

# **Cross-cultural and Educational Adaptation of Asian Students in New Zealand**

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## **CROSS-CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATION OF ASIAN STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND**

### **Background**

Export education is a rapidly growing industry. In 1995 it was responsible for \$530 million in foreign exchange in New Zealand. By 2003 it had created over 20,000 jobs and contributed 1.7 billion to the local economy.

New Zealand now has 82,000 international students. The vast majority of these are from Asia, with 31,000 from China, 15,000 from South Korea and 13,000 from Japan. The continued success of international education as an export industry in New Zealand depends on the adaptation and satisfaction of these international students.

This report summarizes the findings from an Asia 2000 funded project that examined the psychological, sociocultural and educational adaptation of Asian students in New Zealand. The research was undertaken between 1997-2002 and through a period of the Asian economic downturn and recovery, which affected the number and sources of Asian students in New Zealand. The project was conducted to examine the expectations, experiences and adaptation of Asian students and to make recommendations based on research findings as to how students' experiences in and satisfaction with New Zealand may be enhanced.

### **Samples**

Below is a summary of the samples included in the research.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Longitudinal project on psychological, social and educational adaptation*

This part of the project involved three data collections from a sample of Asian students coming to New Zealand. A summary of the surveys is presented in Table 1. The first data collection was undertaken in Asia (Q1), on average 65 days prior to departure. A second survey (Q2) was conducted approximately 96 days after they had arrived in New Zealand. A final data collection (Q3) was undertaken 184 days, on average, into their stay in New Zealand.

One hundred and fifty participants completed the pre-departure survey (Q1). Disappointingly however, a high attrition rate between the pre-departure and post-entry data collections was experienced, resulting in 67 participants completing Q2 and 43 completing Q3. Only 23 of the students completed both Q1 and Q2. However, attrition analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the Q1 participants who did and did not complete both questionnaires.

Twenty-one of the students who completed Q2 also completed Q3. Attrition analysis of these data also indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the social and psychological adaptation of the Q2 students who did and did not complete Q3. However, those who did not complete Q3 reported more academic difficulties in Q2 than those who completed both surveys.

Table 1 Summary of surveys used in the longitudinal study

Survey	Content of survey	Timing of administration	N	Participating Institutions
Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• background information</li> <li>• personality</li> <li>• expectations</li> <li>• adaptation (academic, sociocultural and psychological)</li> </ul>	In Asia, an average of 65 days prior to departure	150	Not applicable
Q2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• background information</li> <li>• experiences</li> <li>• social support</li> <li>• adaptation (academic, sociocultural and psychological)</li> </ul>	On average, 96 days after arrival in New Zealand	67	Lincoln Otago Victoria
Q3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• background information</li> <li>• perceptions of co-nationals and New Zealanders</li> <li>• frequency and satisfaction of contact with co-nationals, other internationals and New Zealanders</li> <li>• perceived discrimination</li> <li>• adaptation (academic, sociocultural and psychological)</li> </ul>	On average, 184 days after arrival in New Zealand	23	Lincoln Otago Victoria

*Comparative samples*

All students who commence tertiary study go through a process of social, psychological and academic adaptation. In order to further understand issues related to cross-cultural adaptation, as opposed to the socio-developmental adjustment associated with the transition to university life in general, a range of comparative samples were also undertaken. These data collections included samples of Asian students studying in their home countries (C1 - 69 students from RIMA, INTI [Malaysian institutions] and 149 students from the National University of Singapore) and 267 New Zealanders (C2) studying at New Zealand universities. The surveys for these studies are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of surveys used in the comparative samples

Survey	Content of survey	Sample details	N	Participating institutions
C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>background information</li> <li>adaptation (academic, sociocultural and psychological)</li> </ul>	Asian students in Asia	218	RIMA INTI NUS
C2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>background information</li> <li>adaptation (sociocultural and psychological)</li> </ul>	New Zealand students in New Zealand	267	Victoria

