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# AN EXPLORATION OF CHALLENGES FACED BY NINGXIA STUDENTS TO ADAPT WITH ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL LIFE IN MALAYSIA



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**RUI ZHANG**



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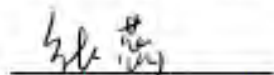

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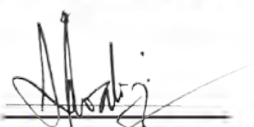
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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the challenges face by Ningxia students studying abroad in Malaysia. It was aim at to reveal the four-stage impacts of their learning experiences and in specific to reveal the adaptation process of the Ningxia students who were studying in Malaysia. The four stage impact are academic adaptations, life adaptations, social adaptations and comprehensive adaptations. The study employed a qualitative paradigm, the 10 participates were chosen by snowballing sampling, an open interview outline was used. The researcher informally observed the students during the interviews. A set of semi-structured questions was used during the interviews. Interviews were transcribed. Coding and constant comparison were adopted during data analysis. The findings show the sub-themes of challenges were the fear and uncertainty; the ability of adaptations; academic challenges; cultural shock. The four-stage impacts revealed clearly the cultural shock, the continuous adjustments the Ningxia students had to go thru during their study in Malaysia. However, the responses of them towards the shocks and adjustments brought them to form new perspectives and eventually adopted a new attitude to function more effectively in the world. The findings also showed that the students went through four processes during their adaptations while studying and learning in a local institution. As a result of the adaptations processes, the students gradually adopted a change in them by becoming more flexible, become more open and become less defensive. These elements of processes allowed them to adopt a new attitude in life and lead them to success in their study in a different culture setting as compared to the home country.



## **PENEROKAAN CABARAN YANG DIHADAPI OLEH PELAJAR NINGXIA UNTUK MENYESUAIKAN DENGAN PERSEKITARAN AKADEMIK DAN KEHIDUPAN SOSIAL DI MALAYSIA**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti cabaran yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa dan mahasiswi dari Ningxia China semasa melanjutkan pelajaran di Malaysia. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti empat tahap implikasi pengalaman pembelajaran dan secara khususnya untuk menjelaskan proses adaptasi mahasiswa dan mahasiswi yang melanjutkan pelajaran di Malaysia. Empat tahap implikasi yang dikaji dalam kajian ini adalah adaptasi akademik, kehidupan, sosial dan adaptasi menyeluruh. Kaedah kajian yang digunakan adalah kaedah kajian kualitatif yang mana 10 responden dipilih melalui kaedah 'snowballing' dengan temubual soalan terbuka. Pengkaji membuat pemerhatian semasa temubual dijalankan dengan responden. Temubual dijalankan menggunakan soalan separa struktur dan semua hasil temubual direkodkan oleh pengkaji. Hasil kajian direkodkan dan dibandingkan analisis data. Penemuan menunjukkan sub-tema cabaran adalah ketakutan dan ketidakpastian; keupayaan penyesuaian; cabaran akademik; kejutan budaya. Empat tahap cabaran menunjukkan dengan jelas bahawa mahasiswa dan mahasiswi dari Ningxia China mengalami cabaran dalam kejutan budaya yang penyesuaian yang berterusan selama melanjutkan pelajaran di Malaysia. Walau bagaimanapun respon mereka terhadap tahap cabaran tersebut membawa mereka kepada perspektif yang baru disamping mengadaptasi sikap yang baru agar boleh memberikan hasil yang terbaik dalam kehidupan seharian mereka. Dapatan kajian juga memperlihatkan bahawa responden mengalami proses cabaran ini sewaktu belajar di institusi pengajian. Hasil daripada proses adaptasi tersebut, mahasiswa dan mahasiswi mudah menyesuaikan diri, fleksibel, dan menjadikan mereka lebih berfikir terbuka serta kurang kerisauan. Elemen yang terkandung dalam proses ini membolehkan mereka menyesuaikan diri dengan sikap yang baru dalam kehidupan mereka. Selain itu ia menyumbang kepada kejayaan dalam pembelajaran mereka dalam budaya dan persekitaran yang berbeza berbanding di negara asal mereka.





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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Economic globalization accelerates international cooperation and competition among higher education institutions around the world (Shamima, Chinnasamy, Abdullah & Junainah, 2021). The development of education internationalization has become an important strategy in the educational policy of many universities, especially world-renowned universities. The characteristics of education internationalization are more frequently stated in the statements of various countries and international universities than in the past. Higher education institutions have effectively attracted international students and improved the quality of teaching through preferential policies, such as easier access to visas, full scholarships, and high-paying jobs after graduation (Yang & Liu, 2017). This phenomenon has led to an increase in the educational mobility of students.

