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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION AMONG CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY

Niu Yue¹, Dr. Nazeera Binti Ahmed Bazari², Sun Xiaotong³, Xia Liyao⁴ and Wang Changlong⁵

1. Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.
2. Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.
3. Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.
4. Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia.
5. Faculty of Sports Science & Recreation, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship and mechanisms influencing the positive psychological capital, social support and sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students pursuing higher education in Malaysian universities. Through quantitative research methods, the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the successful sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students to a new sociocultural environment are revealed. Given the increasing popularity of cross-border international student mobility, this study is highly relevant and provides important insights into the potential opportunities and challenges posed by such mobility. The findings suggest a significant positive relationship between psychological resources (positive psychological capital) and sociocultural adaptation among Chinese overseas students. Meanwhile, social support played a partial mediating role, facilitating the transformation of internal strengths (psychological capital) to external outcomes (sociocultural adaptation). The findings of this study have important implications for university assistance programmes that aim to improve the success and well-being of Chinese overseas students by enhancing psychological resources. Furthermore, this investigation contributes fresh insights to the wider discourse on intercultural education, clarifying how psychological elements impact international student adjustment within such contexts. It serves as a foundation for crafting more impactful interventions targeted at mitigating acculturative stress encountered by international students during their overseas academic pursuits.

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Introduction:-

The rapid increase in the number of Chinese students pursuing higher education in Malaysia had a profound impact on the global education landscape. The relatively low tuition fees have been a key driver of the rapid growth in the number of international students at Malaysian universities in recent years. It has also made Malaysia an attractive and important destination for international students. This trend is expected to continue, suggesting that its impact on

Corresponding Author:-Dr. Nazeera Binti Ahmed Bazari

Address:-Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.

local educational institutions and foreign student recruitment strategies will also be long term. It can therefore be deduced that the continued flow of Chinese students will have a wide-ranging impact on the future growth track of international education as a whole. This trend is due to a number of factors that not only make Malaysia more attractive to Chinese students looking to develop their academic careers and expand their international horizons. For instance, the high quality of teaching resources, affordable tuition fees, English language tuition and rich cultural experiences. At the same time, they also combine to increase the international appeal of Malaysian higher education institutions.

At the same time, making meaningful connections with local students and international classmates is another major challenge as one endeavours to adapt to the social environment. As a result of navigating an unfamiliar social environment, Chinese students may feel isolated and lacking in supportive networks. This sense of isolation can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, creating a vicious cycle. In addition, adapting to the academic requirements of a foreign education system, including different teaching styles, can present additional hurdles. These adjustments may adversely affect students' self-confidence, which in turn affects their academic performance (Koo, Yao & Gong, 2023). Therefore, emphasising the importance of social support mechanisms is crucial to relieve these challenges and foster the sense of belonging among Chinese international students.

In addition, for overseas Chinese students, how to strike a balance between maintaining their cultural identity and adapting to a new cultural environment is also an issue worth thinking about. In the process of adapting to a new environment, these students often encounter issues of self-identity, sense of belonging, and cultural preservation, which complicate the already intricate process of sociocultural adaptation (Li, Hue & He, 2023). Certainly, expectations from family and financial management issues such as living expenses, travelling costs and potential financial constraints can exacerbate an already stressful study abroad experience. Due to a lack of awareness or cultural reluctance to ask for help, Chinese students may struggle to utilise these resources (Huang, Kern & Oades, 2020). Therefore, access to appropriate support services and the development of strategies to support students' effective transitions seem essential (Wu & Zhang, 2023).

The growing trend of Chinese students choosing to pursue higher education in Malaysia. While this brings attractive prospects for global learning, it also requires sensitivity and proactive management of barriers related to sociocultural adaptation and mental health. For higher education institutions and the government, addressing these issues will have positive outcomes in terms of maintaining the academic achievement, overall performance and well-being of international students during their studies in Malaysia. Hence, understanding the role of positive psychological capital, social support in and sociocultural adaptation is crucial in addressing these challenges and promoting the overall well-being of Chinese international students in Malaysia.

Given the continued increase in the number of Chinese students in Malaysian higher education institutions, this trend not only reflects the depth of cooperation between China and Malaysia in the field of education, but also highlights the active pursuit of internationalised educational resources by Chinese students. However, as this population continues to expand, the challenges they encounter in terms of cross-cultural adaptation are becoming more pronounced. In order to understand and address these issues more comprehensively, this study will focus on the following three research objectives:

1. Explore the Relationship between Positive Psychological Capital and Sociocultural Adaptation.
2. To analyse the role of social support in the relationship between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation.
3. Explore the factors that may affect the sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students.