*Cross-sectional samples*

Although Asian students comprise a proportionally higher number, the international student population in New Zealand does consist of a broad and diverse range of nationalities. As such, the question can be asked as to whether Asian students face different types and/or levels of adaptation issues as compared to non-Asian international students. To address this, two cross-sectional studies of international students in New Zealand were undertaken: a study of the perceived availability of social support and adaptation in Asian and non-Asian students at Canterbury and Auckland Universities (CS1 - a total of 237 students); and, a study of perceived discrimination in 180 Asian and non-Asian students at Canterbury University (CS2). These surveys are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Summary of surveys used in the cross-sectional samples

Survey	Content of survey	N	Participating institutions
CS1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>background information</li> <li>stress</li> <li>personality</li> <li>perceived availability of social support</li> <li>adaptation (academic, sociocultural and psychological)</li> </ul>	237	Canterbury Auckland
CS2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>background information</li> <li>cultural identity</li> <li>contact with co-nationals and New Zealanders</li> <li>perception of and relationships with New Zealanders</li> <li>perceived discrimination</li> </ul>	180	Canterbury

## Results

This section reviews the findings from the longitudinal, comparative and cross-sectional studies. First, the expectations and experiences of Asian students are described. This is followed by further discussion of selected aspects of the international student experience, particularly contact with co-nationals and New Zealanders, perceptions of New Zealanders, perceived discrimination, and the availability of social support. Finally, psychological, sociocultural and educational aspects of student adaptation are considered, including the predictors of adaptation and variations in adaptation over time and across student groups.

### *Expectations and experiences of Asian students in New Zealand*

Prior to their departure for New Zealand, and while still resident in Asia, students were asked a series of questions regarding their expectations about living and studying in New Zealand. Shortly after their arrival in New Zealand (after, on average, 96 days) they were assessed again, this time asking about their actual experiences since they arrived. Overall, students' expectations were more positive than their experiences. Table 4 summarises the disparities between students' expectations and experiences.

Further analysis of these data suggest that students whose expectations are "under-met" experience more depression, have more academic difficulties and have more difficulties with social adjustment during their first three months of study in New Zealand. This is discussed in greater detail in the final section of the Results.

### *International students' experiences in New Zealand*

In order to understand more comprehensively the international student experience of being in New Zealand, several additional areas of participants' experiences were assessed. Surveys of both Asian and non-Asian students included questions assessing: contact; perceptions (of New Zealanders as a whole, as well as perceived discrimination); and social support. These data will be discussed in turn, below.

#### *Contact*

Participants were asked how much contact they desired, in both academic and social settings, with New Zealanders and with their co-nationals. They were also asked how much contact they actually experienced with both groups. The results are reported in Tables 5 and 6. All students desired more contact with New Zealanders than they experienced, but the discrepancy was greater for Asian than European and American students.

Students were also asked some additional questions regarding their experiences of contact with New Zealanders. In particular, they were asked to indicate their experiences of contact with New Zealanders in regards to the following: status; voluntariness; depth of intimacy; pleasantness; and cooperation/competitiveness. As is illustrated in Table 7, European and American students reported their contact with New Zealanders to be more positive.

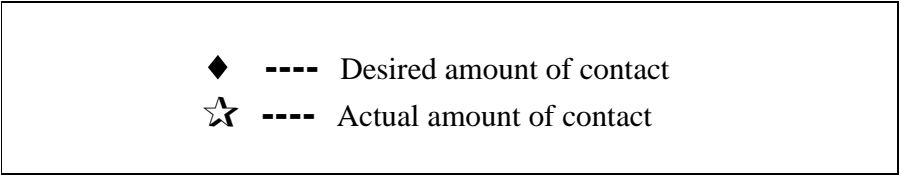
Table 4 The expectations and experiences of Asian students in New Zealand