In “*The 2020 Strategy for The Development of Advanced Countries (1991-2020)*”, the Malaysian government made it abundantly apparent that Malaysia’s ambitious educational objective is to establish Malaysia as a regional hub for high-quality education. The administration has worked very hard to accomplish this challenging objective. For instance, several Malaysian higher education institutions are making aggressive and efficient efforts to draw as many foreign students to Malaysia as possible (Liu, 2018). Higher education shows have been successfully organised there as well as in China, Brunei, and other countries. The Malaysian government has strategic alliances in place with Sohu, China Education Net, China Education Channel, and numerous more foreign educational channels in China. Higher education institutions from Malaysia have frequently sent teams to international education fairs hosted in China, where they explained enrollment regulations and other topics in an effort to draw in more foreign students (Wang, 2016).

According to the statistics of UNESCO, since the launch of *The National Five-year Plan* in 1996, the total number of international students in Malaysia has soared. In 1996, the total number of international students was 1,296. In 2001, after the completion of the five-year plan, the total number of international students reached 16,480 (Xu & Mei, 2018). By 2015, the total number of international students has increased to 46.5 times that of 1996 (Xu & Mei, 2018). The country plans to receive 200,000 foreign students by 2020, making the education sector a major contributor to the country’s economic growth (Shahar, 2017). International students from all over the world have gathered in Malaysia, and the number is constantly rising.

However, since the reform and opening up, China's economy has grown quickly and the quality of life for its citizens has increased. Studying abroad is no longer as out of reach as it once was, and there are now significantly more international students. In 1978, the number of Chinese students studying abroad was only 860. In 2018, the number was 662,100. A total of 703,500 Chinese students studied abroad in 2019, 41400 more than in 2018, an increase of 6.25%. Totally number of Chinese students studying abroad from 1978 to 2019 was 6560,600. Among them, 1656,200 are studying and researching in relevant stages abroad (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2019).

Table 1.1

*Statistical Table of Chinese students studying abroad since the Reform and Development in 1978*

Year	Number of the students
1978	860
1990	2950
2000	38989
2005	118515
2010	284700
2015	523700
2016	544500
2017	608400
2018	662100
2019	703500

*Note*, form Ministry of Education, PRC, 2019

It can also be seen an upward trend in the number of Chinese higher education students studying in Malaysia. According to Juwai (2017), there were 3,800 more mainland Chinese students studying in Malaysia in 2012 than there were in 2016, demonstrating the country's educational attraction. Through favourable policies such as easy access to visas, full scholarships, and well-paid jobs after graduation, Malaysian higher education institutions have been able to increase the number of overseas students



they accept and improve the quality of their instruction. Students' educational mobility has increased as a result of this problem. Of reality, the last ten years have seen an increase in mainland Chinese students studying abroad due to the country's strong economic expansion.

According to China's Ministry of Education, the number of students choosing to study abroad increased dramatically from roughly 284.7 million in 2010 to 608.4 million in 2017. (China's Ministry of Education, 2018). In this regard, the rise in the number of students studying in Malaysia can be viewed as a sign that more Chinese mainland students are choosing to pursue higher education abroad.

However, China's regions don't all share the same track record when it comes to sending students abroad to study. In particular, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, an inland province in northwest China, accounted for 13.9 percent of the country's population in 2017, with an actual population of 6.82 million.

According to the Ningxia Government's statistical information from 2015, there are 2,403,890 Muslims in the province, approximately 36.05% of the province's total population (Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region Statistics Bureau, 2015). From 2016 to 2017, the number of higher education students in Ningxia studying abroad only increased from 1,038 to 1335, among which, the average number of freshmen from Ningxia going to Malaysia is about 500 each year (Zhang, 2018). That is to say, Malaysia is one of the main recipient countries of Ningxia's overseas students. Due to the close cross-cultural and social exchanges between Chinese and Malaysian students,



international students from all over the world have started congregating in Malaysia, and the number of them is steadily increasing. (Ma, 2017).

The majority of the population in both Malaysia and Ningxia is Muslim, however despite this similarity, it is natural to wonder how Ningxian students will adapt to and integrate into the Malaysian socio-cultural landscape. On the one hand, Ningxian non-Muslim students also must adapt to Malaysian culture, which is more diverse than their home culture, and the society is predominantly Muslim. As challenged to that, Muslim students in Ningxia may still face some challenges due to the differences in rituals and daily life between the two countries (Zhang, 2018). This study will develop an empirical investigation on how the socio-cultural context has an impact on the tertiary-level students from Ningxia, and how they adapt into the everyday life of Malaysia when staying in the country.

