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SOCIO-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS EXPATRIATES IN AMERICA

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Li Zhao

December, 2010

SOCIO-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

AS EXPATRIATES IN AMERICA

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SOCIO-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
AS EXPATRIATES IN AMERICA

Li Zhao December 2010 49 Pages

Directed by: Tony Paquin, Jacqueline Pope-Tarrence, and John Baker

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This study examined the relationships between international students' ethnic identity, self-efficacy, uncertainty avoidance, and their socio-cultural adjustment. A total of 65 international students (aged 18 to 33 years) from seven countries completed the online questionnaire. As hypothesized, path analyses demonstrated a positive relationship between students' self-efficacy and their socio-cultural adjustment. International students' uncertainty avoidance had a negative relationship with their self-efficacy, but a positive relationship with ethnic identity. The hypotheses that international students' ethnic identity and uncertainty avoidance are negatively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment were not supported in the present study.

Socio-cultural Adjustment of International Students as Expatriates in America

The globalization of the world provides increased opportunities for cross-cultural interactions between countries. Numerous organizations, especially multinational companies, send employees, working as expatriates, to their overseas branches. Universities, like other organizations, are riding the trend of globalization and have been recruiting students from abroad. In the United States, the number of international students at colleges and universities has grown rapidly in recent years. According to the Open Doors Report (2009), which is published each year by the Institute of International Education (IIE), there were 671,616 international students in the U.S. for the 2008/09 academic year, which represents an 8% increase compared to the previous academic year. The increasing number of international students place increased emphasis on colleges and universities to ensure the success of international students' adjustment to local cultures because a lack of adjustment may cause dropout of overseas students. In addition, failure to complete education overseas may lower international students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Also, the families of students who study abroad may be affected both psychologically and financially due to their high expectations on the students that they choose to send abroad with expensive tuition and living fees.

The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationships between international students' ethnic identity, self-efficacy, uncertainty avoidance, and their socio-cultural adjustment. The following sections will discuss the research surrounding the adjustment of expatriate workers, the similarity of these challenges for international students, and the role of ethnic identity, cross-cultural self-efficacy, and uncertainty avoidance in socio-cultural adjustment of international students.

Expatriates Facing Obstacles

Numerous research studies about expatriates have shown that expatriates suffer from changes such as food, language, working/living environment, manners to deal with people and things both work and non-work related (Aycan, 1997; Lueke & Svyantek, 2000; & Young-Chul, 1996). As world business has increased, the demand for expatriates, especially those from management levels, to live and work overseas has also grown. Thus, preparing expatriates to overcome the obstacles that they may confront in foreign countries becomes critical. Lack of adjustment to local culture is a main reason causing expatriates to be unfulfilled with their work and life abroad. Most unsuccessful expatriates tend to be reluctant to interact with host nationals and to participate in local social life, which reduces their commitments to the host countries' culture (Lueke & Svyantek, 2000). Embarrassment, frustration, disappointment, loneliness, together with homesickness may follow expatriates as the length of time staying in a different country increases (Young-Chul, 1996). Suffering from all the psychological feelings and struggling with cross-cultural adjustment, expatriates may fail to fulfill their tasks and, depending of individual personality factors, become depressed. Holopainen and Bjorkman (2005) found positive relationships between expatriates' personal features, which relate to their ability to tolerate stress, and their achievement overseas. Moreover, according to a study by Young-Chul (1996), failure of American and Japanese expatriates overseas was due to lack of motivation to work abroad, which might be affected by one's adaptation to the host culture and other family-related problems. Expatriates living in a different culture far from their own may also need more family support (Aycan, 1997). After the fresh and curious stage of coming into a new country, expatriates may feel

loneliness and homesick, which will affect their work overseas (Flytzani & Nijkamp, 2007). Expatriates may sometimes face family-related difficulties when adjusting to a new culture. For example, expatriates who live alone in a foreign country without their spouse and/or children may experience more psychologically frustration compared with those whose families live with them in the new culture. Once culture-related barriers defeat overseas employees, less-efficiency, dissatisfaction and turnover may follow. Thus, better understanding the difficulties confronted by expatriates in different cultures is important.

Similarity of Challenges for International Students

With the internationalization of higher education, the university becomes an international enterprise where students coming from different countries gather together to pursue knowledge and skills (Richardson & McKenna, 2001). Students from overseas, similar to expatriates stepping into a foreign country differing from their original culture, may also confront those challenges and obstacles discussed above; both in academic work and social integration. For instance, compared with Western cultures, the academic setting in most Asian countries is more teacher-centered. Thus, Asian students often feel embarrassed if the professor stops for them if they miss or fail to understand a point when the professor delivered his or her monologue. Therefore, most Asian international students seem to be "invisible" both in and out of class in America due to the different cultures. And most of them may feel isolated from the host society as they struggle between being invisible and adaptable. Furthermore, international students may confront more barriers because they tend to be both financially and psychologically self-responsible. For example, overseas students have to consider problems such as living

accommodations, transportation, driver's license, and registering for classes. Compared to expatriates, international students tend to experience greater adjustment difficulties and thus more stress (e.g., Richardson & McKenna). The pressure of being independent in a foreign country makes them feel homesick, lonely, and, at times, isolated from host nationals. A research study conducted by Lin and Yi (1997) concluded that many overseas students showed symptoms of depression, which were a result of a lack of concentration, and low motivation with respect to academic study and social life. If an international student cannot handle these challenges and adjust according to the host culture, he or she may tend to less satisfied with their performance and even quit. Therefore, adjustments to cultures of host countries are equally important for international students.