% agreeing with the expectation

	I expect to.....	Expecta- tions (N=150)	Ex- periences (N = 67)
1	Be able to understand New Zealand English.	80%	57.4%
2	Maintain a positive outlook.	88%	68.7%
3	Form friendships with New Zealanders.	90.6%	41.2%
4	Feel stressed.	30.9%	49.3%
5	Get good grades.	86.7%	28.4%
6	Enjoy socialising with New Zealanders.	82%	51.5%
7	Be able to express myself effectively in English.	76.7%	40.3%
8	Understand New Zealand social customs.	82%	34.3%
9	Have enough money.	62%	50.7%
10	Be accepted by New Zealanders.	72%	37.3%
11	Have no problems with my living arrangements or accommodation.	58.7%	70.1%



Table 6 European and American students’ actual and desired contact with co-nationals and New Zealanders (N = 66)



WITH CO-NATIONALS

Academic activities  
(e.g., studying)



Social or recreational activities  
(e.g., spending time with friends  
clubs, sports, eating out)



WITH NEW ZEALANDERS

Academic activities  
(e.g., studying)



Social or recreational activities  
(e.g., spending time with friends  
clubs, sports, eating out)





Table 7 Perceptions of contact with New Zealanders

**ASIAN STUDENTS (N = 114)**

Equal status	1	2	3	4	5	6
Involuntary	1	2	3	4	5	6
Superficial	1	2	3	4	5	6
Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cooperative	1	2	3	4	5	6

**EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN STUDENTS (N = 66)**

Equal status	1	2	3	4	5	6
Involuntary	1	2	3	4	5	6
Superficial	1	2	3	4	5	6
Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cooperative	1	2	3	4	5	6

### *Perceptions of New Zealanders*

To further appreciate Asian students' experience of being in New Zealand, participants were given a series of items to rate using a seven-point semantic differential scale. They were asked to rate their perceptions of both their co-nationals and New Zealanders on these items. As can be seen in Table 8, there were few differences in the perceptions of the two groups, and both appeared to be perceived moderately favourably. The greatest differences, however, were on the *warm-cold* and the *hard-working- lazy* dimensions.

### *Perceived Discrimination*

Both Asian and European and American students were asked to indicate their agreement with a range of statements relating to attitudes about New Zealanders and their relationships with foreigners. As can be seen in the results reported in Table 9, all international students reported some degree of perceived discrimination. Asian students however, reported higher levels of perceived discrimination as compared to the European and American students in the sample. Significantly, 75 percent of Asian students thought that New Zealanders made fun of foreigners behind their backs. Only 44 percent of the Asian students reported feeling welcome in New Zealand society, and close to 60 percent reported feeling rejected by New Zealanders. Eighty-three percent of Europeans and Americans reported that they felt welcome in New Zealand society, with 35 percent indicating that they felt rejected or treated differently (38%).

Almost twice the number of Asian than European and American students felt that they were not completely accepted by New Zealanders (16% and 5%, respectively) and that New Zealanders had something against them (23% and 9%, respectively). A significantly higher number of Asian students also reported feeling uncomfortable at the way New Zealanders looked at them (26% of Asians and 5% of Europeans and Americans) and that local policies and practices alienated them from locals (39% of Asians and 15% of Europeans and Americans). None of the European and American students reported finding being foreign in New Zealand an unpleasant experience; however, 11 % of the Asian students did so.

