explanation for the participants' responses is that they may have been able to study Thai language in China if they did not come to Thailand, as Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) indicated that the Chinese government policy had seen an important upgrading of the local supply-side of education at all levels. This trend was likely to continue and many host country institutions also participated in this policy by developing their branch campuses in China (Bank, 1992). In addition, Thai-language courses appear to be popular in China due to the increasing number of Thai tourists going to China each year, as well as growing business connections between these two countries ("Growing number of Chinese students study in Thailand," 2006). These may be the reasons for the availability of Thai language courses in China.

With regard to the findings, from both the current study and from Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002), Eder et al.'s (2010), and Yang's (2007) studies, concerning the ranking priority which the students gave to their reasons to study abroad, the ranking related strongly to the 'push' and 'pull' factors as proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). Regarding the 'push' factors, the findings from the current study showed that the reason of *was not possible to study in home country* was a 'not at all important' 'push' factor for the Chinese students. On the contrary, those participants from Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) and Yang's (2007) studies claimed this issue as the 'push' factor for their participants. Considering the 'pull' factors, the results of the current study and those of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002), Eder et al.'s (2010), and Yang's (2007) studies consistently found that *the environmental issue* appeared to be a 'pull' factor. However, the participants of each study gave different degrees of importance to this issue. While the participants in the present study ranked this issue as the most important reason that attracted them to choose MSU, those in Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002), Eder et al.'s (2010), and Yang's (2007) studies claimed it had little influence on them. The importance of various factors to individuals, therefore, appears to relate not only to that factor itself, but also to how it fits into the wider interaction

of multiple factors, which combine to influence how attractive a choice is to each individual student.

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

The answers to this research question showed the reasons the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners decided to come to Thailand for an overseas education and the reasons they chose to study at MSU. The results have been considered in relation to relevant previous studies. The study confirmed that the Thai culture, the importance of personal growth, language, and future career were the students' reasons for coming to further their study in Thailand. In addition, they selected MSU as their first choice because of the physical environment of the university. The results also bring out the important influence of word of mouth flowing back to the home country from students currently studying at the host university, or from those who have studied there in the past.

## **4.2 The Participants' Perspective on How the Chinese Students' Home Country Background Contributed to or Hindered their Adjustment Experiences**

### **Results**

This issue was probed using the research question, "How do the participants think that students' home country background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences?" which relates to skills, attitudes, personality traits, and socio-biographical background as the factors contributing to cross-cultural adjustment. To find the answers of this research question, the participants were asked about their personal, family, and academic background, including what they think about Thailand and Thai language and their future plans. The findings of this question begin with: (4.2.1) Personal background of students; (4.2.2) Family background of students; (4.2.3) The participants' perspective on the students' home country background; (4.2.4) Academic background prior to coming to MSU; (4.2.5) Attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language; and (4.2.6) Future plans.

Data of the students' demographic characteristics (section 4.2.1) were gained from the questionnaires, while that of their family background (section 4.2.2),

academic background (section 4.2.4), and future plans (section 4.2.6) were obtained through the questionnaires and the interviews. Section 4.2.3 presents the findings from interviews and reflective journals and section 4.2.5 shows the interviews' results.

#### **4.2.1 Personal background of students**

The demographic information on the students obtained through the questionnaires was needed to explore and understand their backgrounds before they had a cross-cultural transition to Thailand. Table 2 in Chapter 3 on page 107 presents a summary of the Chinese respondents' background information concerning their demographic data and overseas experiences.

According to the questionnaire responses, the personal backgrounds of the student participants were that 55% of them were 22 years old and 77% were female students. Their place of origin was Guangxi, China. In addition, their first language was Chinese (Mandarin) (86%). After completing the current program of studies, more than half of students planned to study or work in Thailand for about 1-2 years (55%). Nine percent indicated that they intended to live in Thailand for five years or more.

In terms of the students' overseas experiences, all students responded that this was the first time they had studied overseas. Apart from their home country and Thailand, 82% (including S2, S3 and S6) had never been to other countries. Only 18% (including S1, S4, and S5) had been to 1-2 other countries.

In summary, it can be seen that the students were all from Guangxi, China, mostly Mandarin speakers in their early 20s, just above three quarters of them were female, and they had generally not travelled abroad before.

In this area, the Zhuang language is widely spoken. As many scholars have indicated, Zhuang and Thai languages are closely related to each other. Student participants commented:

S2: 'I think some words of Thai language are *like Zhuang language*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3: 'The first time I heard Thai language, I felt that it was *the same as the Zhuang language* that I was familiar with. This made me think that studying Thai might be easier than studying English. What's more, *Thai grammatical structure is similar to Chinese*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

Additionally, a lecturer noted:

L2: 'Those students whose family members used the *Zhuang language* to communicate would have *more advantages* than other Chinese students in studying the Thai language, especially in terms of pronunciation and some vocabulary. It is because *the phonetics and vocabulary of Zhuang language are close to those in Thai*' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

This shows that the similarity in the two languages was recognised by both groups of participants.

#### **4.2.2 Family background of students**

To learn more about the students' family background, the following issues were explored in detail: (4.2.2.1) Financial background, and (4.2.2.2) Family interest in the students' progress. The findings of 4.2.2.1 and those of 4.2.2.2 were obtained from the questionnaires and interviews.

##### **4.2.2.1 Financial background**

The findings about the students' financial background are presented in Table 7, beginning with data from the questionnaires (the number of family members in Thailand, supporters, payment difficulties, and current financial satisfaction) and ending with that from the interviews concerning their family financial status (when they were young and after they grew up).

More than half of the students reported that they had no family member in Thailand (69% and S1, S3, S4 and S6). All students indicated that their education in Thailand was paid for by their parents. Just above three quarters of students found payment for their education in Thailand difficult for their parents (76% and S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6). Overall, 86% and S1, S2, S3, and S4 indicated that they were satisfied with their current financial situation.



The data gathered from the interviews revealed that the students predominantly had a comfortable life. When S1 talked about her family background, she said she was born into a business family and when she was young, she faced hardships because her parents had just started their business. After growing up, her life had changed to be more comfortable.

S1: 'When I was young, I faced hardship because my parents had just started their business. I had to live with my grandparents. After growing up, my parents had a *better income* from the business. Therefore, my life has changed to be *more comfortable*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S2 was also born in a business family but her life had been affluent since she was young.

S2: 'My life has been *affluent* since I was young. Though my parents hadn't started doing their business at that time, our life was *comfortable*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

Similarly, S3 described his life as extremely comfortable. S4 and S5 had also had a comfortable life since they were young. In contrast his friends' family backgrounds, S6 had had a difficult life. His father did not work while his mother was ill.

With regard to the students' financial background, it can be seen that though the students had difficulties in paying for their education in Thailand, they were still satisfied with their current financial situation and had a comfortable life.

**Table 7: Students' financial background**

Students	Questionnaires			Interviews	
	Financial background			Family financial status	
	No. of family member in Thailand	Supporter	Difficulty	Satisfaction	
All students	69% None	Parents	76% Difficult	86% Satisfied	
S1	None	Parents	Difficult	Satisfied	- Young - faced hardship. - Grown up - comfortable life.
S2	Other	Parents	Difficult	Satisfied	- Young - affluent. - Grown up - affluent.
S3	None	Parents	Difficult	Satisfied	- Young - extremely comfortable. - Grown up - extremely comfortable.
S4	None	Parents	Difficult	Satisfied	- Young - comfortable life. - Grown up - comfortable life.
S5	Brother/Sister	Parents	Difficult	Not at all	- Young - comfortable life. - Grown up - comfortable life.
S6	None	Parents	Difficult	Not at all	- Young - comfortable life. - Grown up - had a difficult life.

#### **4.2.2.2 Family interest in the students' study progress**

Questionnaires and interviews revealed the students' family interest in their studies progress and are presented in Table 8, beginning with the results from the questionnaires, followed by those from the interviews.

Data from the questionnaires showed the level of importance of the students' families to their studies in GXUN and in MSU. At GXUN, the results were weighted towards positive responses, with 78% considering that success in their studies was 'moderately' to 'extremely' important to their families. At MSU, the results from all students showed an even spread of answers with no one answer strongly favoured. Among the student participants, S1, S5 and S6 indicated a higher rate of their family importance levels when they studied in MSU. Conversely, S4 reduced the importance of family from an 'extremely important' rating in China to 'very important' in MSU.

The findings from the students' interviews also showed that their parents gave full support to their continued education, as they perceived its importance for their children's life. According to S1, S3, S4, and S5:

S1: 'My parents want me to further my study as much as possible if I have the ability to do that. They think that *education is very important* for my life' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3 and S5: 'My parents have an attitude that *education is the most important thing* in my life' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S4: 'My parents perceive that *studying in Thailand would benefit my fortunes* because after graduation it would be easy for me to find a good job' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

Regarding the role of parents, though S6's parents had little understanding of his study, they let him choose what he wanted to study, approved of his actions, and gave him their support.

S6: 'My parents had no idea about my study because they had little knowledge of higher education. But, they always *agree with my decisions, approve what I have done, allow me to choose what I want to study*, and the most important thing is that they always *give me their support*' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

**Table 8: Family interest in the students' study progress**

Students	Questionnaires		Interviews	
	Importance to family in		Family attitude toward study, Thai & travel	Role of parents
	GXUN	MSU		
All students	23% Extremely 32% Very 23% Moderately 18% Slightly 5% Not at all	27% Extremely 27% Very 18% Moderately 27% Slightly		-
S1	Moderately	Very	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted S1 to further her study if she had the ability.</li> <li>- Enjoyed their trip to Thailand, so wanted S1 to study Thai language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Let S1 make her own decision on studying.</li> <li>- Gave S1 their support.</li> </ul>
S2	Extremely	Extremely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted S2 to work hard and persevere in her studies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helped S2 make up her mind, but still let her choose what she wanted to study.</li> </ul>
S3	Slightly	Slightly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education was the most important issue of life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helped S3 decide what he should study &amp; supported him in his decision.</li> </ul>
S4	Extremely	Very	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studying in Thailand would be advantageous for his fortune &amp; easy to find a decent job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allowed S4 to select his own preference and gave him support.</li> </ul>
S5	Not at all	Very	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education was important for life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allowed S5 to select his own preference and gave him support.</li> </ul>
S6	Very	Extremely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had no idea about S6's study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allowed S6 to select his own preference and gave him support.</li> </ul>

Considering the family backgrounds of all the participants, it can be seen that their families realized how important education was to their children. They gave them a high level of support, though their personal attitudes to study were mixed. The expectation of these students' parents reinforced how significant their families were to the progression of their studies.

#### **4.2.3 Participants' perspective on the students' home country background**

The perspective of the participants will be presented as follows: (4.2.3.1) Students' perspective, and (4.2.3.2) Lecturers' and administrators' perspectives

##### ***4.2.3.1 Students' perspective on their home country background***

Table 9 presents a summary of the participants' perspective on their Chinese background.

Data from the interviews and reflective journals revealed that the students predominantly felt their home country background was hardworking, persistent, diligent, and self-responsible. Because of these background traits, they indicated that they could adjust to their lives in MHK.

**Table 9: Students' perspective on their home country background**

Students	Interviews	Reflective journals
S1	- Hardworking, persistent, and diligent.	- Due to her self-reliant manner since when she was young, she could deal with difficulties she faced in her studies without problem.
S2	- Persistent, hardworking, and diligent.	- Had a great deal of life experiences with her parents; knew how to solve various problems and how to adjust to society.
S3	- Self-responsible, Independent, persistent, hardworking, and diligent.	- He was taught to be able to live independently and help himself.
S4	- Self-responsible, persistent, hardworking, diligent, not afraid of difficulty.	- He had to be responsible for his own life since he studied at high school.
S5	- Dependent, diligent, persistent, and hardworking.	- Though sometimes he had faced financial difficulties, it had not hindered his adjustment experiences.
S6	- Self-responsible, persistent, and hardworking.	- He had to spend his money wisely and save as much as he could.

The students' answers to the interview questions and in the reflective journals expanded on their perspectives regarding the above backgrounds (hardworking, persistent, diligent, and self-responsible). In the interviews, all of the students mentioned that they typically went to review their lecture material and do their assignments at the university library. Though some assignments were more of a challenge, they tended to persevere and work things out for themselves first before seeking help from others, and always made an effort to finish those assignments on time. In addition, they emphasized that they had to be persistent and diligent. According to S1 and S3:

S1: 'There are loads of assignments which are quite difficult. Sometimes, I was very tired, but I have to *try to work on and complete them*. When I have free time after study, I will go to review my lessons and work on those assignments at the library' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3: 'I often remind myself that studying is the most important thing, so, I have to be as persistent and diligent as possible' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S4's reply further highlighted the importance of being persistent.

'I don't care what my results will be. The most important thing that I need to do is just be persistent and diligent. I have to practice my Thai language skills very often' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

Regarding the other characteristics (dependent, independent, and not afraid of difficulty), S3, S4, and S5 explained as follows:

*Dependence*: Only S5 mentioned his dependence in his interviews. He stated that he had not planned for his future yet because he had to consult his parents first. This indicated his dependent personality.

*Independence*: S3 indicated that he had been living in a dormitory since he had studied at high school. At that time, his parents did not want him to come back home often because they would like him to be able to live independently and help himself.

*Not afraid of difficulty.* S4 and S5 mentioned that they were not afraid of difficulty at all. S4 said:

‘I just eat and live my life and work at my own pace, so nothing is difficult for me’ (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

In the students’ reflective journals, they gave various answers concerning their home country background. S1 reported that due to her self-reliant manner since she was young, she could deal with the difficulties she faced during her studies without a problem. S2 stated that her parents had taught her a great deal of life experience, how to solve various problems, and how to adjust to society, which all contributed to her experiencing an easy adjustment after moving to Thailand. S3 said that he was taught to be able to live independently since he was at high school and to help himself at all times, making for very straightforward adjustment experiences in Thailand.

Similar to S3, S4 had been living in a dormitory since he had studied at high school. Due to living far from his family, he had to be responsible for his own life and he felt that this had contributed to his ease in adjusting to the new environment. S6’s parents had run a hotel business since he was young and this made his life comfortable. However, they did not let him spend a large amount of money and therefore, sometimes he faced financial difficulties. This had not caused him a lot of difficulty in his life though and had not hindered his adjustment experiences. In contrast to those five students, S6 viewed his upbringing as difficult. Though his family had a fairly comfortable income, it had to be spent on his mother’s illness. Therefore, he had to spend his money wisely and save as much as he could. S6 gave a similar answer as S5 that he felt that this issue did not hinder his adjustment in living in MHK.

To conclude, through the consideration of the background of the six students, it can be seen that though some of them had difficult backgrounds, this did not hinder their adjustment experiences.



#### 4.2.3.2 Lecturers' and administrators' perspectives on the students' home country background

The lecturers and administrators also viewed the qualities of students of Chinese background to be diligence, enthusiasm, strong will, modesty, punctuality, cooperation, and responsibility. According to L3:

'The Chinese students are very *persistent, enthusiastic, and diligent*. When I teach them, they are *interested in the lessons*, usually *pay good attention*, listen to me, and *concentrate on their study*. This is, perhaps, because they compete with one another and *have a definite goal* for what they are studying' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

L2 provided more detail to support the qualities of Chinese students (punctuality and responsibility):

'When I told them to submit an assignment, for example, they had to submit in today afternoon, all of them will complete it entirely. These Chinese students always *handed in their assignments to me punctually*' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

Additionally, A1's comment lent support to the cooperative manner of students:

'The Chinese students are *very cooperative*. Whenever I asked them to help me with any activities concerning them, they often came to lend a hand' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

In addition to the factors contributing to positive adjustment experiences, L1, L2, and L3 mentioned several cultural aspects considered to be hindering the Chinese students' adjustment.

L1: In a Chinese university, *some of the regulations are different from a Thai university*. For example, in China university students are not *required to wear a uniform*, but in Thailand they must. When these Chinese students come to study in a Thai university they have to wear a uniform too. (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

L2: The Chinese students habitually take an afternoon nap. When they first arrived in MSU, some of them had difficulty accepting that they wouldn't have a chance to take a nap. They said that they couldn't understand my lecture because they were sleepy. But, after only a short period of time, they were

finally able to adjust to the Thai academic environment.  
(Transcripts 27/09/2010).

L3: When the Chinese students first arrived, they faced only a few problems. For example, they did not eat hot and spicy food. But, after 1-2 months, they were able to adjust to that part of the Thai culture. (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

Table 10 presents a summary of the lecturers' and administrators' perspectives (see page 156).

Data from the lecturers' and administrators' interviews revealed that the Chinese background of students could both contribute to and hinder their adjustment experiences. The participants predominantly perceived the qualities of students of Chinese backgrounds to be diligence, enthusiasm, strong will, modesty, punctuality, cooperation, and responsibility. These qualities of the Chinese students' characters appeared to contribute to the students' adjustment experiences. If their Chinese background impeded their adjustment, it only emerged for a short period of time and then the students could adjust to the host country. There is further discussion of these issues in section 4.2.3 on page 171-173.

#### **4.2.4 Academic background and goals prior to coming to MSU**

Table 11 presents a summary of students' satisfaction with progress in studies, academic goals, expectations and fulfilment, beginning with the results from the questionnaires and ending with those from the interviews (see page 157-158).

**Table 10: Lecturers' and administrators' perspectives on the students' home country background**

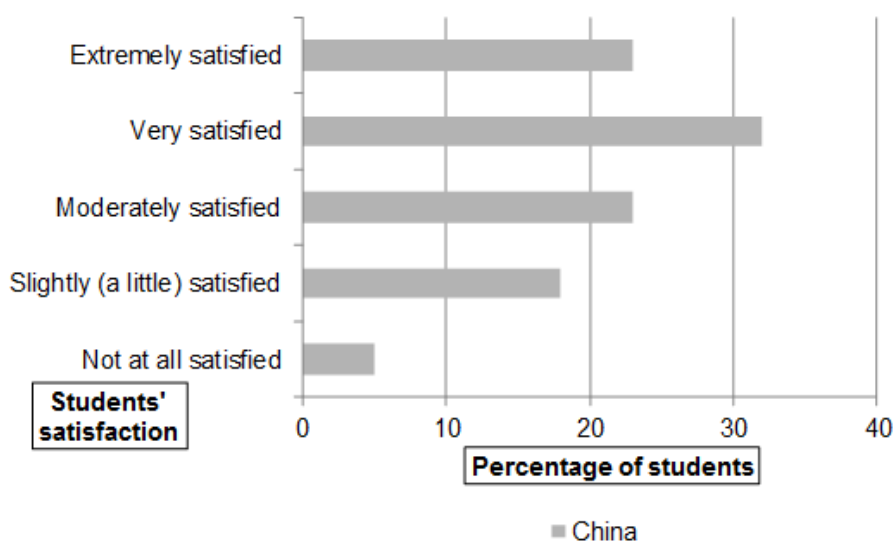
Participants	Perspectives	Contribution	Hindrance
L1	- Students would retain their Chinese culture and faced culture shock, but not a great deal.	/	
	- They were diligent.	/	
	- In China the students were not required to wear a uniform, but it was needed in Thailand.		/
L2	- Students from poorer families would pay more attention to study than those from more affluent families.	/	/
	- Students whose family members still used the Zhuang language to communicate would have more advantages than other Chinese students in studying the Thai language.	/	
	- They were diligent, enthusiastic, strong willed, punctual, cooperative, and behaved responsibility.	/	
	- They had a culture of taking a nap in the afternoon. / They did not eat hot and spicy food.		/
L3	- The cultural differences between Chinese and Thai culture were likely to hinder the students' adjustment experiences only when they were newly arrived in Thailand.		/
	- They were diligent, enthusiastic, strong willed, punctual, cooperative, and behaved responsibility.	/	
A1	- Students often spoke loudly in public. / They were not careful about their manners.		/
	- They were cooperative and generous.	/	
A2	- Though the communication background of the students was quite good, it still hindered their adjustment experiences.		/
	- They were diligent, enthusiastic, strong willed, punctual, cooperative, and behaved responsibility.	/	
A3	- Students who did not have many friends in China would have a problem when they had to adjust to the new environment of another country.		/
	- They were diligent, enthusiastic, strong willed, modest, punctual, cooperative, and behaved responsibility.	/	

**Table 11: Students' satisfaction with progress in studies, academic goals, expectations and fulfilment.**

Students	Questionnaires	Interviews	
		Satisfaction with progress in studies	Academic goals, expectations and fulfilment
All students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 50% Average academic progress</li> <li>- 55% Average Thai language ability</li> <li>- 95% Satisfied with progress</li> </ul>		
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Average academic progress.</li> <li>- Average Thai language ability.</li> <li>- Satisfied with progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Her study results were not good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to achieve good results on her studies.</li> <li>- Had fulfilled her expectations to some degree.</li> </ul>
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Average academic progress.</li> <li>- Average Thai language ability.</li> <li>- Not satisfied with progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai language ability was average.</li> <li>- She preferred to study language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to achieve good results on her studies and have many Thai friends.</li> <li>- Had fulfilled her expectations to some degree.</li> </ul>
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good academic progress.</li> <li>- Average Thai language ability.</li> <li>- Satisfied with progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai language ability was average.</li> <li>- His parents did not worry about his study results.</li> <li>- He liked to study language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to be able to speak Thai to a good level.</li> <li>- His ability in Thai speaking would help him talk to his Thai friends happily.</li> </ul>
S4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good academic progress.</li> <li>- Good Thai language ability.</li> <li>- Satisfied with progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai language ability was average.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to be able to speak Thai to a good level.</li> <li>- If he could communicate in Thai well enough, he would be able to travel around Thailand freely.</li> <li>- Had not fulfilled his expectations yet.</li> </ul>
S5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor academic progress.</li> <li>- Average Thai language ability.</li> <li>- Satisfied with progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He felt satisfied because he gained excellent results on his studies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to be able to speak Thai to a good level.</li> <li>- If he could communicate in Thai well enough, he would be able to travel around Thailand freely.</li> <li>- Had not fulfilled his expectations yet.</li> </ul>

Students	Questionnaires	Interviews	
		Satisfaction with progress in studies	Academic goals, expectations and fulfilment
S6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Average academic progress.</li> <li>- Average Thai language ability.</li> <li>- Satisfied with progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai language ability was average.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to be able to speak Thai to a good level → to the level of a native speaker.</li> <li>- Had not fulfilled his expectations yet.</li> </ul>

From the questionnaires, the participants evaluated their academic background in China with ratings for their academic progress as ‘average’, with 50% of them (including S1, S2, and S6) indicating this rating. However, 95% (including S1, S3, S4, S5, and S6) reported that they were satisfied with their progress in their studies in China (see Figure 11). Regarding their Thai language ability, 55% of them (including S1, S2, S3, S5, and S6) rated their overall ability as ‘average’.



**Figure 11: Students' satisfaction with their progress in studies in GXUN**

The findings from the participants' interviews added more detail to the questionnaire results (see Table 11). S1 replied that although her Thai language ability was average, her study results were not good because of her heavy duties as the class monitor (class leader) in GXUN. S2 indicated her preference and pleasure in studying language, though she was not satisfied with her study

progress. She further mentioned that her Thai language ability was only average. Similarly, S3, S4, and S6 stated that their Thai language ability was average. S3's parents did not worry about his study results. They said that he could do whatever he wanted as long as he could pass his studies. However, S3 reported that he liked to study language very much. In contrast to those students, S5 responded that he gained excellent results on his studies.

In addition to the questions on their academic background before coming to MSU, the participants were interviewed about their academic goals, expectations and fulfilment. S1 and S2 wanted to achieve good results in their studies and both had fulfilled their expectations to some degree. Moreover, before coming to Thailand, S2 had set a goal of having many Thai friends and was able to fulfil this. In contrast to those two students, S3, S4, S5, and S6 would like to be able to speak Thai at a good level. S3 stated that his ability to speak Thai would help him talk to his Thai friends happily. S4 and S5 identified the expectations that if they could communicate in Thai well enough, they would be able to travel around Thailand freely and S6 reported that he would like to speak Thai to the level of a native speaker. However, unlike S2, S4, S5, and S6 had not fulfilled their expectations yet.

In terms of the students' goals for the remaining two months of semester 1/2010, all students hoped that their Thai language skills would improve further. While S1 emphasized her goal was to improve her writing and speaking skills, S5 focused on better speaking and reading skills. S4 set his goal as passing all his courses, while S6 would like to concentrate on his reading ability so that he could understand everything that the lecturers had taught him. S3 indicated that as he had to take a training course next semester, his goal was to practice his speaking skills. In addition, his mother asked him to write a resume so that she could try to find him work with her friends.

Overall, before coming to Thailand, the students had different expectations. While S1 and S2 would like to receive good results in their studies, S3, S4, S5, and S6 had expectations about their speaking skills. All of them would like to

have better Thai language skills. However, though S1, S2, S4, S5, and S6 had plans to improve their studies, S3 did not have any specific plans.

#### 4.2.5 Attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language

To learn more about the students' backgrounds, it is important to gain information on their attitudes—how they perceive Thailand and Thai language. They were interviewed about their first dream or idea of studying in Thailand, their first experience with Thai language, and how they imagined their time in Thailand would be.

Table 12 (see page 162) presents a summary of the participants' attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language, beginning with their first dream/idea of studying in Thailand, followed by their first experience with Thai language, and ending with their visions of how their time in Thailand would be.

Regarding the first dream or idea of studying in Thailand, the participants indicated various issues as shown in Table 12. In terms of the students' first dream/idea of studying in Thailand, they mentioned the importance of studying Thai language, which could help them have a good job and an opportunity to travel. According to S1:

‘I felt that *Thai language is important* because Thailand and China had good business cooperation. If I study Thai, I will be able to *apply my Thai language knowledge in my future work*’ (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3 provided more detail about an opportunity to travel:

‘Studying Thai in Thailand will *help me get a decent job* in the future and I will have *a chance to see the beautiful scenery of Thailand* as well’ (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

In addition, S2, S4, and S5 had watched TV programs in China showing Thai scenery and perceived this to have made them feel enthusiastic to learn the Thai language, while S6 had an attitude that studying Thai would let him learn more about Thai culture. Moreover, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 showed their positive attitudes toward Thai language when they first experienced it. According to S2:

'When I first heard Thai language, I felt that it was *more beautiful than other languages*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

With regard to the students' first experience with Thai language, S2, S3, S4, and S5 reported that some of Thai vocabulary was like Zhuang language (see more detail in Chapter 2 section 2.7.4.3 on page 93-94). With regard to the students' expectations of Thailand, half of them (S1, S2, and S5) mentioned that they expected to face hot weather.

Another question they were asked was about how they imagined their time in Thailand would be while they were flying over. The hot weather of Thailand was one perception that half of students mentioned (S1, S2, and S5). While S1 and S2 thought about Thai food, S3 and S4 dreamt of traveling around Thailand. S6 was the only student who imagined something different. He indicated that he expected the financial status of Thai people would be lower than Chinese.

Considering the students' attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language, it can be seen that the way they perceived Thailand and the Thai language reflected positive aspects rather than negative ones.



**Table 12: Students' attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language**

Students	First dream/Idea of studying in Thailand	First experience with Thai language	How they imagined their time in Thailand would be
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledged that Thailand and China had business cooperation and wanted to apply Thai language knowledge in future work.</li> <li>- Wanted to broaden her worldview.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It was very difficult with strange pronunciation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hot weather. Smiles, Kindness of Thai people. Thai food.</li> </ul>
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had watched TV programs showing Thai scenery and this had made her feel she wanted to learn Thai language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai language was more beautiful than other languages.</li> <li>- Some of Thai vocabulary was like Zhuang language, which she was familiar with.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hot weather. Good taste of Thai food.</li> </ul>
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studying Thai in Thailand would help him have a decent job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some of Thai vocabulary was like Zhuang language, which he was familiar with.</li> <li>- Studying the Thai language must be easier than the English language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Travelling around Thailand.</li> </ul>
S4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had watched TV programs showing Thai scenery and this had made him feel he wanted to learn Thai language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some of Thai vocabulary was like Zhuang language, which he was familiar with.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Travelling around Thailand.</li> </ul>
S5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had watched TV programs showing Thai scenery and this had made him feel he wanted to learn Thai language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some of Thai vocabulary was like Zhuang language, which he was familiar with.</li> <li>- It was very difficult for him to study this language because of its complicated structure with many levels of formality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hot weather.</li> </ul>
S6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wanted to have an opportunity to learn more about the Thai culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai language was more beautiful than other languages and was one of the favourite study choices among Chinese.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The financial status of Thai people would be lower than Chinese.</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.6 Future plans

This section focuses on students' future work and study plans, including students' intentions to work in Thailand after completing their studies.

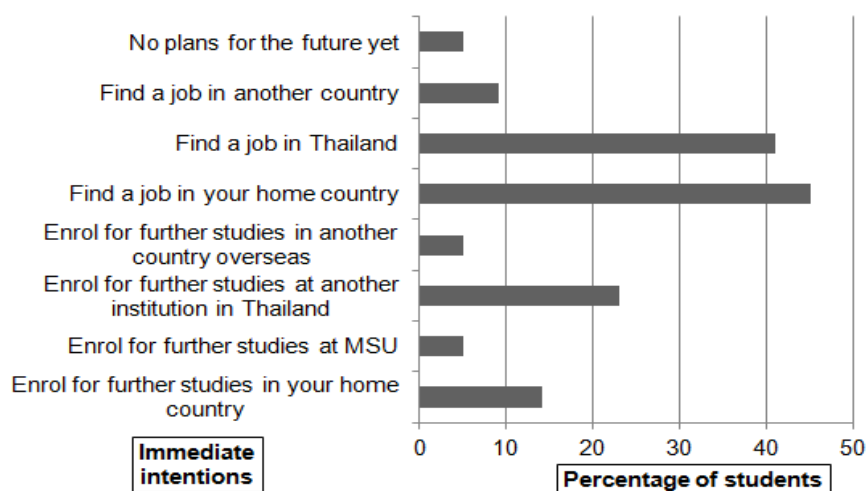
Table 13 presents a summary of the students' future plans, beginning with the results from the questionnaires and ending with those from the interviews.

**Table 13: Students' future plans**

Students	Questionnaires			Interviews
	Plan to work/study	Intentions	Course choice	
All students	55% 1-2 years	See Figure 12	See Figure 13	
S1	3-4 years	Study at another institution in Thailand	Graduation Certificate	- Pursue master's degree and work in Thailand. Then, go back to China to live with and take care of her parents.
S2	1-2 years	Not planned yet	Other (not specify)	- Further study, but had no idea whether parents would allow. - Working in Thailand for 4-5 years.
S3	1-2 years	find a job in Thailand & in China	Bachelor's degree	- Work in China because his parents would not allow him to work in Thailand.
S4	3-4 years	Study in home country	Language course	- Work in Thailand, and then, go back to live in China and study further for a master's degree. - Fulfil his expectations in travelling around Thailand.
S5	5 years +	Study in home country	Foundation studies	- Not planned whether he would work in Thailand or in China, had to consult his parents first.
S6	3-4 years	Study at another institution in Thailand + Find a job.	Master's degree	- Further a master's degree and work at the same time.

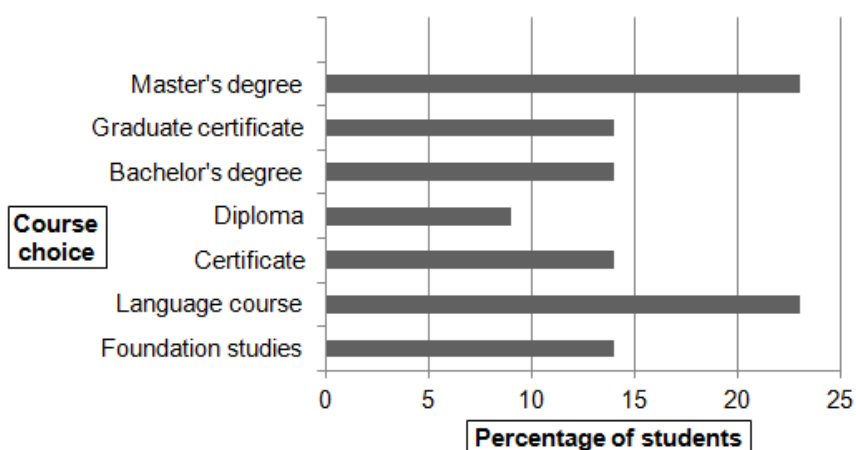
From the questionnaires, more than half of the students planned to study or work in Thailand about 1-2 years (55%, including S2 and S3) after completing their current program of studies. S1, S4, and S6 stated that they planned to study/work in Thailand 3-4 years. The next thing that more than 40% of students were most likely to do was find a job in their home country (45%) and find a job in Thailand (41%) (see Figure 12). The least favourable choices for

them were enrolling for further studies at MSU or in another country overseas (5%).



**Figure 12: Immediate intentions of students**

Figure 13 shows that just over 20% of students would like to take a 'Master's degree' (23%) and a 'language course' (23%). The main fields they intended to study were Economics, Thai, Accountancy and Management, Linguistics, and Tourism.



**Figure 13: Course choice in the future**

The information in the students' interview considerably enhanced the level of detail obtained from the questionnaire responses (see Table 13). The interview results for S1, S2, and S4 show different data from the questionnaires regarding some points. S1, who stated in her questionnaire that she planned to further her studies in a Graduate Certificate course at another tertiary institution in Thailand, stated that she wanted to pursue her master's degree in Thailand. After that, she would like to work in Thailand for a few years to gain more work experience. Then, she would go back to China to live with her parents and take care of them.

Similarly, while S2 responded in her questionnaire that she had not planned for her future yet, she gave different answers through her interviews. S2 stated that she wanted to further her studies, but she had no idea whether her parents would allow it. Working in Thailand for four to five years was another choice for her future. She would like to have work experience so that she could learn about life and learn how to solve her own problems. In addition, S4, who replied in his questionnaire that he wanted to enrol for studies at a language school in another institution in Thailand, responded that initially he would like to work in Thailand, and then, go back to live in China and study further for his master's degree. S4 emphasized that he would like to fulfil his expectations in travelling around Thailand first.

In contrast to S1, S2, and S4, the rest of the students' answers through their interviews coincided with their questionnaire results. S3, whose answer in the questionnaire was 'find a job in Thailand and in his home country', also planned to work in Thailand in the future. However, he indicated that his parents would not allow him to do so. Therefore, he had changed his future plan to work in China instead. Conversely, though S5, whose answer in the questionnaire was to study at another institution in Thailand also wanted employment in Thailand, he replied that he had not planned whether he would work in Thailand or in China. He had to consult his parents first. His parents used to tell him that if he would like to go back to China, they would take responsibilities for his future study and career. Nevertheless, he insisted that he would like to have work

experience without any assistance from his parents. S6 chose two choices in his questionnaire, that he planned to find a job in Thailand and further his studies at another institution in Thailand. In his interviews, he gave the same answers that he wanted to earn his master's degree first, but still had no idea where he should study. In addition, he would like to work at the same time.

Considering the future plans that all students mentioned, it can be seen that while some students would like to work in Thailand after graduation, some would like to gain a higher degree, followed by working in Thailand and going back to their home country.

### **Conclusion of the results**

Data gathered from the students' questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals, including the comments from the lectures and the administrators, can be drawn together to form the overall answers of this research question. The students' home country backgrounds both contributed to and hindered their adjustment experiences. However, the following contributing aspects were also mentioned by the participants: the significance of family, the habitual characteristics (e.g. diligence, persistence, hard work), and a positive attitude towards Thailand and Thai language. On the occasions that their backgrounds hindered their adjustment experiences, it generally only occurred for a short period of time (e.g. 1-2 months) before the students were able to adjust to the host country.

### **Discussion**

The discussion of answers to this research question will be presented in six sections: (4.2.1) background information of students; (4.2.2) Family background of students; (4.2.3) participants' perspective on the students' home country backgrounds; (4.2.4) academic background prior to coming to MSU; (4.2.5) attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language; and (4.2.6) future plans. This question relates to skills, attitudes, personality traits, and socio-biographical background as factors contributing to cross-cultural adjustment.

#### **4.2.1 Personal background of students**

Demographic information about the students obtained from the questionnaires shows that their place of origin was in Guangxi, China where the Zhuang is the largest ethnic group, with a population of about 17 million (*Zhuang ethnic group*, 2002). In this area, the Zhuang language is widely spoken. As many scholars (Benedict, 1975; Y.-H. Lin & Diamond, 1996; Matisoff, 1991; Shafer, 1966) have indicated, Zhuang and Thai languages are closely related to each other. It is possible that the ethnic background of the students could be an important factor contributing to their adjustment. Results from the students' and the lecturers' interviews appear to support this assumption.

With regard to the relationship between Zhuang and Thai languages, a possible interpretation could be that the ethnic background of the students may be a vital determinant influencing their Thai academic adjustment. In Mamman's (1995) paper about the relevance of expatriates' socio-biographical characteristics vis-à-vis intercultural effectiveness, he reviewed literature concerning this issue and found that 'ethnic background' is a significant factor affecting intercultural adjustment. Goodman et al. (2006) also identified 'ethnicity' as one factor influencing a person's ability to cope with a transition. In the current study, the ethnic background includes both the 'inherited' (the students' biological origin) and the 'acquired' (Zhuang language) attributes (Fishman, 1977) as these two issues may be the factors that lead a student to adjust to the Thai educational environment comfortably. However, Mamman's (1995) paper also showed the limitations of his conclusion, as the expatriates considered were from various ethnic backgrounds. All in all, however, this variable should be considered seriously as a possible influencing factor. In the present study, the Chinese students were from the same region, which could certainly be considered as a similar ethnic background. Therefore, this could lead to the conclusion that the ethnic background of this group of students may be an important factor contributing to their adjustment.

The findings concerning the students' ethnic background do not appear to fully support those of Wang (2009). In Wang's study about the relationships among

background variables, resilience characteristics, and adjustment problem areas, background variables were found to be weakly related to the adjustment problem areas. The results of the present study do not support this finding. A possible explanation is that Wang used quantitative methods (the Organizational Development Resources' Personal Resilience Questionnaire and the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory) to obtain her data, without any support information from other sources. This would make the findings of the present study not directly comparable with those of Wang, because in the current study, the questionnaires' results were supported by data from in-depth interviews which could add a deeper understanding of the students' adjustments (J. Wang, 2009) and offer explanations for more definite results (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

With regard to the findings from the current study and those from Mamman's (1995) and Wang's (2009) studies, the connection between those studies and the transition theory can clearly be seen. Goodman et al. (2006) reported that every person has both assets and liabilities/resources and deficits which he/she brings to the transition. Within the *Self* variable, personal and demographic characteristics are regarded as factors that are related to individuals coping with change. In the current study and Mamman's study, ethnic background is considered to be a possibly significant variable relating and contributing to the adjustment of the international students, while the background variables in Wang's (2009) study appear to be in contradiction to Goodman et al. (2006), in which background variables were found to be weakly related to adjustment problems.

#### **4.2.2 Family background of students**

To learn more about the students' family background, the following issues were explored in detail: 4.2.2.1 Financial background, and 4.2.2.2 Family interest in the students' progress.

##### ***4.2.2.1 Financial background***

The findings regarding educational support showed that 100% of students said their education in Thailand was paid for by their parents. Though more than

three quarters of students (76%) mentioned that paying for their education in Thailand was difficult, 86% of them were satisfied with their current financial situation. Data from the interviews concerning the students' family financial status enhanced the information from the questionnaires, as it revealed that the students (S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5) had a predominantly comfortable life. It is possible that the students' families' financial status could be secure enough to support them in a comfortable life.

The findings about the students' financial background lend support to Ying and Liese's (1994) results, from their study regarding the nine factors influencing the cross-cultural adjustment of 172 Taiwanese students during their first months in the U.S. Ying and Liese found that financial resources were one of many determinants that could contribute to the participants' adjustment as the participants were well prepared financially for study abroad. The authors further reported that students who prepared well for their overseas study had higher levels of adjustment. In the current study, the Chinese students' tuition fees and expenses were paid by their parents. Although they mentioned difficulty in paying for their education in Thailand, they felt satisfied with their present financial situation. This indicated that these students were well-prepared for the financial issues and could lead to the conclusion that the way the parents took responsibility for their children's education in Thailand contributed to helping them feel comfortable about their financial matters while studying in the host country. The financial background, therefore, appears to be a crucial factor contributing to the Chinese students' adjustment to living in Thailand. Limitations in Ying and Liese's study include that the data was obtained from questionnaires only, which provided inadequate in-depth detail of the participants' adjustment experiences, whereas the current study obtained data both from questionnaires and interviews, providing more information regarding the participants.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Family interest in the students' study progress***

The participants revealed their family's interest in their studies' progress through their questionnaires and interviews. The findings concerning the interest of the



participants' families showed that the majority of participants indicated the importance of family to their studies in both MSU and in GXUN as 'very' to 'extremely' important (59% and 68% respectively). S1, S5, and S6 indicated a higher rate of family importance levels when they studied in MSU. In addition, the results showed that the students' parents took on a significant role as supporters of their children's studies.