## 1.2 Research Background

With the number of Chinese higher education students studying in Malaysia increasing to about 15,000 in 2016 (Juwai, 2017), almost four times as many as four years ago, it should take note of the reasons why more Chinese students are choosing Malaysia as their goal for further education. Chinese families are generally aware of the educational collaboration between China and Malaysia, leading Chinese parents and students to assume that Malaysia's higher education opportunities are a reliable option. The following are the key factors: (1) a multilingual environment (Kashiwa, 2022); (2) perfect education laws and regulations (Li & Wang, 2022); (3) study abroad facilitation





policy (Liu, 2016); (4) preferred international degree certification and abroad study fees (Yang, 2020).

Particularly for those families that have the financial constraints to send their children into some developed countries directly, higher education opportunities tend to be more economic. And at the same time, the private education sector in Malaysia provides the 'licensing courses' and the 'courses of the pair' with the higher education institutions from developed countries, such as the '3+0', '2+1', and '1+2' programs. This motivates many parents and students to consider studying in Malaysia as a buffer to select further education opportunities in other countries when completing the course in Malaysia (Yang & Huang, 2017).



descent, many Chinese students come to the country to study because Malaysia not only possesses some cultural affinities with China, but also because of its colonial past, Malaysian society has been heavily influenced by British culture. It has drawn students from China to Malaysia to explore the cohabitation of similarities and the differences in other cultures. Many Chinese Muslim students have also been inspired to live and study there. Numerous Chinese Muslim students are interested in moving to Malaysia due to their religious advantages (Zhou & Zhang, 2007). The Belt and Road Initiative, which was launched in 2012, has helped raise Chinese residents' awareness of the value of intercultural dialogue and collaboration in recent years.

Against this background, many families have chosen to send their children to Malaysia to further their education in order to help them develop themselves and to



support both economic and social development (Meng, 2017). The socioeconomic standing of Ningxia families has an impact on the popularity of Ningxia students studying in Malaysia. Ningxia has the 22nd-highest per capita disposable income among China's 31 provinces in 2017 at 20,561.66 RMB (about RM12,139.36) (Bank of China News, 2017). This fact indicates that when sending children to study abroad, families will prioritise their financial situation. In this aspect, Malaysia is an attractive destination due to its stunning natural surroundings, social stability, and affordable living costs, which draw not only Chinese Muslim students but also other ethnic Chinese students who reside in the province.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

The process of studying abroad presents Ningxia students, originating from Ningxia, China, with a myriad of challenges as they endeavor to adapt to the academic environment and social life in Malaysia. These challenges stem from pronounced disparities in environment, religion, food, climate, academic structures, language, and culture between their home country and the host country.

Studying abroad can be a transformative experience for students, offering opportunities for personal growth, academic advancement, and cross-cultural understanding. However, this journey is often accompanied by numerous challenges, particularly when students come from distinct cultural and educational backgrounds. It is reported that students from Ningxia studying in Malaysia have advantages and disadvantages. If they successfully overcome the difficulties they face abroad, their



personality maturity can be highly enhanced, and cross-cultural experience are able to broaden their worldview (Huang, 2015). However, if they are unable to adjust to life in Malaysia, the overseas experience may become a emotional strain and the gains in academic and social competence will be greatly reduced. Therefore, that is the reason why this study seeks out for.

As Zhang (2018) reports, students from Ningxia face challenges when studying and living in Malaysia, one of which is the difference in climate. Ningxia is an inland climate, drought and little rain. In contrast, Malaysia's rainforest climate may be less suitable for Ningxia students. Rather than a natural problem, it is still social-culturally constructed. On the one hand, the climate changes the dietary habits, requiring the students getting used to it. On the other hand, the changes of climate challenge the students about how to take care themselves and overcome life difficulties.

Malaysian food is sweet, sour and spicy, and Muslims do not eat pork and often eat with their hands, so many students are not quite adapted to Malaysian eating habits, especially girls (Zhang, 2015). There are also Chinese restaurants in Malaysia, but due to the lack of food in traditional ways, or the change of taste due to localization, Chinese food is no longer authentic, so Ningxia students also face the biggest challenge in terms of diet.

When asked about the difficulties encountered in learning, speech ranked first in class. Ningxia students showed that they would be tense when speaking, for fear of saying the wrong thing due to the limitation of language level (Peng, 2020). Therefore, the library is naturally one of the more difficult techniques to adapt to. Education is an





unusual and important activity of intercultural adaptation guidance. However, as the entrance education of Malaysian University is based on Malaysian speech, supplemented by English, it is very difficult for Ningxia students who have zero starting point to understand these contents (Kuang & Wu, 2019).

In addition, Muslim students in Ningxia may find it challenging to acclimatize to the local religious milieu due to the different religious practices between the two countries (Zhou et al, 2008). Malaysia is a microcosm of a complex world composed of many races, languages, religions and cultures. The constitution of Malaysia guarantees that each ethnic group has the right to use its own language and culture, which is conducive to the existence and consolidation of ethnic identity (Hu, 2018). Almost all of the most important forms of civilization in the world today can be found in Malaysia. For example, the Malays believe in Islam, and the Chinese in Malaysia have preserved the Confucian culture better than the Chinese, while the Indian worship of God Shiva and Sakyamuni is a symbol of the ancient and great Indian civilization (Yang, 2020). Malay people value religion above all else, which is quite different from the current situation of Chinese people having no religious belief, thus increasing difficulties for Ningxia students' social and cultural adaptation.