Another consideration is that different cultures have different norms to guide behavior. Thus, the cultural adjustment demands of international students can be substantial due to the differences between their cultural backgrounds and those of the host country. Causal observations indicate that some international students struggling to adjust to a host culture are more successful than others. Past research (e.g., Bandura, 1977) suggests that effective communication with professors and peers in academic settings, and comfortable interactions with local people in social situations are crucial elements in the successful adjustment of international students to the host country culture. Three other factors that have been to shown to potentially affect socio-cultural adjustment are ethnic identity (e.g., Li & Gasser, 2005), self-efficacy (e.g., Mak & Tran, 2001), and uncertainty avoidance (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002).

Ethnic Identity and Socio-cultural Adjustment

Ethnic identity refers to one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors stemming from one's ethnic group. The research and theory of ethnic identity can be traced back to Erikson's (1968) ego identity model. In Erikson's view, each individual undertakes an exploration to discover who and what one might be, and then commits to the identity that was uncovered in the exploration process. Phinney, Cantu, and Kurtz (1997) defined ethnic identity based on an individual's self-identification of belonging to a group with common characteristics. Similarly, Jones (1997) viewed ethnic identity as "…that aspect of a person's self-conceptualization which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent."

Culture tends to influence formation of one's ethnic identity. According to Sheets (1999), ethnic identity is developed in situations where individuals share distinctive common features. Four life-span dimensions of ethnic identity development were described by Sheets: "Content Components", identifying the differences between one's own group and others; "Categorical Ascription", self-labeling one's own group; "Situational and Environmental Context", forming feelings about own and other groups; and "Processual Continuum", continuing manner patterns toward an ethnic group. As a social and psychological process, ethnic identity can be applied to help understand international students' difficulties in adapting to the host culture. International students' ethnic identity, which relate to their socio-cultural adjustment, may be strengthened or weakened through living and studying in a different culture. Surrounded by a new culture, international students may realize the differences between their own culture and

the host country's. Clubs and/or student unions, especially for students from overseas, are developed to label their own "people". As the length of stay increases, the student's feelings about their own and local cultures may change. Behavior patterns may also change depending on the individual's adaptation to host countries. There is some evidence that suggests international students with stable identities are more likely to feel satisfied on life. Phinney and Ong (2007), for example, stated that people with strong ethnic identification are free to choose behaviors and attitudes associated with their ethnic group (such as religions). According to this, international students' ethnic identity may affect their satisfaction with overseas life and even their cross-cultural adjustment (Operario & Fiske, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Worrell, 2007). Moreover, although Li and Gasser (2005) reported a negative relationship between Asian international students' ethnic identity and their contact with local culture they did not obtain any significant results with respect to ethnic identity and socio-cultural adjustment.

Cross-cultural Self-efficacy and Socio-cultural Adjustment

Self-efficacy refers to one's belief and expectancy in successfully achieving a certain level of achievement through his or her actions (Bandura, 1977). According to Jex and Britt (2008), individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to set higher goals, persist in the pursuit of those goals, set even higher goals when initial goals are met, and engage more frequently in task related activities. Comparatively, people with lower self-efficacy are more likely to set lower initial goals, abandon goals when faced with adversity, and then set much lower subsequent goals. Moreover, Fan and Mak (1998) brought up the concept of social self-efficacy by applying Bandura's definition of self-

efficacy into students' self-appraisals in social interactions. Social self-efficacy is considered as the expectancy of students in completing academic work or solving daily problems involving social interaction. Also, Fan and Mak developed a 24-item questionnaire measuring international students' social self-efficacy in order to predict their potential for cultural adjustment in a foreign country. Past research has found out that self-efficacy, including social self-efficacy, is related to students' cognitive abilities, self-regulation, motivation, and adjustment (Harrison, Chadwick, & Scales, 1996; Pajares, 1996; Paunonen & Hong, 2010; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Compared to low self-efficacy people, students with high self-efficacy tend to be more interactive both at work and in life and are more adaptable person when facing changes (Harrison, et. al., 1996). Furthermore, low self-efficacy expatriates are found having more acculturative stress than those with high self-efficacy (Zheng & Berry, 1991). Mak and Tran (2001) found, self-efficacy has an impact on migrant students' success in their university studies and future career seeking. They concluded, based on the self-efficacy theory of Bandura (1977), that cross-cultural self-efficacy is a useful indicator of socio-cultural adjustment.

Uncertainty Avoidance and Socio-cultural Adjustment

Hofstede (2001) defined uncertainty avoidance as the degree to which societal or organizational members attempt to avoid ambiguity and anxiety by depending on rituals, societal norms, behavioral codes, and beliefs. People from a culture with high uncertainty avoidance, such as Japan, prefer structure both in work-related and non work-related situations. They are more likely to avoid risk, which may result in embarrassment and loss of "face". Also, Merkin (2006) found that cultural members with high uncertainty

avoidance tend to use more ritualistic communications and react to face-threatening words or behaviors compared to people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures. In organizational situations, high uncertainty avoidance members tend to be more loyal to their employer, more self-employed, and more task-orientated. In educational environments, students from high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer structured learning situations and expect their teachers to be experts in the field they teach (Hofstede, 2001). Although individual levels of uncertainty avoidance levels within a given culture may vary due to differences in personality or other personal reasons, the distinguishing features of being in the same culture, in general, have few variances. For example, a newly graduated student from Japan, where people are higher on uncertainty avoidance, is more unlikely to make complains when working in an American company. Although each Japanese person like him may vary, the general feature of avoiding "trouble", which refers to uncertainty situations, is seldom altered.