The findings above seem to emphasize the role of parents (or family) in the students' academic lives as they valued the necessity of education for the future and they gave their children support. Regarding the necessity of education, S1, for example, stated that her study progress was 'moderately' important to her family when she was in China. However, while studying in MSU, her family perceived that the study progress was 'very' crucial. This could be interpreted as showing that education was important from the parents' perspective. Furthermore, the parents of students (S1's, S4's, S5's and S6's) allowed their children to choose what they wanted to study, while those of S2 and S3 helped them make up their mind. The parents of these students, nevertheless, fully gave support for their children's education as they perceived its importance for their children's life.

The way the students' parents gave support to their children's education could reflect the Chinese collectivist culture toward values of education, where, in their belief, education is an important way to gain knowledge, ability, and virtues (Bond, 2010).

The findings focused on the role of parents as supporters played in the students' transition to the new educational environment. Levine (1976) stated that people who received parental support for their move could adjust better to the new situation than those whose parents disapproved of their actions. In the current study, though S6's parents had no idea about his study, they let him choose what he wanted to study, approved of his actions, and gave him their support. Similarly, S4 and S5's parents also let them follow their own preferences and supported their decisions.

Wintre and Yaffe's (2000) and Mounts's (2004) study results appear to support the idea that parental support could aid students' adjustment to their lives in MHK. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) explored whether parenting style, current relationship with parents, and psychological well-being variables contributed to first-year students' adjustment to university, while Mounts (2004) examined whether the role of parental support contributed to the transition to college. Their studies' results confirmed that the role of parents significantly contributed to most aspects of the participants' adjustment to university. Whereas their study failed to find deeper detail regarding parental support from their single data collection method of a questionnaire, in the current study, an in-depth interview expanded on the detail of information regarding parental support. On this basis, an in-depth interview is proposed as another data source for the explanation of the effects of parental support.

With regard to the findings, in both the current study and in Wintre and Yaffe's (2000) and Mounts's (2004) studies concerning parental support, an association with the *Support* variable is consistently found. Goodman et al. (2006) claimed that *Support* is an important factor influencing individuals' ability to cope with a transition. They identified that family units are one of various sources of support that individuals receive. The findings from the current study, and also from Wintre and Yaffe's (2000) and Mounts's (2004) studies, show that the participants gained support from their parents which helped them in their adjustment. The availability of parental support therefore appears to be a direct contributing factor to the ease of the participants' transition to the new environment.

#### **4.2.3 Participants' perspective on the students' home country backgrounds**

Regarding the students' perspective on their home country backgrounds, they perceived the qualities from their Chinese background as: hardworking, persistent, diligent, and self-responsible. These qualities were also reflected in their behaviours, as all students mentioned that they typically went to review their lessons and do assignments at the library, worked hard on their

assignments, and tried to finish them and hand them in to the lecturers on time. These behaviours emphasized that the background of the students could contribute to their adjustment.

The lecturers and administrators also viewed the qualities of students of Chinese background to be diligence, enthusiasm, strong will, modesty, punctuality, cooperation, and responsibility. This can be seen that they were consistent with the qualities that the students identified about their behaviours--hardworking, persistent, responsible, and diligent. In addition, the following behaviours were found in these students—cooperation, enthusiasm, punctuality, and the confidence to undertake difficult assignments. According to Wang and Cui (2003), the Chinese personalities were: extravert (enthusiastic), cooperative, and conscientious/diligent (e.g. persistent in work, hardworking, and responsible). As Hannigan (1990) pointed out, personality traits are one of three factors that could help individuals to function completely in different cultures. Those personality traits of students, therefore, may lead them to adjust to their lives in MHK effectively. The findings of the current study appear to be supported by those of Ward et al. (2004) in their study about personality in relation to sojourner adjustment. They found that greater extraversion was associated with psychological and sociocultural adjustment, while conscientiousness was related to psychological wellbeing in both sojourning respondents and to sociocultural adjustment in the Singaporean group. While Ward et al.'s (2004) study relied on self-report questionnaires only which could not provide in-depth detail, the present study utilized various data sources to gain deeper detail (J. Wang, 2009).

With regard to the findings from the present study and those from Ward et al.'s (2004) study, it can be seen that there is a relationship between them and socio-psychological processes, particularly cross-cultural transitions. Sussman (2000) claimed 'personality variables' as one of antecedent variables that have been demonstrated to influence the adjustment process. In both the current study and Ward et al.'s (2004) study, personality traits of the Chinese students (e.g. enthusiastic and persistent in work) appeared to have contributed to their

adjustment. Similarly, the findings from Ward et al. showed that the extravert and conscientious personalities of their participants influenced their psychological and sociocultural adjustment. The current study appears to be in firm agreement with the above previous studies in this regard, with evidence of the positive effects that some personality traits can have on the adjustment process.

While there are clearly some issues related to the students' home country background, the evidence in the current study for the degree and duration of any specific influence that this has on the students' adjustment experiences is quite limited. This is an area that could be researched further in the future; to examine the degree to which the students are truly able to make adjustments to these issues in the short timeframe that was mentioned by the lecturers, or to find if there are still difficulties that remain but which become more below the surface.

#### **4.2.4 Academic background and goals prior to coming to MSU**

The findings from the questionnaires showed that though half of the students (50% and S1, S2, and S6) evaluated their academic background in China with ratings for their academic progress of 'average', 95% (including S1, S3, S4, S5, and S6) reported that they were satisfied with their progress in studies in China. Additionally, the findings from the interviews support those from the questionnaires in which the six students mentioned their Thai language ability as 'average'. The findings revealed that the students had background knowledge of Thai language before they arrived in Thailand. Black et al. (1991), Dowling and Schuler (1990), and Stening (1979) reported that linguistic ability is related to individuals' intercultural adjustment. These authors postulated that if people could understand and speak the host language they would be able to adjust effectively. Therefore, it is possible that because the students had Thai language ability from their studies in China, this may have helped them adjust to the Thai academic environment once they were studying in Thailand.

With regard to the issue, S1 mentioned her study results in China as 'not good' due to her heavy responsibilities as the class leader, it is interesting to consider

this matter further. In China, an elected classmate (class leader) has a duty to coordinate with the academic staff, handle discipline, manage the classroom and keep order when the teacher is absent (Anonymous, 2010; Flaitz & Eckstein, 2003). Though these duties contribute to general good order, stability in class, and effective communication between students and teachers (Flaitz & Eckstein, 2003), they may put a burden on the class leader by giving them more responsibilities.

Regarding the findings related to the students' academic goals, expectations, and fulfilment, S1 and S2 had expectations and academic goals to achieve good results on their studies. Both of them had fulfilled their expectations to some degree. Additionally S2 had set her aim, before coming to Thailand, to have many Thai friends, and now had been able to fulfil it. Similarly S3, S4, S5, and S6 had expected to be able to speak Thai to a good level. S4 and S5 identified their expectation as being if they could communicate in Thai well enough, they would be able to travel around Thailand freely. These findings revealed that the students had set themselves a specific target and they were able to accomplish it. This appeared to be a behavioural style of the Chinese which could contribute to cross-cultural adjustment, similar to Wang and Cui's (2003) claims that Chinese were clear about their goals. Furthermore, this behavioural style illustrated their conscientiousness. Gough and Lanning (1986) pointed out that people who had this personality tended to set goals for themselves which were achieved through precise planning and persistence.

#### **4.2.5 Attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language**

With regard to the first dream or idea of studying in Thailand, the students' attitudes appeared to be positive, as they acknowledged the importance of studying Thai language, which could help them have a good job and an opportunity to travel. In addition, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 showed their positive attitudes toward Thai language when they first experienced it.

These findings demonstrate that the students showed their interests in and positive attitudes about Thai language and culture. Hannigan (1990) pointed out that attitudes were one of the factors that influenced cross-cultural adjustment.

To adjust to a new environment effectively, individuals would be helped by having a positive attitude towards the host country, that is, respect and interest for the customs, traditions, and people of the new environment. Additionally, Hawes and Kealey (1981) and Haney (1976) emphasized that an attitude of respect for the host culture is considered as a vital attitude for cross-cultural effectiveness. In the current study, S1 indicated that Thailand and China had good business cooperation. Thus, if she studied Thai language, it would be relevant to her future employment. Similarly, S3 knew that studying Thai would benefit him in the future. These students' perspectives emphasized that the students had an orientation to knowledge (Ruben, 1976) as they perceived higher education specific to their chosen fields would be applicable and beneficial to their future plans. Regarding the students' positive attitudes and orientation to knowledge, it can be concluded that these factors contributed to their adjustment to their lives to Thailand.

#### **4.2.6 Future plans**

From the questionnaires, more than half of students planned to study or work in Thailand for about one to two years (55%, including S2 and S3) after completing the current program of studies. The next career-step that more than 40% of students were most likely to do was find a job in their home country (45%) and find a job in Thailand (41%).

The findings from the students' interviews added more detail to the questionnaire results. S1 planned to work in Thailand for a few years to gain more work experience. Then, she would go back to China to live with her parents and take care of them. S2 stated that she wanted to further her studies, but she had no idea whether her parents would allow her to do that. Similarly, S3 planned to work in China as his parents would not allow him to find a job and work in Thailand. S5, who had not decided whether he would work in Thailand or in China, had to consult his parents first. They had told him that if he would like to go back to China, they would take responsibility for his future study and career.

The above findings concerning the students' future plans in relation to their parents revealed the collectivist society of the Chinese, particularly Chinese family values. In Chinese collectivist culture, everyone is expected to take responsibility for fellow members of their group (Hofstede, 2001b). Hwang (1999) and Mak and Chan (1980) indicated that every Chinese person learns to think of the family first and tries to keep a close relationship with their family. Individuals who show loyalty to their families by retaining good relationships with family members and taking responsibilities for the family are considered ideal children by the Chinese parents (Shek & Chan, 1999). In the present study, while S1, for example, wanted to go back to China so that she could take care of her parents, S5's parents indicated their responsibility for their son's future. This showed the mutual responsibilities among the Chinese and underlined the importance of Chinese family unity and mutual dependence. Due to the Chinese cultural emphasis on family mutual dependence, Bond (2010) stated that it may increase the opportunities for Chinese adolescent immigrants to adjust successfully to their host countries. Florsheim's (1997) study produced results about factors related to the psychosocial adjustment of Chinese immigrants which support Bond's (2010) statement (see more detail in Chapter 2 on page 90). According to Florsheim's study results, it is possible that the way the Chinese students perceived their future plans in relation to their parents could contribute to their adjustment in Thailand. Florsheim suggested that further research could be carried out with a different group of Chinese people in order to determine whether these findings were true in general, and the present study used the Chinese non-native Thai learners as a group of research participants to investigate this idea.

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

The findings of this research question confirm that the students' home country backgrounds contributed to their adjustment experiences. Regarding their personal and academic backgrounds, it can be seen that their personality traits and socio-biographical background should be considered as important factors contributing to their adjustment. Additionally, the information collected on their family backgrounds demonstrated the role of their parents as supporters, which

was regarded as relating to the transition theory in terms of the *Support* variable. Moreover, the students' positive attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language appear to have an influence on their adjustment. How the students perceived their future plans as they related to their parents was also considered as a contributing determinant to their adjustment in Thailand.



## **Chapter 5 Academic Differences and Students' Adjustment Problems**

This chapter presents the results and discussion regarding the students' adjustment experiences while they were in the Thai academic and sociocultural environment. Two major areas were chosen to investigate: (5.1) The differences between MSU and GXUN teaching and learning approaches, and (5.2) The students' adjustment problems. Other areas such as general social and cultural differences outside the classroom were considered in terms of their influence on academic issues, but their wider differences were not addressed.

### **5.1 The Differences between MSU and GXUN Teaching and Learning Approaches**

#### **Results**

The research question, "What differences do students report between home-country and host-country universities teaching and learning approaches?" was raised to determine whether there was a difference between home-country university (MSU) and host-country university (GXUN) teaching and learning styles. To explore the differences, the researcher investigated the students' evaluations of the programme of studies in two aspects—teaching and learning styles. It is important to investigate these two aspects to find out whether they had an influence on the Chinese students' adjustment experiences. Each issue has been defined first, followed by the findings from the students' evaluation of that issue and the summary of their evaluation. The findings are structured as follows: (5.1.1) Teaching styles, (5.2.2) Learning styles, and (5.2.3) Positive and negative experiences

#### **5.1.1 Teaching styles**

Teaching styles refer to a teacher's behaviours and beliefs in various educational contexts, including his/her ability to manage teaching information (Heimlich & Norland, 1994). The following issues relating to teaching styles were considered in my study. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 14 on page 181.

#### **5.1.1.1 Teaching approaches**

In my study, the *teaching approach* refers to the teaching methods' combination, a mixture of the specific instructional techniques or behaviours (Hoyt & Lee, 2002).

#### **5.1.1.2 Teaching pace**

Eyster and Martin (2010) indicated that pace is a measure of teachers' ability to keep an activity moving. Setting the right pace of teaching benefits not only the lecturers, but also the students. The lecturers can have a rest, while the students are allowed to absorb and process what they have learnt (Leaman, 2008). In my study, the students evaluated whether the lecturers taught at a proper pace so they could follow what the lecturers taught.

#### **5.1.1.3 Giving assignments**

During the end phase of a lecture, the lecturers are required to set a task for all students to complete before the next lecture, or for them to bring along to the next tutorial session (Race, 2001). In my study, the majority of students (55%) expressed the view that they were given a large quantity of assignments by the lecturers in MSU, while almost half of them (45%) mentioned that the lecturers in GXUN gave only a small quantity of assignments.

#### **5.1.1.4 Academic assessment and feedback**

Hedge (2000) defined assessment as the general process of monitoring or keeping track of the students' progress. In my study, the students were asked to evaluate the academic assessment procedures and the feedback they received. The findings showed that though the percentage of students giving positive feedback to this area in MSU was not as high as that in GXUN, the students' explanations in the interviews presented that the students had a positive perspective on the assessments received in MSU.

#### **5.1.1.5 Punctuality of lecturers**

It is important for lecturers to be punctual as it reflects the lecturers' ability and can benefit the students (Race, 1999). The findings of the students' evaluation on the lecturers' punctuality showed that all respondents agreed that the

lecturers in MSU arrived late at times, while those in GXUN were usually on time.

To see the differences between the teaching styles in MSU and those in GXUN, it was essential to make a comparative study of the issues in each of the two locations. Table 14 shows this comparison. The findings of the students' evaluation of the teaching styles were compared through the questionnaires and the interviews.

From Table 14, it appears that the respondents perceived there to be differences in most aspects of teaching styles. The issues concerning *teaching approaches*, *giving assignments*, and *punctuality of lecturers* in MSU and those in GXUN were totally different. For example, while the lecturers in MSU utilized several kinds of teaching material in their teaching, those in GXUN used their textbooks only. *Teaching pace* was evaluated as 'about right' both in MSU and in GXUN and was the only topic showing similarity. The *academic assessment and feedback* issue presented both differences and similarities.

Data from the interviews appear to support those from the questionnaires. For example, the questionnaires' findings showed that half of the participants mentioned the freedom and flexibility of the teaching approaches of the lecturers in MSU, whereas 32% indicated that the lecturers in GXUN taught students by following a textbook only. Then, the data from the interviews added more detail to this issue. According to S1 and S3:

S1: 'The lecturers in GXUN often *use textbooks* and *follow their contents closely*, while the lecturers in Thailand *rarely use* them. They give us a hand-out instead' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3: 'In GXUN, the lecturers will *follow the textbooks*, whereas the lecturers in Thailand will assign us to do *group work*. This lets us have an opportunity to do more *self-study*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

**Table 14: Students' evaluation on the teaching styles in MSU and those in GXUN**

Topic	MSU		GXUN	
	Questionnaires	Interviews	Questionnaires	Interviews
<b>1. Teaching styles</b>				
1.1 Teaching approaches	- Freedom and flexibility in teaching (50%).	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, & L3: Many teaching materials (e.g. info sheets, VCDs) and activities (e.g. sing Thai songs, watch Thai movies, do role plays in Thai) S6: - Lesson plans' flexibility: lecturers taught the elements of the course that they felt most relevant, but not appropriate to him	- Following a textbook, no variety in teaching (32%).	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, & L3: A few teaching materials, mostly use a textbook / Inactive teaching S6: Good lesson plans and strict to them
1.2 Teaching pace	- <i>About right</i> (67%).	S1, S2, S3, & S4: Too fast at the beginning, but slower speed later until reaching the right speed	- <i>About right</i> (77%).	
1.3 Giving assignment	- A large quantity of assignments (66%).	S1, S2, S3, S4, & S5: Having to work on many assignments, very difficult sometimes S6: Equal amount as in GXUN	- A small quantity of homework and assignments (45%).	All six students: Not many assignments, having time to travel
1.4 Academic assessment and feedback	- Good to very good (69%). - <i>Average</i> quality of feedback they received (66%).	All six students: Many criteria to assess their academic results	- Good (73%). - <i>Average</i> quality of feedback they received (69%).	All six students: Their academic results would be evaluated only at the end of each semester (no variation)
1.5 Punctuality of lecturers	- Late (100%).	All six students: Late sometimes, not telling students in advance	- On time (100%).	All six students: Usually on time, giving advance inform

The responses identified the differences in teaching and learning styles between the two universities and outlined how these impacted on the students' learning experiences.

### **5.1.2 Learning styles**

As Keefe (1987) stated that learning styles are a mixture of cognitive, affective and physiological personality traits which represent a relatively stable indicator of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment, this thesis evaluated the way the students perceived and responded to their learning environment in MSU and to that in GXUN through a range of issues, discussed below. The findings concerning these issues are presented in Table 15 on page 184.

#### **5.1.2.1 Learning approaches**

The findings concerning the learning approaches indicated that almost half of the students (45%) perceived a lot of differences in the learning approaches. They stated that in MSU, they had more opportunity to create their own work and practice their language skills in class while in GXUN they had less freedom and chances to think creatively and practice their Thai language skills.

Self-reliance was another issue in the learning approaches that showed differences. S2 and S6 stated that in MSU they were taught to do self-study and search for various kinds of information by themselves. This style of learning in MSU was different from what they had learnt in GXUN, where they just came to class, sat, and listened to the lecturers, without searching for any information.

The last difference of the learning approaches was that in MSU the students had to deal with group work. All six students reported that they were usually assigned to work in groups, where they had to take responsibility for their own topic by working on it, collecting some information, combining all of the content together, and discussing things with the other group members. After that, they had to present their group's report to other classmates, and then the lecturers would comment on their group work.

The findings concerning the learning approaches from the lecturers' interviews added two additional points to the learning approaches' topic. The first point was about the rote-learning approach. L1 and L3 stated that in MSU the students were taught in ways that rarely relied on a rote-learning approach and that they were encouraged to think more creatively and critically. L1 and L3 claimed that in GXUN, the students used a rote-learning approach, which focused on memorization. Making another point, L2 reported that the learning approach in MSU emphasized class discussion. The Chinese students did not have to come to class sometimes; instead they would be assigned a task that required them to search for some information on a study topic. Then they had to take part in a discussion in class later on. In contrast, the learning approaches in GXUN did not focus on discussion. The students were required to attend all classes, sit in class, and listen to the lecturers.

#### ***5.1.2.2 Period of study***

In my study, period of study refers to the number of hours per day that the students have to study in each course. The findings pertaining to the students' evaluation of the period of study indicate that there was a difference between the study period in MSU and that in GXUN. All students said it took too long for them to study in each class in MSU, while the study period in GXUN appeared to be more suitable for the students.

In order to see the differences between the learning styles in MSU and those in GXUN, it was necessary to make a comparative study of the issues in each of the two locations. Table 15 shows this comparison. The findings of the students' evaluation on the learning styles were compared through the questionnaires and the interviews. The results of students' interviews are listed initially, and then additional details from the lecturers follow.

From Table 15, it appears that the Chinese participants and the Thai lecturers found that aspects of the learning approach and period of study in MSU and in GXUN were different. These differences could be a major source of students' positive and negative experiences in the host country (Wan, 2001). The findings concerning these experiences are presented in the following section.

**Table 15: Students' evaluation on the learning styles in MSU and those in GXUN**

Topic	MSU		GXUN	
	Questionnaires	Interviews	Questionnaires	Interviews
<b>2. Learning styles</b>				
2.1 Learning approach	More opportunity to think and create work and more practice. Group assignments. Self-reliant (46%).	All six students: Enjoy group work and creative thinking, but were afraid of asking question in class and participated only when they were asked  S6: Self-reliant, more practice L1, L2, L3: Rarely relying on rote-learning approach  L2: Students did not have to come to class sometimes. Class discussion was required later on.	Less freedom and chances to create work and practice. Individual assignment (32%).	All six students: Fewer chances to practice in class. Individual assignment  L1, L3: Rote-learning approach  L2: students were required to attend all classes to study full time courses
2.2 Period of study	Taking too long to study in each class (100%).	S1, S2, S3, S5, & S6: Studying for more than two hours in each course without breaking time, very tired S4: like to study in a long period	Time to study in each class is more suitable (100%).	All six students: Studying for only 40 minutes in each class, with break time of 10 minutes

### 5.1.3 Positive and negative experiences

Though the teaching and learning styles in MSU appear to be different from those in GXUN, the participants seemed to have both positive and negative experiences in studying at MSU as shown in Table 16.

**Table 16: Students' experiences on the teaching and learning approaches of MSU**

Issues	Positive experiences	Negative experiences
<b>Teaching styles</b>		
a. Teaching approach	- Many activities. / Many teaching materials. / Active and lively teaching. / Flexible lesson plans.	- Not follow lesson plans. Students studied only a few lessons.
b. Teaching pace	- About right.	
c. Giving assignment		- Too heavy of a load of assignments.
d. Academic assessment and feedback	- Good to very good→ many sub-tests and criteria to assess the academic results, not only rely on the final exam marks. - Average quality of feedback they received (66%).	
e. Punctuality of lecturers		- Late (100%).
<b>Learning styles</b>		
a. Learning approach	- More opportunity to think and create work. / Self-reliance. / Group assignments. / Class discussion. / Satisfied with learning experiences.	- Afraid of asking question in class.
b. Period of study		- Each class took too long to study. / No break.

Table 16 presents a synthesis of the overall findings of students' evaluation on the teaching and learning styles in MSU and those in GXUN. It can be seen that the teaching and learning styles in MSU led the Chinese students to have both positive and negative experiences. They perceived that the *teaching approach*,



*teaching pace, academic assessment and feedback, and learning approach* could benefit their studies in MSU. However, the respondents showed dissatisfaction on the issues of *giving assignments, punctuality of lecturers, and period of study*. Regarding the aspect of *teaching approach*, while the students mentioned some advantages, they also indicated disadvantages as well.

Considering the students' comments, except for S6 who claimed that he had negative experiences, S1, S3, S5, and S6 stated that they were happy with the teaching style and found it enjoyable whenever they had classes.

S5: 'I like the teaching style of Thai lecturers. They give us *various kinds of assignments* and they teach in a *very active way*. I am *happy* when I have to study with them' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

S6: "The lecturers in MSU *taught whatever they wanted without being fixed to the lesson plans*. This made me feel that those lecturers *did not have a teaching plan* for each period. I preferred the approach of lecturers in GXUN as they had a good lesson plan and taught as they had planned. The lecturers in GXUN will be *strict to their lesson plans* and teach by following the textbooks, while the lecturers in Thailand have the *flexibility to adjust* them. Actually, the Thai lecturers should *stay closer to their lesson plans* and teach us as much as possible. However, I feel *happy* with their teaching style' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

In addition to the above experiences, S1, S3, S5, and S6 reported they could utilize the academic activities such as singing Thai songs, watching Video Compact Discs about Thai culture and doing role-plays in Thai to their daily life and these activities also helped them to improve their Thai language skills.

S1: 'In the 'Aesthetics in Thai Poetry' class, the lecturer teaches us how to *sing Thai songs*. We also have a chance to *do role-play in Thai* when we arrived in MSU. This really helps us to improve our Thai language skills' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3: 'In the 'Thai Folklore' course, the lecturer lets us *watch Video Compact Discs about Thai festivals*. It is very *useful* for us because we can *learn about Thai culture*' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

As can be seen above, the students had a mixed view overall on the teaching styles at MSU, identifying some positive aspects and some negative aspects related to the differences experienced compared with GXUN.

### **Conclusion of the results**

The findings of students' evaluations of the teaching and learning styles in MSU and those in GXUN show that there were differences in the aspects of *teaching approach, giving assignment, academic assessment, punctuality of lecturers, learning approach, and period of study*. Although these differences were identified, the Chinese students appeared to have both positive and negative academic experiences.

### **Discussion**

This research question is related to academic cultural differences, which are considered to be one problem being faced by Chinese international students (Wan, 2001). In addition, it focused on transition theory as the students traversed the new academic culture. Moreover, it related to the socio-psychological processes, as the students could adjust to the teaching pace in a new academic environment by acknowledging the cultural discrepancies between their home cultural values and behaviours and that of the host nation. Furthermore, this research question dealt with the social constructionism approach as they made and created their new bodies of knowledge in Thai academic environment through their interactions with one another and the lecturers.

The findings of this research question obtained through questionnaires and interviews indicate that the respondents perceived the teaching and learning styles in MSU as different from those in GXUN. There were differences in the aspects of *teaching approach, giving assignment, academic assessment, punctuality of lecturers, learning approach, and period of study*. The following section presents a discussion of the teaching styles (section 5.1.1), followed by the learning styles (section 5.1.2) and the positive and negative experiences (section 5.1.3).

### **5.1.1 Teaching styles**

The findings of the students' evaluation of the teaching approaches in MSU and those in GXUN show that there were differences in the teaching approaches in the two locations. From the questionnaires, 50% of the respondents referred to the freedom and flexibility of the teaching approaches of the lecturers in MSU, while 32% stated that the lecturers in GXUN taught students by following a textbook only. The data from the interviews regarding the teaching approaches showed that the lecturers in GXUN usually followed the textbooks, without any additional academic activities (S1, S3, S5, and S6).

Conversely, the lecturers in MSU sometimes used the textbook, but they also made use of various teaching materials and academic activities in their teaching and had the freedom and flexibility to design their own course and adjust the lesson plans. Stronge (2002) stated that flexibility and adaptability are sometimes more desirable than a well-written lesson plan, because classrooms are dynamic. The Chinese students seemed to be satisfied with the teaching approaches of the lecturers in MSU. Though S6 claimed that the lecturers in MSU should stay strictly fixed to their lesson plans and teach as completely as they had previously planned, S1, S3, S5, and S6 said that they were happy with the teaching style and found it enjoyable whenever they had classes.

Their satisfaction indicated that the Chinese students could adapt well to their new environment. The findings lend support to Campbell and Li's (2008) study results which found that the Asian students in New Zealand were satisfied with their learning experiences in terms of the practical program. Most participants reported they adapted well to the new learning environment. They were happy with their business programs and they described these programs as 'practical', 'useful', and 'flexible'. Moreover, they acknowledged that the skills obtained from these programs could be easily transferred to workplaces and real business. In the current study, the academic activities such as singing Thai songs, watching Video Compact Discs about Thai culture and doing role-plays in Thai appeared to be practical and useful for the Chinese students. S1, S3,

S5, and S6 stated that they could utilize them to their daily life and these activities also helped them to improve their Thai language skills.

With regard to the findings of teaching approaches in MSU, the lecturers seemed to be *facilitators* who assigned the students several activities to do. Grasha (1996) stated that the *Facilitator* teaching style emphasizes activities and tasks. It is student-centred and students have assignments that involve a wide variety of tasks. This teaching style appeared to be the most appropriate one for students with an independent learning style. Moreover, Hibberd (2005) stated that through participating in activities and interaction between learners and facilitators to arrive at a higher level of truth, students will be able to actively construct their own knowledge and meaning.

Concerning teaching pace, the findings give support to the social constructionist perspective. In my study, the Thai culture takes on the context of a living thing for the Chinese students. Their past social constructs, from their home country, have to some extent been stripped away by the move to a new living and studying situation and culture. The students need to understand how Thai society functions, how to begin to try to adjust themselves to this new social situation, and how to build knowledge upon those new understandings. We see evidence of this process and its effects in the findings regarding the teaching and learning styles in MSU. The students were now beginning the process of adjusting to the Thai educational environment. They tried to understand what was going on in this academic context and, following some difficulties during the adjustment, finally came to consider the teaching pace of MSU's lecturers to be 'about right'. Marshall (1998), Stam (2001), and Hibberd (2005) indicated that individuals or groups will make and create the world through their interaction with one another and the objects in a new environment and through that process their social interpretations will have an influence on the values that they come to build.

In my study, once in their new learning environment at MSU, the students constructed their new bodies of knowledge in the Thai academic environment in such a way that they agreed that the lecturers' teaching speed in MSU was

'about right'. They interacted with their Chinese classmates and the lecturers and during this adjustment process they formed that interpretation of the teaching pace. Then the process predicted by Social Constructionism continued as they adjusted themselves to better fit into that new meaning they had created. This reveals that part of the reason that the students were satisfied with the teaching and learning styles of the lecturers at MSU was a result of this process, during which they had constructed their own interpretation, through their interaction with the lecturers and classmates, that the teaching pace of MSU lecturers was suitable for their study.

Besides giving support to the social constructionist perspective, the findings of the study also show a correlation to the socio-psychological processes. The majority of students considered the lecturers' teaching speed in both MSU and GXUN as 'about right'. This positive attitude seemed to indicate that the students might have felt as comfortable studying at MSU as at GXUN, despite the contrasting academic cultures. In addition, they may be satisfied with their different learning experiences in both countries. It is possible that they may have anticipated the differences between the two countries' educational environment even before they arrived in Thailand. Therefore, when they moved into a new academic environment, they expected the adjustment to the lecturers' pace and had sufficient flexibility in approach to adapt to it.

This assumption is supported by Sussman (2000) as the participants in the current study could adjust to the teaching pace. For the *intercultural* or *global* identity shift in the socio-psychological processes, Sussman stated that sojourners can hold multiple cultural "scripts" simultaneously and draw on each as the working self-concept requires. In the current study, the students held scripts of both Chinese and Thai teaching pace and made a comparison. They were aware of their cultural identity in this transition cycle. Sussman (2000) indicated that the sojourners' adjustment process is caused by their recognition of the cultural differences between their home cultural values and behaviours and those of the host culture. Their adjustment is facilitated by low cultural centrality and high cultural flexibility and therefore leads to a high level of

adaptation. In this present study, the Chinese students may see themselves more strongly as international students who can interact properly and effectively in this new academic environment. This self-view may help them embrace the cultural differences with a greater flexibility than would be typical for people from their home country.

In addition, the findings concerning teaching pace related to the social constructionism approach. Marshall (1998), Stam (2001), and Hibberd (2005) indicated that individuals or groups will make and create the world through their interaction with one another and the objects in a new environment. Then, their social interpretations will have an influence on the values that they build. In the present study, the students constructed their new bodies of knowledge in the Thai academic environment in such a way that the lecturers' teaching speed in MSU was 'about right'. They interacted with their Chinese classmates and the lecturers and interpreted the teaching pace in this way. Then, they adjusted themselves to fit into that new meaning they had made.

### **5.1.2 Learning styles**

Regarding the findings of the differences in learning styles, L2 mentioned the learning styles of Chinese students in MSU that they were taught to rarely rely on rote learning methods. When she finished teaching them, she would assign them to search for information related to the lesson. After that, they have to discuss things in class.

These learning styles let the students have more opportunity to think and create their work during group assignments and required more work where they were self-reliant. Moreover, they had to take part in a discussion in class. These teaching practices in MSU seemed to be similar to those in the Western countries where students were encouraged to use critical thinking and to question (Hofstede, 1980). Kingston and Forland (2008) argued that East Asian educational traditions were gradually becoming more individualistic than in the past when collectivism was considered as the identity of Asians. East Asian learners were becoming increasingly similar to their Western peers. For example, they were autonomous and reflective learners. This contradicts any

Western stereotypical view that students from Eastern cultures are passive, obedient, and lacking in autonomy.

### **5.1.3 Positive and negative experiences**

Though the Chinese students acknowledged the differences between the teaching and learning styles in MSU and those in GXUN, they appeared to have both positive and negative experiences (see Table 16 on page 185). These findings appear to support Wan's (2001), Swagler and Ellis's (2003), Campbell and Li's (2008), and Kingston and Forland's (2008) study results.

Wan (2001) studied the learning experience of graduate Chinese students in American universities. She mentioned that the differences in culture, language, and social and political systems between two countries were the main sources for the positive and negative experiences of the participants. While Wan's (2001) study failed to give a clear picture of the positive or negative experiences, in the current study, the participants' positive and negative experiences were identified.

In addition, Swagler and Ellis's (2003) investigated the cross-cultural adjustment of Taiwanese students attending graduate school in the United States. These participants reported that they had both positive and negative experiences. With regard to negative experiences, they indicated that English was their number one problem. Moreover, the loss of family, friends, and the general Taiwanese social network led them to have stress. Regarding positive experiences, the participants reported their appreciation in many issues (e.g. the sense of freedom) (see more detail in Chapter 2 on page 64).

Campbell and Li's (2008) study results also showed that their 22 Asian students at a New Zealand University had both positive and negative experiences. The students reported a relatively high level of satisfaction with their study at the host university although they still had some difficulties in their learning. Similarly, the participants in Kingston and Forland's (2008) study also indicated that language was one of many problems that created difficulties for them.

However, they still had positive views of the academic administration of the university.

Concerning positive experiences, the Chinese in my study seemed to enjoy studying as the lecturers were active and had a lively teaching style. They also provided the students with several kinds of teaching materials and academic activities, such as singing Thai songs, watching Thai movies, and doing role-plays in Thai. In addition, the students had the opportunity to take many tests before the final exam. They also had more chances to search for information by themselves, create their own work, and take part in group work. They found that for example, they were highly adaptive and grew to enjoy the variety of assessment techniques.

However, negative perspectives were also reported. S6 seemed to dislike the flexibility of lesson plans as he claimed that the lecturers in MSU taught whatever they wanted without being fixed to the lesson plans. S6 was familiar with the teaching styles of the Chinese lecturers in GXUN and felt he could gain more benefit from this type of studying, while the other style with a flexible plan wasted his time.

Regarding the flexibility of lesson plans and the punctuality of the Thai lecturers in Thailand, a possible explanation is that these behaviours may be a result of the looseness of Thai culture. Hofstede (1980) claimed that people in a country with a loose culture (e.g. Thais) have fewer rules, more flexible normative standards, and are more tolerant of deviations from cultural norms. In the current study, the Thai lecturers were regarded by the students as having flexibility in their lesson plans and of being an unpunctual people. They taught the elements of the course that they felt most relevant, without being fixed to a lesson plan, and came to class late. This may indicate that these lecturers have flexible normative standards and have fewer rules in their teaching styles.

With regard to the findings concerning differences between the Thai and Chinese universities' teaching and learning approaches, a relationship between the findings of the current study; Campbell and Li's (2008); and Wan's (2001)



studies and the transition theory is consistently found. Goodman et al. (2006) claimed that individuals moving into a new situation (e.g. an educational environment) have some common needs and it is important for them to become familiar with the rules, regulations, or norms of the new system. Before moving into a new academic environment, the students' status was common in the present study and in Campbell and Li's (2008) and Wan's (2001) studies--an international student who wanted to further his/her study abroad. These students may perceive the academic differences between their home and host countries and they may be informed about the new academic culture. Therefore, once they had moved through their transitions, they learned to deal with these differences and could adjust their lives to the new environment very well. However, as their home and host countries may have had a mixture of similarities and differences in some educational aspects, this could lead the students to have both positive and negative experiences.

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

Regarding the findings of differences between the Thai and Chinese universities' teaching and learning styles, Eland (2001) stated that when international students enter a new educational environment, it is inevitable for them to encounter academic cultural differences, which Eland called 'educational shock'. Thorstensson (2001) found that educational shock was one variable affecting the adjustment of his Asian international participants. However, though the teaching and learning approaches of the two institutions were found to be different, the participants seemed to have both positive and negative experiences in MSU. The findings of students' evaluations on the teaching and learning revealed the differences between approaches of the Thai university and those of the Chinese university, and the amount of adjustment required by students. Dunn (2006) claimed that the greater the differences are between the two educational systems, the more academic adjustment problems international students tend to face, and this is supported by the findings reported by the participants, with even relatively insignificant changes being commonly mentioned where they produced a degree of "culture shock", e.g. promptness of lecturers.

## 5.2 The Students' Adjustment Problems

### Results

This issue was probed using the research question, "What do the participants perceive students' adjustment problems to be in the first year?" which aimed to identify and analyse the adjustment problems encountered by the Chinese students enrolled at MSU and to understand the sources of these problems. The findings of the students' adjustment problems have been structured as follows: (5.2.1) Academic problems, (5.2.2) Sociocultural problems, and (5.2.3) Support services problems.

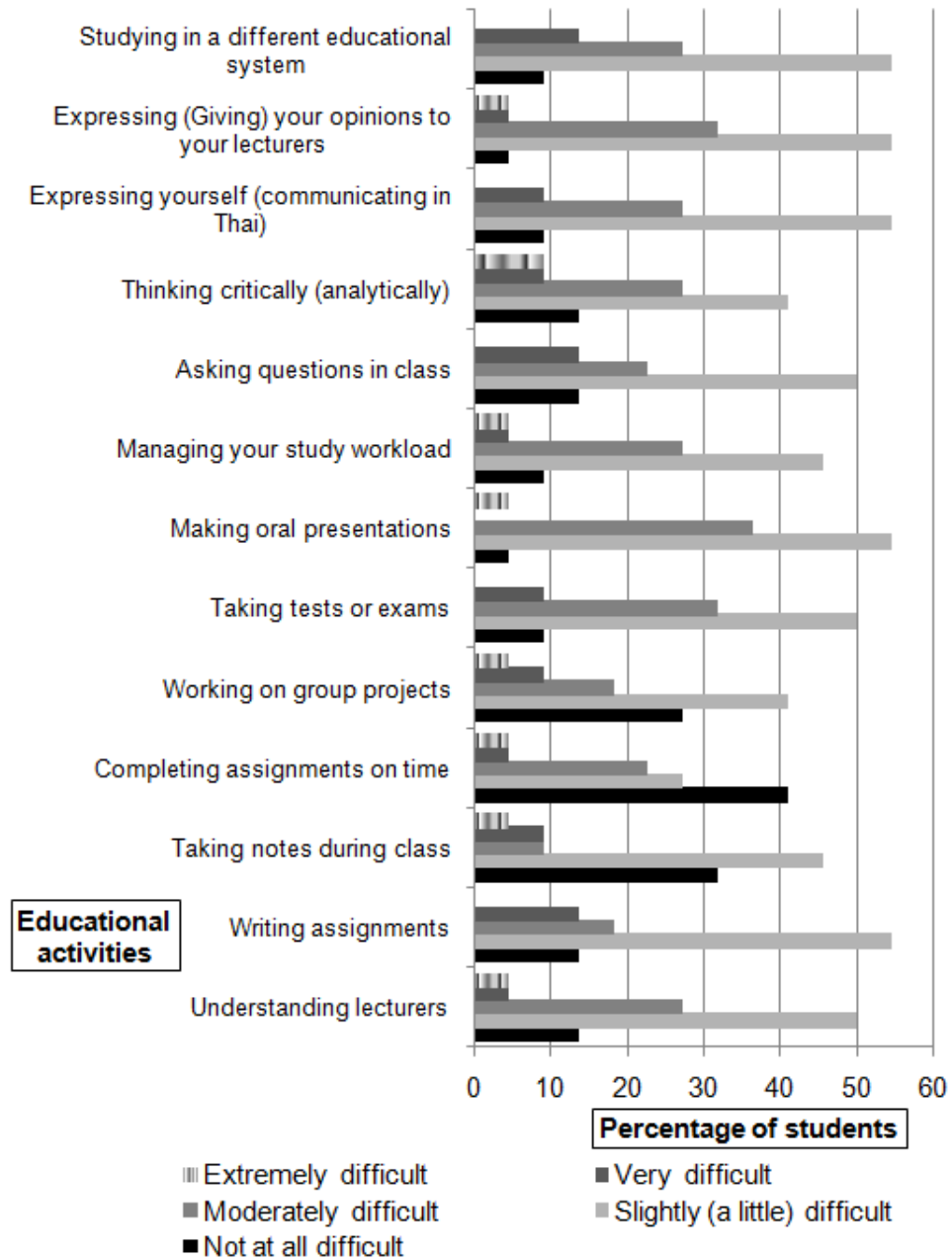
#### 5.2.1 Academic problems

The issues regarding academic problems have been divided into two sections: (5.2.1.1) Academic activities' difficulties, and (5.2.1.2) Academic progress and satisfaction

##### 5.2.1.1 Academic activities' difficulties

To assess whether Chinese students found education activities in MSU difficult, the questionnaires asked for feedback on 13 academic activities. Figure 14 presents the levels of difficulty on academic tasks. It is apparent that the majority of students (40-54%) indicated that all educational activities, excluding *completing assignment on time*, were only 'slightly difficult', while fewer than 10% of students rated eight out of 13 activities as 'extremely difficult'. The number of students who found *completing assignments on time* to be 'not at all difficult' was significantly higher than in other area (41%), and about twice as high as in other educational activities. Just above half of students (54%) replied that the following activities were only 'slightly difficult': *writing assignments*, *making oral presentations*, *expressing themselves (communicating in Thai)*, *expressing (giving) their opinions to their lecturers*, and *studying in a different educational system*. On the other hand, the respondents replied that the following tasks were 'not at all difficult' for them: *completing assignments on time* (41%), *taking notes during class* (33%), and *working on group projects* (28%). All educational activities received some ratings of 'not at all difficult',

‘moderately difficult’ and ‘slightly difficult’, with an ‘extremely difficult’ rating being uncommon.