According to Han (2016), studying overseas is “a significant transitional event that brings with it a considerable amount of accompanying stress, involving both confrontation and adaptation to unfamiliar physical and psychological experiences and changes”. It is acknowledged that cross-border education further intensifies the complexities of adaptation culturally, socially, and psychologically. This is an important issue which should be addressed. Cross-border education changes the socio-





cultural environment for which the tertiary-level students should adjust themselves to fit the new environment. The scholars stated that different types of adjustment including psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, which can be used to describe the journey across cultural boundaries. As they stated, “psychological adjustment, then, is interwoven with stress and coping processes whereas sociocultural adaptation is predicated on culture learning” (Yu, 2019). According to Wang’s (2016) research, isolation from the culture of the host country, homesickness, and language barriers all contribute to psychological issues including depression and dropout rates among Ningxia overseas students. Due to the highly challenging features of cross-cultural experiences for international students. The educational experiences and self-change of the Ningxia learners should be thoroughly examined in this study.



challenge for overseas students, mainly due to raw personal experiences, geopolitical, and social-emotional factors. As Andres (2017) addressed, culture shocks faced by foreign students are highly related to education shocks as it is more likely to convey into sense of isolation from the local academic system. Furthermore, Maha (2018) finds that the learning shocks could also trigger language shocks because failure of communication using a foreign language may demotivate the students from language learning. In the study by Andres (2017), a particular role shock is specified as the confusion in role, role expectations, and values. If one person faces the role shock, they may feel stressed or disordered because the new socio-cultural settings require them to replace the familiar self by new and unfamiliar roles. If this shock is not adjusted properly, the one may further face crisis of self-identity, role loss and role discontinuity. The existing evidence offers the reference to query if all the shocks are applicable in





the case of the Ningxia Students studying in Malaysia. In correspondence to that, we can further ask the question about how they have overcome the shocks and adjustments?

While many studies have assessed the intercultural adaptation among university students from China who study in developed countries such as the case of the America (Wang, 2016), much less works pay attention to developing countries as the host countries for Chinese students. Given that stance, this study narrow down the scope of research subjects from general Chinese students to the students from Ningxia in order to gain more significant data. In this sense, by taking Ningxia as an example of less developed part of China, our findings could more precisely explain the ethnographic characteristics at a provincial level. Furthermore, it was revealed by (Yossuck, Panyadee & Ek-lem (2019) that China is unequally developed whereby simply seeing all the students as a whole may fail to address the socio-economic impact on the development of intercultural adaptation between the students from different region of China.

This study will address both the issues and gaps and provide valuable information on the learning experiences among the Ningxia students studying in Malaysia. It is also the major interest of the researcher as she is one of the participants who could contribute to data collection. It is timely to address issues within those of Ningxia students. The next section explain the purpose of the study.





## 1.4 Purpose of the Study

The learning experiences of Ningxia students study abroad in are exciting and meaningful and transform a person. Experience change provides opportunities or transformations and has values in learning. The main purpose of the study is to understand the learning experiences of those Ningxia students who had endured certain challenges and overcome barrier in academic and in social life during their study in Malaysia. Their adaptations process from all aspects had impacted their outlook towards life. These had put them in the forefront of self-reflection and re-evaluation of their beliefs and lives and lead them to adopt new attitudes and change to become a better arson to fit into the world.



## 1.5 Objectives of the Study

This research's primary goal is to investigate the learning experience among Ningxia as international students studying abroad. The study aimed to investigate their challenges in the academic and also social life. Also, seek to reveal their adaptation process and how those lead them to adopt new attitudes in life. Thus, several specific objectives were established. The objectives are as followed:

1. To discover the various types of challenges face by Ningxia students studying abroad in Malaysia.
2. To determine the four-stage impact (shock, adjustment, response and outcomes) of the Ningxia students while studying in Malaysia.





3. To understand their adaptations in four areas such as academic adaptations, life adaptation, cultural adaptation and comprehensive adaptations among the Ningxia students.
4. To explore the students' adaptation process to their world view.
5. To suggest a new framework for the foreign students who come to Malaysia to study in term of contribution to the new knowledge.

## 1.6 Research Questions

Based on Problem Statement, this study aims to discovery three research questions as followed:

1. What is the challenge faced by Ningxia students studying in Malaysia?
2. How were the four-stage impacts of (a) Shocks (b) Adjustment (c) Responses (d) Outcomes when facing the challenges while studying in Malaysia?
3. What were their adaptations in different aspects while studying in local institutions such as academic adaptations, life adaptations, cultural adaptations, and comprehensive adaptations?
4. How did the students' adaptations lead to the world view?