Table 8 Perceptions of Asian Co-nationals and New Zealanders

\* = co-national group    ◆ = New Zealanders

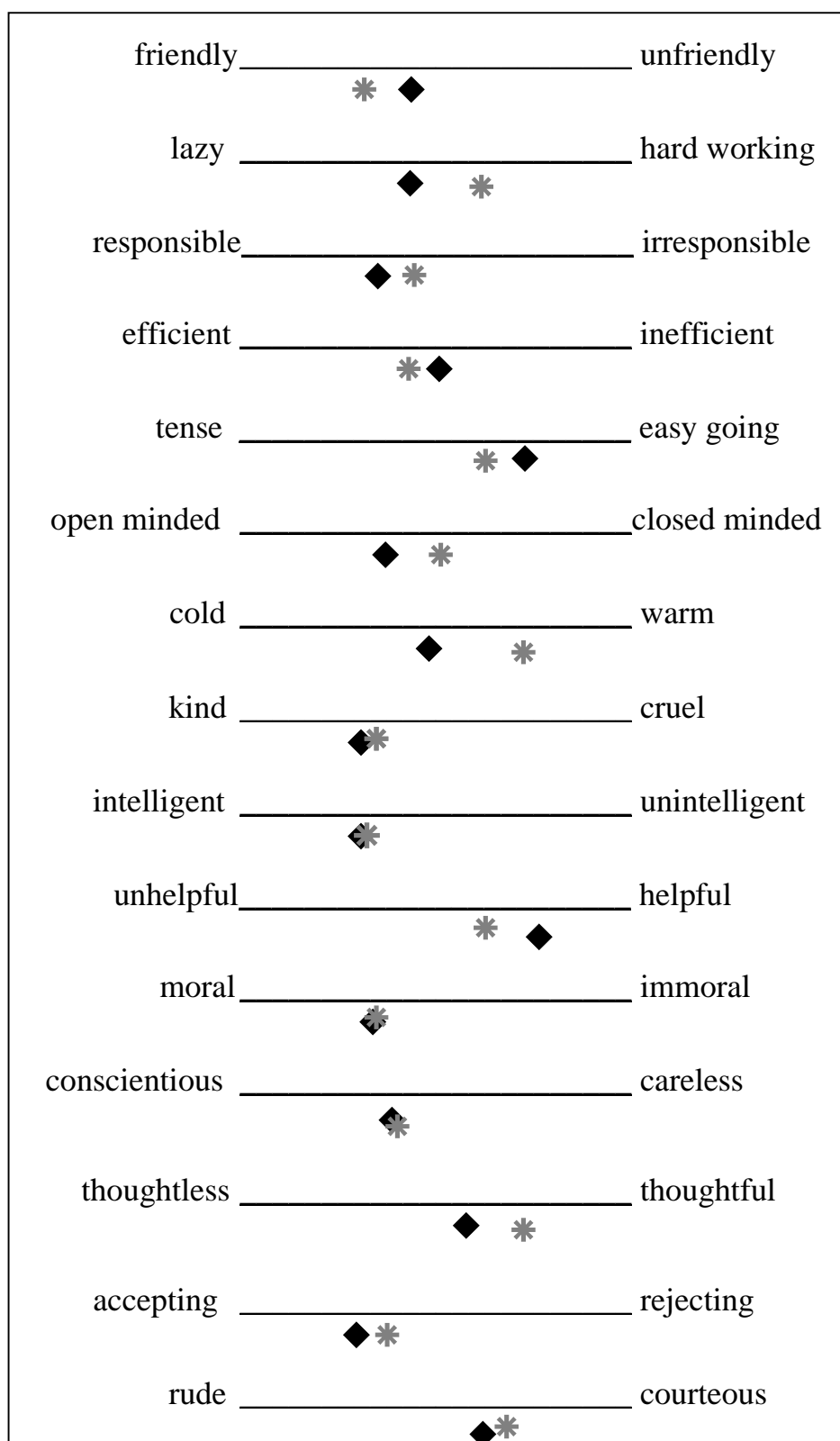


Table 9 Perceived discrimination of Asian and European and American students

Item	Description	Asian students (N = 114)	European & American students (N = 66)
		% Agrees/Strongly agrees	% Agrees/Strongly agrees
1.	Most New Zealanders would like to become better acquainted with foreigners.	36.8%	39.4%
2.	I think New Zealanders make fun of foreigners behind our backs.	75%	56%
3.	On the whole, New Zealanders would prefer fewer foreigners in the country.	43.9%	39.4%
4.	I always feel welcome in New Zealand society.	43.9%	83.3%
5.	Foreigners are usually treated differently than locals.	52.6%	50.0%
6.	New Zealanders have generally favourable attitudes towards foreigners.	49.1%	59.1%
7.	I never feel rejected by New Zealanders.	39.5%	65.2%
8.	New Zealanders are very open to foreign influences.	36.0%	48.5%
9.	I don't feel I get treated differently by New Zealanders because of my nationality or ethnicity.	42.1%	62.1%
10.	Foreigners can never really feel at home in New Zealand.	28.9%	10.6%
11.	Often I feel that I am not wanted in New Zealand society.	17.5%	4.5%
12.	New Zealanders are very tolerant of foreigners.	41.2%	60.6%
13.	I sometimes feel discriminated against here because I am from overseas.	32.5%	16.7%
14.	I sometimes feel I get singled out because I am from overseas.	35.1%	21.2%
15.	I never feel completely accepted by New Zealanders.	41.2%	16.7%
16.	I sometimes feel New Zealanders have something against me.	22.8%	9.1%
17.	I sometimes feel uncomfortable by the way New Zealanders look at me.	26.3%	4.5%
18.	Local policies and practices (e.g., immigration, education) alienate foreigners from locals.	38.6%	15.2%
19.	I often find it unpleasant being a foreigner in New Zealand.	11.4%	0.0%

### *Social support*

Previous research has indicated that social support is an important factor for successful cross-cultural adaptation. Generally, there are two types of social support: instrumental and emotional. Instrumental social support is assistance with practical problems, whereas emotional support is that which assures someone that they are loved and valued.

In assessing sources and availability of social support for international students in New Zealand, it was found that all the international students participating in the research made use of social support from various sources. Family was the most significant source of

social support, which was followed by friends. Support from the community and institutions were the least used means of social support and did not differ significantly from each other in terms of use.

