

1. Introduction

An increasing number of higher education students, Chinese students especially, are living abroad now as international/exchange students to further their education, and experience another cultural environment. The beauty, but also the challenge, of the world in which we live in, is that it is both environmentally and culturally diverse. People who grow up in different social, cultural, and physical environments have different life experiences, which shape their overall cultural perspective, behavioural practices, and personal identity. By living and studying in a foreign community for an extended period, international students are able to experience and understand the beauty of the foreign local culture as a local resident, but they are also likely to experience challenges during their cross-cultural transition.

Moving to a new and unfamiliar environment is both exciting and stressful as it challenges a person in ways never experienced before. After leaving familiar comforts and cultural routines, individuals will experience new encounters and ways of living, thinking, and behaving. The overall experience is rewarding, but also challenging in both psychological and sociocultural ways. First-hand continuous contact with a different culture causes adjustment changes to take place within the individual in a process known as “acculturation” (Ward *et al.* 2001, 99). As international students transition to a new community and educational system, they go through a psychological coping process of social identification and adjustment to affective feelings of acculturative stress. They also experience a sociocultural adaptation process that involves learning the social and cultural behaviours of the host society (Ward *et al.* 2001, 42).