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

### **1.7.1 The Stress-adaptation-Growth Dynamic**

This study adopted different theories and model as the basis for the investigation. The model of Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic which was developed by Kim (2017) provided the general view of both the problem-oriented and the learning/growth-oriented domains while facing stress or challenges especially in a diverse cultural background. Kim (2001), elaborated in more details, stress leads the one to experience self-organization and self-renewal, and the stress experiences would cause a temporary setback. In response to that, the one needs to develop new habits, attempting to take action and respond to the surroundings in order to overcome the difficulty. As a result, the one may accumulate capacity in a long-term, and improve perceptual and intellectual complexity to manage oneself in the changed environment.

### **1.7.2 Oberg's Theory**

Oberg's theory about cultural shock that assumes the overseas experiences are linear developed from Honeymoon to Adjustment (Fitzpatrick, 2017), was also adopted. This model identifies that a person's adaptive experiences could be spiral. In other words, it is possible that the one can progress towards adaptive growth, but also return from growth to stress. More importantly, this model is more suitable to explain cross-cultural or inter-cultural adaptation from a long-term perspective, which overcome the weakness rising from adjustment that only focuses on the short-term changes in the new



cultural context (Anderson, 1994). In this way, we cannot only discover the overseas experiences from the fresh students in Malaysia, but also address the long-term impacts from the experienced Ningxia students.

The model views cultural shocks as an inevitable stage embedded in a person's foreign experiences. There four phases in the model. The first one is a Honeymoon in which the one feels new, exciting, and fascinating on the initial period when staying in the hosting country. After that, there is a Crisis because the one begins to experience cultural shocks due to the perceived the cultural contrasts between entertaining and living at home. Then, the one works to accept and change oneself in the Recovery Phase. On the last phase, Adjustment, the one develops new ability to perform in the new setting.

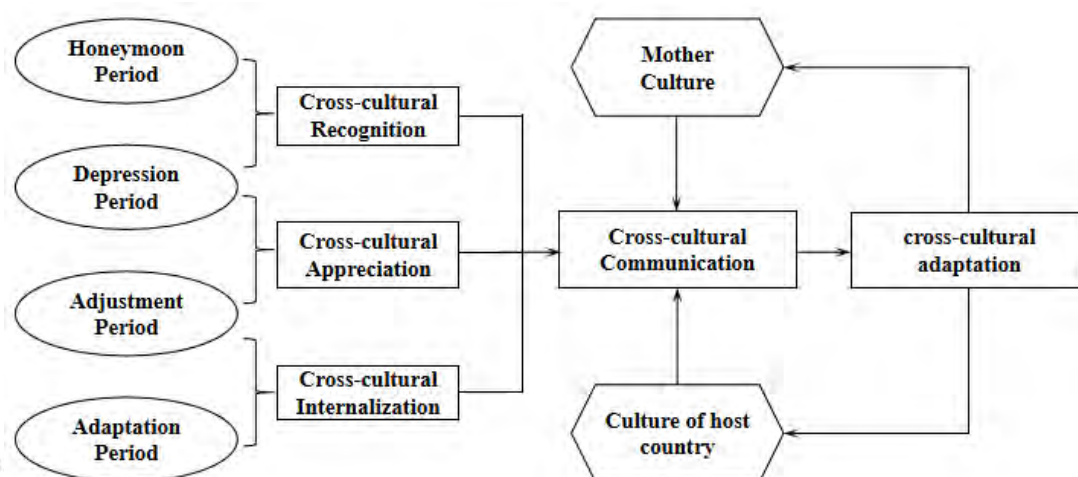


At the macro level, there are two societies: the society of origins and the society of colonization, both of which contain sociological, political, economic, and cultural elements. On the other hand, characteristics of persons (e.g. personal traits, cultural identity, and language competency) and features of the circumstance (e.g. cultural distance, amount of life changes and social support) comprise the micro-level of determinants. By understanding the features of this model, we can discover the case of the Ningxia students staying in Malaysia in more details and depth.

The model is divided into four phases. The first is the honeymoon, in which you feel fresh, exciting and fascinating during the initial stages of your stay in the host country. After that, there is a crisis as one begins to experience culture shock due to perceived differences in the family and host culture. Then, accept and change yourself



during the recovery phase. In the last stage, adjustment, one develops new abilities to adapt to the new environment. In combination with Yan Wenhua's (2008) concept of Cultural Sensitivity and Ober's (1960) Four Stages of Culture Shock, the cross-cultural adaptation process of Ningxia overseas students in Malaysia is described (Peng & Wu, 2019), as shown in Figure 1 below:



*Figure 1.1.* Cross-cultural adaptation process of Ningxia overseas students in Malaysia (Yan, 2008)

In sum, the theory of Kim (2017) consists of the process Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic is found to be apt to explain the challenges and the adaptation processes under investigation (Chen & Zhu, 2020). Oberg (1960) and Zhang (2018) results on culture provided justification that culture shock was more dominant in the issues being studied. The U-shape Curve by Oberg (1960) was deemed appropriate as it formed the basis for the exploration of the four stage of social impacts o international students studying overseas. Chapter 2 will provide a detailed explanation of the theories and models used as the theoretical framework.