Participants were also asked a series of questions about their perceptions about the availability of social support. These results suggest that instrumental social support (i.e., assistance with practical problems) was more readily available to students than emotional support.

Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 10, there were differences in the perception of the availability of social support between the Asian and European and American students. Overall, the Asian students perceived less availability of social support, particularly in the area of emotional support.

**Table 10 Perceived availability of social support**

Percentage reporting that “no one will do this for me” ( $N = 147$ )

		Asian	European/ American
I	Give you directions on how to get around	0	2.1
E	Listen and talk to you when you feel lonely	5.7	2.1
E	Spend quiet time with you when you do not feel like going out	23.9	6.3
I	Help you interpret things you don't really understand	8	0
I	Tell you things that can and cannot be done in New Zealand	19.3	2.1
I	Show you how to do something you didn't know how to do	5.7	2.1
E	Visit you to see how you are doing	21.6	4.2
E	Accompany you when you need someone for company	8	6.3
E	Comfort you when you feel homesick	15.9	4.2

Note: “I” indicates instrumental social support and “E” indicates emotional social support.

### **Adaptation of Asian Students in New Zealand**

The previous sections have considered aspects of the international student experience, in particular, features of their interactions with and perceptions of New Zealanders. In this section student adaptation to life in New Zealand is examined. While adaptation can be understood in a number of ways, in this research the basic distinction is made between psychological and sociocultural adaptation. The first refers to broad psychological well-being and satisfaction, that is, how students feel and feel about their life in New Zealand. The second type of adaptation refers to their social skills or competence, the ability to “fit in, or negotiate interactive aspects of the new cultural environment.

Psychological and sociocultural domains of adaptation are important for everyone, and while the two aspects of adaptation are distinct, they are inter-related. In addition to the fundamental psychological and sociocultural components of adaptation, academic adaptation or how well the students are managing the academic demands of their experience in New Zealand was assessed. Together, these three domains broadly describe student adaptation.

In this section four questions about adaptation in New Zealand are considered.