**Figure 14: Difficulty with educational activities in MSU**

The findings of the Chinese participants’ academic problems have been summarized as showed in Table 17, followed by details of these findings from the interviews and reflective journals.

Data from the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals revealed the students' academic problems in four areas—*writing assignments*, *expressing yourself (communicating in Thai)*, *asking questions in class*, and *understanding lecturers*. All activities were rated by the majority of all students as 'slightly difficult'. *Writing assignments* appeared to be the major problem that was often mentioned by most students (S1, S2, S5, and S6) through their interviews and reflective journals. They indicated that writing Thai poetry was very difficult.

S6 (Interview): 'The lecturer asked us to *write Thai poetry*. It was *very difficult*. I spent many hours thinking about it, but I couldn't figure it out. However, I have to practice and search out various types of information' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

S1 (Reflective journal): 'I feel that *writing Thai poetry is very difficult*. I can't remember enough vocabulary. Whenever I have to write it, I often get a headache. As well as not being able to choose the correct vocabulary, I have a lot of work to place that vocabulary in a pleasant and alliterative form' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

Moreover, the majority of the students indicated that they experienced slight difficulty in *expressing themselves (communicating in Thai)*, *asking questions in class*, and *understanding lecturers*. According to S1, S2, S3, and S5:

S1: 'I am *scared of talking to the lecturers* because I feel that my Thai language skills are *weak*' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S2: 'Sometimes, I *don't know what the lecturers are talking about*. That's why I am *scared to communicate* with them' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S3: 'I *don't dare to talk to the lecturers* because I am *afraid of miscommunication*' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S5: 'My *Thai language skills are not good enough*, so, I *don't talk to the lecturers often*' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

In addition, S2 and S4 faced difficulties when asking questions in class, whereas only S2 said that it was hard for her to understand the lecturers.

S2: 'When studying, I *don't really understand what the lecturers say*. I will ask my Thai friend for help. I *won't ask the lecturers*

so much because I am *afraid of asking* them' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S4: 'When I have any questions, I will *ask my friends*. I *never ask the lecturers*' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

However, the students' comments were generally consistent with the lecturers' and administrators' interviews; that is, those who said they faced problems in *expressing themselves, asking questions in class, and understanding lecturers* were considered as having these difficulties by the lecturers and administrators.

A1: 'I feel that sometimes, *the students don't understand what I just said* to them. I *have to repeat my words and explain again* to make sure that they understand me' (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

L3: '*The Chinese students don't understand what I taught*. I notice from their assignments and can see that they can't do these assignments' (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

A2: 'Sometimes, the students want to speak, but, it's like they are still thinking. *They can't communicate with me very well*' (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

A3: 'Their main adjustment problem is about *their ability to communicate*. This may be because they have just arrived in Thailand. *Their Thai speaking skills may not strong enough*. However, they've made an effort to communicate with me' (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

Furthermore, L2 and L3's opinions reinforced the students' statements that they seemed to be confused when they were being taught and they did not ask questions in class.

L2: 'When I asked the students whether they had been studying this issue, they seemed to be *confused*. They couldn't *answer my questions*, so, they kept quiet' (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

L3: 'When I teach them, they *don't understand* and seem to be *confused*' (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

Overall, it can be seen that the students appear to face academic difficulties in the host country, though they indicated in their questionnaires that they had 'slight difficulty' with almost all of the educational activities..

**Table 17: Academic difficulties of Chinese participants**

Academic problems	Questionnaires	Interviews			Reflective journals
		Students	Lecturers	Administrators	
Writing assignments	54% slightly difficult	S1: Very difficult to write Thai poetry / Had a limited vocabulary and read only a small quantity of books S2: Could not remember the vocabulary + had no idea how to choose the correct vocabulary.			S1: Very hard to write Thai poetry / could remember a little of the vocabulary S5-S6: Very difficult to write Thai poetry S4: Hard to write Thai poetry, but still had fun
Expressing yourself (communicating in Thai)	54% slightly difficult	S1: Was not good at speaking and could not think of vocab S2, S3, & S5: Afraid of communicating with lecturers		A1: Students did not understand what she was talking about. A2 & A3: students' ability to communicate was the main adjustment problem	
Asking questions in class	50% slightly difficult	S2: Afraid of asking the lecturers in class / Asked if they could speak Chinese S4: Afraid of asking the lecturers in class / Asked friends instead.	L3: Some students seemed to be quiet in class and did not ask any questions		
Understanding lecturers	50% slightly difficult	S2: Difficult to understand each other	L2: Students looked confused and could not answer her questions L3: Students did not understand what he taught		

### **5.2.1.2 Academic progress and satisfaction**

A summary of these findings is presented in Table 18, beginning with the results from the students' evaluation of their progress and satisfaction with the progress of their studies, and ending with those from their interviews and the findings of their satisfaction with academic experiences being gained from their interviews and reflective journals.

Data from Table 18 reveals that the Chinese students were predominantly making progress in their studies and were satisfied with the progress they had made at MSU as their Thai language skills were developing. Comments from the participants' interviews and reflective journals concerning their satisfaction with academic experiences were generally consistent with their progress and satisfaction with it; that is, all participants who had found it pleasurable to study Thai language and culture and who felt that the lecturers gave them attention and were very helpful, appeared to be satisfied with the progress of their studies and to have improved in their language skills. These findings revealed that the Chinese students had positive experiences in their studies in MSU.

S1: 'When I first studied with the lecturers, I didn't really understand what the lecturers said. But, I felt that they were *very helpful*. They tried to *speak slowly* and also *drew pictures to help us understand easily*' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S3: 'When I don't understand the lessons, the lecturers *often help* me. They *speak and explain slowly* so that I can catch their words' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S4: 'The lecturers are *very helpful*. When we face any problems, they *help* us' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

S1 and S5 indicated that they had better understanding and communication in Thai at the end of the semester. However, S2, S4, and S6 had found it enjoyable to study the various different aspects of Thai language and culture that were involved.

S1: 'I feel that my *Thai language skills have improved*. I have *better understanding of the Thai language* than last year. This makes me enjoy studying very much' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S5: 'My *Thai language skills are getting better*. I really enjoy studying' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

S2: 'I'm *impressed by learning to sing Thai songs*. The lecturers teach us to sing many songs. I am *very happy to study*' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S4: 'The most enjoyable moment for me is that I have a chance to *sing Thai songs* in the 'Aesthetics in Thai Poetry' course. The lecturer taught me to sing various kinds of Thai songs' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

S6: 'The lecturer assigned us to *do role-play*. He gave us the topic and then we had to find information and write a dialogue. It's really fun' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

With regard to the findings of the students' educational task difficulties and those of their academic progress and satisfaction, it can be seen that though the Chinese participants experienced academic difficulties while studying at MSU, they reported their satisfaction with the progress in their studies and educational experiences in this institution.



**Table 18: Students' academic progress and satisfaction**

Students	Progress & satisfaction with progress		Satisfaction with academic experiences	
	Questionnaires	Interviews	Interviews	Reflective Journals
All students	64% Average 95% Satisfied			
S1	Good, Satisfied	Satisfied / Listening & writing skills improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecturers gave attention, worked more slowly, &amp; very helpful.</li> <li>- Better understanding and communication in Thai.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Though the lessons were too difficult to understand, she was very happy to study.</li> </ul>
S2	Average, Not satisfied	Satisfied / Thai pronunciation better because of speaking Thai every day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had pleasure studying Thai language &amp; culture.</li> </ul>	
S3	Average, Satisfied	Satisfied / Speaking skill better because of travelling with Thai friends often	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecturers gave attention, worked more slowly, &amp; very helpful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liked to watch Thai movies &amp; play games with Thai friends.</li> </ul>
S4	Average, Satisfied	Satisfied / Listening & speaking skills improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had pleasure studying Thai language &amp; culture (had fun with writing a Thai poem).</li> </ul>	
S5	Good, Satisfied	Satisfied / Listening & reading skills improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecturers gave attention, worked more slowly, &amp; were very helpful.</li> <li>- Better understanding and communication in Thai.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had a great time in studying Thai language in different periods &amp; writing Thai poetry.</li> </ul>
S6	Excellent, Satisfied	Satisfied / Listening, reading & speaking improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had pleasure studying Thai language &amp; culture (interested in Thai Folktale &amp; self-study).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoyed studying, esp. self-study &amp; search for information independently.</li> </ul>

## 5.2.2 Sociocultural problems

The sociocultural problems in my study refer to the problems concerning the Chinese students' social interaction and cultural context (Gipps, 1999).

According to Gipps, these issues can be structured as follows: (5.2.2.1) Social problems and (5.2.2.2) Cultural problems.

### 5.2.2.1 Social problems

To understand the Chinese students' social problems, the following aspects were explored: (1) Students' homesickness and loneliness, (2) Students' relationships with people in MHK, and (3) Students' experiences with discrimination.

#### (1) Students' homesickness and loneliness

A summary of the participants' homesickness and loneliness problems is presented in Table 19.

**Table 19: Students' experiences of homesickness and loneliness**

Student	Questionnaires	Interviews	Reflective journals
All students	82% faced difficulty 18% not at all difficult		
S1	Difficult		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Usually called parents.</li> <li>- Consulted her mother when did not know how to cook.</li> <li>- Let her mother know how &amp; where she was.</li> </ul>
S2	Not at all difficult		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Usually called parents.</li> <li>- Let her mother know how &amp; where she was.</li> </ul>
S3	Difficult	Missed his family & friends in China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Usually called parents.</li> <li>- Let his mother know how &amp; where he was.</li> </ul>
S4	Difficult		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Usually called parents.</li> </ul>
S5	Difficult		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Usually called parents.</li> <li>- Missed his mother when writing poem about her.</li> </ul>
S6	Difficult		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Felt lonely on his birthday.</li> </ul>

Issues of homesickness and loneliness were brought up in questionnaires, interviews and reflective journals. While the majority of students reported these difficulties in their questionnaires, S3 was the only student who mentioned homesickness during his interview. He said that:

*'I experience difficulty in adjusting to life here, but, it's only a small issue. For example, I feel homesick and miss my friends in China'* (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

Conversely, although S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 did not mention homesickness and loneliness directly in their reflective journals, they reported that they regularly called their parents in China.

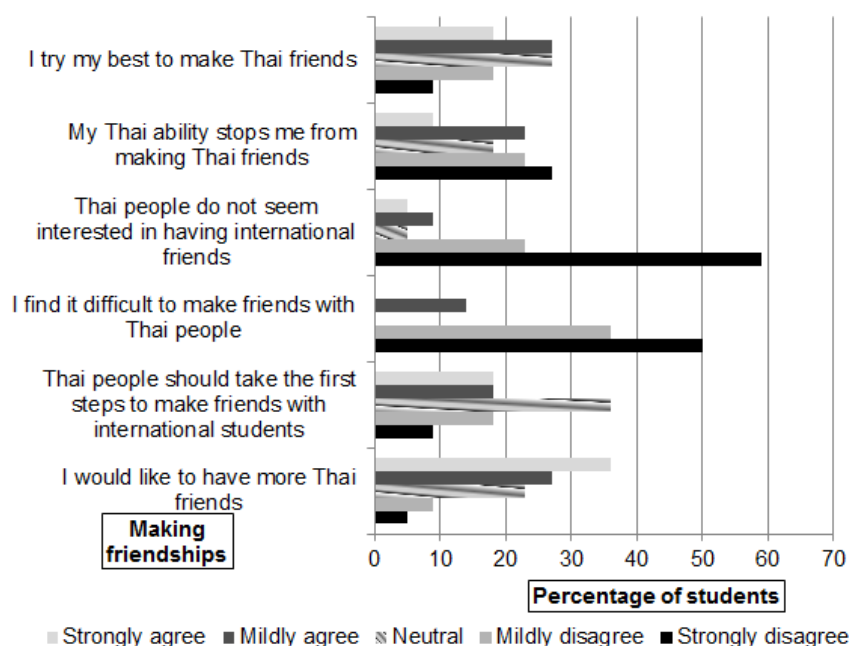
Though some students stated that homesickness and loneliness were not at all a problem for them, the majority of students reported that they often called their parents in China. Taken together with the information from the questionnaires, interviews and reflective journals, in which most participants mentioned feelings of homesickness or loneliness, this would seem to indicate that their calls were not just for social reasons, but part of their coping mechanism when living overseas.

## *(2) Students' relationships with people in MHK*

The structure of this part begins with: (2a) The students' evaluations of making friendships with Thai people, (2b) The number of friends they had in MHK, and (2c) The intercultural and intracultural contacts the students made.

### *2a. The students' evaluations of making friendships with Thai people*

The findings of the students' evaluation of friendship making (see Figure 15) show that over 80% of students believed that making friends with Thai people was not difficult (86%). Moreover, 82% felt that Thai people seemed to be interested in having international friends. Sixty-three percent stated that they would like to have more Thai friends.



**Figure 15: Making friendships in MHK**

Regarding the six students' information, while S1, S2, S3, S4, and S6 agreed that it was easy for them to get to know Thai friends and it was interesting for Thai people to have international friends, S6 mentioned his difficulty in making friends with Thai people and he viewed Thais as not seeming interested in having international friends. Thai language ability appeared to be a barrier for only 32% of students. In the six students' questionnaires, they viewed this issue differently. Whereas S2 and S4 pointed out that their Thai ability was a strong obstacle to making Thai friends, S1, S3, and S6 disagreed with them. With regard to the issue about who should be the first to take the first steps in making intercultural friendships, just over a third of students (36%) responded that Thai people should make an effort first. S1 and S6 also agreed with this, while S4 said that the international students should approach Thais instead. S2, S3, and S5 felt neutral on this topic.

Interestingly, almost half of students (45%) agreed that they tried their best to make Thai friends. This meant that they viewed relationships with Thai people as an important issue for their lives. S1, S2, S4 and S6 also agreed with this.

However, S3 stated that he did not make an effort to make friends with Thai people.

*2b. The number of friends they had in MHK.*

To consider whether they made friendships with Thai people, compatriots, and friends from other nations, it was necessary to look at the number of friends the students made. The findings showed that the majority of Chinese students had Thai friends (55%), while 82% had no friends from other nations. Conversely, half of the students (50%) mentioned that they had many friends from their home country.

In the six students' questionnaires, half of them (S2, S5, and S6) also mentioned that they did not have any close Thai friends, while S4, S3, and S1 said that they had many, a few, and one respectively. Only S6 indicated that he had a few friends from other nations, whereas the rest had none.

From the results of the students' evaluations of making friendships with Thai people from Figure 15 and those of the number of friends in MHK, it can be seen that though almost half of students tried their best to make friends with Thai people, 45% of them still did not have Thai friends.

*2c. The intercultural and intracultural contact the students made.*

For the aspect of spending time with people, Table 20 shows that Chinese students tend to spend the most time, both social and academic, with students from their home country. Also, they spend more time with Thai friends than with other international students. Seventy-seven percent of students responded that they never spent social time or studied with international friends.

**Table 20: Percentage of intercultural and intracultural contact**

<b>Intercultural and intracultural contact (%)</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very often</b>
<b>Spend social time with:</b>					
Thai people	9	27	41	18	5
Compatriots	0	5	5	27	64
Other internationals	77	9	14	0	0
<b>In study session with:</b>					
Thai friends	18	59	18	5	0
Compatriots	0	0	32	23	45
Other internationals	77	0	23	0	0

The data from the six students' questionnaires showed different information: though most students spent the most social time with their Chinese friends, they only spent some academic time with them. While S1, S2, S3, and S4 never spent social or academic time with international students, S5 and S6 stated that they spent some time with these friends. In his reflective journal, S3 replied that his Thai friends came to socialise with him in his room, while S1 and S4 invited their Thai friends to have Chinese food together.

S3 (Reflective journal): 'Today, my friends and I went to the market and bought some veggies and ingredients to cook Chinese food at my room. I also *invited my Thai friends to have dinner with us*. After that, we *played games together*. It was very fun' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S1 (Interview): 'I like cooking in my room with my Chinese friends. Sometimes, I *persuade my Thai friends to come and have Chinese food together*' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

In addition, S4 mentioned that those friends gave him suggestions about travel in Thailand.

S4: 'When I had dinner with my Chinese and Thai friends, we talked about our plan to travel around Thailand. Those *Thai friends made very good suggestions* to me' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

The findings regarding students' friendships with lecturers which obtained from the participants' interviews showed that the majority of participants mentioned a close relationship with the lecturers. Though S1 reported that she did not become close to the lecturers because she was not the class leader (i.e. the student chosen by the class to liaise with the lecturers) and she did not feel comfortable talking to them due to her weakness in speaking skills, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 mentioned the differences in their relationships with the lecturers when they were outside the classroom. For example, S3 and S6 said that:

S3: 'When I am outside the classroom, I will go out to have something to eat with the lecturers. Sometimes, we *play sports together*. However, I pay respect to them when studying with them in a classroom' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S6: 'I *feel close to some friendly lecturers*. Outside the classroom, we *talk like friends*. But, when I am in class, I will *keep my distance to show respect* to them' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

The data gathered from the interviews and the reflective journals provided additional insights on the issue of students' relationships with people in MHK. Table 21 presents a summary of this topic.

Data from the interviews revealed that though all respondents had a few Thai friends, they seemed to have a good relationship with them as they spent time playing, eating, and talking together. In addition, they mentioned their close relationship with their Chinese friends and the assistance they gave one another. Data from the reflective journals reinforced this point as it revealed that the respondents often spent time with their Chinese friends. Conversely, almost all of them reported that they had not formed friendships with international students. For those who had Khmer friends, they indicated that they seldom had social time with them. The students' relationships with the lecturers appeared to be different from that of the administrators; that is, the respondents had a friendly relationship with the lecturers outside classes, while that with the administrators was more distant. For example, some students reported that they had lunch or dinner with some lecturers, while their relationship with the administrators remained purely professional.

**Table 21: Students' relationships with people in MHK**

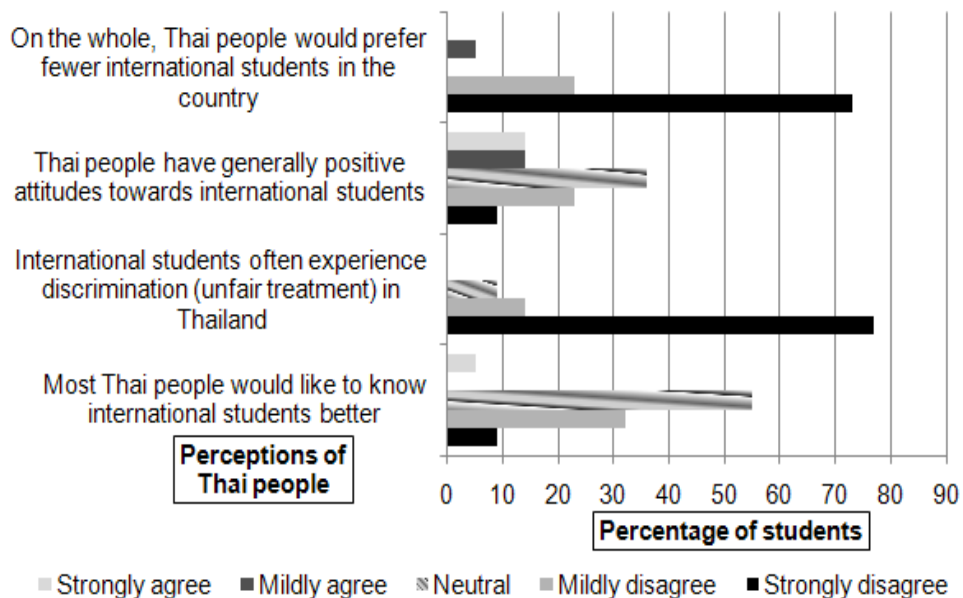
Student	Interview					Reflective journals
	Thai friends	Chinese friends	International friends	Lecturers	Admin.	
S1	A few Thai friends / knew via friends, relatives, lecturers' suggestions	Close + help one another	No int. friend	Not close (weak in speaking, afraid to talk)	Not close	Very happy to spend time with friends / Persuade Thai friends to have Chinese food
S2	A few Thai friends / used to have a Thai boyfriend	Close + help one another	No int. friend	Close	Not close	Often spent time with Chinese friends
S3	A few Thai friends / knew when a festival held in uni. + when selling milk tea at uni. market	Close + help one another	No int. friend	Close	Not close	Often spent time with Chinese friends / Thai friends came to play with him
S4	A few Thai friends	Close + help one another	A few Khmer friends, but seldom talked + met	Close	Not close	Often spent time with Chinese friends / Persuade Thai friends to have Chinese food / Thai friends suggested about travelling
S5	A few Thai friends / rarely went out with them (went with his Chinese girlfriend)	Close + help one another	No int. friend	Close	Not close	Often spent time with Chinese friends
S6	A few Thai friends	Close + help one another	A few Khmer friends, but seldom talked + met	Close	Close (due to his duties)	Often spent time with Chinese friends + close / A few Thai friends + not close



### *(3) Students' experiences in discrimination*

This part considers the students' evaluation of their experience with discrimination and measures perceived discrimination and reflected perceptions, that is, how Chinese students believe Thai people see them. The findings of their evaluation of discrimination showed that the majority of the students indicated that they did not face difficulty with discrimination at all (68%, S2 and S3), while 32% (S1, S4, and S6) stated their difficulties.

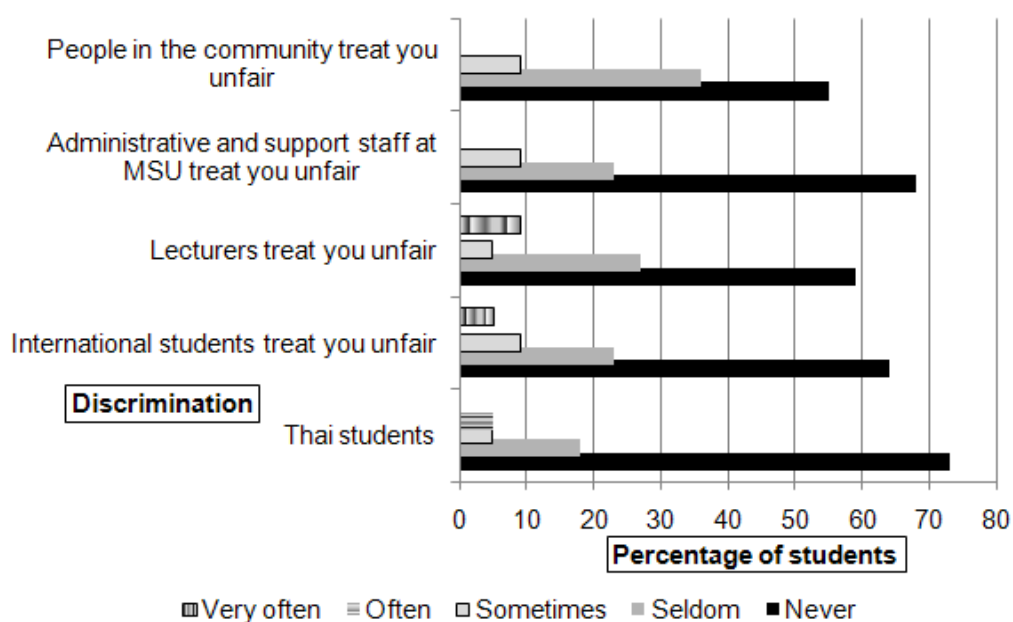
Figure 16 shows the views of Chinese students on the attitudes of Thai people towards international students. The respondents indicated both positive and negative aspects. Regarding their positive views, the majority of them did not believe that international students often experienced discrimination in Thailand (91%) and that Thai people would prefer a lower number of international students in the country (96%). However, the respondents showed their negative view that Thai people had negative attitudes towards international students (31%) and most Thais did not want to know foreign students better (41%).



**Figure 16: Reflected perceptions: Thai people's attitudes as seen by international students**

The results from the six students' questionnaires presented similar trends as those from all the students' questionnaires. S1, S3, and S6 strongly disagreed that international students often received unfair treatment in Thailand and S1, S2, S3, S5, and S6 believed that Thai people would prefer more international students in the country. These findings have been summarized in Table 22.

In addition to the reflected perceptions, the participants were asked to evaluate how often they were treated unfairly by people in the community, by administrators, lecturers, international students, and Thai friends (see Figure 17). It is concerning to report that 9% of students had experienced discrimination from lecturers *very often*. However, it was more encouraging to see that a greater proportion of students had *never* experienced discrimination from community members (55%), lecturers (59%), other international students (64%), administrative or support staff at MSU (68%), or Thai students (73%).



**Figure 17: Level of discrimination**

In relation to the findings from all students' questionnaires, those of the six students' questionnaires showed similar results; that is, more than half of them (S1, S2, S3, and S6) reported that they had *never* faced discrimination problems from people in Thailand. However, these students still faced this

problem from some groups of people to certain degrees (see Table 22). Among the six students, S6 seemed to have had more experience with discrimination as he said he faced this problem from international students and lecturers *very often*. The incident of lecturers' discrimination was raised in S6's first interview as an example. He reported that one time he was waiting in a queue to take a test with a lecturer when a Thai student arrived. The lecturer let the Thai student take the test before him and because of that he had to wait for a long time. When he asked the lecturer about this, he was given no reply. Therefore, S6 was very angry. This made him think that the lecturer treated him unfairly.

The findings of the six students' assessment on the discrimination level have been summarized in Table 22 on page 213, which has been divided into two parts—positive and negative experiences. Each part contains the findings regarding Thais' perceptions from the students' perspectives and those of the students' evaluation of discrimination levels.

Data from the questionnaires revealed that the participants had both positive (e.g. international students did not often experience discrimination) and negative experiences (most Thais did not want to know international students better) with discrimination. Their perceptions of Thai people's attitudes towards international students were generally consistent with their evaluations on the level of discrimination; that is, those who had positive experiences never faced discrimination, and on the contrary, those who presented negative views had various levels of discrimination from people in MHK.

With regard to the discrimination problems, it can be seen that though most students had never experienced discrimination from Thai people, some of them still faced this difficulty. This matter should be considered by all people dealing with international students.

**Table 22: Students' experiences in discrimination**

Student	Positive experiences		Negative experiences	
	Perceptions	Level of discrimination	Perceptions	Level of discrimination
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Int. students did not often experience discrimination.</li> <li>- Thais would prefer more int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Never</i>: Thai &amp; int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most Thais did not want to know int. students better.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Sometimes</i>: Lecturers, admin. &amp; people in community.</li> </ul>
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Int. students did not often experience discrimination.</li> <li>- Thais would prefer more int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Never</i>: Int. students, admin. &amp; people in community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most Thais did not want to know int. students better.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Seldom</i>: Thai students &amp; lecturers.</li> </ul>
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Int. students did not often experience discrimination.</li> <li>- Thais would prefer more int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Never</i>: Thai students lecturers, admin. &amp; people in community.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Seldom</i>: Int. students.</li> </ul>
S4			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thais would prefer fewer int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Seldom</i>: lecturers, admin. &amp; people in community.</li> <li>- <i>Sometimes</i>: Thai &amp; int. students.</li> </ul>
S5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thais would prefer more int. students.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most Thais did not want to know int. students better.</li> <li>- Thais have negative attitudes towards int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Seldom</i>: Lecturers &amp; admin.</li> <li>- <i>Sometimes</i>: Int. students &amp; people in community.</li> </ul>
S6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Int. students did not often experience discrimination.</li> <li>- Thais have positive attitudes towards int. students.</li> <li>- Thais would prefer more int. students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Never</i>: Thai students.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Seldom</i>: Admin. &amp; people in community.</li> <li>- <i>Very often</i>: int. students &amp; lecturers.</li> </ul>

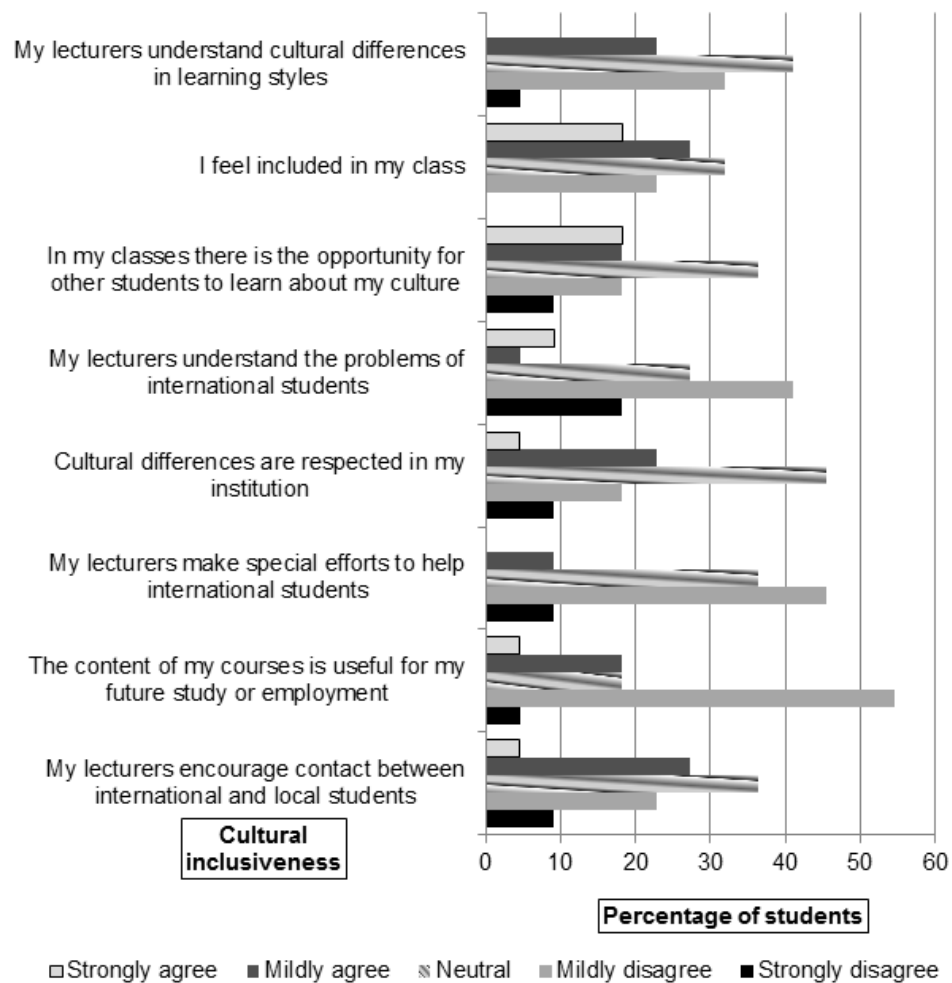
#### **6.2.2.2 Cultural problems**

This section examines perceptions of cultural inclusiveness. Back, Davis and Olsen (1998) stated that to deal with the internationalization of learning environments, it is necessary to make the students from 'culturally different' backgrounds feel included in the classroom.

Regarding the perceptions of cultural inclusiveness in MSU, Chinese students indicated negative feelings concerning the amount of cultural inclusiveness in their educational environments (see Figure 18). Though 45% of students agreed that they felt included in their class and 36% said that there were opportunities for other students to learn about their culture in class, the majority of students disagreed with the following statements:

- *The content of my courses is useful for my future study or employment* (60% disagree);
- *My lecturers understand the problems of international students* (59% disagree); and
- *My lecturers make special efforts to help international students* (53% disagree).

The answers in the questionnaires of the six participating students matched the results from all students in some points. 'I feel included in my class' was the only choice that showed a positive answer from the participants. Though S1, S2, and S4 chose a 'neutral' rating, S3 and S6 replied 'strongly agree' and 'mildly agree' for this index.



**Figure 18: Cultural inclusiveness in students' educational environment in MSU**

Conversely, more than half of the six interviewees reported a similar amount of negative cultural inclusiveness as was reported by all respondents in their questionnaires. The findings of the Chinese students' cultural issues can be summarized as shown in Table 23. Data gained from all students' questionnaires have been presented first, followed by that from the six students' questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals.

**Table 23: Cultural inclusiveness problems of Chinese participants**

Cultural inclusiveness	Questionnaires	Interviews	Reflective journals
Relevance of course content	60% / S1, S4, S5, & S6	S6: - 'Translation for interpreter' - too easy.  - 'Thai poetry writing' – too difficult + no application in future work.	S6: - 'Thai language in different periods' - no application in future work.  - 'Thai poetry writing' – too difficult + no application in future work.
No understanding from lecturers	69% / S1, S2, S3, S5, & S6	S2: Difficult to understand each other	
No respect on cultural differences	27% / S2, S5, & S6		S6: Lecturer forced the int. students to pay respect to them in a Thai style. When the students did that, those lecturers did not respond to their action or smile back to them to show good manners.

Table 23 shows that there were three cultural inclusiveness problems faced by the participants— relevance of course content, lack of understanding from lecturers, and lack of respect of cultural differences. Data from the questionnaires revealed that the majority of the six participants faced these three problems. However, only a few of them commented on the problems in their interviews and reflective journals. For example, S6 commented on the unsuitability of the course content through his interviews and reflective journal, while S2 mentioned her problem with the lecturers' understanding of international students through her interview and S6 identified his feelings about a lack of respect for cultural differences through his reflective journal.

S6: 'The lecturers taught me about the traditional Thai alphabets in an old period. I feel that it is *not suitable* material for me' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

S2: 'When I *talk to the lecturers* about studying, it is quite *difficult for us to understand each other*' (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S6: 'Some lecturers *forced us* (Chinese students) *to pay respect to them in a Thai style*. When we did that, they did not respond to our action or smile back to us to show good

manners. Sometimes, they had not even paid attention to us' (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

Regarding the cultural differences aspects, the participants reported that these aspects were an issue. The majority of students identified through their questionnaires that the differences in culture caused difficulty for them (87% and all six students). They further mentioned three cultural difficulties in their interviews—Thai food, Thai customs, and sleeping patterns. Thai food was a major problem as indicated by the participants through their interviews and reflective journals. The findings of the cultural differences aspects were summarized as showed in Table 24.

**Table 24: Cultural differences problems of the Chinese participants**

Cultural differences	Interviews		Reflective journals
	Students	Lecturers	
Thai food	S1, S2, S3, & S6: Could not eat Thai food when first arrived in Thailand S6: Had diarrhea S5: Like eating Thai food	All three lecturers: Food was one small problem that the students usually had difficulties.	All six students: The taste of Thai and Chinese food was different. / Cook at their rooms
Thai customs	S3: - Did not know that children were not allowed to touch an older person's head S4: - Thai people spoke softly, while Chinese usually spoke loudly - Had to pay respect in Thai traditional style. - Had to take off his shoes when going to Thai friends' rooms.		
Sleeping patterns	S4: No nap time in the Thai culture / Very tired		

Data from the interviews and reflective journals revealed that the participants were predominantly facing cultural differences in food. However, the difficulty in eating Thai food appeared to occur only when they first arrived in Thailand. After that, they were able to solve this problem by cooking in their rooms.

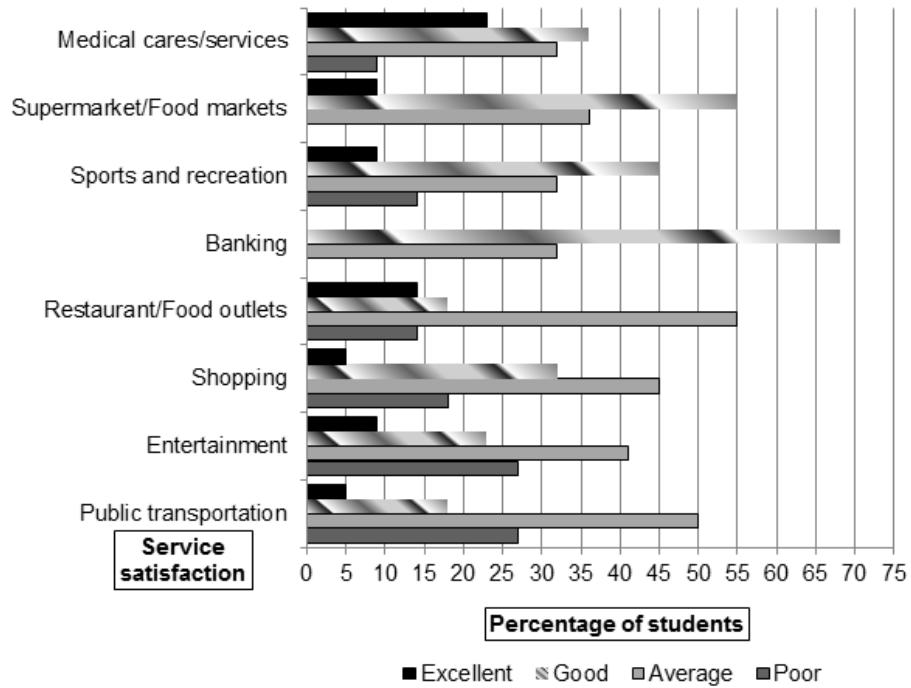


### **5.2.3 Support services problems**

As International students are generally seen to face particular challenges because of reduced familiar and social support services (Mori, 2000), it is necessary to explore the students' support services problems in order to find solutions for their difficulties. The findings of these problems were structured as follows: (5.2.3.1) Social services, (5.2.3.2) Academic services, and (5.2.3.3) Administrative services.

#### **5.2.3.1 Social services**

The findings of the students' social services problems were obtained from the questionnaires. Considering the quality of social services provided in MHK, only the *restaurant/food outlets* received the highest 'excellent' rating by 14% of students, while other services' 'excellent' ratings were lower than 10%. *Banking* was the factor with the highest rating, with 68% of students rating it as 'good'. Also, *supermarket/food markets* (55%), *sports and recreation* (45%), and *medical care/services* (36%) were reported by the majority of students as 'good'. More than 40% of students evaluated the following services as 'average': *restaurant/food outlets* (55%), *public transportation* (50%), *shopping* (45%), and *entertainment* (41%). However, just above a quarter of students (27%) stated that the quality of *public transportation* and *entertainment* in MHK were 'poor', while other services' 'poor' ratings were lower than 20% (see Figure 19).



**Figure 19: Satisfaction of students with the quality of services in MHK**

Regarding the six students' questionnaires, they showed similar results to all students' questionnaires that *banking* (S3, S4, and S6), *sports and recreation* (S3, S4, and S6), and *supermarket/food markets* (S3, S4, S5, and S6) were rated as 'good', while *restaurant/food outlets* (S1, S2, and S6) was rated as 'average'. A summary of these findings has been presented in Table 25. The levels of the social services quality ranged from 'poor' to 'excellent'.