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

Taking into account the study's focus and the analysis of the literature, a conceptual framework is developed. As this study is qualitative research method, therefore there is no examination into variables. However, an exploration of the phenomenon was guided by four major research questions which are:

1. What is the challenge faced by Ningxia students studying in Malaysia?
2. How were the four-stage impacts of (a) Shocks (b) Adjustment (3) Responses (4) Outcomes when facing the challenges while studying in Malaysia?
3. What were their adaptations in different aspects while studying in local institutions such as academic adaptations, life adaptations, cultural adaptations, and comprehensive adaptations?
4. How did the students' adaptations lead to the world view?

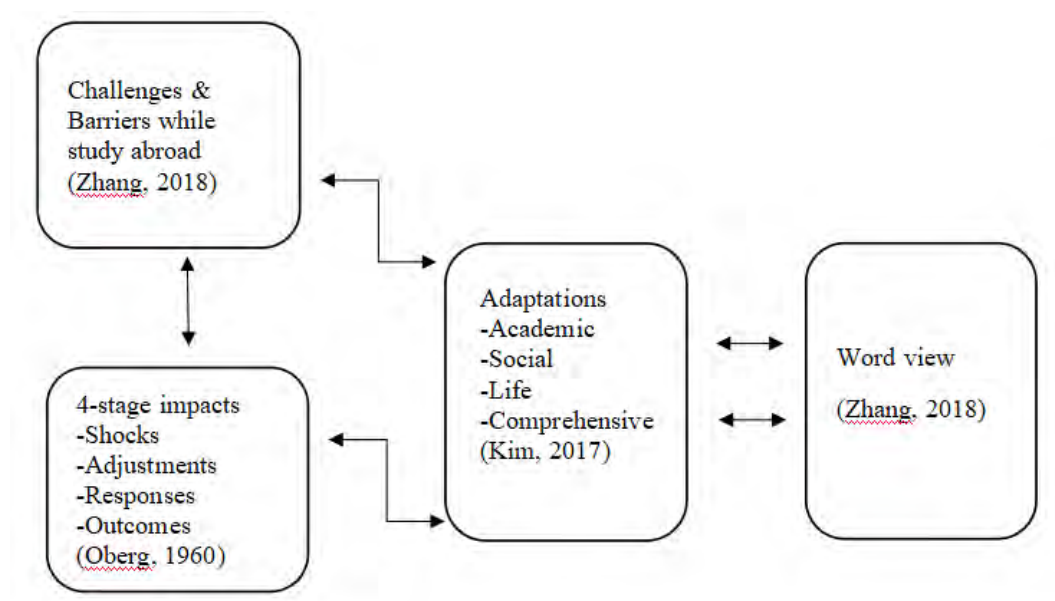


Figure 1.2. Conceptual Framework

## 1.9 Significance of the Study

This study could benefit to both the existing knowledge internationalization research mainly on the issues of cross-cultural phenomenon. The study contributes significant to the theory of stress, growth and of cross-cultural study and a wide range of stakeholders for cross- individual changed as holistic from the psychological perspectives.

### 1.9.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, the current study which covers psychological and socio-cultural aspects of adaptation and personal development acknowledged the interdisciplinary of the research topics across psychological, anthropological and sociological domains. This study combines the theoretical models of cross-cultural adaptation, especially Kim's the stress-adaptive-growth Dynamic and Oberg's U-shape Theory, with the application of Ningxia students' cross-cultural adaptation studies in Malaysia. A theoretical framework for the cross-cultural adaptation of Ningxia students studying in Malaysia is proposed by qualitative analysis method (Chen & Xu, 2020). This theoretical framework provides an exploratory empirical study for the construction of cross-cultural adaptation models for international students.

In addition to traditional interview methods, the researchers also tried to use a variety of data collection methodology based on network communication tools, such as email, wechat, QQ, Tencent Meeting etc., and maintained long-term communication



and contact with students in Ningxia through pen chat, video chat and voice chat. Practice has proved that these diverse data collection methods are not only helpful for researchers to develop and preserve a long-lasting, cordial relationship with the pupils who were interviewed, but also help researchers to understand the ideological status and emotional changes of the interviewed students longitudinally in a certain period of time, so as to carry out dynamic investigation and grasp of the students' adaptation process. These research methods provide more alternative methods for the longitudinal investigation of intercultural communication or adaptation of Chinese overseas students.