- *How well do students adapt, psychologically, socioculturally, and academically?*
- *Which factors predict adaptation?*
- *How does adaptation vary over time?*
- *How does the adaptation of international students compare with peers in their home country and with New Zealand students?*

There are a number of ways to assess adaptation, but the same measurement scales were used in each of these studies. Psychological adaptation has been assessed with a standard measurement for depression. This is common in research with international students as depression has been identified as a common symptom of “culture shock.” Sociocultural adaptation has been measured with the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), again commonly used in research with individuals who cross cultures. As can be seen from items in the tables that follow, this scale asks students to rate the amount of difficulty they experience in performing everyday social activities. Finally, academic adaptation is measured by a scale that was constructed for this research. The scale was modelled on the SCAS but specifically applied to the academic domain. In this case students indicate the amount of difficulty they experience in performing common educational activities.

#### *How well do students adapt?*

Tables 11-13 report findings from international university students in New Zealand.

Table 11 reports the most difficult academic activities for international students. As can be seen from the table, activities that relate to language proficiency seem to be particularly difficult, e.g. making oral presentations and doing all of the assigned readings. It is also noteworthy that students from Asia find these activities more difficult than their international peers from Europe and North America. This is not surprising as Asian students also rate their English proficiency lower (2.6 vs. 3.4 on a 4-point *poor to excellent* scale).

Table 11 Academic adaptation of international students

% rating the task as greatly or extremely difficult (N = 150)	
Making oral presentations	25.3 *
Doing all the assigned reading	24.2 *
Expressing my own opinions to lecturers	22.5 *
Memorising relevant material	18.2 *
Getting necessary feedback from lecturers	17 *
Identifying what the lecturer thinks is important	16.2*
Taking tests and exams	14.9 *
Understanding what is expected of me	14.1
Writing assignments	13.6 *
Thinking critically	12.8 *
Taking notes during lectures	11.0 *
Managing my academic workload	10.8 *
Studying	10.1 *

\* Asian students reporting the task significantly more difficult than European and American students.

Table 12 Sociocultural adaptation of international students

% rating the task as greatly or extremely difficult (N = 150)	
Dealing with bureaucracy	26.9
Dealing with unsatisfactory service	19.5 *
Making friends	16
Talking about yourself and your experiences	14.9 *
Understanding cultural differences	12.8 *
Dealing with someone who is unpleasant	11.3*

\* Asian students reporting the task significantly more difficult than European and American students.

Table 12 lists the everyday activities that students find most difficult. Dealing with bureaucracy presents the greatest difficulty, and this converges with a related study which suggests that dealing with immigration issues (i.e., student visas) is problematic for 1 in 5 students. In the social domains, however, dealing with conflict or dissatisfaction appears

problematic (e.g., unsatisfactory service, unpleasantness) as well as managing some cultural and communication issues. Although Asian students found a number of these activities more difficult than did European and American students, the overall level of difficulty expressed by the research participants is very similar to that found in other groups of cross-cultural travellers, including New Zealand students abroad, expatriate business people and aid workers on overseas assignments (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).<sup>2</sup>

Table 13 Psychological adaptation of international students

% rating the experience as occurring “a good part of the time” or “most of the time”  
(N = 147)

I feel sad	11.6 *
I have crying spells	2.7 *
I have trouble sleeping at night	17.0
I get tired for no reason	20.4
I find I am restless and cannot keep still	18.4 *
I feel more irritable than I used to be	9.6 *

\* Asian students reporting the experience occurring significantly more frequently than European and American students

Table 13 reports students’ responses on a measure of psychological adaptation. While there is some evidence of depressive symptoms and a portion of these are more common in Asian than European and American students, on the whole, the responses appear similar to those found in other groups of cross-cultural travellers.

#### *Which factors predict adaptation?*

##### *Expectations and experiences*

There is strong evidence that students’ expectations are “undermet,” that is, their expectations are significantly more positive than their subsequent experiences. The research also indicates that the gap between expectations and experiences is related to overall adaptation. Specifically, greater discrepancies are associated with poorer psychological and sociocultural adaptation after arrival in New Zealand. In addition, the quality of experiences during the early period of stay in New Zealand relates to later social and academic adaptation.