**Table 25: Students' evaluations of the social services provided in MHK**

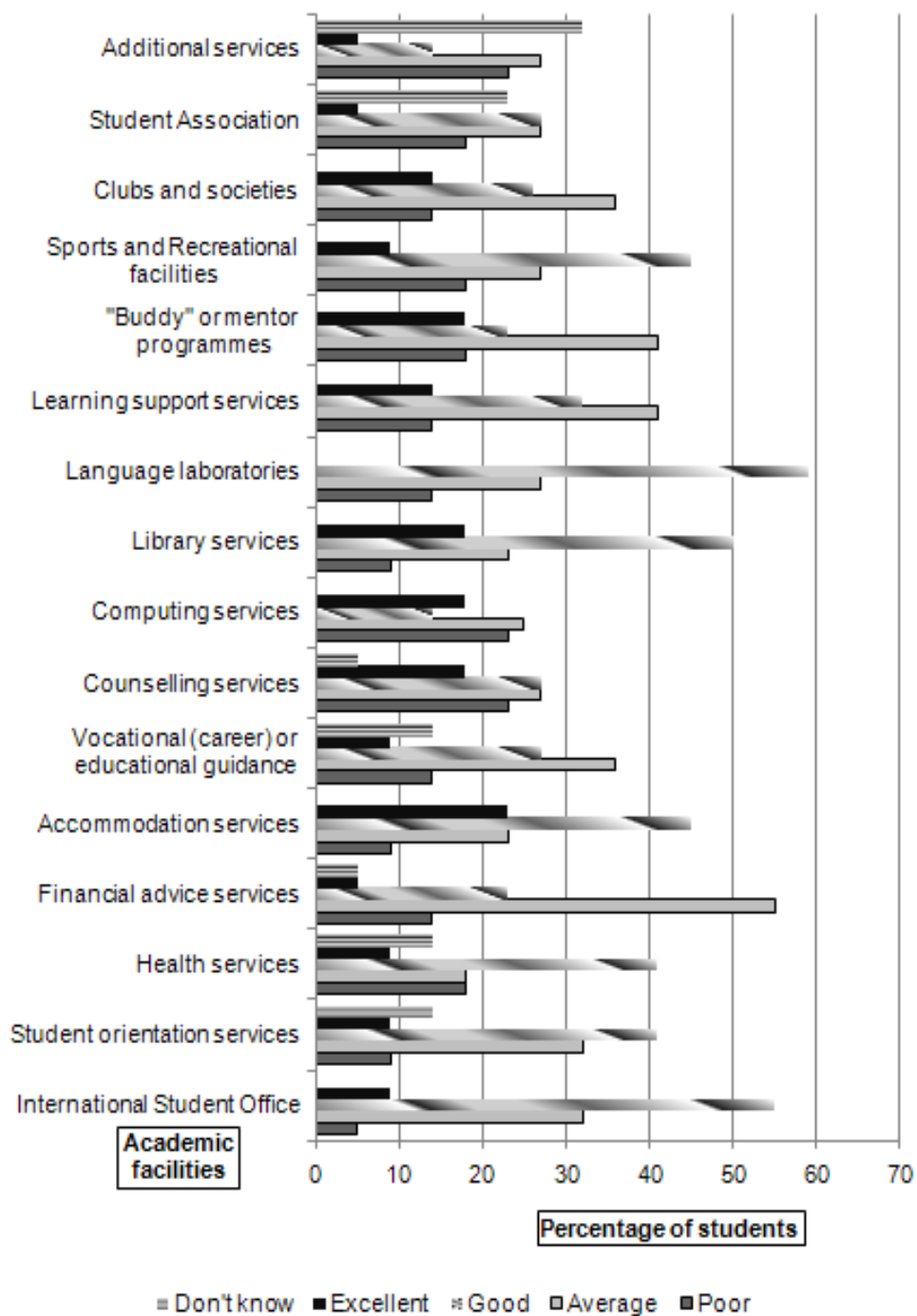
Evaluations	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
All students	Public transportation & Entertainment (27% each)	Public transportation (50%), Entertainment (41%), Shopping (45%), and Restaurant/food outlets (55%)	Banking (68%), Supermarket/food markets (55%) Sports & recreation (45%); & Medical care/services (36%)	Restaurant/food outlets (14%)
S1	Public transportation	Restaurant/food outlets, & the rest services		
S2	Public transportation, Entertainment, Shopping, Medical care/services	Restaurant/food outlets, Banking, Sports and recreation, Supermarket/food markets		
S3			All social services	
S4			Banking, Sports & recreation, Supermarket/food markets	Public transportation, Entertainment, Shopping, Medical care/services.
S5		Public transportation	Supermarket/food markets, Entertainment, Shopping, Medical care/services	Restaurant/food outlets, Banking, Sports & recreation
S6	Public transportation, Entertainment, & Shopping	Restaurant/food outlets	Banking, Sports & recreation, Supermarket/food markets	Medical care/services

Data from the questionnaires reveals that the participants predominantly assessed the following social services in MHK as 'good'; *banking, sports and recreation, and supermarket/food markets*. The *restaurant/food outlets services* were viewed as 'average', while the *public transportation* was perceived as 'poor'. The *public transportation*, therefore, appears to be the biggest social services problem for the participants.

#### **5.2.3.2 Academic services**

Figure 20 presents evaluations of the quality of 16 services or facilities available in MSU. The majority of students assessed the quality of the following services as 'good' to 'excellent': *language laboratories* (59%), *International Student Office* (55%), *library services* (50%), *accommodation services* (45%), and *sports and recreational facilities* (45%).

In contrast, *counselling services, computing services, and additional services* were each viewed less favourably by 23% of students. The academic services/facilities that received a majority of ratings of 'average' were: *financial advice services* (45%), *buddy' or mentor programmes* (41%), and *learning support services* (41%). *Additional services* (33%) and *students association* (23%) were the services that students did not know about.



**Figure 20: Quality of services or facilities provided by MSU**

A summary of the six students' evaluations is presented in Table 26. The levels of the academic services quality ranged from 'don't know' to 'excellent'.

**Table 26: Students' evaluations of the academic services or facilities provided by MSU**

Evaluations	Don't know	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
S1			International Student Office Accommodation services -----All services/facilities-----		
S2		--Almost all services (14/16) –	International Student Office Accommodation services		
S3	8/16 services			8/16 services	
S4	11/16 services		Accommodation services		
S5			International Student Office		--Almost all services (12/16) -
S6		---All services/facilities—			

Data from questionnaires revealed that the participants predominantly rated the quality of the services or facilities in MSU from 'average' to 'good' and 'excellent'. The services and facilities concerning learning, such as *language laboratories*, *library services*, and *learning support services* appeared to be considered suitable by the participants. As the majority of students indicated positive ranges in the quality of academic services, it can be concluded that the participants faced few problems in using the academic services.

Regarding the students' ratings on the overall quality of the services and facilities at MSU, 50% of students rated the services as 'average', while 41% considered these services to be 'good' to 'excellent'. S1 and S3 stated 'good' and S4 and S5 gave 'average' ratings, while S2 and S6 answered 'poor'. Data from the questionnaires showed that the participants rated the overall quality of the services or facilities in MSU from 'poor' to 'average' and 'good'.

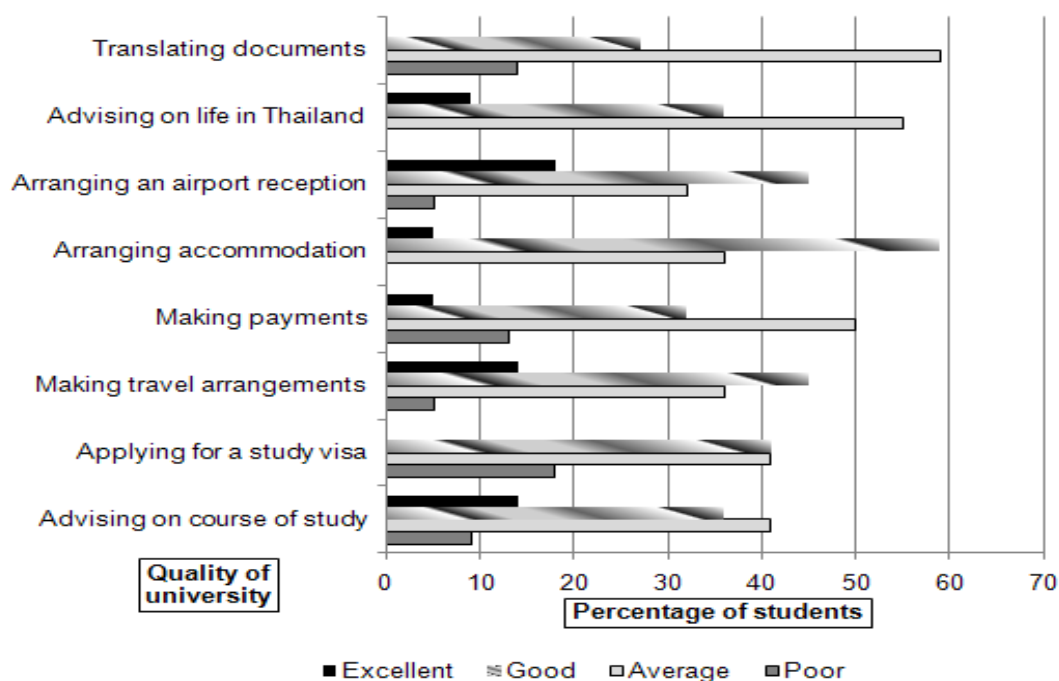
### **5.2.3.3 Administrative services**

As the administrators were assigned to deal with both the academic and social lives of the Chinese students, it was necessary to consider how their services were. This section focuses on: (1) The administrative services' evaluations, and (2) The students' satisfactions with accommodation.

#### **(1) The administrative services' evaluations**

The Chinese participants were asked to assess eight administrative services provided by MSU. The evaluations ranged from 'poor' to 'excellent'. The findings of the participants' evaluations concerning these services revealed that the Chinese students generally gave 'average' to 'good' ratings (see Figure 21). Three areas were mainly evaluated as 'good' by the majority of students as follows: *arranging accommodation* (58%), *making travel arrangements* (45%), and *arranging pick up and airport reception* (45%). More than half of students indicated 'average' ratings to the services of *translating documents* (59%) and *advising on life in Thailand* (55%). While *applying for a study visa* had the highest 'poor' rate (18%), *advising on life in Thailand* and *arranging accommodation* received no 'poor' quality assessments at all. *Arranging an airport reception* appeared to receive the highest 'excellent' ratings of 18%.

In the six respondents' questionnaires, half of them rated 'good' to *applying for a study visa* (S3, S4, and S5) and *making travel arrangements* (S3, S4, and S5), while *arranging accommodation* (S1, S2, and S5) was assessed as 'average'.



**Figure 21: Quality of help provided by MSU**

Overall, around 90% of students indicated that they were satisfied with the administrative services provided by MSU. S1, S3, and S5 also indicated their satisfaction, while S2 and S6 did not feel satisfied with the services at all.

The questions in the students' interviews asked about their initial impression of administrators. The six respondents replied that the administrators from the International Relations Office were very helpful to them. When they had problems they often gave them advice and helped to solve their problems, especially accommodation problems. Moreover, these officers took them to buy some of the necessary educational aids and grocery products when they first arrived in MHK. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 27. The levels of the administrative service quality range from poor to excellent.



**Table 27: Students' evaluations of the administrative services provided by MSU**

Evaluations	Questionnaires				Interviews
	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	
S1 (satisfied)		All administrative services			S1-S6
S2 (Not satisfied)	5/8 services	Arranging accommodation, making payments, & Making travel arrangements			Administrators were very helpful.
S3 (satisfied)			7/8 services	Advising on course of study	
S4 (satisfied)			Applying for a study visa, Making travel arrangements, Advising on life in Thailand & Translating documents	Making payments, Arranging accommodation, & Arranging an airport reception	
S5 (satisfied)		Arranging accommodation & Arranging an airport reception	Applying for a study visa, Making travel arrangements & Making payments	Advising on life in Thailand & Translating documents	
S6 (Not satisfied)	4/8 services	Applying for a study visa & Advising on life in Thailand	Arranging accommodation & Arranging an airport reception		

Data from the questionnaires and interviews revealed that the Chinese participants had predominantly given 'good' ratings to the administrative services and indicated that the administrators were very helpful. They perceived MSU to have provided good service on *making travel arrangements* and *applying for a study visa*. However, S2 and S6 whose ratings were 'poor' expressed their dissatisfaction with most of the administrative services.

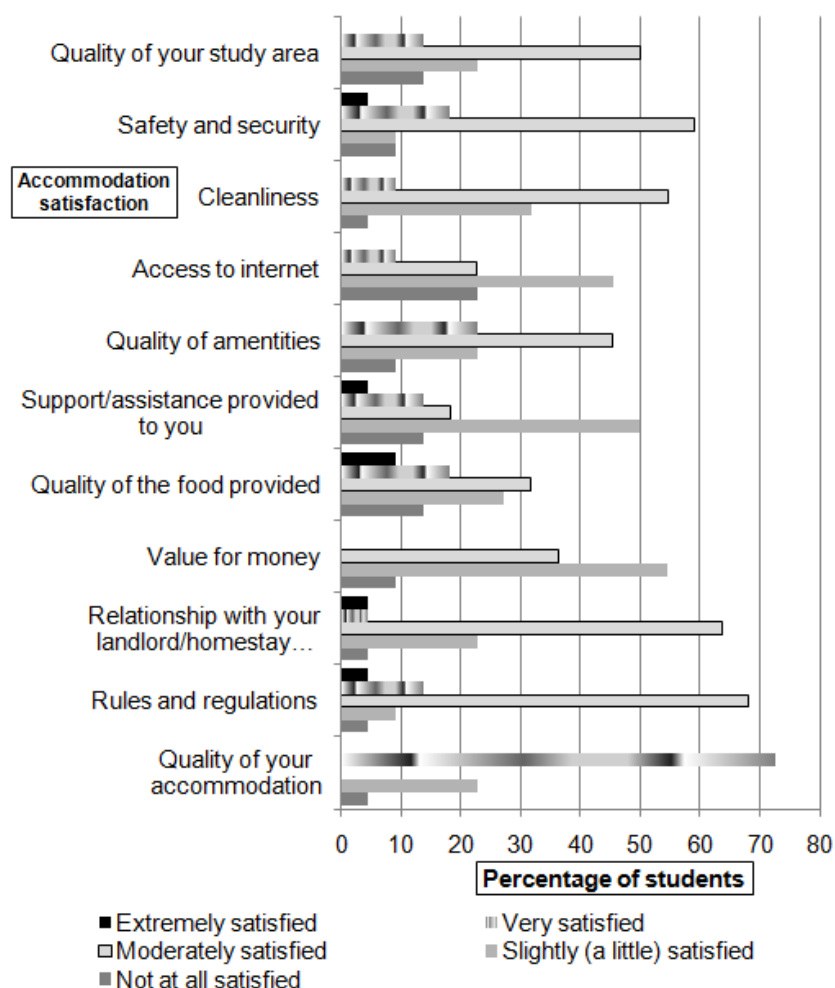
## *(2) The students' satisfactions with accommodation.*

Regarding the students' current living arrangements in MHK, all students lived in an apartment provided by the university. The students were required to evaluate 11 aspects of their accommodation (see Figure 22). The scale ranges from 'not at all satisfied' to 'extremely satisfied'. The greatest sources of satisfaction (moderately, very, and extremely satisfied) came from: *rules and regulations* (87%), *safety and security* (82%), *quality of accommodation (location, air condition, size etc.)* (73%), *dormitory management* (74%), and *quality of amenities (e.g. bathroom)* (68%).

The aspects with which students indicated least satisfaction (i.e. not at all or only slightly satisfied) were *access to Internet* (68%), *value for money* (64%), and *support/assistance provided* (64%). Over 70% of students responded that they were 'very satisfied' with the *quality of their accommodation* (73%).

The six students' questionnaires gave more specific detail to the above results from all the students. While S1 and S2 rated all aspects of accommodation (except *access to the internet*) from 'slightly satisfied' to 'moderately satisfied', S3, S4, and S5's satisfactions with accommodation ranged from 'moderately satisfied' to 'extremely satisfied'. In contrast to their friends, S6 had mixed levels of satisfaction. He indicated 'not at all satisfied' with *value for money*, *quality of amenities*, *access to Internet*, and *quality of study area*, whereas the rest of the aspects received other ratings (slightly, moderately, and very satisfied). *Access to the Internet* was the only aspect of accommodation where more than half of the six students (S1, S2, S3, and S6) were 'not at all satisfied'.

With regard to the students' overall satisfactions with their current accommodation, 95% of students indicated that they were satisfied. All six students also confirmed their satisfaction with the accommodation provided by MSU.



**Figure 22: Satisfaction of all students with accommodation**

Though data from the questionnaires indicate that the participants were satisfied with the accommodation provided by MSU and *access to the Internet* appears to be the only problem faced by the Chinese students, the six participants did not mention any difficulties they faced in their interviews and reflective journals. They only gave their strategies and suggestions for these matters, which will be presented in detail in Chapter 6.

### 5.2.4 Questionnaire scores for students' adjustment problems

The following table gives the average scores for each of the six participants responses to the six principal areas related to adjustment experiences in the questionnaire.

**Table 28: Students' average scores on adjustment experience issues**

No.	Domains	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Average
1	Educational experiences in MSU (degree of difficulties)	2.08	2.23	2.23	2.38	1.69	3.08	2.28
2	Educational experiences in GXUN (degree of difficulties)	1.92	1.31	1.15	3.62	3.92	3.62	2.59
3	Satisfaction on services and facilities	2.08	1.19	4.00	3.86	3.38	1.42	2.65
4	Satisfaction on support received in MHK	2.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	1.00	2.50
5	Relationship with people in MHK (degree of difficulties)	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	4.00	2.00	2.17
6	Life since they arrived in MHK (degree of difficulties)	3.67	3.75	2.25	2.83	3.33	4.00	3.31

Although the small sample size limits the numerical conclusions that can be drawn from the above data, there are some scores that vary significantly enough from the averages to suggest some individual factors may apply. S1 and S2 did not report any academic difficulties, but showed above average levels of problems with support and relationship issues (lower numbers for Q3, Q4, Q5 above show lower levels of satisfaction). In addition, while S3's scoring shows no particular difficulty or issue with any of these six aspects, S6 scores show that he felt less satisfied, or experienced more difficulties in all of the six areas above. S4 and S5 reported some academic difficulties in GXUN (high numbers for Q2 show greater difficulty), but improved scores for academic

issues in MSU. Additionally S5 reported some difficulty in making Thai friends (high numbers for Q5 show greater difficulty).

### **Conclusion of the results**

The research question on what the participants perceived their adjustments to be in the first year was answered through each of the research tools—the questionnaire, the interviews, and the reflective journals. The data shows that there were many difficulties in adjustment that the students faced during their time living in MHK.

First, they faced hardships in their academic tasks such as *writing assignments*, *expressing themselves (communicating in Thai)*, *asking questions in class*, and *understanding lecturers*. However, those educational activities did not cause too much difficulty for the students. The majority of students indicated that almost all tasks were 'slightly difficult', with relatively few selecting other rankings.

Sociocultural problems were another difficulty the students experienced. The students revealed that they felt homesick and lonely and that they often called their parents in the home country. Moreover, they had only a few Thai friends with whom they were trying their best to form relationships with. However, having many compatriots with whom they had a close relationship led them to enjoy their international student life in Thailand. Unfortunately, some students experienced discrimination while studying in MSU. With regard to cultural problems, the participants mentioned that they not only had cultural inclusiveness problems (e.g. no respect on cultural differences), but that they also faced problems with Thai food, Thai customs, and sleeping patterns.

Last but not least of the adjustment difficulties were support services issues. Though the participants experienced difficulty in social services and accommodation, they were predominantly satisfied with the social, academic, and administrative services provided by MSU. The findings regarding the students' social services problems indicate that the participants faced a problem with *transportation*. In addition, the findings related to the students' satisfaction with accommodation show that *access to the Internet* appeared to be the only

common problem for them. However, the findings of the participants' academic services problems and their evaluation of the administrative services show that they did not face difficulties in general.

## **Discussion**

This research question relates to the transition process as the international students entered a new educational situation in which they encountered academic, sociocultural and support services problems (Goodman et al., 2006). In addition, this research question addresses the social constructionist position as the students had to make and create meaning through their interactions with one another and the objects in the environment (G. Marshall, 1998) while attending MSU in Thailand.

The findings of this research question obtained through the questionnaires; students', lecturers', and administrators' interviews; and reflective journals indicate that the respondents predominantly perceived their adjustment problems to be academic, sociocultural, and with support services. Goodman et al. (2006) explained that when sojourners move in to a new situation, it is inevitable for them to face difficulties. This is because the transition could cause risks and be considered as the most challenging and distressing times. The following section presents a discussion of the academic (section 5.2.1), sociocultural (section 5.2.2), and support services problems (section 5.2.3) respectively.

### **5.2.1 Academic problems**

Data from the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals revealed that the students had academic problems in four areas—*writing assignments*, *expressing yourself (communicating in Thai)*, *asking questions in class*, and *understanding lecturers*. Regarding the findings of the students' evaluation of the academic difficulty from the questionnaires, the majority of all students rated all activities as 'slightly difficult'.

*Writing assignments* appeared to be the major problem that was often mentioned by the majority of the six students (S1, S2, S5, and S6) through their

interviews and reflective journals. They stated that writing Thai poetry was very difficult.

These findings appear to contradict their evaluation of the difficulty of writing assignments reported in their questionnaires; that is, those who rated the writing assignment as 'slightly difficult' indicated in their interviews and reflective journals that this task, especially writing Thai poetry, was very difficult. This may be because they faced difficulty only in writing Thai poetry, while they may feel more comfortable dealing with other types of writing assignments.

The findings of the students' evaluation of writing assignments do not appear to support Campbell and Li's (2008) findings, because the majority of this current study reported a slight difficulty in writing assignments through their questionnaires, while they stated their difficulties in writing Thai poetry without mentioning any problems in writing assignments of other courses. In Campbell and Li's study about Asian students' learning experiences in New Zealand, almost all participants indicated that writing assignments, essays, and reports were the most difficult activities because they were not taught about academic conventions practiced in New Zealand before they arrived. A possible explanation for this difference is that Campbell and Li's participants were business undergraduate students who had never received any training in Western academic conventions before they came to New Zealand, whereas the participants of this current study had been studying Thai language writing in China for two years before arriving in Thailand. This would make the findings of the present study not comparable with those of Campbell and Li's, since participants brought a different knowledge background to their new environment (Goodman et al., 2006). Similar results to those of Campbell and Li may have been found if the participants' knowledge background was more similar.

It is interesting to note that the results from S1 and S2's interviews and reflective journals appear to indicate the cause of their writing difficulties; that is, they were unable to remember vocabulary when they had to write. This reflected the learning style of the Chinese students' culture that they may rely on the rote-learning method where knowledge is based on a thorough

understanding of the work of a memorized master (Hofstede, 1980). They intended to achieve short-term memorization of the vocabulary so that they could use it in their writing (Cuthbert, 2005). This indicates that though the participants were studying in the host country, they tried to adapt their learning skills acquired in their own country to the new academic environment (Campbell & Li, 2008).

As 'writing assignments' was reported through the questionnaires as a particular academic difficulty for the students and the cause of this issue was revealed in more detail through the students' interviews and reflective journals, these results confirm the suitability and effectiveness of the triangulation method (see section 3.2.2 in Chapter 3).

In addition, the majority of the participants stated that they experienced slight difficulty in *expressing themselves (communicating in Thai), asking questions in class, and understanding lecturers*. S1, S2, S3, and S5 indicated that they faced difficulty when they had to communicate with the lecturers. S2 and S4 confronted hardship when asking questions in class, while only S2 said that it was difficult for her to understand the lecturers.

Apart from the students' perspectives, the findings from the lecturers and administrators also confirmed their difficulties. A1 and L3 explained that the students seemed to be unable to understand what they said and taught, while A2 and A3 claimed that the students' ability to communicate appeared to be the main adjustment problems they had seen the students face. Moreover, L2 and L3's opinions reinforced statements that the students made regarding feeling confused when they were being taught and not feeling able to ask questions in class.

The findings above seem to reveal that the students had language difficulties in studying at MSU. Though they had studied Thai language in China for two years before coming to Thailand, their language skills were still insufficient since the teaching style in China rarely focused on practicing in class (see Table 14 in on page 181). Therefore, the students had limited language proficiency. The



findings of the participants' difficulties in communication confirm earlier research findings of Andrade (2006), Brown (2008), Kingston and Forland (2008), Frank (2000), Morita (2004), Campbell and Li (2008), Dunn (2006), and Wan (2001) that language proficiency was one of many problems causing difficulties for international students. The findings from Campbell and Li's (2008) study focused on communication with lecturers. Their research results showed that language difficulties prevented each student from effectively communicating with lecturers, listening to lectures, following instructions, understanding assessment criteria and procedures, completing assignments, and doing exams and tests.

Regarding the findings of the students' academic difficulties L2 stated that, while she was teaching the Chinese students, they seemed to be confused and could not answer her questions. It is possible that the students were in the *moving through* stage of their transition. Goodman et al. (2006) explained that while the sojourners were moving through the new situation, they were in the neutral zone where they had the period of emptiness and confusion. To pass through this stage smoothly, Goodman et al. suggested that institutions devote a large amount of time to help international students become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms and expectations of the new academic system. This assistance would lead students to maintain their energy and commitment to pass this *moving through* period, which can be a long transition.

The participants did not have only negative experiences in academic areas, but also reported positive experiences through their evaluation of academic progress and satisfaction with their academic experiences at MSU. Half of the students responded through their questionnaires that they felt satisfied with the progress of their studies at MSU. In addition, the findings of their satisfaction with study progress from their interviews appeared to show positive results; that is, all six students seemed to be satisfied with the progress of their studies at MSU as their Thai language skills were improving. Regarding the students' satisfactions with academic experiences in MSU, the six participants reported through their interviews and reflective journals that they had positive

experiences in studying at MSU. S1, S3, and S4 indicated that the lecturers gave them particular attention and worked more slowly, and were very helpful. S1 and S5 mentioned their better understanding and communication in Thai at the end of the semester, while S2, S4, and S6 had found it pleasurable to study several aspects of Thai language and culture.

The above findings support Zhang and Brunton's (2007) and Zhong (1996b)'s findings. Zhang and Brunton's (2007) study revealed that Chinese international students demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with their educational experiences in New Zealand. Similarly, Zhong's (1996b) findings indicated that among her three Chinese interviewees, all of them claimed that they had a positive attitude toward Americans, as these people were very helpful in both their daily and academic lives. Therefore, Zhong's participants were satisfied with their academic experiences in the U.S. Zhong thought that this may be because these Chinese students were relatively different from early Chinese immigrants; that is, they had a high level of education before coming to the U.S. and had prior knowledge of American culture. Regarding Zhong's assumption, the findings of the students' satisfaction with their educational experiences at MSU may be comparable as the Chinese participants of this current study had studied Thai language and culture in China for two years before they came to Thailand. Therefore, they were well prepared in terms of Thai language and cultural knowledge.

With regard to the issue of the Chinese students in the current study and Zhong's (1996b) participants being well prepared for their change in circumstances, this relates to the transition theory in terms of factors influencing transition—*Support*. Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that in order to cope with a transition, individuals should receive support from their intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the individuals are a part. In the present study, the Chinese students received support from GXUN's lecturers as those lecturers taught and gave them various types of information concerning Thai language and culture. Similarly, the participants in Zhong's (1996b) study had family units as their

supporters. The findings from my study and those from Zhong's study, therefore, emphasize the importance of the Support variable in the transition process.

### **5.2.2 Sociocultural problems**

The sociocultural problems issue relates to social constructionism as the Chinese students had to make and create meaning through their interactions with one another and the objects in the new environment while attending MSU (G. Marshall, 1998). This also has a connection with the sociocultural adaptation model as the students' adjustment could be related to their ability to fit in to the cultural of their new environment and be able to interact with other people in the host country (Searle & Ward, 1990). The discussion of the findings of students' sociocultural problems will be divided into two sections: 5.2.2.1 Social problems, and 5.2.2.2 Cultural problems

#### **5.2.2.1 Social problems**

To discuss the Chinese students' social problems, the following aspects were identified: (1) Students' homesickness and loneliness, (2) Students' relationships with people in MHK, and (3) Students' experiences with discrimination

##### ***(1) Students' homesickness and loneliness***

The Chinese participants indicated their homesickness and loneliness through their questionnaires, interviews and reflective journals. While the majority of students reported in the questionnaires that they faced difficulties in homesickness and loneliness, S3 was the only student who mentioned homesickness in his interview.

Also, although S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 did not mention homesickness and loneliness directly in their reflective journals, they did report that they regularly called their parents in China. This could imply that they missed their parents, felt homesick and called for social contact reasons, although a feeling of loneliness was never reported in most participants' reflective journals.

The findings about homesickness appear to support Rajapaksa and Dundes's (2002) findings as they found that international students were more likely to feel lonely, homesick, and as if they had left part of themselves at home.

Though the majority of the students said in their questionnaires that they experienced homesickness/loneliness, the six interviewees did not mention how severe these problems were. Only S3 reported that he missed his family and friends in China, while S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 replied through their reflective journals that they often called their parents. This may indicate that homesickness and loneliness was not an adjustment issue for the students. They may have been able to adjust to their lives in the host country quite well. Moreover, the level of their homesickness may be low because the Chinese participants had many compatriots with whom they had social and academic contacts. Due to these contacts, the participants may not feel the same degree of loneliness in the host country.

The students' ability to adjust to the new environment can be related to the level of homesickness (Ying & Liese, 1994). Ying and Liese explained that the higher the level of homesickness, the poorer the adjustment of the sojourners. In their study about the adjustment of Taiwanese students to the U.S., Ying and Liese found that the participants who were likely to report a poorer adjustment were those who experienced more homesickness.

The findings about the Chinese participants' loneliness do not appear to support Lewthwaite's (1996) and Sawir et al.'s (2008) findings, because the data from interviews and reflective journals indicated that the participants did not mention their difficulties in loneliness and that they had relationships with Thai and Chinese friends. Lewthwaite found that loneliness was one of many obstacles to integration into New Zealand culture. The author stated that this problem was the consequence of interaction deficiency. The results of the present study do not support Lewthwaite's (1996) findings. A possible explanation is that Lewthwaite's participants were post-graduate students who stated that they did not have time to socialize within the host society. This would make the findings of the current study not comparable with those of Lewthwaite's, since the

participants of this present study were undergraduate students who had the social and academic time to have regular contact not only with friends from their home country, but also with local students. The results from Sawir et al.'s (2008) study also indicated that the majority of their respondents had experienced personal and social loneliness and/or isolation, especially in the early months. This was because of the loss of contact with families and the loss of networks. It is possible that these participants had small national populations in Australia and came to study in Australia independently. The findings of the present study could not be compared with those of Sawir et al.'s as the Chinese participants had large national populations in MSU and they came as a group. Therefore, they had their own social networks from their first arrival in MHK.

With regard to the findings concerning the issues of homesickness and loneliness from the current study and those from Rajapaksa and Dundes's (2002), Lewthwaite's (1996), and Sawir et al.'s (2008) studies, they appear to be associated with two theoretical frameworks: Ward's adaptation model and the *Support* variable in the transition theory. In Ward's adaptation model, psychological adjustment is broadly affected by personality, life changes, coping styles and social support (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Goodman et al. (2006) stated that individuals who gain support from networks of friends would be able to cope with their transitions. In the present study, the Chinese students could move through their transitions and adjust well because they had support not only from their compatriots, with whom they could spend social and academic time, but also from the local students. Additionally, they had their own social networks while studying at MSU. Conversely, the participants in Rajapaksa and Dundes's (2002), Lewthwaite's (1996), and Sawir et al.'s (2008) studies might not have had enough support from those sources as those from the current study's participants. Thus, they faced greater issues of homesickness and loneliness. Regarding these findings from the present study and from those scholars, it can be concluded that the *Support* variable plays an important role in international students' transitions and adjustment.

## *(2) Students' relationships with people in MHK*

The relationship between the Chinese participants and people in MHK was investigated through the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals. The participants were required to evaluate their friendships with Thai people and contact with Thai people, compatriots, and other international students. The findings of these issues showed that the Chinese participants perceived that Thai people had an interest in making international friends. Moreover, making friends with Thai people was not difficult for them. More than half of students had relationships with Thai friends and they sometimes spent social time together. S3 replied through his reflective journal that his Thai friends came to play with him in his room, whereas S1 and S4 persuaded their Thai friends to have Chinese food together. Moreover, S4 mentioned that those friends made suggestions to him about travelling in Thailand. Besides Thai friends, the participants also mentioned that they had many Chinese friends with whom they very often spent social and academic time.

The findings above reveal that making relationships with people in the host country may not have caused social adjustment difficulties for the Chinese participants. These findings do not support Nicholson's (2001), Zhang and Brunton's (2007), and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) findings, as the data from the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals indicated that the participants did not face difficulties in making friends with Thai people.

In Nicholson's (2001), Zhang and Brunton's (2007), and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) studies, the participants were Asian students studying in Western countries (the U.S., New Zealand, and the U.K.). Those researchers' findings showed that those Asian students faced difficulties in making American, New Zealand, and British friends. They therefore concluded that those Asian international students encountered social adjustment problems. The results of the present study do not support this conclusion. A possible explanation is that Nicholson's, Zhang and Brunton's, and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's participants came from Asian countries and studied in Western nations. This would make the findings of the current study not comparable with those of Nicholson, Zhang

and Brunton and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, since there is a tendency that Asian students are more likely to make friends with Asian students than Western students because of the smaller cultural difference (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

The findings about the number of friends that the Chinese participants had in MHK showed that all of them had friendship networks with Chinese friends more than Thai friends. Lowenthal and Weiss (1976) emphasized that an individual's network of friends is another important social support system. Loss of the friends' network can lead to sojourners' transition difficulties. One possible reason the Chinese participants had more Chinese friends is that they came to study at MSU in a group as MSU had signed an academic contract with GXUN where these students had studied during their first and second years. Therefore, there were many Chinese friends from GXUN coming to study together for their third and fourth years at MSU. These findings do not support Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011), because the Chinese participants claimed to have a higher ratio of friends from China than those from Thailand. Hendrickson et al. studied international students' friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels. They claimed that though prior research had demonstrated that most international students had co-national friends, their findings did not replicate these trends as their respondents indicated that they had more friends from the host country than the home country. The results of the present study do not support these findings. A potential explanation is that Hendrickson et al.'s respondents were graduate students who were required to have high-level English skills. Their self-report showed that they also believed that they had a high level of English comprehension. This would make the findings of the current study not comparable with those of Hendrickson et al., as the Chinese participants were undergraduate students who considered their Thai language ability as *average*.

With regard to the findings of students' friendships with lecturers which were obtained from the participants' interviews, the majority of participants reported that they had a close relationship with the lecturers. Though S1 reported that

she did not become close to the lecturers because she was not the class leader and she did not feel comfortable talking to them, due to her weakness in speaking skills, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 mentioned the differences in their relationships with the lecturers when they were outside the classroom.

This shows that the respondents felt close to some friendly lecturers outside class but inside the classroom, they would keep their distance from the lecturers to show their respect. This reflects the Chinese culture where there is a high-power distance between teachers and students in their relationships. Teachers are the only ones who demanded a high level of respect (Kingston & Forland, 2008). In addition, Confucian thought has affected the practice of Chinese in that they should pay respect to their teachers (Philips et al., 2002).

It is interesting to note that the participants did not mention any adjustment problems concerning teacher-student relationships. This may be because their relationships with lecturers in Thailand did not differ from those in China, as Hofstede (2001a) pointed out that the high Power Distance (PDI) condition in Thailand is similar to China and is accepted by the society as a part of their cultural heritage. In addition, Thailand and China are both a collective culture where people are closer and friendlier with each other compared to those people in an individualistic culture (Zhai, 2002).

The findings of the students' relationship with lecturers in MSU, therefore, do not support Wan's (2001) findings in her study about the learning experience of graduate Chinese students in American universities. In Wan's study, the Chinese participants claimed that the teacher-student relationship in the U.S. and that in China were different and considered to be one barrier to their adjustment to the U.S. culture. In China, teachers are considered superior and the students should pay them respect, so, the teacher-student relationship in China appears to be formal. Conversely, the relationship in the U.S. was informal and lacked structure and suitable behaviour from both teachers and students. Therefore, Wan concluded that the differences in the teacher-student relationship could cause adjustment difficulties to international students. The results of the current study do not support this conclusion. A possible



explanation is that Wan's respondents were Chinese students studying in the U.S., where the culture values individuality and independence. This could make the findings of the present study not comparable with those of Wan as the Chinese participants at MSU were in the Thai culture, which has a collectivist culture the same as that in China (see Hofstede's cultural dimension analysis in Chapter 2 on page 92-93).

The findings from the current study concerning the issues of relationship with people in MHK and also those from Nicholson's (2001), Zhang and Brunton's (2007), and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) studies, all appear to relate to Ward's adaptation model. Ward and Kennedy (1992) claimed that sociocultural adaptation is related to factors such as the amount of contact with people from the host country, the length of residence in the new culture, cultural identity and cultural distance. In the present study, more than half of students had relationships with Thai friends and they sometimes spent social time together. It is possible that the students may feel close to Thai people as they share the same cultural value (collectivism) (Hofstede, 2001a). The amount of contact with people from the host nation and cultural distance in the current study could be a reason that helps the Chinese students to adjust to Thai environment easily. However, these factors may not have applied in the same way to the participants in Nicholson's (2001), Zhang and Brunton's (2007), and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) studies, as those participants were Asian students studying in Western countries (the U.S., New Zealand, and the U.K.) with clearly differing cultural distances compared with the current study.

### *(3) Students' experiences in discrimination*

The findings regarding discrimination experienced by the students were gained from the questionnaire, interviews, and reflective journals and show that the majority of the students never faced difficulties in discrimination. It is possible this is partly because the participants were studying in Thailand, where people's cultural values have elements stemming from Chinese cultural heritage (Hofstede, 2001a). Collectivism is considered common to both Thailand and China and manifests as a close and committed social 'group', be it a family,

extended family, or extended relationships (Hofstede, 2001a). This would mean that the participants would never encounter discrimination in Thailand. These findings do not appear to support Ye (1992) in her study of Chinese students' needs and adjustment problems in a U.S. university. In Ye's study, the Chinese respondents reported that they experienced racial discrimination at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the U.S. They said that some American students and staff had self-centred and/or American-centred attitudes. While Ye's study failed to provide a clear explanation of the specific discrimination incidence(s) encountered by the respondents, the current study provided detailed information about a discrimination incidence faced by a Chinese student in MSU.

#### **5.2.2.2 Cultural problems**

The findings about the students' perceptions of cultural inclusiveness were obtained through the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals. The findings from the questionnaires showed that the participants indicated both positive and negative experiences in cultural inclusiveness. With regard to their positive experiences, the participants mentioned that they felt included in their class. Conversely, they claimed that in terms of academic cultural inclusiveness, the course content would not be advantageous to their future study or employment (S1, S4, and S6). In addition, they agreed that cultural differences were not respected in the university (S2, S5, and S6) and the lecturers did not understand the problems of international students (S1, S2, S3, S5, and S6). Data from the students' interviews and reflective journals also reinforced these negative experiences.

Regarding cultural differences, the participants reported through the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals that these differences were a source of difficulty for them. They said in their questionnaires that the differences in culture caused them difficulty (87% and S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6) and then they mentioned three cultural difficulties in their interviews—Thai food, Thai customs, and sleeping patterns. Thai food appeared to be an issue

for all participants. Data from the lecturers' interviews also raised this issue as one small cultural problem encountered by the Chinese respondents.

It is interesting to note that though all participants (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6) mentioned cultural problems in their questionnaires, S6 appeared to be the only student who often reported negative experiences through his interviews and reflective journal. He criticized the suitability of the course content and revealed that his cultural differences were not respected by the lecturers, while other respondents seemed to be less vocal on these matters. It is possible that S6's personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources were different from his Chinese friends. S6 was a 24 year-old man who was voted by his friends to be the class monitor. This means that he may have self-efficacy and a high level of maturity, which would make him unafraid to comment on and talk about those problems. Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that an individual's personal and demographic characteristics (e.g. age and stage of life and gender) bear directly on how he or she perceives and assesses life. In S6's case, he was the oldest man in class so he may perceive the situation of his transition differently from his compatriots. Moreover, his personality characteristics such as self-efficacy (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) and self-confident maturity (Hannigan, 1990) may have led him to assess the cultural difficulties differently (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Goodman et al. (2006) mentioned that people approach the same transition from different frames of reference. For S6, though he was studying in the same educational program as his Chinese friends, he reacted according to his own experiences and maturity level.

The findings of the students' cultural problems with Thai food appear to support Nicholson's (2001) findings in his study about the adaptation of Asian students to American culture. He found that food was one problem faced by his 10 Asian participants at Western Michigan University in the U.S. The author did not mention any details concerning this matter in his study. In the current study, the students only mentioned that they could not eat Thai food when they first arrived in MHK, but after some time they could adjust to life in MHK. This could

be interpreted to mean that food may not have been the main adjustment problem for the Chinese participants.

With regard to the above findings about Thai food, both the current study and Nicholson's (2001) study show a relationship to transition theory. Goodman et al. (2006) claimed that in order to move through a transition, an individual needs to release aspects of the self and of former roles and learn new roles. In the current study, the Chinese students may release 'the Chinese' role in themselves and learn to adjust to Thai food or find strategies to deal with this issue, in a similar way to that which the participants of Nicholson's (2001) study were shown to do.

### **5.2.3 Support services problems**

The findings of the students' evaluations of support services provided in MHK were gained from the questionnaires and interviews. While the results concerning social and academic services were obtained through the questionnaires, those regarding administrative services were from the questionnaires and interviews.

With regard to the findings of the students' evaluations of social services, these showed that though they assessed the social services in MHK (e.g. *banking, sports and recreation, and supermarket/food markets*) as 'good', *public transportation* was perceived as 'poor'. These findings support Nicholson's (2001) findings. Ten Asian students in Nicholson's study mentioned transportation as one difficulty they faced in the U.S. However, it was not a major adjustment problem for his participants. The findings from the present study also show similar results to Nicholson's study, as the participants did not mention transportation difficulties in their interviews and reflective journals at all. This could be interpreted to mean that transportation may not have been an issue for the participants' adjustment in MHK.