### 1.9.2 Practical Significance



Questions about cross-cultural adjustment have a significant impact on the academic achievements and quality of life of international students. Students frequently experience varied degrees of culture shock while they live and study far from home in a new sociocultural setting (resulting in psychological and life stress). Foreign research have demonstrated that inability to cross-culturally adapt is likely to cause academic failure, retreat, or deficiency in students, as well as lead to psychological and physiological difficulties or behavioral anomalies with catastrophic repercussions.

The development of students' cross-cultural competence is also not given enough priority by Chinese and Malaysian educational institutions, and there are still not enough organized, efficient, and targeted cross-cultural training initiatives. Promoting and insuring students' healthful advancement and personal growth still has a lot of space for improvement. At present, there are numerous research on foreign







students in the areas of policies and regulations, teaching mode, teaching and curriculum management, and there are few systematic empirical studies on cultivating students' cross-cultural communication and adaptability.

From the practical perspectives, studies on international students abroad have been focused on its language barriers local scenario or in other countries. However, this study looked into the depth of the change of an individual so it provides value information for the recruitment agencies representing Malaysia higher education, policy makers in the education sectors, administrators in higher learning institutions, educational leaders and the relevant stakeholders.



While this study is expected to benefit the academics and the society at the same time, there are some limitations that should not be simply overlooked. One limitation rises from the reflexivity of the researcher. Any researchers have the awareness of the influence of themselves on the research subjects or the research topic, and the same time their research experiences have the impact on how the researcher developed the study (Gilgun, 2008). Related to this study, the information of the overseas and adaptation experiences from the Ningxia students would not truly reflect the reality about the subjective feelings, opinions among the students, but the filtered knowledge produced from the researcher's worldview. This affects the development of literature review, methodologies, and the way to interpret research findings. Especially in a research with qualitative research methods, it may be still uncertain that how the



researchers practice reflexivity and integrate it into their work (Probst, 2015). Consequently, it increases the difficulties to assess if the outcomes or conclusions.

Another limitation of the study is the ethical issues in cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural research's ethical concerns the protection or ethical assessment of human subjects, secrecy, instruction for Institutional Review Boards (IRB), and customs governing informed consent (Clark, 2012). As we discussed, overseas students can hold a state that is either positive or negative. when they adapting themselves into a hosting country (Kim, 2001). We may expect to interact with some students who have the 'vulnerable' experiences linking to cultural shocks in Malaysia. If the researcher inappropriately interacts with them, it may intensify the negative feelings or emotions. More than that, while the study is to discovery the topic of cross-(inter-) cultural adaptation, the researcher self must have the capacity of cross-(inter-) cultural adaptation, not only for research intervention purpose but also for being sensitive enough to perceive the vulnerability that should not be involved in the study process, particularly in the methods used to collect data.

## **1.11 Operational Definition**

### **1.11.1 Cross Cultural**

"It refers to a method and activity that studies groups with two or more different cultural backgrounds and reveals the similarities and differences of people's social behaviors, psychological characteristics and their development rules under different social



conditions through the comparison of different cultures, so as to provide a basis for understanding the universality of social psychological phenomena” (Behrnd & Poraelt, 2012). In this context it is between the Chinese Muslim from Ningxia as compare to Muslim in local setting.

### **1.11.2 Adaptation**

“Adaptation refers to the change of one or both fixed cultural patterns in the process of continuous contact between two groups with different cultural patterns” (Wang, 2015). In the context of this study, the adaptation means the Ningxia students’ ability to fit into Malaysia’s new environment and being able to adapt and adopt in certain forms of differences between China and Malaysia’s different cultures within a society.

### **1.11.3 Cross-cultural Adaptation**

“The definition of cross-cultural adaptation is the dynamic process by which The similarities and different culture between individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environment, establish or re-establish and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Kim, 2001). It emphasizes how the students could integrate a unique aspect of their own culture into the sociocultural setting of the host nation. In this context of study, it expects to see what and how the Ningxia students develop new things for their experiences in Malaysia.



#### 1.11.4 Academic Adaptation

Academic adaptation is the propensity for people to overcome challenges and produce successful learning outcomes, also known as academic adaptability, which mainly includes four factors: learning style, technologies, atmosphere, and both mental and physical well-being (Tian, 2001). In this context of study, it means a certain level of adjustment or modification in the learning and teaching processes as differences are presume in the policy, curriculum, methods and classroom management in the context of higher learning institutions.

#### 1.11.5 Social Adaptation

Social adaptation is a process in which behavior patterns and main concepts change with the social environment, but in the process of change, individuals or groups need to constantly adjust their own state to adapt to the change of the whole social environment (White, Burleson & Knight, 2016). In this context of study, it means Ningxia students can take appropriate solutions, and when they encounter difficulties and setbacks, they also have the ability of self-adjustment and psychological relief.