Uncertainty avoidance may be an important factor with respect to international students' cultural adjustments. Students from other countries confront risks during their stay in a different culture. Their degree of discomfort about these strange surroundings may be related to uncertainty avoidance. Ladbury and Hinsz (2009) propose that uncertainty avoidance can predict people's behavior and decision making in risky situations. Therefore, international students with high uncertainty avoidance may be less likely to take advantage of their opportunities for contact with host societies that may result in poorer socio-cultural adjustment.

The Present Study

Based on the literature reviewed above, I formulated a questionnaire to test international students' socio-cultural adjustment, ethnic identity, self-efficacy, and uncertainty avoidance by using a sample of international students from a mid-western university in the United States. In recent years, the university has enrolled over 1000 international students from many different countries. For the 2009/2010 academic year, students from India (30%) comprised the largest subgroup of international students, followed by China (18%), Saudi Arabia (12%), and Vietnam (6.6%). In general, most international students are male (56%; International Student and Scholar Services, 2010).

I proposed that a useful framework for predicting international student's socio-cultural adjustment as expatriates in Western societies would include (a) the international students' ethnic identity, (b) the students' self-efficacy, (c) their uncertainty avoidance level, and (d) students' socio-cultural adjustment. The present study tested the following five hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: International students' ethnic identity is negatively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment.

Hypothesis 2: International students' self-efficacy is positively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment.

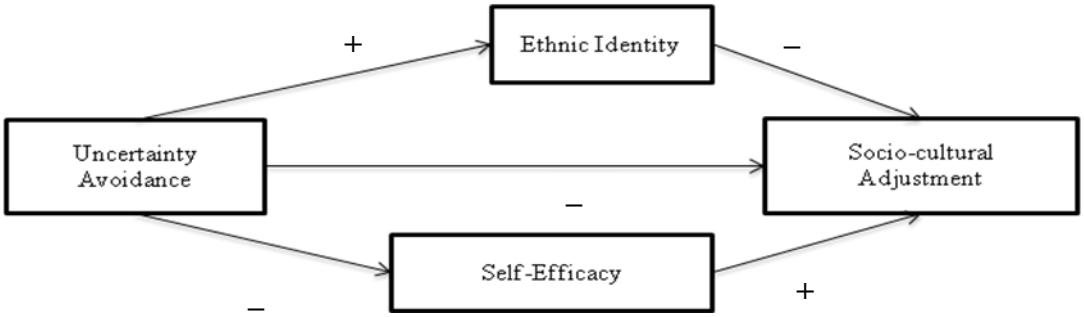
Hypothesis 3: Uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with international students' socio-cultural adjustment.

Hypothesis 4a: International students' uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with their self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 4b: International students' uncertainty avoidance is positively correlated with their ethnic identity.

Figure 1

Hypotheses structure for the present study



Method

Procedure and Participants

Subjects were limited to all international students (both undergraduates and graduates) at a university in the mid-western region of the United States. An email containing a website link to the online questionnaire was distributed to all international students in the university. The survey's purpose, procedure, benefit, potential risk, and the researcher's contact information were included in the email (See Appendix A). The international student email address list was obtained through the membership list of international students provided by the university's International Student and Scholar Services. Each participant was allowed to complete the online questionnaire within two weeks via the website link attached in the email. Participation in the study was absolutely voluntary and anonymous.

A total of 72 international students from nine countries in the university participated in the online survey. Sixty-five of them including 38 (58.5%) females and 27 (41.5%) males who ranged in age from 18 to 33 years (M = 24.29 years, SD = 3.24) completed the questionnaire. By geographical region of origin, 61 (93.8%) of the participants were from Asian countries (i.e., China, Japan, Taiwan, India, South Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia), three (4.6%) were from Saudi Arabia, and one (1.5%) from Turkey. The average length of stay in the U.S. was 24.57 months (SD = 17.22). Most respondents (90.8%) were single (N = 59). Of the married subjects (N = 6), half reported their spouse lived here in the U.S. with them. Most married participants (N = 5) had at least one child, but only two subjects had their children with them here in the United States. The majority (N = 36) of the participants spoke their own first language most

frequently in America, 25 spoke English quite often, and four weighed the two languages equally frequent.

Measurement

Respondents were asked to complete an on-line questionnaire, which was composed of four subsections respectively measuring the international students' socio-cultural adjustment, ethnic identity, cross-cultural self-efficacy, and uncertainty avoidance.

Socio-cultural adjustment. A Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) with 29 items developed by Ward and Kennedy (1999) was used in the study (See Appendix B). Participants were asked to respond to all questions using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*no difficulty*) to 5 (*extreme difficulty*). Scores obtained from the scale indicated the respondents' perceptions when facing difficulties understanding American values and cultures. Sample items included statements such as "Understanding jokes and humors," and "Dealing with people staring at you." The 29-item scale contains two main parts which can be calculated separately. One part measures participants' Behavioral-Adaptation Difficulty with 22 items (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, and 28), and the other part assess the Cognitive-Adaptation Difficulty with 7 items (items 5, 8, 10, 18, 23, 26, and 29). Average scores of the 29 items were used to measure the overall socio-cultural adaptation level. Higher values obtained in the scale indicated greater difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation. In the present study, the overall reliability of the 29-item scale was found to be excellent (α = .97); the 7-item cognitive-adaptation difficulty (α = .94) and the 22-item behavioral-adaptation difficulty (α = .96) were adequately reliable.