The findings concerning the students' evaluations of academic services reveal that the participants rated the quality of the services or facilities in MSU in positive ranges (from 'average' to 'good' and 'excellent'). The services and

facilities concerning learning, such as *language laboratories*, *library services*, and *learning support services* appeared to be considered suitable by the participants. Moreover, they did not mention any academic services in their questionnaires and reflective journals. This might indicate that they were satisfied with the academic services provided by MSU. As their evaluations were positive, it can be concluded that the participants did not face significant problems in using the academic services.

The findings above appear to support Mavondo et al.'s (2004) and Campbell and Li's (2008) findings. Mavondo et al.'s study is about a model for evaluating student satisfaction with universities concerning their resources and capabilities and students' willingness to recommend the university to prospective students, while Campbell and Li did their research on Asian students' learning experiences in New Zealand. The international students in Mavondo et al.'s study stated that student services, library services, and quality of learning contributed to their satisfaction with their institutions, while Campbell and Li's respondents indicated that at an institutional level, they were happy with the quality of services and effective learning support systems. However, the participants of Mavondo et al.'s and Campbell and Li's studies were from various nations (including China), which could make the findings of academic services problems non-representative of the overall views of all Chinese international students.

The findings of the students' evaluations of administrative services show that the Chinese participants predominantly gave 'good' ratings to the administrative services and indicated that the administrators were very helpful. The six respondents replied through their interviews that the administrators from the International Relations Office were very helpful. When the respondents had problems they often gave them advice and helped to solve their problems. These officers also arranged pick up and airport reception for them and took them to buy some of the necessary educational aids and grocery products when they first arrived in MHK. This sort of assistance could result in the students feeling satisfied with the administrative services.

Considering the results from the participants' assessment of social, academic and administrative services, it can be seen that these participants were satisfied with those services. This may indicate that the support services in MHK do not cause difficulties for the participants in transition to their lives in MSU. Goodman et al. (2006) claimed that *Support* is one factor that influences the ability of each person to cope with a transition. For the participants in the present study, they received social, academic, and administrative services to support them and they also expressed satisfaction with these services. This means that they may have been able to more easily cope with their transitions.

The findings regarding the students' evaluations of social, academic, and administrative services do not support Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) findings, because the participants appeared to be satisfied with those services. In their study, the interviewees reported that they had very rarely used the support services at their university. This was partly because they were unclear what Chinese Students' Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustments services were available, and partly because they were dubious of their value. Several complained that there were not enough activities to help overseas students mix with home students, and one person (a mature female student) was particularly critical of the student union for failing to play a more facilitative or supportive role in helping students from different cultures get to know each other. The results of the present study did not support these findings. A possible explanation is that Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's participants were heterogeneous in terms of background; some were mature students who had work experience, others were new university graduates and some were middle school leavers. This would make the findings of the current study not comparable with those of Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's, since individuals with different background would perceive life differently (Goodman et al., 2006).

Regarding the findings from the present study and those from Mavondo et al.'s (2004), Campbell and Li's (2008), and Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) studies, an association with transition theory in terms of the *Support* variable is consistently found. Goodman et al. (2006) stated that *Support* is an important

factor influencing individuals' ability to deal with a transition and they identified the institutions as a source of support. The findings from the current study, and also Mavondo et al.'s (2004) and Campbell and Li's (2008) studies, show that the participants who had received the proper quality of support from the institutions were and that this may have helped them cope with their transitions. On the contrary, the participants in Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) study were dissatisfied with the support provided. This may have had a negative influence on their transitions. With regard to these findings, they showed that the availability and quality of the support provided by the institutions was a direct contributing factor to both the level of satisfaction felt by the students and also to the ease of their transition to the new environment.

Furthermore, a relation from the current study's findings to Ward's adaptation model is found. The psychological and sociocultural adaptation models indicated that at the beginning of the students' time abroad, sojourners generally experience the least comfort upon arrival and adaptation. Therefore, there is a need for those who provide support to sojourners to concentrate efforts especially in the beginning of the intercultural experiences. In the current study, the administrative officers had helped the Chinese students since they first arrived in MHK.

#### **5.2.4 Questionnaire scores for students' adjustment problems**

S1 and S2 were the two female students in the participant group and appeared to have difficulties with support and social issues. While it is difficult to generalize from just these findings, it is possible that this may reflect a difference in the level of importance placed on those issues by female students, or it may be that the female students actually did face more difficulties than their male classmates.

S3 showed no particular issues from his questionnaire scores in these areas.

S4 and S5 showed that they felt that they had less academic problems in Thailand than they did in China. This may be because of the different teaching and learning styles, or because of a change in their own focus/motivation.

S5 also reported issues with making Thai friends. From interviews he reported that he had a Chinese girlfriend and spent little time socializing with Thai people and the scores appear to reflect this lack of opportunity to make friends, rather than a particular difficulty.

S6 averaged lower satisfaction and/or greater difficulty for scores in all of the areas. This may reflect genuine difficulties that he experienced in all areas, or it may indicate that he was more likely to take a negative point of view when scoring a question.

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

The findings of this research question, together with those of other relevant previous studies, relate to the transition process as the students moved into a new academic environment where they faced academic, sociocultural, and support services issues. The study revealed that the academic issues appeared to be the area most often mentioned by the participants, while the sociocultural and support services issues seemed to cause only a few difficulties. However, though the students faced difficulties in academic, sociocultural, and support services issues, they claimed that overall they had a positive experience in their studies in the host country. Sussman (2000) indicated that positive experiences of this type were less frequently reported and these findings therefore demonstrate a significant contribution to cross-cultural transition studies.



## Chapter 6 Strategies and Suggestions

This chapter focuses on the results and discussion concerning two issues:

6.1 The strategies the students used to adjust to an indigenous academic and cultural environment.

6.2 The participants' suggestions for the university to help students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme.

### **6.1 The Strategies the Students Used to Adjust to an Indigenous Academic and Cultural Environment.**

#### **Results**

The research question, "What strategies do students use to adjust to an indigenous academic and cultural environment?" was raised to find out what strategies and skills were needed to deal with the students' adjustment problems and the strategies that the lecturers and administrators utilized in order to fulfil the students' needs. The findings of this question are structured as follows: 6.1.1 Academic strategies, 6.1.2 Sociocultural strategies, and 6.1.3 Support services' strategies.

#### **6.1.1 Academic strategies**

According to the findings about academic problems, the participants mentioned that they faced difficulties in *writing assignments*, *asking questions in class*, *expressing themselves (communicating in Thai)*, and *understanding their lecturers*. In this section, the findings of the participants' strategies to cope with those academic problems are presented in Table 29, beginning with the results from the questionnaires; those from students', lecturers', and administrators' interviews; and ending with those from the reflective journals.

**Table 29: Participants' academic strategies in MSU**

Academic strategies				
Questionnaires	Interviews			Reflective journals
	Students	Lecturers	Administrators	
1. Help you with language or communication problems (66%, S2, S3, S4, & S5: People from home country, 32%, S1, S2, & S3: Thai friends)	<b>S1:</b> Listened to Thai songs / Watched Thai movies & TV programmes / Asked & talked to Thai friends <b>S2:</b> Asked Thai & Chinese friends / Studied hard / Remembered vocab	<b>L1:</b> No difficulty in teaching because he could speak Chinese. / Asked senior students <b>L2:</b> Reviewed Thai language lessons for students / Students made their own efforts to study & adjust to Thai learning style / Asked Thai friends <b>L3:</b> Used basic vocab. / Gave explanation & example. / Learnt & spoke Chinese to students / Asked Thai friends & talked to them / Talked to lecturers	<b>A1:</b> Explained & asked the students again <b>A2:</b> Tried to guess what the students wanted to communicate <b>A3:</b> Told students to ask the Chinese lecturers or Chinese friends who could speak Thai very well to come with them	<b>S2:</b> Asked & talked to Thai friends <b>S3:</b> Solved problems by himself / Asked Thai friends <b>S6:</b> Figured out by himself
2. Help you find your way around educational guidance (69%, S2, S3, S4, & S6: People from home country, 27%, S1, S3, & S5: Thai friends)	<b>S3:</b> Remembered vocab (rote-learning) / Practiced speaking with Thais. / Listened to Thai songs / Looked at lecturers' non-verbal language <b>S4:</b> Remembered vocab / Asked Thai & Chinese friends / Practiced speaking with Thais <b>S5:</b> Remembered vocab / Read & studied slowly / Concentrated more <b>S6:</b> Practiced speaking with Thais / Looked up words in dictionary / Talked to Thais			
3. Help with educational problems (55%, S1, S3, S4, S5, & S6: People from home country, 32%, S2: Staff)				

The findings from the questionnaires concerning the sources of support that were available to help the students with academic problems show that *people from the students' home country* was an important source of support for the majority of students, while their second source was *Thai student friends and staff*. The three lecturers indicated not only their strategies to help the Chinese participants deal with their academic problems, but also the students' strategies. In addition to the lecturers' strategies, the administrators used several strategies to deal with the students' academic problems (communication in Thai).

In addition to asking for some help from others, the students had their own strategies to deal with their problems, such as, studying harder (S2), practicing Thai language skills on their own (S1, S3, S5, and S6), and remembering vocabulary (S2, S3, S4, and S5).

S2: 'I haven't had good results for my studies this semester yet, so, I want to *study harder*. I want my Thai language skills to get better. The Thai language isn't my native language. If I am able to speak so my Thai friends can understand what I say, I am happy' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S3: 'I don't understand what the lecturers say in a class. I've tried to solve my problems by *practicing listening on my own* and trying to listen to what they say. Then, I will know what they are talking about' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S4: 'After studying, I feel that there are many words that I can't read. I solve this problem by trying to *remember vocabulary*' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

In addition to the students' strategies, the lecturers and administrators appear to support the students by using various strategies to help them deal with their academic issues. L1 reported that:

'It *wasn't difficult* for me to teach the Chinese students because *I can speak Chinese*' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

Similarly, L3 learnt Chinese language sometimes. He stated that:

'In addition to teaching Thai to the Chinese students, I try to *learn Chinese*. I feel that when I speak Chinese to them, they

can understand and remember what I teach immediately'  
(Transcripts 27/09/2010).

In summary, though the findings from the questionnaires showed that the majority of students mentioned *people in their home country* as an important source of support, those from the students', lecturers' and administrators' interviews, and the students' reflective journals revealed in great detail that *Thai friends* appeared to be one source of support that the students often made good use of. In addition to asking for some help from this group of people, the students had their own strategies for dealing with their problems, such as, practicing Thai language skills on their own, watching Thai movies, and remembering vocabulary. Additionally, the lecturers and administrators appeared to support the students by using various strategies to help them cope with their academic problems.

#### **6.1.2 Sociocultural strategies**

With regard to the sociocultural problems, the participants indicated that they faced problems regarding homesickness/loneliness, relationships with Thai people, Thai life and culture (food), and sleeping patterns. The findings about their strategies to deal with these problems will be presented in relation to each problem. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 30, beginning with the results from the questionnaires; those from students', lecturers', and administrators' interviews; and ending with those from the reflective journals.

**Table 30: Participants' sociocultural strategies in MHK**

Issues	Sociocultural strategies				Reflective journals
	Questionnaires	Interviews			
		Students	Lecturers	Administrators	
Homesick/ lonely	Talk with you if you are upset, troubled, lonely or homesick (64%, S1 & S3: People from home country)	<b>S3:</b> Called his parents in China			<b>S1, S2, S3, S4, &amp; S5:</b> Called parents in China
Relationship with Thai people	Discuss relationship issues (68%, S1, S2, S3, S4, & S6 People from home country)	<b>S5:</b> Tried to find Thai friends & reduced the amount of time spent going out with his Chinese girlfriend			
Thai life & culture (food)	1. Answer questions about life in Thailand (46%, S2, S3, & S6: People from home country, 45%, S1 & S3: Thai friends)  2. Help you become involved in community activities (66%, S1, S2, S5, & S6: People from home country, 27% Thai friends)	<b>S1, S2, &amp; S3:</b> Asked the cook to make Thai food unsweetened & not too spicy / Cooked their meals  <b>S6:</b> Wrote down the name of food & looked up meaning in dictionary	<b>All three lecturers:</b> Students cooked for themselves  <b>L3:</b> Consulted senior students & Thai friends	<b>A3:</b> Students could adjust to Thai life quite quickly	<b>All six students:</b> Cooked their meals <b>S1:</b> Called her mom to ask how to cook
Sleeping pattern		<b>S4:</b> Took a nap when did not have class / Adjusted to his routine			

The findings from the questionnaires concerning the sources of support that were available to help the students with issues associated with sociocultural problems indicated similar results to the sources of academic support. *People from the students' home country* was a vital source of support for the majority of students, while *Thai student friends* was their second choice.

The participants who indicated Thai food was a problem identified their coping strategies through the interviews and reflective journals. S1, S2, and S3 replied in their interviews that they had dealt with this problem either by asking the cook to make it unsweetened and not too spicy for them, or by cooking their own meals in their apartment. S6 explained that he had no idea about the ingredients of the food he ordered and therefore had to solve this problem by writing down the name of the food and then looking up the meaning in the dictionary. The data in the students' reflective journals expanded in more detail on the issue of food. All six students indicated that the taste of Thai and Chinese food was different. They mentioned that if they wanted to have Chinese food, they had to go out with their friends to a market and buy ingredients to cook in their apartment. They stated that they liked cooking because they could make food to their own taste. The three lecturers who felt that Thai food was only a small issue also stated that the students solved this by cooking for themselves. After a few months had passed by, the students were able to adjust to the taste of Thai food.

Regarding the issues with sleeping patterns, S4 indicated that he had found some difficulty in adjusting to life in MHK when he was not able to take a nap in the afternoon, as he would have done when he was in China. To deal with this difficulty, he mentioned his strategies through his interviews. S4 said that:

'In China, there's a culture that people would take a nap in the afternoon. Chinese people like to sleep. When I first arrived in Thailand, I felt tired and wanted to take a nap. To deal with this issue, I had to *adjust my routine and become accustomed to the Thai culture*. I would take a nap only when I did not have class in the afternoon' (Transcripts 26/06/2010).

His response shows that the sleeping pattern he had had in China did not fit into Thai culture, so, he had to change his behaviour.

### **Conclusion of the results**

To adjust to an indigenous academic and cultural environment, the Chinese students used several strategies. They asked for assistance from various sources of social support such as *people from their home country*, *staff at MSU*, and their *Thai student friends*. The majority of students claimed that they were satisfied with the support they received.

Regarding the students' strategies to deal with their difficulties, it can be seen that the students coped with their problems using various approaches. To cope with academic problems, they tried to practice their Thai language skills as much as they could and made their own efforts to study and adjust to the Thai learning style. They often asked their Thai friends for help. *People from home country* was also another important source from which the participants asked assistance to find strategies to deal with their sociocultural problems. Moreover, when they had any problems concerning support services, they asked MSU staff to help them.

### **Discussion**

The discussion of strategies will be presented in the following structure: 6.1.1 Academic strategies, and 6.1.2 Sociocultural strategies.

This research question relates to the transition process as the international students enter a new educational situation in which they encounter academic, sociocultural and support services problems (Goodman et al., 2006). To move through the transition process, strategies to deal with those problems are required. Goodman et al. (2006) stated that the moving-through period starts when learners know the 'ropes'. Learners may require assistance to maintain their 'energy and commitment' because their moving-through period can be a long transition. In addition, this research question concerns social constructionism as the students had to make and create meaning through their

interactions with one another and the surroundings (G. Marshall, 1998) while attending MSU.

### **6.1.1 Academic strategies**

The findings from the questionnaires concerning the sources of support that were available to help the students with academic problems show that *people from the students' home country* were an important source of support for the majority of students, while their second main source was *Thai student friends and staff*. However, findings from the students', lecturers', and administrators' interviews, and the students' reflective journals reveal in-depth detail which indicates that *Thai friends* appears to be one source of support that the students often made good use of.

In addition to asking for some help from others, the students had their own strategies to deal with their problems, such as, studying harder (S2), practicing Thai language skills on their own (S1, S3, S5, and S6), and remembering vocabulary (S2, S3, S4, and S5).

With regard to the above findings, it can be seen that while engaging in studying abroad, the Chinese international students had to try to make academic adjustments to a new environment where there were different patterns of teacher-student interaction, classroom atmospheres, academic requirements and assessments and teaching and learning styles (Ward et al., 2001). They needed to put in more effort than local students to fit into the new culture due to their difficulties in adjusting to the unfamiliar culture of learning. In the current study, the Chinese students had to study hard and find their own approaches to cope with academic issues. The transition theorists--Bridges (2004), Ebaugh (1988), Van Gennep (1960), Hudson (1991), Hudson (1999), and Bloch and Richmond (1998) agree that a person will react individually with regard to how he/she moves through the phases of the transition. Successful results are considered to be dependent on the individual's perceptions of the transition, their resources and limitations, and their overall ability to cope with the transition.



As the participants predominantly dealt with their academic adjustment issues in MSU by seeking help from Thai friends and talking to them to practice their Thai language skills, it could be concluded that the Chinese participants changed their previous role from 'Chinese students studying Thai language in China' to a new role of 'Chinese international students studying Thai language in Thailand'. They made an effort to adjust to the Thai educational environment by learning and practicing their language skills with Thai people. Their transition appeared to correlate with Levinson's (1986) view. Levinson (1986) said that:

Moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self, letting go of former roles, and learning new roles. People moving through transitions inevitably must take stock as they renegotiate these roles. Transitions often involve significant life events that require coping with what is perceived to be a crisis situation. (p. 23)

Regarding the value of remembering vocabulary as a strategy of most participants (S2, S3, S4, and S5), a possible explanation is that the Chinese participants may have been using a familiar rote-learning technique from when they were in China. Sussman (2000) mentioned that:

Sojourners are faced with a continuum of accommodation choices that range from maintenance of the cultural self and its behavioural repertoire at one anchor to transposition to a new cultural self and a new behavioural and cognitive repertoire at the other, the latter colloquially described as 'going native.' (p. 363)

In the current study, when the Chinese participants were in a new academic culture, they still maintained their cultural self and behaviour by applying rote-learning techniques. Hofstede (1980) indicated that the majority of East Asian students use rote-learning. He claimed that traditionally East Asian cultures encouraged an attitude of conservation of knowledge that was based on a thorough understanding of the work of a recognized master. In this present study, it is possible that the participants tried to memorize vocabulary because they wanted to have a deep understanding of what they were studying. Though some Western academic staff, students, and researchers believe that East Asian students use rote-learning methods as the only means of learning, Chan

and Drover (1997) argue that rote learning involves not only learning through memorization, but also uses deep learning strategies. Moreover, some learners utilize the process of memorization as a route to deeper understanding.

In addition to the students' strategies, the lecturers and administrators appear to make extra effort support the students by using several strategies to help them deal with their academic issues (see the results on page 250-253).

Both L1 and L3 had previous experience teaching Chinese students in China. The issues related to this appear to be supported by Zhou and Todman's (2008) findings in their study about the adaptation of Chinese postgraduate students in the UK. Their finding showed that one of the good points about Chinese students coming in groups was that their initial adaptation was likely to be smoother because the teachers who were selected had a great deal of experience in dealing with Chinese students and some of them had worked in China and could speak Chinese. The lecturer participants in this present study were also chosen to teach the Chinese international students because of their teaching experience. However, Zhou and Todman's (2008) participants consisted of two groups of Chinese students from two regions of China (Nanchang and Wanli). They studied in two Scottish universities (Abertay and Dundee) for postgraduate studies in three major subjects (Information Technology, Software Engineering, and English for Professional Development). Therefore, their findings concerning the students' academic adjustment experiences need to be interpreted with caution because their participants came from various regions and universities. In the present study, the findings relating to this matter could be interpreted directly as the participants were only one group studying in one major subject (Thai as a foreign language).

### **6.1.2 Sociocultural strategies**

The findings about the students' sociocultural strategies indicate that besides seeking help from people in the participants' home country, the participants could deal with sociocultural issues by themselves by calling their parents, cooking their own meals, and adjusting their routine to fit Thai culture. Data from the lecturers' interviews support and enhance the details of the students'

strategies, showing that they cooked for themselves and consulted their senior students and Thai friends.

The above findings reveal that the students used various strategies to cope with their sociocultural issues. Pearling and Schooler (1978) claimed that there are many alternative techniques for individuals to use in every area of their lives and that strategies have the effect of decreasing stress in certain situations. Meanwhile, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicated that there are two major coping orientations—changing the situation or relaxing oneself—and in the current study, the Chinese students coped with their issues using the latter. Lazarus and Folkman further suggested four possible coping modes: direct action, inhibition of action, information seeking, and intrapsychic. In the present study, the students were found to use each of these coping modes in different situations. For example, they cooked meals to their own taste (direct action), consulted their senior students and Thai friends (information seeking), and adjusted their routine to better fit with Thai culture (intrapsychic).

With regard to the sources of support the students sought help from, Goodman et al. (2006) classified the types of support individuals receive according to their sources. They are intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the individuals are a part. In this current study, the Chinese participants usually asked for sociocultural assistance from people in their home country. It is possible that the Chinese participants felt strong ties to their family members (Wan, 2001) and may have considered these people as someone with whom they had close relationships and could rely on. Lowenthal and Weiss (1976) suggested that intimate relationships—involving trust, support, understanding and the sharing of confidences—are a crucial resource during stressful transitions.

Another possible interpretation could be that these Chinese participants were from a collectivist or interdependent culture where they perceived themselves as inseparable from social relationship circumstances. Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Triandis (1989) claimed that individuals of Asian ancestry tend to focus on collectivistic identity. They are unable to differentiate their own

interests from people in the group (Erez & Earley, 1993). Conversely, they bound their 'selves' to others. Due to these reasons, it is likely that the Chinese participants might have felt more comfortable sharing their sociocultural issues with people from their home country. Moreover, their Chinese culture emphasizes that people should not share their personal problems with outsiders (Ye, 1992) and individuals should be loyalty to the family (Wan, 2001). As a result, Chinese participants mostly sought help from people in their home country. These findings do not appear to have been found in previous studies.

The participants' network of friends was another important social support source when students had sociocultural issues. Goodman et al. (2006) explained that the presence of friends can help an individual recover from his/her hardship. Daniels's (2005) statement also emphasized the importance of assistance from a network of friends. He stated that students can master concepts and ideas that they are unable to understand on their own with assistance from adults or friends who have more advanced knowledge.

The findings about the participants' strategies to cope with their sociocultural issues appear to support Yeh and Inose's (2002), Yeh and Wang's (2000), and Zhai's (2002) findings. Yeh and Inose explored the difficulties and coping strategies of 247 Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant students on the East Coast of America by using a questionnaire. They found that the most frequently indicated coping strategy for their participants was the use of social support networks. Yeh and Wang (2000) studied Asian American coping attitudes, sources, and practices. The authors also determined that social networks were the source of help from which Asians and Asian Americans tend to seek assistance. The participants of Yeh and Wang's study were 470 Asian American (Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Indian) undergraduate and graduate students from nine universities and colleges on the East and West Coasts of the U.S. Like Yeh and Inose's study, Yeh and Wang's merely obtained information from questionnaires. While Yeh and Inose's and Yeh and Wang's research data was obtained using the quantitative method only, the data of this present study

comes from both quantitative and qualitative methods so more in-depth details are provided.

Though Zhai's (2002) findings showed similar results to Yeh and Inose's (2002) and Yeh and Wang's (2000) in that the participants sought help from their social networks, Zhai's research methodology was different. Zhai explored international students' adjustment issues and their required social support. The author interviewed 10 international students at The Ohio State University and found that these participants experienced significant difficulties in coping with U.S. education, cultural differences, and language issues. The results showed that family or friends were the most preferred resource from which to seek help, especially for emotional and psychological problems. While Zhai used only qualitative methods, the present study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods.

With regard to the findings, in both the current study and in Yeh and Inose's (2002), Yeh and Wang's (2000), and Zhai's (2002) studies concerning the participants' strategies to cope with their sociocultural issues, a relationship with the *Support* variable has been consistently found. Goodman et al. (2006) claimed that *Support* is a significant determinant affecting individuals' ability to cope with a transition. They identified the sources of support which individuals receive as being: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions. The findings from the current study, and also from Yeh and Inose's (2002), Yeh and Wang's (2000), and Zhai's (2002) studies, show that the participants use social support networks as one of their coping strategies. Regarding these findings, they show that the availability of the social network support as a direct contributing factor to the ease of the participants' transition to the new environment.

Regarding the students' strategies when they had to adjust their routine to not sleeping in the afternoon this could be explained by the socio-psychological processes focusing on the sociocultural adaptation issue. Sussman (2000) stated that when sojourners are in a new cultural environment, they recognize the differences between their cultural selves and the new cultural context. In

order to fit in the new environment, the participants have to adjust themselves by changing their behaviours, cognitions, or both and, consequently, cultural identity because their sets of cultural cognitions and behaviour are no longer proper within the new cultural context. In this present study, S4 indicated that he had found some difficulty in adjusting to life in MHK when he was unable to take a nap in the afternoon, as he would have done when he was in China. To deal with this difficulty, he mentioned his strategies through his interviews. S4's response shows that the sleeping pattern in China was inappropriate in Thai culture, so, S4 had to change his behaviour.

With regard to academic and sociocultural strategies, a correlation with the social constructionism approach and sociocultural adaptation model is apparent. For the academic strategies, when the students studied in a Thai academic context and experienced Thai social life, they interacted with their classmates and lecturers and built knowledge based on their understanding of both Thai educational culture and lifestyle. It was at this point that they often experienced some problems related to the differences between Thai and Chinese academic and sociocultural issues. To deal with those problems, they had to develop their own approaches such as seeking help from Thai friends and talking to them to practice their Thai language skills, cooking meals to their own taste, and adjusting their routine to better fit with Thai culture. These strategies show that through participating in academic activities and interacting effectively with other people, the students could actively contribute to developing their own knowledge and understanding of the Thai language through greater awareness of background and context.

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

The findings regarding the participants' strategies show that each participant - the Chinese students, lecturers, and administrators - had their own strategies to deal with the academic and sociocultural issues. Though *people from the students' home country* appear to have had a significant role in helping the students to cope with the academic and sociocultural issues, *Thai friends* (or social network support) was also considered to be a source of support that the

students usually made good use of and formed a direct contributing factor to the ease of the students' transition. Moreover, the lecturers' previous experiences in teaching international students were emphasized as an important factor in helping the students adjust to a new academic environment.

Regarding the use of *people from the students' home country* among the Chinese students, the cultural background information they disclosed should be taken into account where it relates to this strategy to fully understand their situations. Furthermore, as students have to make a significant effort to make academic and sociocultural adjustments when they first moved in to a new environment, those who have to deal with these students should pay more attention to them during this transition process, so that their issues can be solved timeously.

## **6.2 The Participants' Suggestions for the University to Help Students Overcome their Adjustment Problems and to Improve the Programme.**

### **Results**

This issue was from the research question, "What suggestions do the participants have for the university to help students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme?" which aimed to find the participants' suggestions to help the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and other international students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme. The results from the related questions in the questionnaires have been presented first to identify the students' suggestions and then have been supported by the information from the interviews and the reflective journals. The suggestions on the following issues have been presented: (6.2.1) Academic suggestions; (6.2.2) Sociocultural suggestions; and (6.2.3) Support services suggestions.

### **6.2.1 Academic suggestions**

This part will be divided into three sub-parts—students' suggestions, lecturers' suggestions, and administrators' suggestions.

### **6.2.1.1 Students' suggestions on academic issues**

The students had suggestions for three related groups of people—the lecturers, other Chinese-indigenous Thai learners and international students, and the administrators/faculties/university board. Their suggestions for those people are as follows:

#### *(1) Students' suggestions for the lecturers*

Data from the questionnaires revealed that the students wanted the lecturers to try to encourage the students' interest and ensure that they pay attention to their study. Moreover, more study periods per week should be scheduled for them. Additionally, the lecturers should be more proactive in talking to international students to find out whether they have any problems so that they can help or make suggestions to the students.

The information from the six students' interviews further reinforced the questionnaire results. All of them gave similar advice to the lecturers, stating that they should come to class on time. S1 added that the lecturers should teach every time that they have a scheduled class. Furthermore, they should teach more academic content to the students and give more information on Thai society and culture to increase the students' knowledge. Regarding this matter, S2 also had the same opinions as S1. She commented that on the occasions that the lecturers were not able to teach, they should let the students know in advance. Moreover, S2 stated that the lecturers' pace of teaching was too fast and she would prefer them to teach at a slower speed because some of her friends, whose Thai language skills were poorer, had difficulty following what was being said. S3 and S6 suggestions were similar to S1 and S2 in that they suggested the lecturers teach more content to the students. In addition, S3 mentioned the problems he had faced when lecturers had not followed the teaching schedule and so could not finish their series of lectures by the date when the students were due to go back to China, causing them to not be able to travel. S3 suggested that the lecturers should set a confirmed end date for the course, which would allow the Chinese students to book their flight tickets in advance. At the beginning of the semester, S4 proposed that in addition to just



sitting and learning in the classroom, the lecturers should give them regular opportunities to study and travel outside and learn about Thai culture more frequently.

The students' reflective journals were another research tool that further supported the findings from the questionnaires and the interviews. Only S3 and S6 gave suggestions concerning academic issues to the lecturers. S3 reported that he would like the lecturers to teach them more course content because he felt their current teaching did not cover a wide enough range. S6 offered a large number of suggestions. He repeated the comments from his interviews that the lecturers should be punctual when they had class. S6 further explained that the teaching staff needed to set a good example for the students in this matter so that they had the moral right to punish students who came to class late. Moreover, he claimed that the lecturers should do more preparation for their lessons in advance, which he felt would help their teaching to be more interesting and fun for the students.

To conclude, the students gave suggestions to the lecturers that they should come to class and teach them on time and pay more attention to the Chinese students. Moreover, the students should have an opportunity to study more both inside and outside the classroom

## *(2) Students' suggestions for other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and international students*

The findings regarding the students' suggestions for other Chinese-indigenous Thai learners and international students on academic issues are presented in Table 31, beginning with the findings from the questionnaires, those from the interviews, and ending with those from the reflective journals.

To assist other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners to overcome adjustment difficulties, the participants suggested the following through their questionnaires: (1) Students should have a clear purpose and focus. Everything depends on them. They have to help themselves as much as they can; (2) Students should try to practice their academic skills regularly; and (3) When studying, students

should pay attention to the lecturers, and make an effort to speak out and ask questions. They should manage their own reading schedule to review the lessons and gain more knowledge.

**Table 31: Students' suggestions for other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and international students on academic issues**

Students	Suggestions for other Chinese & internationals students		
	Questionnaires	Interviews	Reflective journals
S1	- Communicate with Thai friends.	- Watch Thai movies or Thai TV programmes.	
	- Speak out in class.	- Concentrate their efforts on Thai language studies.	
S2	- Communicate with Thai people.	- Study Thai as well as they could before coming to Thailand.	
	- Do self-study.	- Work hard, make effort, do self-study, manage study time, & pay attention to their studies.	
	- Manage study time properly.		
	- Speak out and ask questions.	- Make good Thai friends.	
S3	- Practice Thai language skills.	- Bear in mind that studying is the most important part.	
	- Communicate with Thai people.	- Spend time with Thai friends.	
S4	- Pay attention to lecturers & study.	- Practice Thai language skills.	
S5	- Practice Thai language skills.	- Find Thai friends. When talking to them, relax & try to befriend.	
		- Manage study time properly.	
		- Practice Thai language skills.	
S6	- Communicate with Thai people.	- Consider future plans & decide what they wanted to do.	- Be generous & help other people.
		- Practice pronunciation and listening skills before coming to Thailand.	

The following data gained from the interviews and the reflective journals not only supported, but also enhanced the questionnaires' results. The six participants gave several suggestions to other Chinese non-native Thai learners and second language (SL2) international students coming to Thailand to study (see Table 31). S2, S4, and S5 suggested a similar approach in that the students should find Thai friends, manage their study time, and practice their language skills. When talking to Thai people, they should relax and try to befriend them and furthermore, they should not be afraid of speaking incorrectly. In the students' reflective journals, S6 offered the suggestion that students should be generous and help other people, which would be reciprocated when they needed some help themselves. He also suggested that the student giving help would gain from the experience of teaching others too and that this would help them in the future.

In summary, the advice that the six students gave to other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and international students who intended to come to study in Thailand was that they should pay attention to their studies and try to practice Thai language skills both before and after arriving in Thailand so that they would not face problems in communication with Thai people and so that their language skills would show a better and quicker improvement.

### (3) Students' suggestions for the university

Table 32 presents a summary of those findings, beginning with the findings from the questionnaires and those from the interviews.

**Table 32: Students' suggestions for the university on the academic issues**

Students	Suggestions for the university		
	Questionnaires	Interviews	Reflective journals
All students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The administrators should to talk more to int. students &amp; ask whether they are having any difficulties and help them find out how they could solve their problems.</li> <li>- The Chinese students should have the opportunity to study with Thai students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talk &amp; ask whether they have any difficulties, help them find out how they could solve their issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit and talk to them at least once a month.</li> <li>- Take them travelling more often.</li> <li>- Address their problems as soon as possible.</li> <li>- Pay more attention to the Chinese students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit and talk to them at least once a month.</li> </ul>
S2			
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talk &amp; ask whether they have any difficulties, help them find out how they could solve their issues.</li> </ul>		
S4		No comment on this issue	
S5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a good environment for study.</li> </ul>	
S6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Chinese students should have the opportunity to study with Thai students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Chinese students should have the opportunity to study with Thai students.</li> </ul>	

The principal suggestions from the 22 participants who answered questionnaires were that they would like the administrators to talk more to international students and ask whether they are having any difficulties and help them find out how they could solve their issues. S1 underlined this suggestion both in her interviews and reflective journals. She said that:

'The lecturers and the university board should *pay more attention* to us. If they have time, please come to *visit, talk* to us, and *ask* whether we have any problems or we need any help. We don't have any relatives here. Our parents don't stay with us here so I want the university board to *pay more attention* to us' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

The students (including S6) also replied that the Chinese students should have the opportunity to study with Thai students.

S6: 'The university should *allow us to study with Thai students* so that we can learn more about Thai academic culture and how the Thai students behave in a class' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

The student's general comments appear to ask for the university to make a bit more effort, generally in more informal ways, in areas that would help the encourage the students' participation and movement towards greater participation, and ultimately integration, into MSU class and university life.

#### **6.2.1.2 Lecturers' suggestions on the academic issues**

The findings about the lecturers' suggestions on academic issues are presented in Table 33, beginning with their suggestions for Chinese students facing difficulties, those for other Chinese and second language international students, and those for the faculties/university board.

**Table 33: Lecturers' suggestions on the academic issues**

Lecturers	Suggestions for		
	Chinese students who faced difficulties	Other Chinese & SL2 international students	Faculties/university board
L1	- If they had any problems, they could talk to him directly or to their Thai friends.	- In addition to studying the Thai language, they should learn about Thai culture as well.	
L2	- If they had any problems, they could talk to her directly or to their Thai friends.	- In addition to studying the Thai language, they should learn about Thai culture as well. - Before coming to Thailand, they should have some Thai language background which they could learn from various sources.	
L3	- If they had any problems, they could talk to him directly or to their Thai friends.	- Before coming to Thailand, they should have some Thai language background which they could learn from various sources.	- The university policy towards the int. students should be emphasized.

In summary, the lecturers gave suggested that the students should talk to them when they face difficulties in studies. Furthermore, they advised that students should have some Thai language background and learn about Thai culture before studying in Thailand. The officer or team taking care of the students should also be empowered to give specific help to the students.

#### **6.2.1.3 Administrators' suggestions on the academic issues**

The findings about the administrators' suggestions on academic issues are presented in Table 34, beginning with their suggestions for Chinese students facing difficulties, those for other Chinese and second language international students, and those for the university.

**Table 34: Administrators' suggestions on the academic issues**

Admin.	Suggestions for		
	Chinese students who faced difficulties	Other Chinese & SL2 international students	University
A1	- If the Chinese students face any issues, they could consult or ask for assistance from her.		
A2	- If the Chinese students face any issues, they could consult or ask for assistance from her.	- Practice more Thai conversation.	- Students should come to MSU earlier than in the past to study a Thai preparation course.
A3	- If the Chinese students face any issues, they could consult or ask for assistance from him. - The students should make an effort to find Thai friends.	- Have sufficient Thai language skills to be at a level that they could manage basic communication with Thai people. - The students should consider whether they were ready to come to Thailand. (1. Think about the size of the tuition fee they had to pay the university, 2. Feel able to adjust to the new academic and social environment.)	- The university board should have clearer goals which also match its policies regarding the international students' enrolment.

Data from the administrators' interviews revealed that the Chinese students should ask for assistance from the administrators directly when they face academic issues. In addition, international students should have Thai language skills and practice more Thai conversation so that they do not face so many communication issues. To improve the programme and help the Chinese students at the same time, the administrators suggested to the university that the students should be taken to MSU earlier than in the past to study a Thai preparation course first, before starting their main studies.

### **6.2.2 Sociocultural suggestions**

The following parts present the participants' suggestion on social issues (section 6.2.2.1) and those on cultural issues (section 6.2.2.2).

### **6.2.2.1 Suggestions on the social issues**

The participants focused their advice on the relationships with people in MHK. The findings concerning this matter are structured as follows: (1) Students' suggestions, (2) Lecturers' suggestions, and (3) Administrators' suggestions

#### **(1) Students' suggestions**

The findings regarding the students' suggestions on the social issues have been presented in Table 35, beginning with the findings from the questionnaires, followed by those from the interviews and ending with those from the reflective journals.

Data from the questionnaires showed the participants' suggestions that the students should talk to Thai people, participate in various activities in the university, and have the opportunity to live with Thai people. S6 replied in his questionnaire and also commented through his interviews about this issue. He said that:

*'The university board should let us have a chance to stay with Thai people. This will help us know more about the Thai culture. For the students who don't want to do that, the university should not force them though. Also, the university should give us the freedom to choose whether we want to stay with Thai people or not' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).*



**Table 35: Students' suggestion on the social issues**

Students	Questionnaires	Interviews	Reflective journals
S1	- Talk to Thai people and participate in various activities in the university.		
S2	- Talk to Thai people and participate in various activities in the university. - More activities involving talking to Thai students should be set up for int. students.	- The lecturers should be friendlier to the students. - The lecturers should narrow the relationship space between them and the students. - The international students should have an opportunity to gather together. - S2 wanted to hold the activity so the Chinese students could cooperate with Thai students.	- The Chinese students should have an opportunity to participate in activities with Thai people.
S3	- More activities involving talking to Thai students should be set up for international students.		- More language buddies should be arranged for the international students.
S4			- More language buddies should be arranged for the international students.
S5	- Talk to Thai people and participate in various activities in the university. - More activities involving talking to Thai students should be set up for international students.	- The lecturers should be friendlier to the students.	- The lecturers should get to know and be friend with the students. - More holiday activities between Thai and international students should be arranged. - More language buddies should be arranged for the international students.
S6	- The Chinese/international students should have the opportunity to live with Thai people.	- The university should arrange for the int. students to live with Thai people. - If some incidents occur, all related people should be calm down, talk to one another, and solve the problems carefully and sincerely.	

Then, data from the interviews added more suggestions about the activities and the relationship issues, while that from the reflective journals reinforced the activities matters and gave more information about language buddies. For example, while S2 wanted to hold an activity where the Chinese and Thai students could talk, S6 claimed that more holiday activities between Thai and international students should be arranged.

S2: 'I think that there are not very many activities for international students. The university board should *arrange some activities where the international students can join in and work together*. If any problems occur, we can discuss them. When we have any issues about our studies or daily lives, we can talk about how to cope with them and help one another' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S6: 'During a weekend or a holiday, it would be great to *have more activities where the Thai and international students can cooperate and gather together*, like a small party' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

With regard to the findings about lecturer-student relationships, S2 and S5 recommended that the lecturers should be friendlier and narrow their relationship space with the students. S2 mentioned this issue in her interviews, while S5 wrote in his reflective journal.

S2: 'I want the lecturers to *narrow the relationship space between them and the students*. If everybody becomes friends, I would feel able to ask questions and talk to the lecturers' (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S5: 'In daily life, *the lecturers should get to know and become friends with the students*. When the students want to talk to the lecturers, they won't be shy' (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

Another social issue mentioned by the participants is that of language buddies. S3, S4, and S5 suggested to the lecturers through interviews that they would like them to find more language buddies with whom they could talk regularly.

S3: 'When the Chinese students arrive in MSU for the first time, I want the lecturers to *introduce them to many language buddies* to help them learn the Thai language' (Transcript 25/09/2010).