#### 1.11.6 Life Adaptation

Life adaptation mainly includes common difficulties in life, such as natural environment, diet, language, rhythm of life and so on (Wen et al, 2014). In this context



of study, life adaptation means the time Ningxia students live in the Malaysian cultural environment affects their understanding of Malaysian social culture. The longer Ningxia students live in Malaysia, the better their language and social skills will be. The more social support they can get, the more comfortable and relaxed they will feel in daily life.

### 1.11.7 Comprehensive Adaptation

Comprehensive adaptation refers to the acquisition of a set of social life style composed of symbols, norms, values and material objects in the original cultural context, and to guide their emotion, behavior and cognition (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). In this context of study, it involves the adjustments not only in the social and life, but more on the feelings and reflection towards the differences of values, beliefs, and ways of life in a new environment. Thus, it leads to qualitative change such as new attitudes or self-transformation.

### 1.11.8 Cross-border Tertiary Education

“The movement of people, programme, providers, curricula, projects, research and services in tertiary (or higher) education across national jurisdictional borders” (World Bank, 2007). It is a subcategory of the internationalisation of education and can be a part of business endeavours, academic exchange programmes, and projects including development assistance.





### 1.11.9 Adjustment

“The reduction or satisfaction of (short-term) drives” (Anderson, 1994). This concept could be different from adaptation because the latter more refer to the way making the one fit to the foreign context in a long-run perspective. In this sense, the students could make continues effort of adjustments to adapt themselves in a hosting country. In this context of study, it expects to see what and how the Ningxia students make the effort to change themselves to fit the environment of Malaysia.

### 1.11.10 Cultural Shock



A situation in when “being confronted by a new culture...individuals find themselves faced with challenges to their deeply held beliefs and understandings which in turn pose potential threats to their sense of identity and sense of well-being” (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). As social and cultural factors are always interwoven together, in this study, we do not differentiate the term of cultural shock from social shock. In this context of study, it expects to see what the specific aspects of cultural shocks in the Ningxia students’ experiences in Malaysia.

### 1.11.11 Education Shock

“Experiences of acute frustration, confusion and anxiety experienced by some students, who find themselves exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods, bombarded





by unexpected and disorienting cues, and subjected to ambiguous and conflicting expectations” (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2005). Due to the cultural shocks, education shock normally co-occurs for some of the international students, which may be also a main barrier for the Ningxia students in Malaysia. In this context of study, it expects to see what the specific aspects of education shocks in the Ningxia students’ experiences in Malaysia.

#### **1.11.12 Language Shock**

“One of the less recognized aspects of cultural shock as its emotional impact is not so overtly strong that it could cause great harm or destruction to individuals who experience it” (Fan, 2010). Language difference is key cause of cultural shock when a student starts the life journey in the hosting country. Especially in Malaysia, it has a complex structure of language composition which consists of English, Malay, Cantonese, and so on. As the students from a country with a single language, it may be a main challenge the students from Ningxia to Malaysia. In this context of study, Language shock mean how the students from Ningxia have difficulties, and how they deal with the language problems when they study in Malaysia.

#### **1.11.13 Role Shock**

“The sudden and often dramatic confrontation of unfamiliar roles, or even familiar roles which are played differently in the host country” (Minkler & Biller, 1979). This might





become a socio-psychological barrier for an international student because the role shock can trigger different issues such as for self-identity, self-concept, or self-esteem. In this context of study, it expects to see what are perceived as the difficulties of considering who they are, what they have, and what value they possess among the Ningxia students in Malaysia when they felt shocked or frustrated, corresponding to the three concepts above.

#### 1.11.14 Self-change

Self-change refers to the attempts and efforts made by individuals to change their living habits and behavior. It is the aftermath of comprehensive adaptations. It has the characteristics of consciousness and initiative, it is an important embodiment and beneficial way of individual psychological development and socialization acceleration (Li & Liu, 2004). In this context of study, it requires an individual to take a closer look and life and make an effort to reflect, compare the test the existing assumptions and adapting a new set of rules in life which will bring outcomes in one's life.

#### 1.12 Summary

In chapter one, the researcher discussed the background of the pertinent research issues. The learning experiences among the Ningxia students were exciting and meaningful and the self-changed which led them to be better provide strength to human enhancement cognitively and affectively. Those challenges and those adaptations





among the Ningxia students provide a solid picture of the international students study abroad scenario. The research question focused only on the challenges, the four-stage social impacts and the adaptation process of the students which was anticipated to be worth researching as it is apt and timely as the number of international students into a foreign country is increasing and Malaysia has a vital role to play to be the center of quality education in the region. Chapter two put forth the literature that supports the study.