##### *Contact*

International students engage in contact with a wide range people while in New Zealand, and this research examined the quality and quantity of contact with three groups: people from their home country (co-nationals), other international students, and New Zealanders. On the whole, the findings indicated that contact with co-nationals did not exert significant influence on the adaptation process; however, contact with New Zealanders and other international students was important. More frequent and more satisfying contact with New Zealanders and other internationals was related to better psychological, social and academic adaptation.

##### *Perceptions*



How international students view New Zealanders and how they believe that New Zealanders see them can be an important aspect of the adaptation process. In this instance, although Asian students held moderately positive stereotypes of New Zealanders, these perceptions were unrelated to psychological and sociocultural adaptation. However, students who perceived greater discrimination experienced more social and academic adjustment problems.

#### *Social Support*

Social support is known to assist people to cope with difficulties and challenges, and in this regard the situation for international students is no different from others who are dealing with significant life changes. As discussed previously, international students rely mainly on family and friends for their support, and both instrumental and emotional social support predicts better psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

#### *Personality*

Personality traits exert influence on how one adapts to life in a new culture, and there is some evidence that successful adaptation can be predicted by traits measured before students depart for study abroad. In this research, neuroticism was related to post-arrival psychological and academic adaptation problems. When personality and adaptation are measured concurrently rather than longitudinally, a clearer and stronger pattern of inter-relationships emerge. Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness are associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Openness is related to better sociocultural adaptation, and Neuroticism is linked to more psychological and sociocultural problems.

#### *Other factors*

Although not the focus of the current project, two additional factors emerged as significant predictors of adaptation. Self-reported language proficiency predicted better psychological, sociocultural and academic adjustment. This is a common finding and has also been observed in samples of international students in the United States. Stress was also an important predictor of adaptation, and not surprisingly, higher levels of stress were strongly related to psychological and sociocultural adaptation problems.

#### *How does adaptation vary over time?*

Psychological, sociocultural and academic adaptation was assessed before departure from home country and then twice after arrival in New Zealand. As discussed previously, the first assessment was done approximately 65 days before departure, the second approximately 96 days after arrival in New Zealand and the third approximately 184 days after arrival. The results (based on paired samples) showed that:

- Students were more depressed after arrival in New Zealand than before departure from their home countries, but that there was no significant difference between the first and second post-arrival testings.
- Students experienced more academic difficulties in New Zealand than at home, but there were no significant changes from the first to second post-arrival assessments.
- There were no differences in sociocultural adaptation over the three testings.

The pre-departure and post-arrival differences in psychological well-being have been observed in other groups of cross-cultural travellers, including New Zealand aid workers abroad.

#### *How do Asian international students in New Zealand compare with their co-national, other international, and New Zealand peers?*

In order to explore unique characteristics of the international educational experience, comparisons were made between: a) Malaysian students in New Zealand ( $N= 48$ ) and in Malaysia ( $N = 47$ ), b) Asian ( $N = 132$ ) and European and American ( $N = 79$ ) international students in New Zealand, and c) Asian international students ( $N = 130$ ) and New Zealand students ( $N = 267$ ) in New Zealand. The results showed that:

- There were no significant differences in either the psychological or sociocultural adaptation between the two groups of Malaysian students.
- Asian students reported more social and psychological difficulties than European and American students.
- There were no significant differences in psychological adjustment between Asian and New Zealand students; however, as would be expected, New Zealand students reported fewer sociocultural difficulties.

Differences in the sociocultural adaptation between native and overseas born residents are commonly found in international research, and some studies also show differences in psychological adaptation. These results highlight the adaptive capacity and resilience of the Asian students in New Zealand as they compare favourably with their co-national and New Zealand peers. The results also suggest, however, that international students from Europe and North American are even more resilient and cope somewhat better with the cross-cultural transition.