S4: 'I want the lecturers to *let us have more chance to meet Thai students*. They can do like what they used to do in the past when they introduced us to Thai students who were studying Chinese language to be our language buddies. We should have an *opportunity to travel with Thai students too*. This will help both parties to learn about each other's culture easily' (Transcript 26/09/2010).

S5: 'It would be great for the international students if the university board could *provide Thai buddies* for them, as then they would benefit from *learning more of the Thai language and culture*' (Transcript 26/09/2010).

As in the discussion on the more classroom specific issues, the students again felt that more informal efforts to make them feel more comfortable and more relaxed about participating would be helpful, both in the specific issues related to their classes and university life, and also with giving a route that would help them in wider social areas of their adjustment to living in MHK.

### *(2) Lecturers' suggestions*

For the lecturers' suggestions on students' relationships, L1 stated that he would explain to the Chinese students about the nature of Thai people so that they would know what Thai people were like. Adjustment to the Thai environment is dependent on the students themselves. They need to make a decision by themselves about what they should do. In contrast to L1, L2 and L3 suggested that they should communicate often and spend more social time with the Thai people they knew rather than with Chinese friends.

### *(3) Administrators' suggestions*

The administrators were also interviewed concerning relationship matters. Their advice to the Chinese student was that they should spend time not only with their Chinese friends, but also Thai friends. A2 further revealed more information about Chinese students' views on having Thai friends. They said that if they spent social time with Thai friends, their Chinese friends would react negatively and talk to them sarcastically. This made them nervous about having Thai friends.

Regarding relationships with people in MHK, the lecturers and the administrators emphasized that the students should communicate often and spend social time not only with their Chinese friends, but also Thai friends.

#### **6.2.2.2 Suggestions on the cultural issues**

The following section shows the participants' suggestions on cultural issues—students' suggestions (section 1) and lecturers' and administrators' suggestions (section 2).

##### **(1) Students' suggestions**

The findings concerning the students' suggestions on the cultural issues are presented in

Table 36.

**Table 36: Students' suggestions on the cultural issues**

<b>Students</b>	<b>Questionnaires</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Reflective journals</b>
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The lecturers should talk to int. students more often and ask whether they have any problems.</li> <li>- The Chinese/int. students should try to learn more about Thai culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The lecturers should pay more attention, visit, and talk to the Chinese students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The lecturers and the university should come to visit the Chinese students more often and take more interest in them.</li> </ul>
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Chinese/int. students should try to learn more about Thai culture.</li> </ul>		
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The lecturers should talk to int. students more often and ask whether they have any problems.</li> </ul>		
S4			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The lecturers and the university should pay more attention to the Chinese students.</li> </ul>
S5		No comment on this issue	
S6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Chinese/int.</li> </ul>		

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students should try to  
learn more about Thai  
culture.

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Data from the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals revealed the consistent suggestions that the lecturers and the university should pay more attention to the Chinese students by, for example, talking to them more often. The details of the above findings were gathered as follows:

### *(2) Lecturers' and administrators' suggestions*

L1, L2, and A1 made similar suggestions regarding Thai culture. L1 and L2 claimed that to live in Thailand, it was a must for them to know how to adjust to Thai society and culture. A1 advised that not only did the students need to learn about the national Thai culture, but also the way of life for north easterners, as having knowledge about Thai culture only would not be sufficient for them. They should also learn how to communicate in the local dialect. If it was possible, the Chinese lecturers who could speak the northeast local dialect, should teach the students some vocabulary and let them know that the food in the northeast was different from standard Thai food. This would help them have a better understanding of the place where they would be coming to study.

## **6.2.3 Support services suggestions**

This section has been divided into three sub-sections—students' suggestions, lecturers' suggestions, and administrators' suggestions.

### **6.2.3.1 Students' suggestions**

The findings concerning the students' suggestions on the institutional support are presented in Table 37, starting with the results from the questionnaires, followed by those from the interviews.

**Table 37: Students' suggestions on the institutional support**

Students	Questionnaires	Interviews
S1	- More counselling and assisting services for int. students should be organized.	
S2	- More counselling and assisting services for int. students should be organized.	- The university should provide special Chinese administrators to coordinate with the Chinese students directly and specifically.
S3		- No comment on this issue. The university had done a great job already.
S4	- More counselling and assisting services for int. students should be organized.	- The university should help the students apply for a job.
S5		- The university should arrange the accommodation so that the Chinese students could share rooms with Thai people.
S6	- More counselling and assisting services for int. students should be organized.	- The university should arrange the accommodation so that the Chinese students could share rooms with Thai people.

Data gained from the questionnaires and the interviews show that the participants had various suggestions concerning institutional support. The majority of students provided suggestions on the counselling and assisting services through their questionnaires. Moreover, the findings from the interviews added more suggestions for the university, with students suggesting that helping with a job search, providing accommodation shared with Thai people, and arranging special Chinese administrators would be beneficial for the Chinese students.

#### **6.2.3.2 Lecturers' suggestion**

The findings concerning the lecturers' suggestions on support services issues are presented in Table 38.

**Table 38: Lecturers' suggestions on the support services**

Lecturers	Interviews
L1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- He would like to let the university know about the Chinese students' behaviour so that they could deal with them correctly.</li></ul>
L2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A study room and specific teaching and learning aids for the Chinese students majoring in Thai as a foreign language should be provided.</li></ul>
L3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The university should appoint an officer or a team to take responsibility for this Chinese student group.</li><li>- A study room for and specific teaching and learning aids for the Chinese students majoring in Thai as a foreign language should be provided.</li></ul>

The three lecturers were interviewed about their suggestions for the university, particularly in regard to issues pertaining to international students. Each of them made different suggestions.

L2: 'Now, the problem of our major (Thai as a foreign language) is that we don't have a study room where the teachers can arrange the teaching and learning aids for the students. I have already reported this issue to the faculty board and asked for the room, but no room is available. The faculty board provided a postgraduate study room for us, but we can't really use it for 100 percent of the time. Therefore, I want the faculty or the university board to *arrange a specific room for the students*' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

L3: 'The faculty or the university board should *provide a study room for the Chinese and the international students* who study in the major of Thai as a foreign language so that they can have a resource space specifically for their major. For some issues, they can't learn with Thai student groups' (Transcripts 27/09/2010).

The physical requirements that concerned the lecturers in connection with international students were the availability of a suitable study room and the assignment of administrators to deal specifically with the international students, while the ideal suggestions were concerned with the university policies and the students' behaviour.

### **6.2.3.3 Administrators' suggestions**

The question of the administrators' suggestions for the university concerning the support services was raised during the interviews with the administrators. Only A1 talked about this issue. She mentioned that the faculties' board should monitor the budget of the Cooperation Programme between MSU and GXUN more strictly. The students' accommodation was raised as an example. As the faculty had to take responsibility for paying the apartments' rent on behalf of the Chinese students, the faculty accountants sometimes did not check the real payment details. The students were assigned to live three people per room. However, when there were only two students, the landlord still charged the faculty the same rate as for three students. Therefore, in reality, the faculty accountants needed to collect more money from the two students but this issue was still being neglected by the faculty board.

### **Conclusion of the results**

To help the Chinese students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme, suggestions from the students, lecturers, and administrators should be considered.

Regarding the academic issues, the participants consistently suggested to other SL2 international students they should pay attention to their studies and try to practice Thai language skills both before and after arriving in Thailand so that they would be less likely to face issues in communication with Thai people and so that their language skills would improve more quickly.

In terms of the suggestions on sociocultural issues, the students advised the university to pay more attention to them to find out whether they had any problems. Additionally, the Chinese students suggested that other students should try to learn more about the Thai culture to avoid cultural problems. With regard to the relationships with people in MHK, more activities between Chinese and Thai or international students should be arranged. Furthermore, they should have an opportunity to live with Thai people. The lecturers' and the administrators' suggestions emphasized the point that the students should often communicate with and spend social time with Thai friends.



Considering the support services issues, the participants proposed various suggestions. They suggested that the university should provide consulting and assisting services for them. Concerning the lecturers' suggestions on the support services for the students, they would like the university to arrange an international students' study room and appoint administrators who can deal specifically with the international students. The administrators' suggestions to the university drew attention to the care needed from the faculty's accountants regarding the monitoring of the financial budgets.

## **Discussion**

To investigate their suggestions, three key areas were explored—(6.2.1) academic; (6.2.2) sociocultural; and (6.2.3) support services. This question relates to social constructionism as the participants are trying to create their new conventions, practices, and bodies of knowledge to replace those from their previous experiences (Hibberd, 2005).

### **6.2.1 Academic suggestions**

The findings about the students' suggestions for the administrators/faculties/university board show the importance of three issues: talking about their academic and daily lives, asking whether they had any issues, and making a visit once a month. They suggested that the administrators/faculties/university board should pay more attention to the Chinese students by talking to them and asking whether they have any academic issues.

Regarding the participants' suggestions on talking more with the administrators/faculties/university board, it is possible that the Chinese students rarely had a chance to talk to those people. When they had any issues, they would report these to the class leader who took responsibility for coordinating with the officers. If the administrators/faculties/university board could make a visit to the students, it would offer the students more opportunity to discuss their issues with those people closely and directly.

Another suggestion for the administrators/faculties/university board was about collaborative study. The participants gave advice that the Chinese/international students should have the opportunity to study with Thai students. In addition to the suggestions from the 22 participants' questionnaires, S6 emphasized this issue in his interviews.

The above findings support Sawir et al.'s (2008) conclusion in their study about international students' personal and social loneliness in Australia. They suggested that to help the international students quicken their learning of conversational and academic English the university should arrange that the international and local students share a common learning setting. This will also assist them to feel that they belong to their home and host nations. Furthermore, this will give vital learning experiences for local students as well. For example, they will have an opportunity to learn about an international culture. While Sawir et al.'s (2008) study did not focus on a specific nation, the present study focused only on Chinese students. A shared learning environment will facilitate an understanding of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners in cross-cultural transition.

Additionally, S5 replied through his interviews that the university should create a good study environment for the students so that they could maintain their interest and motivation. These findings appear to support Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) findings in their study about undergraduate students' expectations of universities and their perceptions toward university administrators. Half of their participants stated that the university campus setting, both naturally and socially, should be developed by the university leadership team. For example, the natural campus areas should be increased (52.6%) and social campus settings should be established (51%). However, Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) study did not give any reasons why the participants gave these suggestions. This may be because Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's findings were obtained from a questionnaire only. In the current study, the findings were from in-depth interviews where the participants could give details and explanations to gain certain results (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

Data from the administrators' interviews revealed that the Chinese students should ask for assistance from the administrators directly when they face academic issues. In addition, the international students should have Thai language skills and practice more Thai conversation so that they do not face so many communication issues. To improve the programme and help the Chinese students at the same time, the administrators gave suggestions to the faculties/university board that the students should be taken to MHK earlier than in the past to study in a Thai preparation course first, before starting their main studies. These findings appear to correlate with Wan's (2001) conclusion in her study about the learning experience of graduate Chinese students in American universities. She concluded that schools could help the international students who had language difficulties by possibly providing English language classes. In the current study, the participants indicated writing assignment issues and also communication problems. These matters need to be solved in advance. Therefore, the administrators suggested that providing a Thai preparation course for the Chinese/international students would help the students cope with their academic issues.

### **6.2.2 Sociocultural suggestions**

Referring to the students' suggestions on social issues, data from the questionnaires revealed that the participants felt international students should have an opportunity to live with Thai people. Then, data from the interviews added more suggestions such as cooperative activities between the Chinese and Thai students should be arranged.

The above findings emphasize the importance of social life. Individuals and groups try to create a network to construct their social world (G. Marshall, 1998). In the current study, the Chinese students wanted to live with Thai people so that they could learn about Thai social life. In addition, they would like the university board to arrange more social activities among the international students. These findings lend support to Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) findings in their study about the psychological and sociocultural adjustments of two Chinese students at a British university. They stated that the institutions

needed to find more ways of promoting contact between overseas students and the local British community. Students should be informed about opportunities to do volunteer work in the community, and encouraged to participate at some point during their studies. Also, more local people should be encouraged to befriend overseas students. This will lead to mutual benefits. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong further mentioned another possibility that the institutions could hold some 'open' cultural events where people can be put in touch with each other. Additionally, they need to facilitate multicultural networks by arranging and promoting more social activities. While the participants in Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) study comprised various educational backgrounds, (e.g. mature students who had work experience and new university graduates), those in the present study were a group of Chinese students studying their bachelor's degree.

With regard to the findings about lecturer-student relationships, S2 and S5 recommended that the lecturers should be friendlier and narrow their relationship space with the students. S2 mentioned this issue in her interviews, while S5 wrote in his reflective journal. These findings support Wan's (2001) findings. Wan said that lecturers could assist international students by being friends with them and motivating other students to be friends with them. This will help them to be familiar with the host culture more quickly.

Language buddies were another social issue mentioned by the participants. S3, S4, and S5 suggested to the lecturers through interviews that they would like them to find more language buddies with whom they could talk most of the time. These findings lend support to Sawir et al.'s (2008) conclusions. Their findings demonstrated that two-thirds of 200 international students, resident onshore in Australia, had experienced problems of personal and social loneliness and/or isolation, especially in the early months. This was because of the loss of contact with families and the loss of networks. To deal with these issues, Sawir et al. concluded that universities should promote mechanisms that trigger networking, such as student clubs and buddy systems. While Sawir et al. (2008) did not study the particular mix of services provided by each university, the present

study identified what support services MSU arranged for the international students.

With regard to the students' suggestions on the cultural issues, the findings from the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals show the same issues being consistently brought up. The students suggested that the lecturers and the faculties/university board should pay more attention to international students and take the time to visit and talk to them more often. The same points were brought up in similar terms across all three sources of data (see

Table 36 on page 277) and seemed to be a common need felt by all of the students. Mathison (1988) claimed that through the use of triangulation method, various sources of data could lead to a single proposition about the phenomenon being studied and a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). On this basis, the triangulation method is considered as an appropriate method for obtaining more accurate and valid results.

### **6.2.3 Support services suggestions**

The findings from the students' questionnaires concerning their suggestions on the institutional support show that they wanted the university to arrange the counselling and assisting services for the international students. These support Zhai's (2002) findings in her study about international students' adjustment issues and needed social support. She explored international students' adjustment issues and needed social support. The author interviewed 10 international students at The Ohio State University. These participants suggested that it would be helpful for international students to make better adjustment if their college and department provided academic orientation, improved student counselling, and strengthened language support. While Zhai's (2002) participants consisted of graduate students from various countries and regions, the current study's participants were Chinese undergraduate students from one specific region.

Though the participants in the current study indicated that they sought assistance from people in their home country and from Thai friends, it is surprising to note that they suggested that MSU should establish a counselling centre where they can ask for help. These findings do not appear to support Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) findings as their participants' expectations of a counselling centre were low. Though they needed to get professional support, they showed a hesitation to ask for help. The authors stated that only less than a quarter of the participants responded that they asked for professional support at their universities.

With regard to the lecturers' suggestions, the findings indicate that the lecturers (L2 and L3) wanted to facilitate proper support services for the Chinese/international students by providing them with a study room and teaching and learning aids. The lecturers' suggestions show that they wanted to facilitate the Chinese/international students to adjustment to Thai academic culture. Therefore, they would like the university board to provide teaching and learning resources for the students. These findings support Wan's (2001) conclusion and Hacifazlioglu and Ozdemir's (2010) findings. Wan conducted her study at a major university in the eastern part of the United States. One graduate student and his wife were selected as key informants. Wan reported that the differences in language, culture, and social and political system between China and the United States were the major sources for the students' positive and negative experiences. She concluded that educators can assist students by becoming aware of their home culture, different learning styles, frustration in adjusting to school life and cultural shocks they need to overcome; and by helping them adjust to the American educational systems and learn about American culture. Similarly, the participants in Hacifazlioglu & Ozdemir's (2010) study suggested that they wanted the university to equip all classes with educational technology and increase the number of places for learning and group studies. While Wan's (2001) study used only the qualitative approach and Hacifazlioglu & Ozdemir's (2010) study used a quantitative approach, the present study applied both approaches to obtain deeper detail (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

### **Conclusion of the discussion**

Regarding the findings concerning the participants' suggestions, it can be seen that the participants from both the current study and Sawir et al.'s (2008), Hacifazlioglu & Ozdemir's (2010), Wan's (2001), Spencer-Oatey & Xiong's (2006), and Zhai's (2002) studies tried to propose suitable and applicable suggestions which would benefit them and their institutions. This group of people, made up of international students, lecturers, and administrators can be said to have formed a social group, which is trying to define itself by constructing its own new conventions, practices, and bodies of knowledge to replace those from its previous experiences (Hibberd, 2005). In this case, the members of the group, through interaction with one another, had come to know and understand what they could suggest or what they could do to most benefit or improve the experiences of international students.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Introduction

After a discussion of this study's findings in Chapters 4 to 6, this chapter considers the implications of these findings. First, a summary of the key findings of the research is presented in section 7.2, then the contributions made by this study are outlined (section 7.3), as well as its limitations (section 7.4) and implications for further research (section 7.5). Finally, the chapter ends with concluding remarks in section 7.6.

The objective of this study was to investigate the adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country. Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at MSU, Thailand, were chosen to make up the case study used in this research. The study was centred round the students and staff in the major of 'Thai as a Foreign Language' at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at MSU in Thailand. A triangulated approach was utilized to collect data by multiple methods (questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and reflective journals) and data sources (students, lecturers, and administrators) over the four-month period of a semester.

### 7.2 Summary of Key Findings

*RQ1: Why do students choose a university outside of China for their undergraduate studies?*

The students' interviews revealed that they had predominantly decided to undertake an education in Thailand because of the opportunity to travel and the perceived benefits and advantages (e.g. travel opportunity, life experience, future employment) it would bring regarding their future opportunities. More than three quarters of the students indicated that they had selected MSU as their first choice for study. Among these students, 47% stated that they chose to study at MSU mainly because of its calm and pleasant environment, suitable for living and studying. In addition to this reason, *recommendations from lecturers and*



*senior students in China* was the only common reason that all of the participants gave.

*RQ2 -How do the participants think that their home country background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences?*

The participants indicated that their home country background had both contributed to and hindered their adjustment experiences. Regarding the aspects that contributed to their adjustment experiences, they specifically mentioned the importance of family, their individual personality traits (e.g. diligence, persistence, being hardworking), and the positive attitudes they held towards Thailand and the Thai language. The participants indicated that their families realized how important education was. Additionally, they gave them good support on educational and financial issues. With regard to their personality traits, they perceived the qualities that came from their Chinese background as: being hardworking, showing persistence and diligence, and taking self-responsibility. These qualities were also reflected in their behaviour. The lecturers and administrators also viewed the qualities shown by students of Chinese background to be diligence, enthusiasm, strong will, modesty, punctuality, cooperation, and responsibility. These positive behaviours, associated with the background of the students, are factors that could contribute to their successful adjustment through perseverance and a general attitude that their efforts in that regard would be rewarded. Regarding the attitude issues, the way they perceived Thailand and the Thai language reflected positive aspects rather than negative ones. They acknowledged the importance of studying Thai language, which could help them have an opportunity to travel and get a good job in the future. With these positive attitudes towards Thailand and the Thai language, it can be concluded that these factors contributed to students adjusting to their lives to Thailand.

With regard to the background aspects that hindered their adjustment experiences, though some students had difficult backgrounds (e.g. S5 faced financial difficulties sometimes, S6 viewed his upbringing as difficult), they stated that it did not hinder their adjustment experiences. However, the lecturers

and the administrators claimed that several aspects concerning differences in the Chinese culture seemed to hinder the Chinese students' adjustment in Thailand. For example, in China the students did not have to wear a uniform, while it was a requirement in Thailand. In addition, they had a culture of taking a nap in the afternoon in China. Nevertheless, these background issues were likely to hinder the students' adjustment experiences only when they were newly arrived in Thailand, but after more time had passed (about 1-2 months) the Chinese students had already successfully made the greater part of their adjustment in adapting to Thai culture.

*RQ3- What differences do students report between home-country and host-country universities' teaching and learning approaches?*

The findings regarding the students' evaluations of the teaching and learning styles in MSU and those in GXUN revealed differences between the approaches of the two universities. Regarding teaching styles, there were found to be completely different approaches to issues concerning *teaching and learning approaches, giving assignments, and punctuality of lecturers* at MSU when compared with those at GXUN. Regarding the teaching approach, for example, the lecturers in MSU utilized several kinds of teaching materials in their classes, while those in GXUN used their textbooks only. With regard to the learning approach, the students had more opportunity to think, do creative work, and more time for individual practice of language skills when studying in MSU, while this opportunity occurred less when they were in GXUN. With regard to assignments, the majority of students (55%) expressed the view that they were given a large quantity of assignments by the lecturers in MSU. Comparing Thailand with their home country, all six students said that the workload in GXUN was less than in MSU. Almost half of students (45%) mentioned that the lecturers in GXUN gave only a small number of assignments. Regarding the punctuality of lecturers, the findings showed that all students agreed that the lecturers in MSU arrived late at times, while those in GXUN were usually on time.

From the evaluation of participants on teaching and learning styles, the students tended to most often mention positive experiences at MSU. Some negative aspects were also reported; for example students mentioned the uncertainties in their scheduling arising from the greater flexibility of lesson plans and the lack of punctuality of the Thai lecturers at MSU. These findings, therefore, highlighted not only the academic cultural differences (e.g. *teaching and learning approaches, giving assignments, and punctuality of lecturers*) between the host and the home country universities, but also the positive and negative student experiences which these led the students to have.

*RQ4 - What do the participants perceive students' adjustment problems to be in the first year?*

The study revealed that the academic issues (e.g. *writing assignments, expressing themselves by communicating in Thai, asking questions in class*) appeared to be the area most often mentioned by the participants, while the sociocultural issues (e.g. *homesickness and loneliness, lack of respect regarding cultural differences, Thai food*) and support services issues (e.g. *transportation*) seemed to cause only a few difficulties to the students. However, though the students did face difficulties in each of the academic, sociocultural, and support services issues, they claimed that overall they had a positive experience during their studies in the host country. For example, S1, S3, and S4 reported that the lecturers gave them particular attention and worked more slowly, and were very helpful. S2, S4, and S6 had found it pleasurable to study several aspects of Thai language and culture.

*RQ5: What strategies do students use to adjust to an indigenous academic and cultural environment?*

The findings regarding the participants' strategies showed that each group of participants—the Chinese students, lecturers, and administrators - had their own strategies to deal with the students' academic and sociocultural issues. For the Chinese students, more than half (55%) indicated that *people from the students' home country* played an important role in helping them to cope with

the academic and sociocultural issues which they experienced when moving to Thailand. The lecturers and 32% of students also regarded *Thai friends* to be a source of support that the students usually made good use of and which formed a directly contributing factor to the ease of the students' transition. Additionally, the lecturers helped by noticing when some part of the lessons may have been unclear to the students, and then clarifying that material by either spending more time repeating it again, or perhaps teaching the same material in another way, to try and ensure the students understood it more fully. Similarly, the administrators also tried to explain things in a clearer way to the students when they did not understand.

*RQ6- What suggestions do the participants have for the university to help students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme?*

The participants made a number of suggestions that could benefit them and their institution. To improve the quality of teaching and learning, it was suggested that the lecturers make more of an effort to come to class and start teaching the students on time. Moreover, the university was advised that holding more social activities and arranging more language buddies for international students would help the new students adjust to studying in Thailand by expanding their opportunities to speak Thai in more social, everyday, circumstances. Additionally the participants felt that it would be helpful for international students to learn more about the Thai language and culture both before and after arriving in Thailand, for example by taking part in a Thai preparation course in Thailand, in order to give them some Thai language and cultural background knowledge that would help the students overcome adjustment difficulties and settle into their new environment. The participants made a further suggestion that the university staff should visit and talk to them more often, so that closer and more regular contact could be established between both parties, allowing any problems to be dealt with at an early stage and in a less formal manner. Furthermore, to improve the programme, the university was advised to provide consulting and assisting services for

international students and to appoint a special Chinese administrator to coordinate with the Chinese students directly and specifically.

### **7.3 Contributions of this Study**

The findings of the study confirm aspects of previous theories about the adjustment experience and add some new implications regarding theory and the adjustment experience. The following sections discuss the theoretical and adjustment experience implications that have been noted in the study.

#### **7.3.1 Theoretical contributions**

Regarding the theoretical frameworks of the study, there are six theoretical perspectives that can be used to examine the adjustment experiences encountered by non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country (as presented in Section 2.2 from page 16 to 46).

7.3.1.1 Push-Pull factors;

7.3.1.2 Factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment;

7.3.1.3 Social constructionism;

7.3.1.4 The transition theory; and

7.3.1.5 Factors in socio-psychological processes.

7.3.1.6 Ward's adaptation model

The key parts of each theory will be summarized and followed by an examination of how it relates to the present study. Then, 'my original contribution to the field of adjustment' will be presented in section 7.3.1.7.

##### **7.3.1.1 Push-Pull factors**

Push-pull factors have been used to understand international student flows, decisions and motivation to study overseas, and the choice of country (Chen, 2007). The "push" factors function within the home country and contribute to the student's initial interest in studying abroad. In contrast, "pull" factors operate

within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Results from this study raised the importance of push-pull factors' influence on the students' decisions to study overseas. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) claimed that "push" factors included lack of access to higher education, perceptions of the quality of the tertiary education system, and the availability of technology-based programs. In addition, the authors found various 'pull' factors that attract international students to come to the host country (e.g. knowledge and awareness of the host, recommendations from friends, relatives, or environment). Considering the 'push' and 'pull' factors mentioned by Mazzarol and Soutar, it can be seen that some 'push' factors (perceptions of the quality of the tertiary education system and the availability of technology-based programs) appear to be a 'pull' factor as well (knowledge and awareness of the host). A possible reason is that some determinants can act as either a 'push' or a 'pull' in different situations. If that factor occurs when the students are in their home country and it causes the students to make a decision to study abroad, it is a 'push' factor. After making their minds to study internationally, 'pull' factors then attract the students to choose a host country and an institution.

In the current study, *the importance of personal growth, language, and future career* were considered as the 'push' determinants that encouraged the Chinese students to come to Thailand, whereas *the environment of MSU* was regarded as the 'pull' factor that encouraged them to choose MSU. Nearly half the students (47%) responded that MSU was chosen because it was in a calm and pleasant environment suitable for studying and living. The findings concerning *the environment of MSU* showed that this study supported the theory of push-pull factors, where Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) indicated that *environment* was a 'pull' factor which influenced the decision of international students to study abroad. This 'pull' factor appeared to be different from one previous study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) where participants perceived the importance of environment as a less influential reason, while the present study's participants placed greater emphasis on the importance of this factor in their

choice of host university. It is possible that though the 'pull' factor in the present study and the "pull" factor in Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study initially appear to correspond exactly, the actual degree of influence that this factor carries may vary in different contexts. Moreover, the participants in Mazzarol and Soutar's study came from various countries, educational backgrounds, and age groups. This would make the findings of the current study not directly comparable with that study, since the students involved had different personal characteristics (Li & Bray, 2007).

#### ***7.3.1.2 Factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment***

Hannigan (1990) reviewed the literature and summarized various publications concerning factors associated with Intercultural Effectiveness and also factors that have a negative relation. He indicated three major factors that could help international students to function fully in different cultures: skills or abilities, attitudes, and personality traits. Having 'skills or abilities' mean that each person has interpersonal and communication skills (e.g. listening skills), the ability to enter into a meaningful dialogue with other people, to initiate interaction with a stranger, to effectively deal with communication misunderstandings and different communication styles as well as linguistic ability in host cultures and interaction management. Regarding 'attitudes', it means that individual should have a positive attitude towards the host culture: that is, respect and interest for the customs, traditions, and people of the host country so that they would be able to adjust to the new environment. In addition, individual's personality traits were defined as a willingness to immerse oneself in the new environment rather than rigidly maintaining the values of the home culture (Hannigan, 1990).

Besides those three factors mentioned above, Mamman (1995) noted that the 'socio-biographical' background (e.g. the cultural setting, ethnic background, and linguistic ability) is also regarded as being among the most important factors that can contribute to intercultural adjustment. Hannigan mentioned the following personality traits as negative factors that have an inverse relationship to cross-cultural effectiveness: perfectionism, rigidity, dogmatism,

ethnocentrism, dependent anxiety, task-oriented behaviour, narrow-mindedness, and self-centred role behaviours.

The findings of the study supported these established factors as contributing to cross-cultural adjustment and revealed some others. The students' ethnic background, personality traits, linguistic ability, and attitudes appeared to be factors that supported the established findings. The findings showed that 'the ethnic background' of the students was an important factor contributing to the Chinese students' adjustment to their new environment. In the present study, the ethnic background includes both the 'inherited' (the students' biological origin) and the 'acquired' (Zhuang language) attributes as these two issues may be positive factors that lead a student to adjust well to the Thai educational environment.

In addition, the findings showed that all participants – the students, the lecturers, and the administrators - perceived the following qualities from the Chinese students' background to be influential as well: being hardworking, persistent, diligent, and able to take self-responsibility. These 'personality traits' of the students could lead them to adjust well to the host country. Consideration of the 'linguistic ability' of students in my study also demonstrated evidence that those factors contributed to cross-cultural adjustment. The findings revealed that the students had background knowledge in the Thai language when they were still in China. When they arrived in Thailand, their linguistic ability may have helped them adjust to the Thai academic environment, both by better understanding the teaching and being more comfortable in class, but also by helping them become more comfortable in the wider academic and social environment that they had moved to, and this factor, therefore, contributed positively to their adjustment.

The last, but not least, issue is 'attitudes'. The findings indicated that the students showed their interests and positive attitudes regarding Thai language and culture. They were interested in the customs, traditions, and people of the new environment. These attitudes helped them adjust to the host country effectively, possibly by easing the adjustment experience through greater



knowledge of the host country's social and cultural background, as well as giving them more opportunity to get to know a wider range of Thai people through social interaction, both in the university and in the wider host community.

Consideration of additional factors contributing to cross-cultural adjustment revealed the influence of the family background of the students as it related to their financial background, family interest in the students' progress, and the Chinese family values. This appeared to be a crucial factor contributing to the students' adjustment to living in Thailand, with students from a supportive family being well prepared for the financial issues which arose and helped by the way their parents took responsibility for their education in Thailand, making them feel comfortable about financial matters while studying overseas.

Moreover, the findings concerning the students' future plans in relation to their parents revealed the influence of Chinese family values, with the students stating that they planned to go back to China after graduation so that they could take care of their parents. Similarly, their parents indicated the responsibility they felt towards their children's future, and this family mutual dependence, with their parents taking roles as supporters, may have increased opportunities for the Chinese students to adjust successfully to the Thai environment (Bond, 2010). Regarding family interest, the students' parents took roles as supporters of the students and this was considered as a positive factor, which assisted the students' adjustment to their lives in the host country.

#### **7.3.1.3 Social constructionism**

Social constructionism focuses on the significance of culture and context in comprehending what happens in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. This perspective considers there to be no meaning in the world until people construct it for themselves. Furthermore, the deeper meaning of their social world is formed through the interpretation of their interactions with one another and the objects in that environment.

The findings of the study give support to the social constructionist perspective. In the study, the Thai culture takes on the context of a living thing for the Chinese students. Their past social constructs, from their home country, have to some extent been stripped away by the move to a new living and studying situation and culture. The students need to understand how Thai society functions, how to begin to try to adjust to this new social situation, and how to build knowledge upon those new understandings. We see evidence of this process and its effects in various findings. Regarding the teaching and learning styles in MSU, the students were now beginning the process of adjusting to the Thai education environment. They tried to understand what was going on in this academic context and, following some difficulties during the adjustment, finally came to consider the teaching pace of MSU's lecturers to be 'about right'. Marshall (1998), Stam (2001), and Hibberd (2005) indicated that individuals or groups will make and create the world through their interaction with one another and the objects in a new environment and through that process their social interpretations will have an influence on the values that they come to build.

In the present study, once in their new learning environment at MSU, the students constructed their new bodies of knowledge in the Thai academic environment in such a way that they agreed that the lecturers' teaching speed in MSU was 'about right'. They interacted with their Chinese classmates and the lecturers and during this adjustment process they formed that interpretation of the teaching pace. Then the process predicted by Social Constructionism continued as they adjusted themselves to better fit into that new meaning they had created. This reveals that part of the reason that the students were satisfied with the teaching and learning styles of the lecturers at MSU was a result of this process, during which they had constructed their own interpretation, through their interaction with the lecturers and classmates, that the teaching pace of MSU lecturers was suitable for their study.

Similarly, the findings concerning academic and sociocultural strategies demonstrated support for the social constructionism approach. When the students were in a Thai academic and social environment, they participated in

activities and interacted with their Chinese and Thai friends, lecturers, and administrators. Almost half of students (45%) agreed that they were making a significant effort to form relationships with Thai people. They perceived Thai people as showing an interest in having international friends, so this made it easier for the participants to make friends with them and made them want to have more Thai friends. They characterized their relationship with the lecturers as feeling close to some friendly lecturers when they were outside the classroom; however, when they were inside the classroom, they would keep more distance from them to show their respect. These actions suggest that the students perceived the significance of the Thai culture, where younger people should pay respect to their seniors. Moreover, they were also aware that outside the classroom, where the context changes and they were no longer in a formal teacher/student context, the lecturers and students could be friends. Conversely, when they were a student inside the classroom, they realized that they should act as a student who has to show respect to the lecturers. This evidence indicated that the students understood the social norms of the new environment, and then they constructed their own layer of meaning and interpretation of that, as demonstrated through their behaviours and interaction.

The overseas students had formed a new meaning for their lives in Thailand based on their understanding of the Thai culture. They had learnt how they should cope with their difficulties. Though the findings from the questionnaires showed that the majority of students mentioned *people in their home country* as an important source of support, in-depth findings from the students', lecturers' and administrators' interviews, and the students' reflective journals revealed the detail that *Thai friends* appeared to be another important source of support that the students often made good use of. For example, when they faced academic problems (e.g. *writing assignments, making oral presentations, and expressing themselves by communicating in Thai*), about one-third of them (32%) sought help from Thai friends. Besides asking for some help from this group of people, the students had developed their own strategies to deal with their problems, such as, practicing Thai language skills on their own, watching Thai movies, and working to remember vocabulary. Moreover, to deal with their cultural

difficulties (e.g. inability to eat Thai food, taking a nap in the afternoon), they cooked meals to their own taste and adjusted their routine to better fit with Thai culture. These findings reveal that when international students are in another cultural context, it is essential for them to realize and understand what happens in that society, to interact with other people in order to learn about the new environment, and to try to adjust to the new context that affects an element of their day-to-day lives.

#### **7.3.1.4 The transition theory**

Transition Theory focuses on the transitions that adults undergo throughout their lives and the means they use to cope with and adjust to those changes. A transition is defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The transition process describes stages, which define how far a person has moved through the transition. Schlossberg et al. defines the transition process as consisting of three phases; *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out*. According to the integrated model of the transition process, either *moving in* or *moving out* is regarded as the first stage (Goodman et al., 2006). In this stage, individuals will need to learn and become familiar with the rules and regulations, expectations and norms of the new system. Then, the *moving through* period starts when they know the ropes (e.g. how to balance their activities with other parts of their lives) and are able to make progress in their new situation, gradually becoming more comfortable there. *Moving out* is conceptualized to be both the end of one transition and the beginning of a new transition. In the process of coping with their transition process, four major sets of factors which influence individual’s ability are mentioned by Goodman et al (2006): *Situation* (what is happening?), *Self* (To whom is it happening?), *Support* (What help is available?), and *Strategies* (How does the person cope?).

The findings of the study showed evidence supporting transition theory with regard to: (1) Moving through and (2) Support.

### (1) Moving through

The findings of the study concerning the students' strategies to cope with their academic and sociocultural problems reinforce the ideas of the *moving through* concept. Goodman et al. (2006) pointed out that in order to move through a transition, individuals need to release aspects of the self and of former roles and then learn new roles. If they encounter difficulties, they require strategies to deal with those problems. In the study, the participants predominantly dealt with their academic adjustment issues in MSU by seeking help from Thai friends and by talking to them to practice their Thai language skills, and so it could be concluded that the Chinese participants changed from their previous role of 'the Chinese students who are studying Thai language in China' to a new role of 'the Chinese international students who are studying Thai language in Thailand'. They made an effort to adjust to the Thai educational environment by learning and practicing their language skills with Thai people and at the same time learned to cope with their cultural problems, overcoming difficulties with Thai food by cooking meals themselves to their own tastes. This also demonstrates an example where the Chinese students may release 'the Chinese' role in themselves and either learn to adjust to new circumstances in their host country (Thai food) or find their own strategies to deal with those issues.

Additional findings providing support to the *moving through* concept relate to the students' academic difficulties. The lecturers identified that initially the students seemed to be confused and could not answer the questions that the lecturers asked. This evidence reinforces what Goodman et al. (2006) mentioned about the *moving through* stage where they stated that while the sojourners were moving through the new situation, they found themselves in a neutral zone where they experienced a period of emptiness and confusion. In relation to this study the evidence suggested that the Chinese students were in the *moving through* stage of the transition. Before coming to Thailand, they had been studying Thai language for two years, mostly with Chinese lecturers in China, but it is possible that their language skills were still insufficient. Therefore, when they studied Thai language with Thai lecturers, they did not fully understand

what the lecturers said and so were undergoing a period of confusion when they had their worst difficulties in understanding in their classes, as Goodman et al. indicated.

## (2) Support

Various findings regarding the Chinese students in the current study strengthen the transition theory in terms of one of the principle factors influencing transition—*Support*. Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that in order to best cope with a transition, individuals benefit from receiving support from people who make up their intimate relationships, family units and networks of friends, and from the institutions and/or communities of which the individuals are a part. In the present study, the Chinese students received support from GXUN's lecturers when those lecturers taught and gave them various types of information concerning the Thai language and cultural knowledge before the students went to Thailand. Additional findings demonstrating support for the *Support* issue relate to homesickness and loneliness. In my study, the participants mentioned that they did not face difficulties in loneliness and that they had relationships with Thai and Chinese friends. This could be a factor that helped them move through their transitions more easily, as they had support not only from their compatriots, with whom they could spend social and academic time, but also from the local students. This helped them to form their own wider, social networks during their time studying at MSU. Additionally, the Chinese participants also asked for sociocultural assistance from people in their home country, and these extra support sources appeared to be a great help for the students when recovering from the difficulties and hardships they experienced.

The results from the participants' assessment of social, academic and administrative services show that these participants were generally satisfied with those services. This may indicate that the support services in MHK do not cause difficulties for the participants when transitioning to their lives in MSU. These findings show support to the *Support* issue in the transition theory, as Goodman et al. (2006) stated that this is one factor that influences the ability of each person to cope with a transition. The participants in the study received

social, academic, and administrative services to support them and they also reported general satisfaction with these services. For example, more than half of them gave 'good' ratings to the social services in MHK (e.g. *banking* [68%], *supermarket/food markets* [55%]). Moreover, the majority of them assessed the quality of academic services (e.g. *language laboratories* [59%], *library services* [50%]) as 'good' to 'excellent'. In addition, they predominantly gave 'good' ratings to the administrative services in *arranging accommodation* (58%) and *making travel arrangements* (45%). This suggests that the lack of difficulties presented in this area may have helped them to more easily cope with overcoming other problems, and so eased their transition experience.

In conclusion, the findings appear to support the transition theory in the aspects of *moving through* and *Support*. To move through a transition, the international students needed to release their former roles and to make the effort to learn new roles. During this stage they were sometimes confused by what they were experiencing and to cope with this confusion, *support* from various sources (e.g. family members and friends) was an important factor that helped them move through those transitions.

#### **7.3.1.5 Factors in socio-psychological processes**

The theoretical writings on *self*, *self-concept*, and *cultural identity* provided by Sussman (2000) are useful to help analyse and explain social behaviours, and to understand the problems of the sojourners in their cultural transitions. She defined *Self* as referring to how individuals thought and perceived themselves in relation to what is currently happening in their society. The concept of *self* (*self-concept*) was proposed by Triandis (1989). He divided it into three aspects according to what individuals perceived: (1) 'private' (what do you think about yourself? E.g. "I am a good student"), (2) 'public' (what do other people think about you? E.g. "People think that I am a good student"), and (3) 'collective' (what do people in your group think about you? E.g. "My family and friends think that I am a good student"). Furthermore, 'Cultural identity' is often conceptualized as sharing a border with national identity (i.e., thinking of oneself as Chinese or American). Triandis's definition of culture includes geographic

localization as a basic element together with shared language and shared notions of the self. In my study, the students thought of themselves as Chinese.