Ethnic identity. A 12-item Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measurement (MEIM) Scale, developed by Phinney (1992), was used to asses each participant's perceived ethnic identification (See Appendix C). Participants used a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included statements such as "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group," and "I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group." According to Phinney, the 12-item scale can be viewed as two factors: Ethnic Identity Search (items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10); and Affirmation, Belonging, and Commitment (items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12). The mean scores of the 12 items were used to measure the respondents' ethnic identity level. High scores obtained in this measurement implied individuals' possession of strong ethnic identification. The α for the 12-item MEIM scale in the study was .96, with alphas of .87 and .97 for the Ethnic Identity Search, and Affirmation, Belonging, and Commitment factors, respectively.

Cross-cultural social-efficacy. A 20-item Cross-cultural Social-efficacy Scale for Students developed by Fan and Mak (1998) was used to measure each individual in the study (See Appendix D). Participants responded via a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). Sample items included statements such as "I feel confident asking a lecturer a question," and "I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most people." According to Fan and Mak, the 20-item scale has four subscales: Absence of Social Difficulties (item 1 to item 9), Social Confidence (item 10 to 14), Sharing Interests (item 15 to 17), and Friendship Initiative (item 18 to 20). Each subscale can be calculated separately. The average scores of the 20 items were used in the study to assess participants' cross-cultural social-efficacy level. High scores obtained in this scale

reflected individuals' confidence in social functions in a different culture. The reliability of the 20-item scale was .65 in the present study, with alphas of .95, .84, .95, and .90 for the Absence of Social Difficulties, Social Confidence, Sharing Interests, and Friendship Initiative subscales, respectively.

Uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance was assessed by using the nine questions (See Appendix E) developed in the GLOBE Beta questionnaire. A 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*), was used to respond to each item. Sample items contained statements such as "I believe that societal requirements and instruction should be spelled out in detail so citizens know what they are expected to do." Based on the instruction of the GLOBE Beta questionnaire, the 9-item measurement has two subscales relating to the aspect of uncertainty avoidance: Societal Practices (items 1, 2, 3, and 6) and Societal Values (items 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9). The Societal Practices subscale assesses people's beliefs about the norms and practices in their society. The Societal Values subscale measures people's concerns about the norms and values that should be in their society. The responses obtained on every question were reversed scored. The average of the nine questions was calculated to reflect respondents' uncertainty avoidance level: high scores indicated a higher degree of avoiding uncertainty. In the present study, the alpha for the overall measurement was .69, with alphas of .52 and .55 for the Societal Practices and Societal Values subscales, respectively.

Demographic information. Participants provided their age, gender, marital status, whether their spouse and/or children live here in the U.S. with them, length of stay in the U.S., original country they come from, first language, and language spoken most frequently in the United States (See Appendix F).

Results

Descriptive Statistics/Demographic Factors

Demographic items such as age, gender, marital status, family companion, and length of stay, were used as points of comparison when measuring participants' socio-cultural adaptation, ethnic identity, social self-efficacy, and uncertainty avoidance. Subscales for each variable measurement were used in the correlation tests to precisely display their relationships with each demographic item.

The correlation scores in Table 1 shows that age was significantly correlated with international students' socio-cultural adaptation ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$), Behavioral-Adaptation Difficulty ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$), and Cognitive-Adaptation Difficulty ($r = -.29$, $p < .01$). These relationships were negative, indicating that older international students had less difficulty adapting to American society. The results also showed that students' length of stay was not significantly correlated with their socio-cultural adjustment. However, international students' difficulty in behavioral adaptation was negatively correlated ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$) with their length of stay in the United States. This relationship was negative, indicating that the longer international students stayed in America, the less difficulty they had adapting to American people's social behaviors and perceptions.

Moreover, age was positively correlated with international students' uncertainty avoidance ($r = .26$, $p < .05$), especially their socio-cultural values ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). The students' age was also significantly correlated with their absence of social difficulties ($r = .26$, $p < .01$). These positive relationships showed that the older the international students, the greater their preference for avoiding uncertainty.

Table 1

Pearson correlation between demographic variables and four main variables

	Age	Length of stay
Sociocultural Adjustment	-.32**	-.24
Behavioral-Adaptation Difficulty	-.34**	-.25*
Cognitive-Adaptation Difficulty	-.29**	-.22
Ethnic Identity (EI)	.10	.16
EI Search	.18	.15
Affirmation/Belonging/Commitment	.03	.15
Social Self-Efficacy	-.04	.04
Absence of Social Difficulties	.26**	.13
Social Confidence	-.10	-.01
Sharing Interests	-.12	.01
Friendship Initiatives	-.14	-.05
Uncertainty Avoidance	.26*	-.22
Sociocultural Practices	.11	-.26*
Sociocultural Values	.34**	-.12

**$p < .01$, *$p < .05$

In addition, differences related to sex, marital status, and presence of spouse were investigated to help better understand international students' adjustment in America. As shown in Table 2, females and singles had slightly more difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment compared with males and married people, respectively. Married international students whose spouse and/or child lived with them here in the United States showed a little less difficulty in adjusting themselves to American society. Females, singles, and

married people who lived with their spouse and/or child here in the U.S. also showed slightly stronger ethnic identity than males and married people whose spouses were not here (Table 2).