### **Summary of Findings**

All students undergo a process of psychological, social and academic adaptation as part of their university experience. This study aimed to look specifically at the experiences of Asian students in New Zealand. In order to achieve this objective, longitudinal and cross-sectional studies were undertaken using a range of samples of international and domestic students. The key findings of the project were:

- Students' pre-entry expectations generally exceed their post-arrival experiences.
- Larger discrepancies between expectations and experiences were associated with psychological and sociocultural adaptation problems.
- All international students desire more contact with New Zealand students than they have, but this is particularly true for Asian students.
- All international students experienced some level of discrimination, but this was greater in Asian students.
- The factors associated with successful adaptation were: realistic expectations, language proficiency, more frequent and more satisfying contact with New Zealanders, availability of social support, lower levels of stress and perceived discrimination, and extravert, agreeable, open, conscientious, and less neurotic personality traits.
- Despite the presentation of some psychological and social adjustment problems, overall, Asian students adapt well to being in New Zealand.

### **Recommendations**

The results of the research support a range of recommendations that can be applied in a practical manner to facilitate the successful adaptation of international students,

specifically those of Asian origin, to New Zealand. These recommendations will be discussed in relation to the pre-entry and post-arrival periods taking cognisance of the student and institutional perspectives.

At the pre-entry stage, institutions should ensure that recruitment materials present a realistic portrayal of student life in New Zealand. By doing so, not only does this address the issue of diminishing the gap between expectations and experiences, it may also lead to more efficient student self-selection based on informed choice.

Institutions can also work with students to provide cross-cultural training or orientation programmes prior to their arrival in New Zealand. It would be useful for these programmes to include New Zealand culture-specific training (both New Zealand culture in general, as well as the New Zealand educational environment) and stress and coping skills.

English language proficiency is critical to successful sociocultural, psychological and educational adjustment. Institutions should consider raising English proficiency requirements, as well as exploring alternative means for assessing English proficiency for academic purposes. Students require both general English proficiency skills (e.g., to promote sociocultural adjustment), as well as language skills specific to educational settings.

Efforts to assist students to adapt successfully to New Zealand must be sustained through the post-arrival period. Cross-cultural training and orientation, as discussed above, should continue to be provided. Opportunities to involve New Zealanders in the programme at this stage, through initiatives such as the Excell Programme, or a buddy/mentoring system, are likely to increase the effectiveness of the training. In addition to enhancing social and educational skills, these programmes promote increased intercultural understanding for all participants through contact that is voluntary, pleasant and works towards a shared goal.

Continued training and support for the improvement of language skills are essential for students to maintain successful adaptation across psychological, social and academic domains. Institutions should provide, or ensure that, their students have access to remedial language courses such as English for academic purposes and conversational English after arrival in New Zealand.

Student needs go beyond educational training and skills development. They also extend to the interpersonal domain. Significant issues in this area include discrimination, contact and social support.

Perceived discrimination is not an objective indicator of actual discrimination, but the two are highly related. Although training for international students can assist them in understanding and accurately interpreting the behaviours of New Zealanders and possibly diminish their perceptions of discrimination, programmes designed to raise intercultural awareness for New Zealanders would also be useful. Programmes for both staff and students should address issues pertaining to cultural differences and effective methods for

communicating across cultures. This, in turn, would lead to a more inclusive environment for international students.

Another way to reduce discrimination is to promote equal status, voluntary, intimate, pleasant, and cooperative contact between New Zealanders and international students. The contact may be formal or informal, and both buddy systems and residential programmes are known to be particularly effective. Institutions should consider implementing these and similar types of initiatives.

Contact can also be important for establishing avenues for social support. As students rely on family, friends, institutional and community sources of support, schools and universities can create infrastructures to improve the accessibility and increase the availability of support. One way this can be achieved is through institutional resources such as student services that provide instrumental support in the form of basic information and guidance. Another way is by creating the opportunities for students to establish social support networks in the same way that institutions can promote intercultural contact. Institutions would be advised to ensure adequate student services and to implement programmes that provide occasions for intercultural contact for international students.

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> As discussed in the accompanying document on the administration of the grant, due to the Asian economic downturn a range of additional samples were added to the original proposal to ensure that the major research objectives could be met.

<sup>2</sup> Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23, 659-677.

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