There is a relationship between the issues of *self*, *self-concept*, and *cultural identity*. Individuals will choose which concept of *self* matches the way in which they want to behave. The manner in which they want to perceive themselves in each of the 'private', 'public', or 'collective' aspects will, then, be affected by their cultural values: individualism and collectivism, and tightness and looseness (Sussman, 2000). In individualist cultures, the issues of self-reliance and independent behaviours are emphasized. People are more aware of the needs of themselves and their immediate family as opposed to concern for the group (Lemm, 1999). Moreover, they feel they have a moral right to pursue their own happiness. This pursuit needs a great deal of independence, initiative, and self-responsibility. Conversely, collectivist cultures focus on awareness of others and care for traditions and values.

For the issues concerning learning approaches, the Chinese participants acknowledged that their former learning style did not fit well with the Thai educational culture and, in reaction, they adjusted their role from passive students (who were required to sit and listen to the lecturers) to active students (who had more chances to use their creative ideas) instead. This behaviour appears to support 'the sociocultural adaptation' that Sussman (2000) indicated in the socio-psychological processes. She stated that when the sojourners are in a new cultural environment, they recognize the discrepancy between their cultural selves and the new cultural context. In order to fit in the new environment, the Chinese participants had to adjust themselves by changing their behaviours and, consequently, their own cultural identity to some degree because their sets of cultural behaviours were no longer seen as proper within the norms of the new cultural environment.

The student responses concerning the teaching pace of MSU lecturers is another finding of the present study which reinforces the 'sociocultural adaptation concept'. The majority of students considered the lecturers' teaching speed in both MSU and GXUN as 'about right'. These positive responses



appear to indicate that the participants may have been satisfied with their different academic experiences in both countries and that they may have felt as comfortable studying at MSU as at GXUN despite the contrasting academic cultures. In addition, it is possible that they may have anticipated the differences between the two nations' educational contexts even before they arrived in Thailand and then, when they moved into a new academic environment, they were already expecting to have to make the adjustment to the lecturers' pace and had sufficient flexibility in approach to adapt.

This assumption that the participants in the present study would be capable of adjusting to the teaching pace was supported by Sussman (2000). Sussman stated that as part of the intercultural or global identity shift found in the socio-psychological processes, sojourners can hold multiple cultural "scripts" simultaneously - being aware of the various cultural norms, accepted behaviours and habits and "ways of doing things" of more than one culture - and then find themselves able to draw on each of these references to guide and adjust their own behaviours, as required by the culture in their current location and/or situation. In the current study, the students held scripts of both Chinese and Thai teaching paces and were able to make a comparison between those, while remaining aware of their own cultural identity in this transition cycle. Sussman (2000) indicated that the sojourners' adjustment process is precipitated by their recognition of the cultural differences between their home cultural values and behaviours and those of the host culture. Their adjustment is facilitated by low cultural centrality and high cultural flexibility and therefore leads to a high level of adaptation. In this present study, the Chinese students may view themselves more strongly as international students who can interact properly and effectively in this new academic environment and this self-view may have helped them embrace the cultural differences with a greater flexibility than would be typical for people from their home country.

Overall, regarding the contributions of the theoretical perspective above, it can be seen that before coming to Thailand, there are two important factors: "push" (*the importance of personal growth, language, and future career*) and "pull" (*the*

*environment of MSU*) that push the students to make a decision to study abroad and that then attract them to choose the host country respectively. In addition, their ethnic background, personality traits, linguistic ability, attitudes, and the influence of the family background appear to be factors contributing them to cross-cultural adjustment. When they were in Thailand, the students tried to adapt to their new educational environment, to construct new bodies of knowledge through their interaction with people and then interpret that knowledge. When they found that their behaviours did not fit into the new cultural context well, they changed them, based on their growing understanding of the social condition. They had learned from their experiences and knew how they should behave. Though they faced difficulties during their transitions, they found their own strategies to cope with those problems and also asked for support from other people (e.g. *people in their home country, Thai and Chinese friends*). Due to their ability to adjust well to the new environment they were able to report positive overall experiences.

#### **7.3.1.6 Ward's adaptation model**

Ward's adaptation model has been used to understand psychological and sociocultural adaptation of the sojourners. Psychological adaptation is related to psychological well-being or satisfaction (Ward & Kennedy, 1992) while sociocultural adaptation refers to the ability to "fit in," to acquire culturally appropriate skills, and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment (Searle & Ward, 1990). The models of psychological and sociocultural adaptation demonstrate the need for significant support for sojourners especially in the beginning of the intercultural experiences. Ongoing empirical research has revealed that they are dependent upon variables such as social support, the amount of contact with people from the host country, and cultural distance (Ward & Kennedy, 1992).

The findings of the study showed evidence supporting Ward's adaptation model. The Chinese students could adjust well to the new environment because they had both academic and social support from their Chinese friends and also from the Thai students. Furthermore, more than half of students had

relationships with Thai friends and they sometimes spent social time together. It is possible that the students may feel close to Thai people as they share the same cultural value (collectivism) (Hofstede, 2001a). The amount of contact with people in the host country and cultural distance in the current study could be a reason that helps the Chinese students to adjust to Thai environment easily. Moreover, results from the study give support to the psychological and sociocultural adaptation models as the administrative officers had given various kinds of support to the Chinese students since they first arrived in MHK, such as arranging pick up and airport reception, taking them to buy some of the necessary educational aids and grocery products, and giving them advice.

#### ***7.3.1.7 My original contribution to the field of adjustment***

While previous literature considered a broad measure of cultural distance in terms of levels of individualism/collectivism in the different countries, and considered the corresponding effects influencing cross-cultural adjustment, the results from my study suggest that a finer division should be looked at. Although the home and host countries in my study, China and Thailand, can both be considered as collectivist, there are still significant differences in “culture” to be overcome by sojourners. I feel that an additional consideration of the level of tightness/looseness of a culture, and particularly in regard to the academic culture, can help to improve the prediction of adjustment difficulties.

As previously outlined in the literature review chapter, cultural tightness/looseness can be defined as the degree of how strictly people follow their norms, values, and behaviours. In cultures that show more tightness, people follow various cultural rules and society laws more strictly. Those who behave differently will be punished (Pelto, 1968). In contrast to these tight cultures, people in loose cultures have fewer rules, have more flexible normative standards, and are more tolerant of deviations from cultural norms.

In the academic setting, tightness/looseness is an additional cultural factor to which the sojourner has to adjust as this influences the teaching and learning styles significantly. Three issues were reported by the participants concerning

the differences between teaching and learning styles of MSU and those of GXUN.

The first issue was about the freedom and flexibility of the lecturers.

The findings showed that there were differences in the teaching approaches in the two locations. Half of the students referred to the freedom and flexibility of the teaching approaches of the lecturers in MSU, while 32% stated that the lecturers in GXUN taught students by following a textbook only. The students indicated that the lecturers in MSU used the textbook sometimes. However, they made use of various teaching materials and academic activities in their teaching and had the freedom and flexibility to design their own course and adjust the lesson plans.

Secondly, the punctuality of the lecturers was mentioned as another difference. All respondents agreed that the lecturers in MSU arrived late at times, while those in GXUN were usually on time.

The third issue concerned the learning approaches. Almost half of students (46%) perceived various differences in the learning approaches. They stated that while they were in GXUN, their studies included only a little practical work, as the students were required to sit and listen to the lecturers. In contrast, when they studied at MSU, they had more opportunity to create their own work, search for more information by themselves, practice their language skills in class and take part in group work.

Regarding the flexibility of lesson plans and the punctuality of the Thai lecturers in Thailand, a possible explanation is that these behaviours may be a result of the looseness of Thai culture. Hofstede (1980) claimed that people in a country with a loose culture (e.g. Thais) have fewer rules, have more flexible normative standards, and are more tolerant of deviations from cultural norms. In the current study, the Thai lecturers were regarded by the students as having flexibility in their lesson plans and of being unpunctual. They taught the elements of the course that they felt most relevant, with the flexibility to design

their own courses and their lesson plans. This may indicate that these lecturers have flexible normative standards and have fewer rules in their teaching styles.

As Thailand has a loose and collectivist culture, the Chinese students who were in the Thai educational environment had learned the norms of that society and had come to perceive themselves as a 'collective', which was being influenced by the loose and collectivist culture in Thailand. Then, their former behaviours, with their roots in the strictness of the tight Chinese culture, had to adjust and change to fit the new environment.

While previous studies would predict that Chinese and Thai educational styles had similarities, as they are both collectivist cultures, this study has identified that there are also differences. For example, the findings concerning the differences between MSU and GXUN teaching and learning approaches showed that the lecturers at MSU emphasized student-centred learning where the students are expected to be independent learners and have critical and creative thinking. In this regard the Thai approach appears more similar to the western style of learning, which I believe could be predicted from the fact that they are both "loose" cultures.

Looking at the students' academic adjustment experiences in Thailand I feel that two different processes can be seen to be taking place at the same time: Firstly, social constructionism, as the students build their own meaning from the new environment; and secondly, the transition process, as the students adjust to better fit their new environment. In both of these regards the looser academic structure, influenced by the wider loose culture of Thailand, helps create a flexible atmosphere which may better accommodate and facilitate international students by creating a wider choice of available options in the general environment, and in teaching and learning methods in particular.

In summary, "culture" alone is not the overriding influence on this experience, but rather intercultural education should be considered as a process, reflecting the students' relationships with their learning environments and teachers.

### **7.3.2 Research contributions**

The findings of the study make contributions to the subject matter of both the international adjustment experience and the related methodology. The following sections provide details on these issues.

#### ***7.3.2.1 Contributions on adjustment experience***

The new social and educational environments that international students experience when they study overseas cause some difficulties and confusion. The students have to adjust to different cultural, social and economic environments and at the same time have to become comfortable with new learning and teaching styles (Mavondo et al., 2004). Their difficulties can include culture shock (Thorstensson, 2001), language difficulties (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Wan, 2001), adjustment to different customs and values (Nicholson, 2001; Thorstensson, 2001), differences in education systems (Campbell & Li, 2008), homesickness and loneliness (Lewthwaite, 1996; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008), and a loss of established social networks (Lewthwaite, 1996; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008). Despite this, there has been a rapid growth in the number of international students studying abroad (Mavondo et al., 2004). With the hosting of international students quickly becoming a more important consideration for universities, it is more necessary than ever to better understand the issues affecting the quality of their adjustment and to understand these factors from the students' point of view. As undergraduate students typically stay at a university for only four years, it is important that they adapt to all aspects of the new culture rapidly to be able to study effectively, feel comfortable, and maximize their educational opportunities.

A large number of research studies focusing on a variety of issues have been motivated by the problems of international students' adaptation to different host countries. Various researchers have devoted a great deal of effort to the study of adjustment problems and issues of international students from several countries including Brown (2008), Campbell and Li (2008), Kingston and Forland (2008), Dunn (2006), Zhou and Todman (2008). Moreover, many of

these studies have concentrated on the intercultural experiences of Chinese students during their overseas study and have investigated intercultural communication either between Chinese and the host countries' students, or between Chinese students and students of other cultures in both classroom and social contexts, analysing various problems that have occurred and identifying improvement strategies (Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Wan, 2001; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Y. Zhou & Todman, 2008). In addition, several researchers have investigated factors influencing the adjustment of international students (Mamman, 1995; Mounts, 2004; J. Wang, 2009; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994). Though various issues concerning international students' adjustment have been studied extensively, limitations among the above studies were found.

Firstly, the researchers treated international students as if they were a homogenous grouping. They grouped various nationalities of students into one single group. For example, the participants in Campbell and Li's (2008) study were from India, Indonesia, East Timor, Thailand, China, Hong Kong, Cambodia, and Vietnam, while those in Sawir et al.'s (2008) study were from more than 30 different nations. These students were of many nationalities, and as such had different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The differences among them should be considered. Although addressing all possible combinations of cultural/social/national differences among students would have led to overwhelming detail, exploring the characteristics of each nationality is required.

Another limitation concerns the different dimensions of adjustment. Several previous studies were found to deal mainly with the single dimension of academic or sociocultural adjustment. Six studies focused on the academic adjustment dimension only (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Dunn, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Thorstensson, 2001; Y. Zhou & Todman, 2008), while seven studies considered sociocultural adjustment only (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Nicholson, 2001; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Ward et al., 2004). As

adjustment experiences of students involve a range of both academic and sociocultural dimensions, investigating only a single issue will not necessarily uncover the connections and interactions between issues that form the larger picture.

Thirdly, three studies (Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Wan, 2001) involving students from Mainland China had a participant group that consisted only of graduate students, and so the findings may not be applicable to other populations such as undergraduate students. Studies that include undergraduate students in the sample are required to find out whether they face the same or different difficulties as those in graduate programs.

Fourthly, only a few studies have been carried out which explored the reasons that international students choose to study abroad (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007) but neither these, nor any other study has involved research about why Chinese students choose Thailand as their study destination. For Thai universities to attract a better market share of Chinese international students, it is important that those education providers understand why some Chinese students choose to study in Thailand and which factors influence their choice of university.

Fifthly, though many researchers (Mamman, 1995; Mounts, 2004; J. Wang, 2009; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994) have contributed various general suggestions beneficial to international students, obtained from studies which explored factors influencing their adjustment experiences, these discoveries may still not address all of the particular factors affecting Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners. It is essential to investigate whether the factors that previous studies have claimed to be associated with the adjustment of international students also influence the adjustment experiences of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners in Thailand.

Sixthly, most studies completed in the field of international student adjustment have focused on students who are in a host country that is culturally very different from their own, for example, Asian students in Australia, New Zealand,



the U.S., and the U.K. (Campbell & Li, 2008; Mamman, 1995; Ward et al., 2004; Ying & Liese, 1994). There have been relatively few studies investigating the experiences of Chinese international students who were in a host country considered more similar to their own culture (Collectivistic culture). Regarding this limitation, a study of International students in a host country with a similar culture to their own home country is needed to find out whether there are any differences in academic or sociocultural issues which could influence the students' adjustment experiences.

Last but not least, there are limitations related to the research participants. Various studies (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Dunn, 2006; Frank, 2000; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Nicholson, 2001; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Thorstensson, 2001; Wan, 2001; Ward et al., 2004; Ying & Liese, 1994; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007) have explored the perspectives of only the international students and have not triangulated this data with additional information from the lecturers and administrators who are also involved in the students' academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences. It is essential to also explore the perspectives of these people to understand the overall picture of the students' adjustment experiences. Gaining information from several points of view can add more concrete and in-depth data to the study.

This present study has attempted to address these limitations by investigating the adjustment experiences of the Chinese undergraduate students who were non-indigenous Thai learners at MSU, Thailand. This host country is considered to have a similar culture to that of the students' home country. Although Thailand and China are generally perceived to be culturally similar, it is interesting to examine to what extent this perception is correct. The study looked at their experiences from the time they decided to study abroad to the end of their first semester of study, covering the students' expectations about coming to study in a foreign country, the factors contributing to or hindering their adjustment experiences, the differences they reported between home-country and host-country universities teaching and learning approaches, their academic

and sociocultural adjustment difficulties and how they resolved these issues, and their suggestions for how improvements could be made to the course structure, teaching and organization. Not only were the students' perspectives explored, but also those of the lecturers and administrators. By taking this wider view the study has made several contributions to the broader research literature on international students' adjustment issues in foreign settings.

1. My study contributes to the general research literature with its identification of the students' expectations of coming to study in a different country. The participants indicated factors that push and pull Chinese students to study in Thailand. The findings of the study provide information to help Thai institutions ensure that overseas students' needs and expectations are understood and met, and to make sure that students' time living and studying in Thailand is enjoyable and successful. By better understanding the way that decisions are made when students select an overseas university or country for their study, Thailand, and other host countries alike, can gain insight to the processes involved.
2. The present study contributes to the general research literature with its identification of the factors that play a role in Chinese students' adjustment experiences. The factors identified were: the students' ethnic background, financial background, the role of parental support, personality traits, and positive attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language ability.
3. This study looks at teaching and learning in a Thai university and provides useful information and a detailed picture for the staff and faculty, international services professionals, lecturers, and other people concerned with international students. The findings of the study indicated the differences that exist between the Chinese university's (GXUN) and the Thai university's (MSU) teaching and learning styles with regard to teaching approach, giving assignments, academic assessment, punctuality of lecturers, learning approach, and period of study. This data

could assist the teaching and administrative staff to: (a) select appropriate teaching/learning styles; (b) effectively meet student expectations; (c) gain insight into the Chinese students by learning about them, their perspectives, and their world (Patton, 1990); and (d) avoid intercultural miscommunications.

As mentioned earlier, most of the previous studies of international adjustment focused on individuals who adapted to host cultures that were very different from their own. This study shows that even if the host culture is somewhat similar to the home culture, the students still need to adjust to the host institutional environment, which can differ a great deal from that of his or her home country.

4. Since this study provides in-depth detail on the participants' suggestions regarding ways for the university to help students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme in three key areas (academic, sociocultural, and support services), these findings may help lecturers and administrators arrange orientation and support services for Chinese students.
5. Regarding the findings concerning the participants' academic, sociocultural, and support services problems, this study contributes valuable in-depth information that can facilitate the academic and sociocultural preparation of non-indigenous students who study in a different country, so that these sojourners will have the ability to perform well or fit into the host culture.
6. The researcher positioned the study to produce information from the perspectives of the Chinese students, the lecturers, and the administrators, since it is they who are most closely associated with the students' academic and sociocultural adjustment experiences. Therefore, the study complements and expands on previous research, which had focused on information gathered from only a single type of participant.

Overall, the study makes valuable contributions to the empirical study of international students' adjustment experiences. These contributions introduce potential ideas of benefit to not only the students, but also to their institutions.

### ***7.3.2.2 Contributions on methodology***

In other earlier literature, three types of research methodologies have been used: quantitative, qualitative, and a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Regarding the quantitative methodology, various researchers employed only quantitative methods (e.g. questionnaire) in their studies which focused on objective measurements through the use of numbers and statistics (Dunn, 2006; Hacifazlioglu & Ozdemir, 2010; Mavondo et al., 2004; Mounts, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; J. Wang, 2009; Ward et al., 2004; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2002; Yeh & Wang, 2000; Ying & Liese, 1994; D. Zhang et al., 2007; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). However, the use of this methodology only is not able to provide sufficient in-depth detail.

In addition to the quantitative literature, several researchers were found to use only a qualitative methodology, which focused on a subjective interpretation of results rather than a measurement of factors (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Eder, Smith, et al., 2010; Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004; Nicholson, 2001; Philips et al., 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Zhai, 2002). Two of them (Andrade, 2006; Philips et al., 2002) examined secondary documents, while the rest utilized interviews in their studies. By using this research methodology, the findings are produced without any means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Besides the research mentioned earlier, many studies have applied both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in their studies (Chen, 2007; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Lewthwaite, 1996; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Thorstensson, 2001; Yang, 2007; Y. Zhou & Todman, 2008). Using those methodologies together provides unique advantages in the advancement of the knowledge base (Cowger & Menon, 2001) and adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation (Flick, 1992). However, some limitations to those studies still

emerged. For example, in Kingston and Forland's (2008) study, they used questionnaires and semi-structured focus groups to obtain data. Nevertheless, specific and profound details from the students need to be obtained through in-depth interviews.

In the current study, the triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints was applied to attempt to improve the results by integrating a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The findings of the study appear to not only support the triangulation method, but also introduce supporting evidence for other research methods, which have not been found in previous research. Several points related to academic issues (e.g. writing assignments and satisfaction with academic experiences) appeared repeatedly and these details were expanded on and clarified through the triangulation of sources of data (the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals). Moreover, regarding the reasons the students chose to study at MSU, *recommendations from lecturers and senior students in China* appeared to be the only single reason that all participants gave. In addition, the *Thai friends* source was consistently identified as a source of support in the students', lecturers', and administrators' interviews, and also through the questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journals. The triangulation method, therefore, is shown to be an appropriate method for acquiring more valid and accurate results regarding the students' academic strategies. This indicates that the findings of this study give support to the triangulation concept.

The findings concerning Chinese personality traits also added evidence regarding the validity of the research methods. The current study investigated the factors contributing to the Chinese participants' adjustment experiences and these results showed that Chinese personality traits (e.g. extraversion and conscientiousness) were found to be one significant factor. These findings were obtained from various sources of data (the interviews from students, lecturers, and administrators and the students' reflective journals) and this strengthened the validity of the results and provided in-depth detail from various perspectives, whereas previous research (Ward et al., 2004) relied on self-reporting in

questionnaires only. The use of multiple data sources in the present study, rather than using only questionnaires, demonstrates the application of the additional research methods concerning the students' adjustment.

Though the triangulation approach appears to have been successful in the current study, the use of reflective journals still needs to be improved. With regard to the above findings concerning the reasons the students chose to study at MSU, the sources of support, and the factors contributing to the students' adjustment experiences, it can be seen that the triangulation of methods and data sources helped the researcher to obtain significant and valid results. However, to best use reflective journals as part of a qualitative method, it is suggested that researchers should make efforts to ensure a suitable and sustained level of motivation from all participants for the duration of the study. This would help ensure that the responses recorded are detailed and candid and reflect the true feelings of the participants, and to ensure that a spread of data from the entire time period is obtained from all participants. The balance between the researcher's desired duration of the study and the length of time that participants can stay motivated to provide full responses should be considered and existing literature reviewed for useful techniques to encourage full participation, for example an on-going system of rewards, appropriate to the time contributed by participants to maintain their journals.

### **7.3.3 Applications**

The results of the study have confirmed the awareness of the factors that push and pull international students in deciding to come to a host country, the differences between the home and host country teaching and learning styles (regardless of a similar general culture), and the factors contributing to or hindering their adjustment. Clearly, suggestions from the participants, together with their strategies to cope with academic, sociocultural, and support services issues, would be of benefit to both MSU and other institutions seeking to best accommodate international students in similar situations. The following sections present applications directly pertaining to MSU (section 7.3.3.1) and general applications for other contexts (section 7.3.3.2).

### **7.3.3.1 Applications to MSU**

The results of the study identified a number of issues that could be addressed by MSU to improve student and lecturer experiences in future courses.

With regard to the findings concerning the push-pull factors, results from this study raised the importance of the push-pull factors' influence on the students' decisions to study overseas (see Mazzarol and Soutar, 2012 ). *The Thai culture and recommendations from the lecturers and senior students in China* were considered as the 'push' determinants that encouraged the Chinese students to come to Thailand, whereas *the environment of MSU* was regarded as the 'pull' factor that attracted them to choose MSU. Regarding those push-pull factors, host country universities need to consider how they influence students' study destination choices and to take the opportunity to then provide a service that lives up to the expectations which these determinants have created in the students.

The findings concerning the differences in teaching and learning styles between Thai and Chinese universities showed that a particular issue that the students mentioned was the punctuality of the lecturers. Though this matter does not appear to affect the teaching style of the MSU lecturers, it could decrease the students' positive impressions in regard to the teaching environment at MSU and, therefore, should be taken into account as a factor of some significance.

Another adjustment implication concerning the teaching style results involves applying the teaching methods of the host country's university lecturers to the home country's universities. From the current study a suggestion could be made, for example, that GXUN apply the teaching methods of the lecturers in MSU to give the students in China who are intending to study in Thailand an opportunity to become familiar with Thai educational teaching and learning styles. This would help the adjustment process of not only the students, but also the MSU lecturers, and may broaden the teaching skills at GXUN as an additional benefit.

With regard to the students' strategies of using *Thai friends* as a source of help, this interaction could be helped along by scheduling additional activities to strengthen the relationship between international and Thai students, and in addition, the process could be started sooner, prior to the students' departure from their home country, by teaching some local language and culture to increase their awareness of Thai culture and help make the students feel more comfortable socially when they first arrive in Thailand.

### **7.3.3.2 Applications to other contexts**

The findings concerning the students' reasons for choosing MSU brought out the important influence that word of mouth referral has, which implies that by providing a good quality of teaching, learning, and support services for the current international students, the university staff help ensure that this group of students recommend the institution to friends or junior students in their hometown or home university.

Furthermore, the study reveals various results applicable to teaching, learning, and administrating in other situations and contexts. Regarding the teaching issues, the findings indicated four areas of application to teaching styles. Firstly, the results from the students' evaluations regarding teaching approaches showed that the students had positive perspectives toward the active and creative teaching of the lecturers, where they were provided with several kinds of teaching materials (e.g. information sheets, Video Compact Discs, power point presentations) and class activities (e.g. doing role plays in Thai, watching Thai movies and then discussing them, singing Thai songs). Due to this satisfaction, it is suggested that other institutions consider applying a wide variety of teaching materials and educational activities in their teaching. This would provide the students with both more effective and more enjoyable activities. Considering the teaching flexibility, it would benefit the students if the lecturers could have enough flexibility to design their own courses and their lesson plans and make changes to better cover topics as the course progresses, but that the course should have a well-prepared structure and an outline lesson plan to follow when teaching.



The load of assignments is the second factor related to teaching styles that should be considered. The students reported that the quantity of assignments in GXUN was small, while in MSU the quantity was large. In addition, they stated that the assignments given in MSU were very difficult for them. These findings showed that the appropriate number and degree of difficulty of assignments should be carefully considered when planning the course structure. Other institutions may benefit from doing some research on this topic to determine the appropriate quantity and degree of difficulty for the assignments that they arrange for their international students.

Thirdly, the findings concerning academic assessment and feedback emphasized the importance of assessment procedures. The participants indicated that the academic assessment in MSU was very good, as the lecturers gave them many sub-tests before the final exam and used various criteria to assess their academic results. Conversely, the lecturers in GXUN would evaluate the students' academic results only at the end of each semester and rely on the final exam mark alone. These findings appear to show that the participants may prefer a wide variety of assessment procedures to being evaluated only at the end of the semester. Continuous assessment of this type is also helpful in identifying specific problem areas to both students and lecturers while they are still able to be addressed before the end of the semester. Regarding these findings, utilizing a wide range of assessment procedures is recommended for other institutions to monitor and keep track of their students' progress. It would not only add variety to student's learning experiences, but also motivate students to develop different skills and thought processes (Race, 2001). The greater variety of assessment methods could also be considered as giving a fairer assessment of the students' true abilities.

The fourth implication of the adjustment experience emerged in issues related to the punctuality of the lecturer. By informing both the lecturers and the international students of the influences of their respective cultural backgrounds, a greater degree of understanding could be formed regarding their expectations of each other. The findings concerning the lecturers' punctuality showed that the

students complained that their Thai lecturers often came to class late, regarding this as showing a lack of respect to them. This matter brought out the cultural effects stemming from the fact that the Chinese students were from a 'tight' culture, where people strictly adhere to various cultural rules and social laws, while the Thais are from a 'loose' culture, which has more flexible normative standards, and is more tolerant of deviations from cultural norms. In order to help the students' initial adjustment process with regard to this cultural issue, the university board could ensure that the lecturers make a particular effort to be more punctual for new Chinese students. Once classes have become established, both students and lecturers could acknowledge and try to come to understand each other's cultural background, leading to a more rapid mutual understanding and reduction in cross-cultural misunderstandings in these and other related matters.

With regard to the learning issues, two implications were found. The first matter is about learning approaches. The findings showed that the participants had positive feelings toward the learning approaches of MSU where they had more opportunity to create their own work, practice their language skills in class, do self-study and group assignments, and search for several kinds of information by themselves. These findings appear to indicate the significance of learning freedom to the students and suggest that other institutions should consider this when drawing up teaching plans. The chance for the students to think creatively and have more language skills practice in class should be applied as a general principle, to enhance and promote the students' learning ability. In addition, opportunities to do self-study and independent research should be actively encouraged in preference to a system where the students sit and listen to the lecturers only.

A second learning issue appears when reflecting on the Chinese learning style culture, where they were assumed to rely on the rote-learning method. The results of this study appear to indicate that the participants tried to adapt their familiar learning skills, acquired in their own country, to the new academic environment of their hosts (Campbell & Li, 2008). The host lecturers could

consider taking advantage of this by introducing the Chinese learning style alongside their usual teaching approach. For example, they might produce additional course notes in the form of a vocabulary list for the students to memorize, with the words and phrases related to each lesson. This could make the students feel more comfortable by creating a mixture that combines elements of the familiar and the new learning styles.

Besides those teaching and learning issues, the study also revealed results applicable to university administration. The findings show that around 90% of students indicated their satisfaction with the administrative services provided by MSU. Moreover, the assistance from the administrators created a favourable initial impression with the students. Regarding these findings, a warm welcome from the administrators to the international students is a suggestion of good practice that other institutions should consider. For example, the institutes could arrange airport pickup for the students and take them to buy some of the essential educational aids and grocery products when they firstly arrived in the host country. Furthermore, the institutions could take some care to pay attention to their needs, give them advice, and help them to cope with academic and personal issues (e.g. learning difficulties, accommodation, travel activities, visa matters). This would help the students feel welcome and have emotional security.

The Chinese students sought advice from people in their home country to help them deal with academic issues and during this process knowledge about their cultural background could be used to ensure that their position and point of view is fully understood by those providing assistance. As the students already make substantial efforts to adjust to the academic and sociocultural situation of their new environment, it would be helpful for them to receive more assistance and guidance during these changes, with issues being dealt with timeously, as they arise.

Referring to the participants' suggestions in Chapter 6, there are ways in which the overseas students' adjustment to their new environment could be aided. Firstly, the university could arrange that, when the international students arrive,

a preparation course in the host country's language is available. Furthermore, the university could help to ensure that the students have more opportunity to meet with people in the host country, in the educational setting, in more general student activities and in social interaction with the wider community. This will help international students with their adjustment in the host country (Sawir et al., 2008; Ward et al., 2001)

Considering the applications to MSU and for other contexts, it can be seen that prior experience and knowledge of the push-pull factors, the teaching and learning style differences, and the factors contributing to or hindering adjustment would assist those institutions in becoming more effective as facilitators for international students and with that deeper understanding of their backgrounds, cultural values, and beliefs the students' academic and sociocultural experiences could be optimised.

#### **7.4 Limitations of this Study**

As is common, practicalities forced certain limitations on the scope of this study.

7.4.1 The most obvious limitation of the study is that it was a case study involving only Chinese undergraduate students from one university, with the findings limited to information drawn from 28 people (22 Chinese students, three Thai lecturers, and three Thai administrators). Although this sample size is too small to claim with certainty that the findings are all generally representative for the wider population of Chinese/Thai and others around the world, the aim of this study was always to investigate the adjustment experiences of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at MSU only. If Chinese students from other Thai universities had also been studied, the similarities and differences for students among these universities could have been examined and, in that case, the findings might have been more widely applicable and more solid generalized conclusions to other Chinese undergraduate student populations could have been drawn. However, there is no reason to expect findings to be much different.

7.4.2 The Chinese participants were all from the south of China and all originated from the Guangxi Province, where the Zhuang is the largest ethnic group and the Zhuang language is widely spoken. The participants in my study all had previous experience with that language, with some fluent speakers, and therefore a number of the findings of this study may possibly have to be considered as being specific to this ethnic/lingual group to some degree.

7.4.3 The Chinese participants were being interviewed in a second language. This could limit their ability to express themselves fully and to cover the full degree and complexity of their ideas and experiences.

7.4.4 Reflective journals were kept by a group of students and, and while some students responded with enthusiasm to writing them, some were less forthcoming. The period of time that students were asked to continue writing these journals may have been too long for all participants to retain a good level of motivation, and expectations should be set regarding how detailed and candid the experiences reported by all students should be.

The above limitations lead on directly to implications for further research, which are presented in the following section.

## **7.5 Implications for Further Research**

The following implications for further research are suggested:

7.5.1 Regarding the findings from the study, which revealed the importance of recommendations from lecturers and senior students in China, it may be useful to examine the extent to which students communicate with these people about their experiences studying abroad and it may be necessary to formalize the process by which lecturers and senior students share information about their experiences with international students. This could help to give the university more specific background information regarding student communication with their home country and to suggest how best to make use of this knowledge in order to provide useful information to those concerned parties and present the course in a way to gain a greater number of international students.

7.5.2 As indicated by Li and Bray (2007), the behaviours of actors and the choices they make are affected by a variety of external push and pull factors, with the actor's individual characteristics determining the actual influence of each one. These personal characteristics include socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivation, and aspiration. Due to these characteristics, a group of Chinese individuals from more varied personal background (e.g. different ages, different academic backgrounds, from different regions in China) should be sought for future research to compare with this study and determine whether the participants have similar or different responses to push and pull factors, and to what extent those responses are influenced by these personal characteristics.

7.5.3 The findings of the study have provided further evidence confirming that the ethnic background of Chinese students influences their adjustment experiences in Thailand. The question can be raised: would similar results be obtained if this study were replicated to look into the adjustment experience of non-Chinese students who also come from ethnic backgrounds similar to Thai? Further research studying other groups of international students in Thailand who have a similar ethnic background to the host country people (e.g. Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese) would help to determine whether the ethnic background variable is a factor that strongly contributes to students' adjustment in general, as it appears to have done in the case of the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners in my study. The advantage of looking across similar ethnic backgrounds would be that if their adjustment difficulties were found to be the same as Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, the information from that study could be useful to assist lecturers and administrators in knowing how to facilitate or deal with those students, in the same way that they have learnt to deal with those Chinese ones.

There are many possible combinations to further study these implications in the wider context for areas outside Southeast Asia. Similar studies could be carried out with Chinese students studying in host countries that are very different

culturally from their home countries (e.g. Chinese students in North America, Europe or Australia/New Zealand).

Comparisons of the experiences of those students with the experiences of the students in the current study would help to determine the respective influences of home and host countries, and also influence of specific differences between those. The results, however, may still be, at least partially, specific to Chinese students. Similarly, studies could be further extended to cover more groups from entirely different host and home countries (e.g. Spanish students studying in India), to try and identify which experiences are the most universal and which are determined to a greater degree by specific factors. This obviously introduces a great many possible combinations of nationalities, cultures and academic situations, and it would appear that careful planning of the studies and analysis of the results may be required to target specific factors, so as not to risk losing sight of the patterns which exist in an overwhelming amount of data.

7.5.4 Further research incorporating a similar research instrument and a larger sample size would be of value. The current study was only a case study and as such was limited to a very small number of participants, and, therefore, may not necessarily be sufficient in itself to produce findings that can be generalized to the wider population of students learning a second language.

This study has identified a range of factors that appear to have had a strong influence on this group of students. There are further research opportunities to corroborate and strengthen the conclusions of this study, to examine to what extent these factors are found in student groups in similar but varied circumstances and to broaden the range of participants to find factors which apply to student populations at overseas universities in general.

## **7.6 Concluding Remarks**

International students experience various problems as they adjust to academic and sociocultural life in a host country. In my study, the adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country

were examined within the theoretical framework of the push-pull factors, factors contributing to and hindering cross-cultural adjustment, the social constructionism approach, the transition theory, socio-psychological processes, and Ward's adaptation model. The current study provided several useful findings. For instance, the importance of the push-pull factors' influence on the students' decisions to study overseas was highlighted. Moreover, the students' home country backgrounds were found to contribute to their adjustment experiences. Furthermore, generally positive experiences appeared to be reported by the students, although they still faced some, mainly academic, difficulties. Regarding these significant results, it is important not only for people dealing with international students, but also the students themselves to understand each other's academic and cultural background so that the experience can be of maximum value to both parties.



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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet for Students, Lecturers, and Administrators

Appendix B: Consent Form for Students, Lecturers and Administrators

Appendix C: Questionnaire for Students

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Students, Lecturers, and Administrators

Appendix E: Questions for Reflective Journals

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Appendix I: Categories and Themes

Appendix J: Formation of Themes

Appendix K: Sample Transcripts of Interview and Reflective Journal

## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheets for Students, Lecturers, and Administrators

### Participant Information Sheet for Students



#### Date Information Sheet Produced:

11 June 2010

#### Project Title

Adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: A case study of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

**Researcher** : Dusadee Kongsombut      **Supervisor** : Prof. John Bitchener

#### An Invitation

You are invited to participate in a study of adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: a case study of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand.

Although I am still employing by MSU, I do not have responsibilities during the three-year period while studying PhD in New Zealand.

#### What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of this research is to seek answers for the following questions:

1. Why do some students choose MSU, which is in a diverse multilingual population, with social and cultural conditions so unfamiliar to the majority of international students? Larger (less selective) numbers choose universities in a big province like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Chonburi.
2. What differences do Chinese non-native Thai learners report between Thailand and Chinese university teaching and learning approaches?
3. What do they perceive as their adjustment problems in the first year at MSU?
4. What strategies do they use to adjust to a Thai academic & cultural environment?
5. How do they think their Chinese background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences?

6. What suggestions do they have for administrators to help them overcome their adjustment problems and for improving the program?

To achieve this project's aim, triangulation of multiple methods, data sources and viewpoints are required. I will document the participants' adjustment experiences over a four-month period. Students, lecturers, and administrators' perspectives will be examined by using an in-depth interviewing method (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Frank, 2000; Kaur, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1996; McClure, 2007; Ramsay et al., 1999; Seidman, 1991; Sepnecer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Thorstensson, 2001; Trice, 2003; Wan, 2001). In addition, I will distribute a questionnaire to 27 fourth-year Chinese students (Dunn, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Lewthwaite, 1996; Seidman, 1991; Thorstensson, 2001; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Participants' narrative stories will be obtained through interviews and reflective journal reports (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004).

The presentations and publication that will result from this research will be identified as follows;

**Students:** the consent form enables the students to request feedback by deleting a Yes/No option. Should this be required, a report on the findings, using appropriate language and terminology, will be forwarded to the university, to be posted on to students at their last address held by the university.

#### **How was I chosen for this invitation?**

You are a Chinese non-indigenous language learner studying a second language at MSU.

#### **What will happen in this research?**

With your consent, you will be involved in an audio-taped one-on-one interview about your adjustment experiences in studying a second language at MSU and writing a reflective journal about your adjustment experiences. I have outlined the scope of what you can write in Appendix E (Questions for reflective journal). Your journal will, then, be handed to me weekly.

#### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

The discomforts and risks are not likely to emerge because the data is only going to be collected by the researcher who is not involved in any relationship with any participants. Because participants will be free to answer or not answer questions, they can avoid any possibility of embarrassment or awkwardness. They will be reminded of this before the questions are asked. They will not be providing answers in a group context but on a one-to-one basis, thereby further reducing any possibility of embarrassment or awkwardness.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If any risks emerge, they will be alleviated by the freedom that all participants have when they choose how they would like to answer questions that they consider embarrassing or uncomfortable. Moreover, they can withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection process. What is more, all findings will be presented in a way that preserves the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, participants will not be able to be individually identified.

**What are the benefits?**

You and other participants will have access to a report that outlines the information gained from the research. The report will consider the issues that are raised about adapting to studying a second language at MSU, Thailand, and about the teaching and learning methods used. The aim is to see in what ways things can be improved for all students, lecturers and administrators. If you wish, you may receive a report on the findings of the study after the completion by circling the 'Yes' option on the consent form accompanying this Information Sheet.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You will not be identified at all in the reporting of this research. Once reviewed by the researcher, the tapes will be securely kept at AUT. After six years, they will be destroyed.

Although the university at which you are studying will be recognised for its contribution towards this research, the thesis which the researcher writes and any publications which result from it will not make reference to names of teachers and students.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no cost of participating in this research.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You will have one day to consider this invitation. If you are willing to participate, please complete the consent form attached and return it to the researcher tomorrow.

If you decide to withdraw, please contact the researcher at the number or address at the end of this information sheet.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Prof. John Bitchener, [john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz](mailto:john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz), Tel. +64 9 921 9999 extn 7830.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), Tel. +64 9 921 9999 extn 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?****Researcher contact details:**

Dusadee Kongsombut

Tel. 086-928 3698

E-mail : [jrw8078@aut.ac.nz](mailto:jrw8078@aut.ac.nz)

**Project supervisor contact details:**

Prof. John Bitchener

Tel. +64 9 921 9999 extn 7830

E-mail : [john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz](mailto:john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz)

***Executive Secretary AUTECH* : Madeline Banda**

Tel. +64 9 921 9999 extn 8044

E-mail : [Madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz)

Many thanks for considering this invitation

Dusadee Kongsombut

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *30 July 2009*,

AUTECH Reference number *09/62*.

## **Participant Information Sheet for Lecturers and Administrators**



### **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

11 June 2010

### **Project Title**

Adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: A case study of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

**Researcher :** Dusadee Kongsombut      **Supervisor :** Prof. John Bitchener

### **An Invitation**

You are invited to participate in a study of Adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: A case study of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand.

Although I am still employing by MSU, I do not have responsibilities during the three-year period while studying PhD in New Zealand.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The aim of this research is to seek answers for the following questions:

1. Why do some students choose MSU, which is in a diverse multilingual population, with social and cultural conditions so unfamiliar to the majority of international students? Larger (less selective) numbers choose universities in a big province like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Chonburi.
2. What differences do Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners report between Thailand and Chinese university teaching and learning approaches?
3. What do they perceive as their adjustment problems in the first year at MSU?
4. What strategies do they use to adjust to a Thai academic & cultural environment?
5. How do they think their Chinese background has contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences?
6. What suggestions do they have for administrators to help them overcome their adjustment problems and for improving the program?