Table 2

Demographic differences in means of the four main variables

	Female	Male	Single	Married	Spouse Here		Child Here	
					Yes	No	Yes	No
Sociocultural Adjustment	2.38	2.30	2.41	1.71	1.55	1.86	1.23	1.86
Behavioral-Adaptation Difficulty	2.27	2.26	2.32	1.72	1.58	1.86	1.32	1.86
Cognitive-Adaptation Difficulty	2.50	2.34	2.51	1.70	1.52	1.86	1.14	1.86
Ethnic Identity (EI)	3.32	3.10	3.24	3.08	3.49	2.67	3.24	2.67
EI Search	3.11	2.88	3.02	2.90	3.27	2.53	2.90	2.53
Affirmation/Belonging/Commitment	3.53	3.31	3.45	3.26	3.71	2.81	3.57	2.81
Social Self-Efficacy	3.61	3.65	3.64	3.47	3.56	3.37	4.19	3.37
Absence of Social Difficulties	4.22	4.28	4.15	5.19	5.19	5.19	6.50	5.19
Social Confidence	2.97	3.28	3.16	2.57	2.40	2.73	3.10	2.73
Sharing Interests	3.91	3.67	3.88	3.11	3.56	2.67	3.83	2.67
Friendship Initiatives	3.33	3.36	3.38	3.00	3.11	2.89	3.33	2.89
Uncertainty Avoidance	5.73	5.45	5.58	5.94	5.76	6.13	5.69	6.13
Sociocultural Practices	5.69	5.51	5.58	5.92	5.92	5.92	5.88	5.92
Sociocultural Values	5.78	5.39	5.58	5.97	5.60	6.33	5.50	6.33

Note. Total $N = 65$ including Females ($N = 38$), Males ($N = 27$); Singles ($N = 59$), Married ($N = 6$).

The mean scores for international students' social self-efficacy reflected that males scored slightly higher than females, especially on factors such as Social Confidence,

Absence of Social Difficulties, and Friendship Initiatives. Furthermore, females and married students who lived here with their families showed a bit more preference for avoiding uncertainty in American culture. The results of independent t-tests (Table 3) indicate that marital status significantly affected international students' socio-cultural adjustment ($t = 2.39$, $p < .05$). However, the differences in the average scores of the four main variables in accordance with gender, presence of spouse, and presence of children were not statistically significant, respectively.

Table 3

Independent sample t-test: demographic differences in the four main variables

	Female Male (Gender)	Single Married (Marital Status)	Spouse Here (Family)	Child Here (Family)
Sociocultural adjustment	t = .46	t = 2.39*	t = -.72	t = -1.68
Ethnic identity	t = 1.26	t = .52	t = .94	t = .52
Self-efficacy	t = -.18	t = .52	t = .16	t = .63
Uncertainty Avoidance	t = 1.16	t = -1.24	t = 0	t = -.07

*$p < .05$

Testing the Research Hypotheses

Path analysis was used to test the hypotheses; however, correlation analysis was also used in the present study to examine the potential relationships between the four measurement scales, subscales, and demographic variables.

Correlation analysis

Table 4 displays the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the four main variables. Correlation analysis shows that international students' socio-cultural adjustment was significantly correlated with their social self-efficacy ($r = .47$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2 which stated that international students' self-efficacy is positively related to their socio-cultural adjustment was supported. Hypotheses 4a stated that international students' uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with their self-efficacy was also supported with r (63) = -.22, $p < .05$. Moreover, hypothesis 4b posited that international students' uncertainty avoidance is positively correlated with their ethnic identity was supported in the study with r (63) = .23, $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 1 stated that international students' ethnic identity is negatively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment. This hypothesis was not supported in the study with r (63) = .18, $p < .05$. International students' ethnic identity was not negatively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment, but was positively correlated to their adjustment in a different culture. Hypothesis 3 posited that Uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with international students' socio-cultural adjustment. This hypothesis was not supported in the present study with r (63) = -.09, $p < .05$.

Table 4

Means, standard deviation, and correlations among measured variables

	M	SD	2	3	4
1. Socio-cultural adjustment	2.35	.72	.18	.47**	-.09
2. Ethnic identity	3.22	.70		.12	.23*
3. Self-efficacy	3.62	.78			.22*
4. Uncertainty Avoidance	5.62	.58	.23*	-.22*	---

Note: $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$; $N = 65$

Furthermore, each of the four factors contained in the Cross-cultural Social-efficacy Scale, which was used to assess international students' self-efficacy, was found to be significantly correlated with socio-cultural adjustment (Table 5).

Table 5

Correlations between socio-cultural adjustment and the subscales of self-efficacy

	Socio-cultural Adjustment
Absence of Social Difficulties	-.69**
Social Confidence	.55**
Sharing Interests	.67**
Friendship Initiatives	.48**

Note: $^{**}p < .01$

Also, correlations of the scores obtained from the subscales for Social Self-efficacy and Ethnic Identity exhibited several significant relationships (Table 6). International students who scored high on socio-cultural values, which is a subscale of uncertainty avoidance, tended to have stronger ethnic identity ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). However,

international students who had higher scores on socio-cultural practices, which is the other subscale of uncertainty avoidance, had less social self-efficacy ($r = -.31$, $p < .05$), especially on social confidence ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$).

Table 6

Correlations of the subscales scores for uncertainty avoidance, self-efficacy, and ethnic identity

	Socio-cultural Practices (UA)	Socio-cultural Values (UA)
Self-efficacy (SE)	-.31*	-.09
Absence of Social Difficulties	-.12	-.11
Social Confidence	-.33**	-.09
Sharing Interests	-.23	-.06
Friendship Initiatives	-.01	.06
Ethnic Identity (EI)	.07	.33**
EI Search	.06	.37**
Affirmation/Belonging/Commitment	.07	.27*

Note: $p^{**} < .01$, $p^{*} < .05$.