To achieve this project's aim, triangulation of multiple methods, data sources and viewpoints are required. I will document the participants' adjustment experiences over a four-month period. Students, lecturers, and administrators' perspectives will be examined by using an in-depth interviewing method (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Frank, 2000; Kaur, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1996; McClure, 2007; Ramsay et al., 1999; Seidman, 1991; Sepnecer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Thorstensson, 2001; Trice, 2003; Wan, 2001). In addition, I will distribute a questionnaire to 27 fourth-year Chinese students (Dunn, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Lewthwaite, 1996; Seidman, 1991; Thorstensson, 2001; Z. Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Participants' narrative stories will be obtained through interviews and reflective journal reports (Frank, 2000; Morita, 2004).

The presentations and publication that will result from this research will be identified as follows;

**Lecturers and administrators:** part of the interview procedure will involve asking the lecturers and administrators how best report back on the findings of the study. Their replies will inform the feedback process. In addition, articles will be written for publication in journals relevant to lecturers such as *Journal of Teaching in Higher Education*, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, and *International Education Journal*.

#### **How was I chosen for this invitation?**

You are a lecturer or an administrator who are teaching and dealing with Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, studying a second language at MSU.

#### **What will happen in this research?**

With your consent, you will be involved in an audio-taped one-on-one interview about Chinese students' adjustment experiences in studying a second language at MSU.

#### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

The discomforts and risks are not likely to emerge because the data is only going to be collected by the researcher who is involved in a relationship with the lecturer participants just as a colleague, but not has any supervisory authority over them. Because participants will be free to answer or not answer questions, they can avoid any possibility of embarrassment or awkwardness. They will be reminded of this before the questions are asked. They will not be providing answers in a group context but on a one-to-one basis, thereby further reducing any possibility of embarrassment or awkwardness.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If any risks emerge, they will be alleviated by the freedom that all participants have when they choose how they would like to answer questions that they consider embarrassing or uncomfortable. Moreover, they can withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection process. What is more, all findings will be presented in a way that preserves the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, participants will not be able to be individually identified.

**What are the benefits?**

You and other participants will have access to a report that outlines the information gained from the research. The report will consider the issues that are raised about how students adapt to studying a second language at MSU, Thailand, and about the teaching and learning methods used. The aim is to see in what ways things can be improved for all students, lecturers and administrators. If you wish, you may receive a report on the findings of the study after the completion by circling the 'Yes' option on the consent form accompanying this letter.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You will not be identified at all in the reporting of this research and in particular your managers will not know if you are participating or not. In addition, your identity will not be revealed to the management. Once reviewed by the researcher, the tapes will be securely kept at AUT. After six years, they will be destroyed.

Although the university at which you are studying will be recognised for its contribution towards this research, the thesis which the researcher writes and any publications which result from it will not make reference to names of teachers and students.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no cost of participating in this research.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You will have one day to consider this invitation. If you are willing to participate, please complete the consent form attached and return it to the researcher tomorrow.

If you decide to withdraw, please contact the researcher at the number or address at the end of this information sheet.



**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Prof. John Bitchener, e-mail: [john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz](mailto:john.bitchener@aut.ac.nz), Tel. +64 9 921 9999 extn 7830.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?****Researcher contact details:**

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Tel. +64 9 921 9999 extn 8044

E-mail : [Madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz)

Many thanks for considering this invitation

Dusadee Kongsombut

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 July 2009,

AUTEK Reference number 09/62.

## Appendix B: Consent Forms for Students, Lecturers and Administrators

### Consent Form for Students



**Project title:** Adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: A case study of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

**Project Supervisor:** Prof. John Bitchener

**Researcher:** Miss Dusadee Kongsombut

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated .....2010.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I will be keeping a reflective journal and that I will be asked to submit it to the researcher once a week for each week of the semester.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

.....

Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 July 2009*

*AUTEC Reference number 09/62*

## Consent Form for Lecturers and Administrators



**Project title:** Adjustment experiences of non-indigenous students studying a second language in a different country: A case study of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners at Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

**Project Supervisor:** Prof. John Bitchener

**Researcher:** Miss Dusadee Kongsombut

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated ..... 2010.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

.....

Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 July 2009*

*AUTEC Reference number 09/62*

## Appendix C: Questionnaire for Students

### Part A - Background Information

#### Personal Information

---

1. Age:.....Years

2. Gender:

*(Please tick one box only)*

Male.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Female.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2

3. Place of Origin:

Province: ....., China

4. How many years do you plan to study/work in Thailand?

*(Please tick one box only)*

Less than a month.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
1 to 6 months.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
7 to 12 months.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
1 to 2 years.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
3 to 4 years.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
5 years or more.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6

**5. What other family members, if any, do you have in Thailand?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

Parent.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Brother/Sister.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Boyfriend/Girlfriend.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
I have no family member in Thailand.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

**6. Is this the first time you have studied overseas?** *(Please tick one box only)*

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	No.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
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**7. What is your first language?** *(Please tick one box only)*

Chinese (Mandarin).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Chinese (Cantonese).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

**8. Apart from your home country and Thailand, have you been to other countries?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 (Go to question 9)	No.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 (Go to question 10)
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**9. How many countries have you been to?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

1-2 countries.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
3-4 countries.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
4 + countries.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

**Educational Institution**

---

**10. Is your education in Thailand paid for by...?***(Please tick one box only)*

Yourself.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Parents.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Other family members.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Scholarship or other award.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Loan.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Your government.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	7

**11. How financial difficult is it for you and/or your family, to pay for your education in Thailand?***(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Slightly (a little).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Moderately.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Very.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Extremely.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Don't know/Not Sure.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6

**12. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current financial situation?***(Please tick one box only)*

<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Slightly (a little)</b>	<b>Moderately</b>	<b>Very</b>	<b>Extremely</b>
<b>satisfied</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>satisfied</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**13. How would you rate your Thai language ability in the following areas?**

*(Please tick one box only for each area)*

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
a. Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. Speaking	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
e. Overall	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

**Part B – Making a choice about where to study**

**All questions in this section refer to your choice to study at the educational institution in Thailand where you are currently enrolled.**

**14. Was MSU your first choice as a place of study?** *(Please tick one box only)*

Yes..... ☐ 1 (Go to question 15)      No..... ☐ 2 (Go to question 16)

**15. Why did you choose MSU as your first choice for a place of study?**.....

.....

.....

**16. If not, what was your first choice as a place of study?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Burapha University.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Suan Dusit Rajabhat University.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
University of Thai Chamber of Commerce.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

17. Why did you choose this place as your first choice for a place of study? .....

.....

18. How important were the following factors in choosing MSU as a place to study?

(Please tick one box only)

	Not at all	Slightly (a little)	Moderately	Very	Extremely
a. Friend's recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Senior's recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Teacher's recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Parents/family member's recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. Financial support from your government	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. Advertisements for study in	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. Direct contact from MSU	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. Internet Information	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
i. Family's preference	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
j. Your own preference	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
k. Family members or friends in MSU	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
l. The quality of education at MSU	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
m. International recognition of MSU	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
n. Beautiful scenery	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
o. Safety	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
p. MSU culture and life style	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
q. Travel and adventure	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
r. Was not possible to study in university	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5



	Not at all	Slightly (a little)	Moderately	Very	Extremely
s. Was not possible to study in country	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
t. Cost	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
u. Opportunity to move to another province later	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
v. Opportunity to live in Thailand at a later date	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

### Part C – Living Arrangements in Maha Sarakham (MHK)

#### 19. Where are you currently living?

(Please tick one box only)

- In a student dormitory with Thai roommates..... ☐ 1
- In an apartment provided by the university (living with Chinese roommates) ☐ 2
- Other (please specify)..... ☐ 3

#### 20. On average, how much do you spend per week on accommodation and living expenses (this includes rent, power, phone, food, entertainment and domestic travel/transport expenses)?

(Please tick one box only)

- 0 – 500 Baht..... ☐ 1
- 501 – 1,000 Baht..... ☐ 2
- 1,000 – 1,500 Baht..... ☐ 3
- 1,501 – 2,000 Baht..... ☐ 4
- 2,000 Baht + ..... ☐ 5

**21. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your accommodation?**

	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Slightly (a little)</b>	<b>Moderately</b>	<b>Very</b>	<b>Extremely</b>
a. Quality of your accommodation (air condition, size etc...)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Rules and regulations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Relationship with your dormitory management	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Value for money	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. Quality of the food provided	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. Support/assistance provided to you	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. Quality of amenities (e.g. bathroom)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. Access to Internet	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
i. Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
j. Safety and security	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
k. Quality of your study area (lighting, desk, space, peace and quiet)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**22. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current accommodation?** *(Please tick one box only)*

<b>Not at all satisfied</b>	<b>Slightly (a little) satisfied</b>	<b>Moderately satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Extremely satisfied</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Part D – Educational Experiences in MSU

### Self Assessment

23. How well are you doing in your studies in MSU? *(Please tick one box only)*

Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

24. How satisfied are you with your progress in your studies? *(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all satisfied	Slightly (a little) satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

25. How important is it to your family for you to do well in your studies? *(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all important	Slightly (a little) important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**26. How difficult are the following educational activities for you?**

*(Please tick one box only for each activity)*

	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Slightly (a little)</b>	<b>Moderately</b>	<b>Very</b>	<b>Extremely</b>
a. Understanding lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Writing assignments	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Taking notes during class	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Completing assignments on time	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. Working on group projects	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. Taking tests or exams	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. Making oral presentations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. Managing your study workload	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
i. Asking questions in class	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
j. Thinking critically (analytically)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
k. Expressing yourself (communicating in Thai)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
l. Expressing (Giving) your opinions to your lecturer	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
m. Studying in a different educational system	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Evaluating your programme of studies

### 27. Please rate the quality of the following.

(Please tick one box only for each activity)

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
a. The content of your course	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. The feedback you receive	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. The quality of your lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. The assessment procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

### 28. Overall, is the amount of work in your course(s)...

(Please tick one box only)

Too little.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
About right.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Too much.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Not applicable.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

### 29. Overall, is the speed of teaching...

(Please tick one box only)

Too slow.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
About right.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Too fast.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Not applicable.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

## Cultural Inclusiveness

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### 30. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*(Please tick one box only for each activity)*

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Mildly disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mildly agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a. My lecturers encourage contact between international and local students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. The content of my courses is useful for my future study or employment	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. My lecturers make special efforts to help international students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Cultural differences are respected in my institution	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. My lecturers understand the problems of international students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. In my classes there is the opportunity for other students to learn about my culture	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. I feel included in my class	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. My lecturers understand cultural differences in learning styles	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Part E – Educational Experiences in GXUN

### Self Assessment

31. How well were you doing in your studies in GXUN? *(Please tick one box only)*

Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

32. How satisfied were you with your progress in your studies in GXUN? *(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all satisfied	Slightly (a little) satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

33. How important was it to your family for you to do well in your studies in GXUN?  
*(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all important	Slightly (a little) important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**34. How difficult were the following educational activities for you when you were in China?**

*(Please tick one box only for each activity)*

	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Slightly (a little)</b>	<b>Moderately</b>	<b>Very</b>	<b>Extremely</b>
a. Understanding lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Writing assignments	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Taking notes during class	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Completing assignments on time	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. Working on group projects	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. Taking tests or exams	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. Making oral presentations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. Managing your study	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
i. Asking questions in class	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
j. Thinking critically	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
k. Expressing yourself (communication in Thai)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
l. Expressing (Giving) your opinions to your lecturer	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
m. Studying in a different educational system	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5



## Evaluating your programme of studies in China

### 35. Please rate the quality of the following.

(Please tick one box only for each activity)

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
a. The content of your course	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. The feedback you receive	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. The quality of your lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. The assessment procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

### 36. Overall, is the amount of work in your course(s)...?

(Please tick one box only)

Too little.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
About right.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Too much.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Not applicable.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

### 37. Overall, is the speed of teaching...?

(Please tick one box only)

Too slow.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
About right.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Too fast.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Not applicable.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

## Cultural Inclusiveness

### 38. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*(Please tick one box only for each activity)*

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Mildly disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mildly agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a. My lecturers encourage contact between international and local students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. The content of my courses is useful for my future study or employment	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. My lecturers make special efforts to help international students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Cultural differences are respected in my institution	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. My lecturers understand the problems of international students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. In my classes there is the opportunity for other students to learn about my culture	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. I feel included in my class	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. My lecturers understand cultural differences in learning styles	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Please fill in the following issues in Chinese or Thai language;

39. When comparing between MSU and GXUN teaching and learning approaches, what differences have you seen for each issue?

No.	Issue	Teaching and learning approaches of MSU	Teaching and learning approaches of GXUN
1	Teaching style		
2	Studying style		
3	Classroom regulations		
4	Load of assignment		
5	Period of study		
6	Punctuality of a lecturer		
7	Academic evaluation		

## Part F – Services and Facilities

### University Use

40. Please rate the quality of help provided to you by MSU in the following areas.

*(Please tick one box only for each activity)*

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
a. Advising on course of study	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. Applying for a study visa	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. Making travel arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. Making payments	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
e. Arranging accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
f. Arranging an airport reception	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
g. Advising on life in Thailand	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
h. Translating documents	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

41. Overall, how satisfied are you with the services provided by MSU?

*(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all satisfied	Slightly (a little) satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Facilities at MSU

### 42. Please rate the quality of the services or facilities that are available in MSU.

*(Please tick one box only for each activity)*

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Don't know
a. International Student Office	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Student orientation services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Health services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Financial advice services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. Accommodation services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. Vocational (career) or educational	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. Counselling services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. Computing services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
i. Library services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
j. Language laboratories	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
k. Learning support services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
l. "Buddy" or mentor programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
m. Sports and recreational facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
n. Clubs and societies	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
o. Student Association	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
p. Additional services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**43. Please rate the overall quality of the services and facilities at MSU.** *(Please tick one box only)*

Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

**44. Do you think MSU is good value for money?** *(Please tick one box only)*

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Not sure.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

**45. Would you recommend friends, family members, or junior students at GXUN to study in MSU?** *(Please tick one box only)*

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Not sure.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

## Part G – Support that you might receive in MHK

46. This section is about the sources of support that are available to help you in MHK.  
For each activity, tick the sources of support that are available to you.

(Please tick as many boxes as apply for each type of activity)

	Staff at MSU	Thai student friends	Inter- national student friends	People from the community	People in your home country	Others
a. Talk with you if you are troubled, lonely, homesick	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
b. Help you if you are sick	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
c. Help you with language or communication problems	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
d. Provide information about sexual health	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
e. Discuss relationship issues or concerns with you	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
f. Help you find your way	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
g. Help with educational issues or problems	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
h. Help you become involved in community activities	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
i. Answer questions that you have about life in Thailand	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
j. Help with your living arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
k. Give advice on banking and budgeting (financial matters)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6

47. Overall, how satisfied are you with the support you receive? *(Please tick one box only)*

Not at all satisfied	Slightly (a little) satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Part H – Your relationships with people in MHK

### Friendship

48. The following questions are about making friends with people in MHK. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

*(Please tick one box only for each statement)*

	Strongly disagree	Mildly disagree	Neutral	Mildly agree	Strongly agree
a. I would like to have more Thai friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Thai people should take the first steps to make friends with international students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. I find it difficult to make friends with Thai people	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Thai people do not seem interested in having international friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. My Thai ability stops me from making Thai friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. I try my best to make Thai friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5



Here are some questions about the people you know in MHK. Please indicate the answer that is best for you.

**49. How many close friends do you have from the following groups of people?**

*(Please tick one box only for each group of people)*

	None	One	A few	Some	Many
a. Thai people	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. People from your home country	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. People from other countries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**50. How often do you spend social time with the following groups of people?**

*(Please tick one box only for each group of people)*

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very often
a. Thai friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Friends from your home country	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. International friends from other countries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**51. How often do you study with the following groups of people?**

*(Please tick one box only for each group of people)*

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very often
a. Thai students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Students from your home country	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. International students from other countries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Thai people and International students

**52. How do you think Thai people view international students? Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with each statement.**

*(Please tick one box only for each statement)*

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Mildly disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mildly agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a. Most Thai people would like to know international students better	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. International students often experience discrimination (unfair treatment) in Thailand	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Thai people have generally attitudes towards international students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. On the whole, Thai people would prefer fewer international students in the country	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**53. How often do the following people treat you unfairly or negatively because of your national, cultural or racial background? Please indicate the answer that applies best to you. (Please tick one box only for each group of people)**

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very often</b>
a. Thai students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. International students	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Administrative and support staff at MSU	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. People in the community (e.g., neighbours, vendors, apartment's owner/officers)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

## Part I – Life since you arrived in MHK

### 54. How much do you agree or disagree with the following?

(Please tick one box only for each statement)

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Mildly disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mildly agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
a. In most ways my life in MHK is my ideal (exactly as I would like it)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. The conditions of my life in MHK are excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. I am satisfied with my life in MHK	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. So far I have got the important things I want from my life in MHK	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. If I could live my life over, I would change nothing about my life in MHK	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

### 55. Please rate the quality of the following in MHK. (Please tick one box only for each area)

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
a. Public transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. Entertainment (e.g., movie, clubs, pubs)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. Shopping	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. Restaurant/Food outlets (e.g., takeaways)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
e. Banking	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
f. Sports and recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
g. Supermarkets/Food markets	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
h. Medical care/services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

**56. Please rate the level of difficulty you have with the following:** *(Please tick one box only for each area)*

	Not at all	Slightly (a little)	Moderately	Very	Extremely
a. Public transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Language & communication	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. Cost of living	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. Cultural differences	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. Making Thai friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. Shopping	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. Accommodation/living arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
h. Racism & discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
i. Access to entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
j. Loneliness/homesickness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
k. Finding full time and/or part-time work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
l. Immigration/Visas	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

### Working in MHK

**57. Does your student permit allow you to work part time while studying in MHK?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

Yes..... ☐ 1

No..... ☐ 2

Don't know..... ☐ 3

**58. Have you tried to find part time paid work while studying in MHK?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

- |   |                          |                              |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yes, I am currently working part time.....            | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 <b>(Go to question 59)</b> |
| Yes, I have worked part time, but not at present..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <b>(Go to question 63)</b> |
| Yes, but I did not succeed in finding work.....       | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <b>(Go to question 62)</b> |
| No, I haven't tried to find part time work.....       | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <b>(Go to question 63)</b> |

**59. What type of part-time work are you currently doing? If you have more than one part-time job, choose the job that you spend the most time doing.**

*(Please tick one box only)*

- |  |                          |   |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Hospitality (e.g., waitress, tourist information)..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Retail/Sales (e.g. supermarket checkout).....          | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Office (e.g., administration).....                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| Education (e.g., tutor).....                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |
| Professional (e.g., law, marketing, accounting).....   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 |
| Research (e.g., research assistance).....              | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 |
| Information Technology (e.g., computer helpdesk).....  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 |
| Labour (e.g., gardening).....                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8 |
| Other (please specify).....                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9 |

**60. What is your main reason for working part time in MHK?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

To gain work experience directly related to my field of study or future career plans.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
To gain general work experience in Thailand.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
To improve my Thai.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
To meet living/tuition costs.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

**61. If you are currently working part time in MHK, how many hours a week are you working (on average)?**

0-5 hours	6-10 hours	11-15 hours	16-20 hours	Above 20 hours
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Please continue to question 63				

**62. If you did not succeed in finding work, what were the main reasons for this?**

*(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

I was told I didn't have enough work experience.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Employers were unsure about whether I was allowed to work....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
I was told my Thai was not good enough.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
I was told there was a high level of competition for jobs.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Don't know/Unsure.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6

## Part J – Future plans

**63. Immediately after you complete your current programme of studies, what is the next thing you are most likely to do?**

*(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

Enrol for further studies in your home country.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Enrol for further studies at MSU.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Enrol for further studies at another institution in Thailand.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Enrol for further studies in another country overseas.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Find a job in your home country.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Find a job in Thailand.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
Find a job in another country.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	7
No plans for the future yet.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	8
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	9

**64. If you are planning to enrol for further studies, at what level will this be?**

*(Please tick one box only)*

Language School.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Tertiary institution (polytechnic, institute of technology, university, or other tertiary institution).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

**65. If you are planning to enrol at a Tertiary Institution (polytechnic, institute of technology, university, or other tertiary institution), or at a Thai/English/other Language School, what course will you be taking?**

*(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

Foundation Studies.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1 (Go to question 67)
Language Course.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 (Go to question 67)
Certificate.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Diploma.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Bachelor's degree.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Graduate Certificate.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
Postgraduate Certificate.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	7
Master's degree.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	8
Other (please specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	9

**66. What will be your main field of study? (e.g., Business Management, Finance).....**

.....

**67. Do you plan to work in Thailand after you have completed your studies? (Please tick one box only)**

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	No.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
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## Part K – Suggestions for helping other Chinese Students

Please write your answer for the following issue in Chinese or Thai language;

68. What suggestions do you have for

A. Helping other Chinese non-native Thai learners to overcome the adjustment problems

.....

.....

.....

.....

B. Improving the program

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Thank you for your time and help**

**TO RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE:** Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided and give it to the administrators at:

RN1-411, Department of Thai and Oriental Languages

Rajanakarin Building, Mahasarakham University,

Khamrieng, Kantarawichai,

Maha Sarakham

**Remark:** *This questionnaire is adapted from, "National Survey of International Students", Ministry of Education, New Zealand.*

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions for Students, Lecturers, and Administrators**

### **Interview Questions for Students**

#### **Interview 1 (will be conducted at the beginning of semester)**

##### **Backgrounds:**

1. Pseudonym:

Name selected.....

Why did you select this pseudonym? What does it mean to you?

2. How old are you? Could you please tell me about your family background?
3. Could you please tell me much about yourself and your life as you can up until you came to Thailand?
4. In the aspect of your childhood interests,
  - 4.1 Please describe your first experiences with Thai language—feelings/perceptions.
  - 4.2 What were your family attitudes toward study, Thai, travel?
5. In the aspect of your college interests and activities,
  - 5.1 What was your academic and professional background prior to coming to MSU?
  - 5.2 What is your background in learning Thai?
  - 5.3 Have you ever lived/studied outside China?
  - 5.4 When did you first have the dream or the idea to study in Thailand?

##### **Before arriving in Thailand:**

6. How did you receive information from Guangxi University for Nationalities about MSU before you arrived in Thailand? Was it helpful for you?

##### **The day you left to go to Thailand:**

7. What happened on the day that you left to go to Thailand?
8. Did your family go with you to the airport? Was it difficult to leave them? What you were thinking and feeling?
9. Imagine yourself on the airplane flying to Thailand. What did you imagine Thailand was going to be like?

**After arriving in Thailand:**

10. Please describe your first day in Thailand.
11. What was life like for you in MSU? Describe a typical day from the time you got up in the morning until you went to bed.
12. What specific difficulties did you face?
13. What were your initial impressions of MSU, your lecturers, administrators, and your courses? Was anything surprising to you?

**Reasons for coming to MSU/Academic goals and interests/Future plans:**

14. What did you expect to achieve before you came to Thailand? Have you fulfilled your expectations?
15. What made you decide to come to Thailand for an overseas education?
16. What role did your parents play in your decision to study abroad?
17. Why did you choose MSU instead of other universities?
18. What are your academic goals and interests?
19. What are your future plans after completing your studies at MSU?

**Program of study/Courses:**

20. What were your main learning difficulties when you first studied at the university? What did you do to overcome these difficulties?
21. What courses are you currently taking? Why are you taking them? Please describe your courses (e.g., content, assignments, classroom activities, lecturer, classmates).
22. How did you participating in your course? Do you have any difficulties or concerns?
23. Please describe relationships with your lecturers, other students, international students, and administrators.
24. Compared to your classroom experiences in your country, what are the differences you have identified, such as teaching styles and assignment requirements?
25. Did you make any Thai friends?
26. Are you experiencing any difficulty in adjusting to life here? How did you deal with it?
27. Have you been working here in Thailand? Are you experiencing any difficulty? How do you deal with it?

**Advice/suggestions for Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, L2 international students, lecturers, administrators and the university:**

28. What advice would you give to other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and L2 international students coming to Thailand to study?
29. Do you have any advice or suggestions for course lecturers/faculties/administrators, particularly in regard to issues around Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and international students? What advice would you like to inform lecturers and administrators to help them be better equipped to teach/assist Chinese and international students who are firstly arrived in MHK?
30. What kind of institutional support do you think would be helpful for Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and international students? What institutional support did you find helpful, especially for Chinese students who just arrived in MHK?

**Interview 2 (will be conducted at mid semester—the second month after beginning this semester)**

**General impressions of the past two month of this semester studies/courses:**

1. What courses are you currently taking? Why are you taking them? Please describe your courses (e.g., content, assignments, classroom activities, lecturer, classmates).
2. What are your general impressions of your past two month of this semester studies/course? What did you enjoy about your studies/courses?
3. What concerns, if any, did you have about your program?
4. What kinds of difficulties, if any, did you experience in your studies in general? How did you deal with your difficulties?

**Course lecturers/classmates:**

5. Do you have any comments about your course lecturers?
6. How did you interact with your course lecturers and classmates inside and outside the classroom?

**Academic/Thai abilities:**

7. What concerns do you have about your academic skills and abilities in general?
8. Do you feel that your Thai has improved over the past two months? What kinds of Thai abilities do you think you need to improve? Did you make any special efforts to improve your Thai skills?
9. What opportunities do you have to use Thai (speak/listen/read/write) inside and outside the classroom?

**Academic life at MSU:**

10. Please describe your typical day/week.
11. What are some of the significant events that happened to you since you came to MSU?
12. What is the biggest difference between the Thai and Chinese educational systems you have found during the past two months?

**Plans for the rest two months of this semester:**

13. Do you have any goals for the rest two months of this semester?
14. What are you planning to do to improve your study?

**Interview 3 (will be conducted at the end of semester 1/2010)****General impressions of semester 1/2010 courses:**

1. What are your general impressions of your semester 1/2010 studies/courses? What did you enjoy about your studies?
2. What kinds of difficulties, if any, did you experience in your studies in general? How did you deal with your difficulties?
3. Compared to your classroom experiences in your country, what are the differences you have identified, such as teaching styles and assignment requirements?

**Course lecturers/classmates:**

4. Do you have any comments about your course lecturers or your relationship with them?
5. How did you interact with your course lecturers and classmates inside and outside the classroom?

**Academic/Thai abilities:**

6. What concerns do you have about your academic skills and abilities in general?
7. Which of the following is easiest and which is most difficult for you? Why?
  - Listening (listening to lectures/tutorials)
  - Reading (doing assignment reading)
  - Writing (writing assignments, taking notes)
  - Speaking (doing oral presentations, expressing own views)
  - Taking tests and exams
8. What academic or Thai abilities do you think have been improved over the semester 1/2010? Why do you think they improved? Did you make any special efforts to improve your Thai skills?

9. What areas of academic or Thai abilities do you feel you still need to improve?
10. What opportunities do you have to use Thai (speak/listen/read/write) inside and outside the classroom?

**Reflections about studies in general:**

11. Do you have any comments about your classroom experiences throughout the semester 1/2010?
12. Please describe some of your most interesting/challenging/rewarding experiences during your studies.
13. Do you have any other comments about your academic life at MSU in general?
14. What is the biggest difference between the Thai and Chinese educational systems you have found during the semester?

**Advice/suggestions for Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, L2 international students, lecturers, administrators and the university:**

15. What advice would you give to other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and L2 international students coming to Thailand to study?
16. Do you have any advice or suggestions for course lecturers/faculties/administrators, particularly in regard to issues around Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and other L2 international students? What advice would you like to inform lecturers and administrators to help them be better equipped to teach/assist Chinese and other L2 international students?
17. What kinds of institutional support do you think would be helpful for Chinese and other L2 international students? What institutional support did you find helpful?

**Future plans:**

18. What are your future plans about your academic/professional career?

## **Interview Questions for Lecturers and Administrators**

### **Questions for Lecturers**

#### **A. Questions about the course**

##### **Characteristics of the course and the student group:**

1. What is the nature of this course in terms of content, format, and assignments? Is there anything special about this course compared to other courses that you teach?
2. How would you characterize this year's student group? Is there anything special about this year's students that has influenced the way you organized the course?

##### **Expectations for and evaluations of the Chinese students:**

3. What expectations do you have about individual students in this course? Is there an official requirement for classroom interaction in this course? If there is, what is the purpose of such requirement?
4. Are there any norms or rules of classroom interaction/participation that you promote in this course? If there are, what are the norms/rules, and how do you promote them?
5. How do you evaluate the study result of each student? What are the criteria for evaluation?

##### **Impressions of and interaction to the Chinese students:**

6. Do you think why the Chinese students choose to study at MSU instead of other universities?
7. What impressions do you have about the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and other L2 international students? Do you see any difference between domestic students and international students in terms of class interaction/participation?
8. How did you interact with your Chinese students inside and outside the classroom?
9. Do you have any comments about their classroom interaction/participation or other issues in general?

##### **Pedagogical adjustments:**

10. Do you know about teaching and learning approaches in Chinese university? What differences do you explore between Thai and Chinese universities?
11. Have you made any pedagogical adjustments to meet the needs of Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners in this class?

**B. General questions on the issues of classroom communication, academic and cultural socialization, and the Chinese students**

**Difficulties experienced by students/suggestions for students:**

12. What kinds of adjustment problems have you seen the Chinese students face in the classroom and outside? Do you know how they deal with these adjustment problems?
13. How do their Chinese backgrounds have contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences?
14. What advice or suggestions would you offer or have you offered to those who are having such difficulties?

**Difficulties experienced by course lecturers:**

15. What kinds of difficulties or issues, if any, have you faced in teaching the Chinese students? How did you deal with them?
16. Are there any positive/negative aspects of having students from diverse backgrounds in your courses?
17. How would you improve your teaching to fulfil the students' needs or to assist them as much as possible?

**Advice/suggestions for the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, L2 international students and the university:**

18. What advice would you give to other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and L2 international students coming to Thailand to study?
19. Do you have any advice or suggestions for faculties or the university board, particularly in regard to issues around international students?
20. Are there any other related issues you would like to comment on?

**Questions for Administrators**

**C. Questions about the administration**

**Characteristics of the administration and the student group:**

1. What is the nature of this administration? Is there anything special about this administration compared to other administration that you are responsible for?
2. Do you know about the administrative process in Chinese university? What differences do you explore between Thai and Chinese universities?
3. How would you characterize this year's student group? Is there anything special about this year's students that have influenced the way you organized the administration?



**Expectations for the students' interaction/participation:**

4. What expectations do you have about individual students' interaction/participation in this administration? Is there an official requirement for their interaction/participation in this administration? If there is, what is the purpose of such requirement?
5. Are there any norms or rules of interaction/participation that you promote in this administration? If there are, what are the norms/rules, and how do you promote them?

**Impressions of the Chinese students:**

6. What impressions do you have about the Chinese students in this administration? How do they interact in the administration? Do you see any difference between domestic students and international students in terms of interaction/participation?
7. Do you think why the Chinese students choose to study at MSU instead of other universities?

**Administrative adjustments:**

8. Have you made any administrative adjustments to meet the needs of the focal students?

**D. General questions on the issues of administrative communication, academic and cultural socialization, and focal students**

**Difficulties experienced by students/suggestions for students:**

9. What kinds of challenges/adjustment problems have you seen the students face in your administration? Do you know do they deal with these challenges/adjustment problems?
10. What advice or suggestions would you offer or have you offered to the students who are having such difficulties?
11. How do their Chinese backgrounds have contributed to or hindered their adjustment experience?

**Difficulties experienced by administrators and their strategies:**

12. What kinds of difficulties or issues, if any, have you faced in having these students in your administration? How did you deal with them?
13. Are there any positive/negative aspects of having students from diverse backgrounds in your administration?
14. How would you improve your administration to fulfil the students' needs or to assist them as much as possible?

**Advice/suggestions for the Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners, L2 international students and the university:**

15. What advice would you give to other Chinese non-indigenous Thai learners and L2 international students coming to Thailand to study?
16. Do you have any advice or suggestions for faculties or the university board, particularly in regard to issues around international students?
17. Are there any other related issues you would like to comment on?

## **Appendix E: Questions for Reflective Journals**

Name:.....Date:.....

### **1. General attitude on your everyday life**

1.1 What is your general impression/miserable of today's life?

1.1.1 Social life (e.g. relationship with Chinese/Thai/other nationality friends or people)

1.1.2 Personal expenses

1.2 What are your problems or new experiences in your everyday life that you face?

1.3 How do you solve/adjust to those problems or deal with your new experiences?

### **2. Perspectives on your study**

2.1 What did the class do today? (In summary: e.g., whole-class discussion about A; teacher's lecture on B; small discussion on C; student presentations)

2.2 How did you participate in today's class? (Please reflect on your participation)

2.3 Any observations about other people's participation?

2.4 What differences do you explore between Thai and Chinese education?

### **3. Your personal background**

3.1 How do your personal backgrounds have contributed or hindered your adjustment experiences?

### **4. Suggestions for administrators and lecturers**

4.1 What suggestions do you have for administrators and lecturers to help you overcome your adjustment problems and to improve the program?

You can write about this question whenever you can think about the reason

### **5. Why do you choose a university outside of China for your undergraduate studies?**

## Appendix F: Observation Protocol

**Investigator:** Dusadee Kongsombut  
Ph.D. Candidate in Languages  
Department of Languages and Social Sciences  
Tel. (Thailand) +6686-928 3698  
(New Zealand) +6421-237 7306  
E-mail: [jrw8078@aut.ac.nz](mailto:jrw8078@aut.ac.nz)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how Chinese non- native Thai learners become socialized into the cultures of MSU classrooms and acquire competence in academic environment in Thai. In addition, this research project will explore what difficulties Chinese students may experience in classroom and what strategies they use and develop to deal with their difficulties.

**Procedures for classroom observations:** After receiving information about the courses which the student participants are taking, the investigator will seek permission from the students as well as from their course lecturers to observe their classes. The purpose of these observations is to find out (1) the overall nature of particular courses, (2) norms and patterns of classroom interaction in these courses, (3) the focal students' language and classroom socialization experiences, and (4) other emerging issues related to classroom interaction. The investigator will quietly sit in the classroom and take notes on these issues. This observation will be taken weekly on all subjects concerning second language studies that the participants attend. It will last about two hours for each subject. The investigator will attend their classes for one semester. After finishing class observation for each week, the investigator will write a summary on the participants' academic adjustment as shown in the following table.

**Confidentiality:** Any information resulting from this research will be kept strictly confidential. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

**Sample of an Observation Protocol**

**Subject:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

No.	Participants' name	Observation Issues											
		Nature of the subject			Patterns of classroom interaction			Attend class on time	Class participation	Reaction to the lecturer's interaction	Relationship with classmates/ lecturer	Responsibility in class/assignment	Ability to give presentation
		Lecture	Practice	Field work	Discussion	Group work	Individual work						
1	A		/		/			x	1	2	0	2	1
2	B		/		/			/	1	1	2	1	0
<b>Summary on the participants' academic adjustment for each week:</b>													
1	A												
2	B												

**Remark:**

1. " / " and "x" will be filled in boxes, "Nature of the subject" to "Attend class on time"
2. The following numbers will be filled in boxes, "Class Participation" to "Ability to give presentation"  
0 = Not at all                      1 = Poor                      2 = Good

## Appendix G: Letter of Ethical Approval



# MEMORANDUM

## Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

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To: John Bitchener  
From: **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC  
Date: 30 July 2009  
Subject: Ethics Application Number 09/62 **Adjustment experiences of Chinese non-native Thai learners, studying a second language at Mahasarakham University.**

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Dear John

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 15 June 2009 and that I have approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 10 August 2009.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 30 July 2012.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 30 July 2012;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 30 July 2012 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTECH is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECH approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at [charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz](mailto:charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz) or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the AUTECH and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely



**Madeline Banda**  
**Executive Secretary**  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Dusadee Kongsombut [jw8078@aut.ac.nz](mailto:jw8078@aut.ac.nz)

## Appendix H: Letter of Consultation



Confucius Institute at Mahasarakham University  
Mahasarakham University  
Kantarawichai District, Maha Sarakham Province, Thailand 44150  
Email: somkiet.p@msu.ac.th

May 20, 2009

### To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Miss Dusadee Kongsombut, a Ph.D. candidate in Languages at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand has already undertaken consultation about the suitability and usefulness of her research design and instrument with me.

After intensely discussing, Prof. Huang Bingshen, Director of the Chinese side of Confucius Institute at Mahasarakham University and I consent that her research project will benefit not only to Chinese students, but also to the Chinese programs at Mahasarakham University.

I am therefore willing to permit her to collect data with Chinese native learners who are under the responsibility of Confucius Institute at Mahasarakham University.

Should you need further information concerning her issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address above.

Yours sincerely,



(Asst. Prof. Somkiet Pooapatwiboon)  
Director of the Thai side of Confucius Institute at Mahasarakham University



## **Appendix I: Categories and Themes**

### **Category 1 Reasons for choosing a university outside of China**

**Theme 1:** The reasons the Chinese students decided to come to Thailand;

**Theme 2:** The reasons they chose to study at MSU instead of other Thai universities

### **Category 2 Perspectives on how the Chinese students' home country background contributed to or hindered their adjustment experiences.**

**Theme 1:** Personal background of students

**Theme 2:** Family background of students

**Theme 3:** The participants' perspective on the students' home country background

**Theme 4:** Academic background prior to coming to MSU

**Theme 5:** Attitudes toward Thailand and Thai language

**Theme 6:** Future plans

### **Category 3 Differences between MSU and GXUN teaching and learning approaches.**

**Theme 1:** Teaching styles

**Theme 2:** Learning styles

**Theme 3:** Positive and negative experiences

#### **Category 4 Adjustment problems**

**Theme 1:** Academic problems

**Theme 2:** Sociocultural problems

**Theme 3:** Support services problems

#### **Category 5 Strategies the students used to adjust to an indigenous academic and cultural environment.**

**Theme 1:** Academic strategies

**Theme 2:** Sociocultural strategies

**Theme 3:** Support services strategies

**Theme 4:** Lecturers' and administrators' strategies to improve the students' studies

#### **Category 6 Suggestions for the university to help students overcome their adjustment problems and to improve the programme.**

**Theme 1:** Academic suggestions

**Theme 2:** Sociocultural suggestions

**Theme 3:** Support services suggestions

## Appendix J: Formation of Themes

Data that implied the same underlying meaning were grouped together to form themes. For example, the theme “academic problems” was formed by grouping the following data together.

S1: ‘I feel that *writing Thai poetry is very difficult*. I can’t remember enough vocabulary. Whenever I have to write it, I often get a headache. As well as not being able to choose the correct vocabulary, I have a lot of work to place that vocabulary in a pleasant and alliterative form’ (Transcripts 25/09/2010).

S6: ‘The lecturer asked us to *write Thai poetry*. It was *very difficult*. I spent many hours thinking about it, but, I couldn’t figure it out. However, I have to practice and search out various types of information’ (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

S3: ‘I *don’t dare to talk to the lecturers* because I am *afraid of miscommunication*’ (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S2: ‘When studying, I *don’t really understand what the lecturers say*. I will ask my Thai friend for help. I *won’t ask the lecturers* so much because I am *afraid of asking* them’ (Transcripts 25/09/2011).

S5: ‘My *Thai language skills are not good enough*, so, I *don’t talk to the lecturers often*’ (Transcripts 26/09/2011).

L3: ‘*The Chinese students don’t understand what I taught*. I notice from their assignments and can see that they can’t do these assignments’ (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

L2: ‘When I asked the students whether they had been studying this issue, they seemed to be *confused*. They couldn’t *answer my questions*, so, they kept quiet’ (Transcripts 27/09/2011).

## Appendix K: Sample Transcripts of Interview and Reflective Journal

### Sample transcripts of interview

S6: “อาจารย์ให้เราแต่งกลอน ยากมาก ครั้งหนึ่งผมคิดหลายชั่วโมงก็คิดไม่ออก แต่ก็ต้องฝึกและหาข้อมูลเยอะๆ”

S6: ‘The lecturer asked us to write Thai poetry. It was very difficult. I spent many hours thinking about it, but I couldn’t figure it out. However, I have to practice and search out various types of information’ (Transcripts 26/09/2010).

### Sample transcripts of reflective journal

S1: “หนูรู้สึกว่าการประพันธ์ร้อยกรองไทยยากมาก จำคำศัพท์ไทยได้ไม่เยอะ เขียนบทกวีทุกครั้งก็ปวดหัว นอกจากคิดคำศัพท์ไม่ออกแล้ว ยังต้องเอาคำศัพท์มาสัมผัสกันอีก”

S1: ‘I feel that *writing Thai poetry is very difficult*. I can’t remember enough vocabulary. Whenever I have to write it, I often get a headache. As well as not being able to choose the correct vocabulary, I have a lot of work to place that vocabulary in a pleasant and alliterative form’ (Transcripts 25/09/2010).