Path analysis

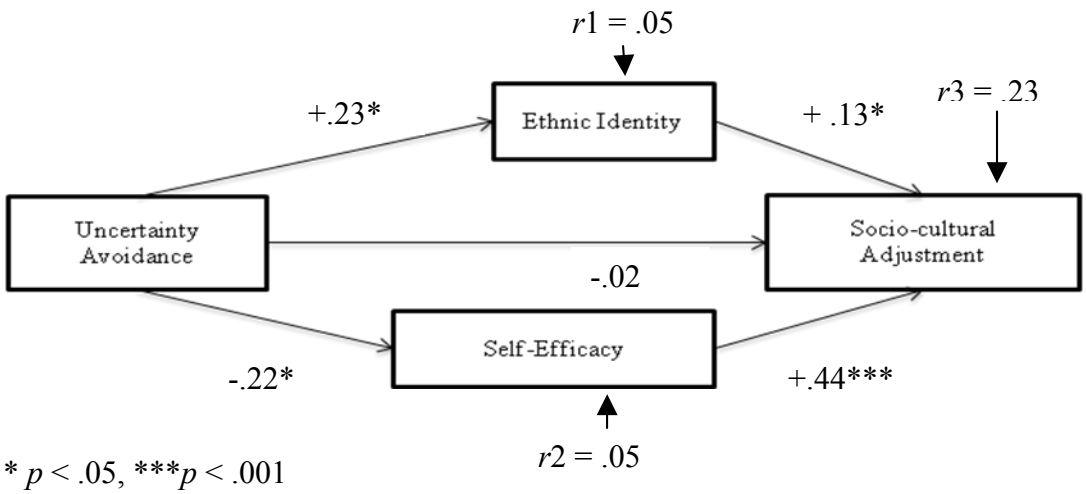
Path analysis was run in three stages to test the hypotheses in the present research. First, ethnic identity, self-efficacy, and uncertainty avoidance were regressed on socio-cultural adjustment to assess their direct effects. Next, uncertainty avoidance was regressed on ethnic identity to test Hypothesis 4b. Then, uncertainty avoidance was also regressed on self-efficacy to assess Hypothesis 4a.

Hypothesis 2 which stated that international students' self-efficacy is positively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) was supported in the

present study (Figure 1 & Table 7). Hypothesis 4b poised that International students' uncertainty avoidance is positively correlated with their ethnic identity ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$), and Hypothesis 4a stated that International students' uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with their self-efficacy ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$) were both supported in the study.

Figure 2

Path analysis graph



* $p < .05$, ***$p < .001$

According to the path analysis graph, international students' ethnic identity was positively correlated with their socio-cultural adjustment ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 which posed that international students' ethnic identity is negatively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment was not supported. Also, Hypothesis 3 which stated that uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with international students' socio-cultural adjustment was not supported in the study. International students' uncertainty avoidance had no significant relationship with their socio-cultural adjustment ($\beta = -.02$, $p < .05$).

Table 7

Path analysis regressions

		b	*SE b*	*β*	*R square*
Step 1	(Constant)	1.76	.42		
	Ethnic Identity	.18	.13	.18*	.032
Step 2	(Constant)	.43	.50		
	Ethnic Identity	.13	.12	.13*	
	Self-Efficacy	.42	.10	.45***	.231
Step 3	(Constant)	.59	.97		
	Ethnic Identity	.13	.12	.13*	
	Self-Efficacy	.41	.11	.44***	
	Uncertainty Avoidance	-.03	.15	-.02	.232

Note. * $p < .05$, ***$p < .001$; $R^2 = .03$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .20$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$); $\Delta R^2 = 0$ for Step 3.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 predicted that students' ethnic identity is negatively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment. The results from both the correlation analysis and the path analysis revealed that there was a positive relationship between the ethnic identity of international students and their socio-cultural adjustment. This result is not consistent with Li and Gasser (2005) stating that no significant relationship was found between Asian students' ethnic identity and their socio-cultural adjustment (r = -.04, *ns*). In their study, they concluded that the no-relationship might result from the social support that their sample of Asian students received from ethnic networking (i.e., social gatherings, student unions, and small groups from same city). The networking among their own ethnic groups helped the students overcome difficulties in the process of socio-cultural adjustment. However, in the present study, non-Asian students were also involved, which may have impacted the results and made it different from what Li and Gasser obtained in 2005. Another possibility for the different result obtained in the present study may be because the university from which the current sample was drawn has a short history of enrolling international students. In the university, the enrollment of international students greatly increased only since the academic year of 2008. The lack of experience with international students may result in less networking activities organized within the same ethnic groups by the university. Without the opportunity for students to retreat into these same-culture groups, they may be eager to have more contact with their professors, American classmates/roommates, and local communities after school to enlarge their social circle. Also, local American's interest in cultures from different countries (i.e.,

international festivals, home stay, and holiday invitations) may accelerate international students' socio-cultural adjustment.

In accordance with Mak and Tran (2001), Hypothesis 2 stated that international students' self-efficacy is positively correlated to their socio-cultural adjustment. This hypothesis was supported, indicating that the higher self-efficacy (absence of socio difficulties, social confidence, sharing interest, and friendship initiative) that international students possess, the more successful they are adjusting to a different culture. One possible explanation for this is that international students with a greater expectation of academic achievement, personal growth, and future career, tend to have higher self-efficacy. The more international students expect to achieve when studying abroad, the more attention that they will pay to adjusting themselves to local culture, which may reduce the difficulties associated with adapting to American society.

Hypothesis 4a predicted that international students' uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with their self-efficacy. Both simple correlation and path analyses carried out in the present study supported this prediction. This suggests that international students who have higher preference for avoiding uncertainty tend to have lower expectations in being successful in a new culture. For example, many international students, especially Asian students (i.e., Chinese, Taiwanese, and South Koreans), return to their own countries immediately after they graduate from American universities. This phenomenon may be because these students know, maybe before they come to study in America, that they will have a better career path in their own countries where there is less uncertainty. Moreover, international students with higher scores on the Societal Practices subscale of uncertainty avoidance had lower scores on social self-efficacy (Table 6).

High scores on the Societal Practices indicate international students' preference for their own society's beliefs about the norms and practices. This finding shows that international students who scored high on the Societal Practices may prefer life in their own countries and tend to have low expectation of achievement when studying in America.

Hypothesis 4b predicted that international students' uncertainty avoidance is positively correlated with their ethnic identity. The results based on both of the two analyses revealed that there was a positive relationship between the two variables. These results indicate that internationals students with a higher tendency for avoiding uncertainty have more perceptions, feelings, and behaviors originating from their ethnic group. Furthermore, according to the correlation analysis, international students with stronger ethnic identity had higher scores on the Societal Values subscale of uncertainty avoidance (Table 6), which measures people's concerns about the norms and values that should be in their society. This finding indicates that the stronger the sense of being a member of an ethnic group, the more that international students are concerned with what their society's norm and values should be.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with international students' socio-cultural adjustment. Both the correlation analysis and the path analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between the two variables. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported in the present study. This result may, in part, be due to a lack of variability as the majority of the participants were from Asian countries (i.e., China, Japan, India and South Korea), which uncertainty avoidance levels tend to be high. However, although there was no direct effect of uncertainty avoidance on adjustment, the results suggest that ethnic identity and self-efficacy may mediate an

indirect relationship between the two variables. Hypothesis 4a and 4b were proved in the present study that international students' uncertainty avoidance was negatively related to their self-efficacy and positively related to their ethnic identity, respectively. Furthermore, international students' self-efficacy and ethnic identity were both proved to be positively related with their socio-cultural adjustment. In sum, these findings indicate that internationals students with higher avoidance for change tend to have lower expectation of achievement and have more difficulties in cultural adjustment; they also tend to have higher ethnic identity and have fewer difficulties in socio-cultural adjustment.

Also, the simple correlation analysis conducted in the present study showed that the individual differences such as age and length of stay had some relationship with international students' socio-cultural adjustment, but only age and marital status showed significantly correlations with the students' socio-cultural adjustment (Table 1, 2 and 3). Specifically, these findings show that older international students and married students tend to have less difficulty adjusting to American culture.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the present study. First, the small sample size used in the study may arouse argument. According to Kline (1998), while the desirable sample size for a path analysis is to have a 20 to 1 ratio for the number of subjects to the number of model parameters, a realistic sample size is a 10 to 1 ratio. However, if the ratio is less than 5 to 1, the estimates may be considered unstable. In the present study, there were six parameters. So the desirable sample size for the study is $N = 120$ and the realistic sample size is $N = 60$. Therefore, according to these guidelines, the sample size for the present study while small ($N = 65$), was stable.

Second, all the responses were collected based on self-report. The questionnaire in the study was distributed through email containing a website link. It is possible that some participants paid little attention or even provided inaccurate information when completing the self-report questionnaire. Another problem might be the method of collecting data. In the present study, only one method, self-report online questionnaire, was used to collect data. For future study, other methods such as interviews, paper-pencil questionnaires, or observations should be adopted to ensure more stable data.

Third, the findings in the present study may not generalize to all international students in America. The samples were selected from only international students in a particular area (a mid-western university in the United States), and the majority of the participants were Asian international students. Therefore, for future study, various populations (e.g., international students from other countries, immigrant students, etc.) should be included, which may further verify the findings of this study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study focused on investigating the influential factors that affect international students' socio-cultural adjustment by looking into the relationships of one aspect of each dimension: ethnic identity, self-efficacy, and uncertainty avoidance, respectively. The findings of this study revealed that international students' self-efficacy and ethnic identity is positively related to their socio-cultural adjustment. Uncertainty avoidance appears have an indirect impact on adjustment. Specifically, uncertainty avoidance is negatively correlated with the students' self-efficacy, and positively correlated with ethnic identity, and both of these variables are related to adjustment. This study demonstrates that there are factors that influence

international students' socio-cultural adjustment; as such, universities may consider enhancing their orientation programs and support services to address these factors and thereby, help international students better adjust themselves to the society and culture in the United States. For example, the university should persistently connect international students with American students and/or families as early and often as possible in order to develop a sense of belonging in a social network in American society. These methods may help international students lower their uncertainty avoidance level, arouse their expectation of achievement, encourage their ethnic identity, and as a result, reduce their difficulties in adjusting American culture.

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Appendix A

Email to Potential Participants and Assent Page

Dear International Students,

You are being asked to participate in a study that will investigate participants' adjustment to living in the USA. Please read the following material carefully. It describes the purpose of the study, the procedure to be used, risks and benefits of your participation, and what will happen to the information that is collected from you. This study is being conducted through Western Kentucky University and has been reviewed and approved by the Western Kentucky University Institutional Review Board. You must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate.

1. *Nature and Purpose of the survey:* This study is to examine the relationships between international students' ethnic identity, self-efficacy, uncertainty avoidance, and their socio-cultural adjustment. The data will be used to further understand the obstacles to adjust to local culture.

2. *Explanation of Procedures*: Your participation in this study will require you to take 10 to 15 minutes to fill out the online questionnaire.

3. *Discomfort and Risks*: The risks of participation appear to be small. There is, however, always a slight chance that an item could cause some discomfort. Please leave any item blank if answering it bothers you.

4. *Benefits*: You may gain a better understanding of the obstacles that facing you during your study abroad experience. Also, you may gain a sense of having helped improve the experience of future international students by providing data that will be used to help understand the factors influencing international students' socio-cultural adjustment. Participants may request a copy of the complete thesis from the Principle Investigator.

5. *Confidentiality*: Your identity will be completely anonymous. There will be no way for anyone to identify who completed which questionnaires. The data collected from you will be combined with data collected from other people. The data gathered will be used to answer the research hypotheses of this study.

6. *Refusal/Withdrawal*: Refusing to complete the questionnaire will have no effect on any future services you may receive from Western Kentucky University. Anyone who agrees to fill out the questionnaire is free to quit at any time with no penalty.

7. *Questions*: If you have any questions about the study, please contact any one of the following persons:

Li Zhao, the Principle Investigator, (270)779-5620

Anthony Paquin, Ph.D., the faculty advisor, (270)745-4423

Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator, (270)745-2129

Please click on the link below to begin completing the online questionnaire. By clicking on the link, you are indicating that you are giving your informed consent for the researchers to use your responses. You are also indicating that you understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5N7SQYS

Thank you for your cooperation!

Li Zhao

WKU I/O Grad Student

Appendix B

Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale

SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION SCALE

Please indicate how much difficulty you experience in WKU in each of these areas.
Use the following 1 to 5 scale.

		No difficulty	slight difficulty	moderate difficulty	great difficulty	extreme difficulty
	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	Making friends.					
2	Finding food that you enjoy					
3	Following rules and regulations.					
4	Dealing with people in authority.					
5	Taking a _____ (host country) perspective on the culture.					
6	Using the transport system.					
7	Dealing with bureaucracy					
8	Understanding the _____ (host country) value system.					
9	Making yourself understood.					
10	Seeing things from a _____'s (host national's) point of view.					
11	Going shopping.					
12	Dealing with someone who is unpleasant.					
13	Understanding jokes and humor.					
14	Accommodation.					
15	Going to social gatherings.					
16	Dealing with people staring at you.					
17	Communicating with people of a different ethnic group.					
18	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.					
19	Dealing with unsatisfactory service.					
20	Worshipping.					
21	Relating to members of the opposite sex.					
22	Finding your way around.					
23	Understanding the _____ (host country's) political system.					
24	Talking about yourself with others.					
25	Dealing with the climate.					
26	Understanding the _____ (host country's) world view.					
27	Family relationships.					
28	The pace of life.					
29	Being able to see two sides of an inter-cultural issue.					

Appendix C

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	Question	1	2	3	4
1	I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.				
2	I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.				
3	I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.				
4	I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.				
5	I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.				
6	I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.				
7	I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.				
8	In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.				
9	I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.				
10	I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.				
11	I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.				
12	I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.				

Appendix D

Cross-cultural Social-Efficacy Scale for Students

Cross-cultural Social-Efficacy Scale for Students

		Strongly agree			Neither	Strongly disagree		
	Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I do not handle myself well in social gatherings.							
2	It is difficult for me to make new friends.							
3	I have difficulties making new friends in University.							
4	I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most people.							
5	I have difficulties participating in class discussions.							
6	I am usually quiet and passive in social situations.							
7	I have difficulties getting a data when I want one.							
8	I have difficulties talking to university staff.							
9	It is difficult for me to express a different opinion.							
10	I feel confident asking a lecturer a question.							
11	I feel confident talking to my lecturers.							
12	I feel confident in asking questions in class.							
13	I am confident of my language skills.							
14	I feel comfortable requesting information.							
15	I have common interests with local people.							
16	I have common topics for conversation with local people.							
17	I enjoy activities that most local people enjoy.							
18	When I'm trying to become friends with someone who seems uninterested at first, I don't give up easily.							
19	If I see someone I would like to meet, I go to that person instead of waiting for him or her to come to me.							
20	I feel confident in joining a student organization.							

Appendix E

Uncertainty Avoidance Questionnaire

1. In this society, orderliness and consistency are stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.

strongly agree	agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	disagree	strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. In this society, people lead highly structured lives with few unexpected events.

strongly agree	agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	disagree	strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. In this society, societal requirements and instructions are spelled out in detail so citizens know what they are expected to do.

strongly agree	agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	disagree	strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. This society has rules or laws to cover:

almost all situations			some situations			very few situations
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. I believe that orderliness and consistency should be stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.

strongly agree	agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	disagree	strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. I believe that a person who leads a structured life that has few unexpected events:

has a lot to be thankful for						is missing a lot of excitement
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. I believe that societal requirements and instructions should be spelled out in detail so citizens know what they are expected to do.

strongly agree	agree	agree somewhat	neutral	disagree somewhat	disagree	strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. I believe that society should have rules or laws to cover:

almost all situations			some situations			very few situations
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. I believe that leaders in this society should:

provide detailed plans concerning how to achieve goals						allow the people freedom in determining how best to achieve goals
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix F

Demographic Questions

1. Your age: _____
2. Your sex:

    Male _____

    Female _____
3. Which country are you from? _____
4. How many months have you been in the U.S.? _____
5. Your marriage status?

    Single _____

    Married _____

    Divorced _____

    Widowed_____
6. If married, is your spouse living with you here in the U.S.?

    Yes _____

    No _____

    Not applicable _____
7. How many children do you have? _____
8. If you have children, are they living with you here in the U.S.?

    Yes _____

    No _____

    Not applicable _____
9. What is your first language? _____
10. Language spoken most frequently in the U.S.? _____