By exploring the relationship between psychological resources, social support and sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students in Malaysia, it will not only enhance the understanding of the difficulties and challenges faced in the process of international student mobility, but also reveal the deep-rooted mechanisms of action behind these difficulties. While providing empirical support for the theory of cross-cultural adaptation, it will also provide targeted adaptation strategies for international students and higher education institutions to help them better integrate into the Malaysian cultural environment and achieve personal growth.

Literature Review:-

Factors of Cross-cultural Adaptation Success

Sociocultural adaptation is an important challenge that international students and transnational workers have to face in a new cultural environment. In order to deeply understand this process, many scholars have conducted extensive research from different perspectives. In exploring the complex phenomenon of sociocultural adaptation, scholars have analysed the key factors affecting individuals' successful adaptation in new cultural environments from multiple dimensions. Personal characteristics and background are widely recognised as important foundations influencing sociocultural adaptation. Early studies such as Adler's (1993) emphasised the significant role of age, gender, previous experience and cross-cultural training (CCT) in an individual's adaptation to a new culture (Adler, 1993). However, most of these studies are based on Western perspectives, and their applicability to non-Western regions and cultures needs to be further verified.

Apart from individual factors, training and preparation are also important in facilitating sociocultural adaptation, and scholars such as Adler (1993) and Vesa Peltokorpi (2008) have pointed to the importance of cross-cultural training in helping individuals to cope with the challenges of a new cultural environment (Adler, 1993; Vesa Peltokorpi, 2008). However, the effectiveness of existing training programmes varies according to regional and cultural differences, which makes it particularly important to develop more targeted and individualised training programmes. Meanwhile, language proficiency as a basis for intercultural communication has been emphasised by several scholars such as Vesa Peltokorpi (2008) and Masgoret (2006). They point out that language barriers are one of the main factors affecting the sociocultural adaptation of individuals, and therefore, improving language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills is the key to facilitating adaptation (Vesa Peltokorpi, 2008; Masgoret, 2006).

It can be seen that sociocultural adaptation is influenced by a variety of factors, including individual resources and background, training and preparation, sociocultural factors, and extracurricular activities and social support. To better understand this phenomenon and promote successful individual adaptation, future research needs to adopt a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach, with a focus on universal and specific analyses in a cross-cultural context.

Psychological Capital and the Impact on International Students' Sociocultural Adaptation

The well-being and success of overseas students in higher education depends to a large extent on their access to psychological resources. Research has shown that the difficulties these students face in sociocultural adaptation can be mitigated by developing psychological resources, social support and coping mechanisms. Psychological capital as a psychological resource can provide international students with a building block for mental health outcomes and help them adapt more successfully to their new environment. According to Wang & Rahimpour (2022), resilient individuals are able to cope with and manage the psychological consequences brought about by culture shock, academic expectations, and feelings of isolation (Wang & Rahimpour, 2022). These results suggest that resilience plays a crucial role in promoting well-being and assisting international students to adapt more successfully to new environments. Cao and Meng's (2022) systematic review provided a structured exploration of a wide range of factors that contribute to cross-cultural adaptation in China (Cao and Meng, 2022). The study revealed the complexity of influences by categorising predictors into six groups, including demographic characteristics, personal and environmental resources, and needs and barriers. The preference for prioritising resources over needs suggests the importance of having appropriate psychological resources for effective adaptation. This strategy highlights the importance of developing individual resources and utilising situational help to advance sociocultural adaptation for international students.

In exploring the impact of psychological capital on individual sociocultural adaptation, although studies directly targeting international students are more limited, research on the relationship between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation among migrant children and ethnic minority students provides a valuable reference for this study. Yang M. (2018) revealed a positive correlation between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation by investigating a group of migrant children in China's Henan Province (Yang M., 2018). He found that enriched psychological capital significantly contributed to the sociocultural adaptation of migrant children in unfamiliar environments. Ye et al. (2019) delved into the role played by psychological capital in the mainstream cultural adaptation process of ethnic minority matriculants (Ye et al., 2019). This study also provides an important perspective for understanding the impact of psychological capital on sociocultural adaptation of international students. They pointed out in their study that psychological capital significantly and positively predicts the mainstream cultural adaptation of ethnic minority matriculants, i.e., the higher the level of psychological capital, the

stronger the mainstream cultural adaptation ability of the matriculants. Psychological capital, as a kind of positive psychological development state manifested by individuals in the process of growth and development, not only helps matriculants' psychological adjustment when facing a new environment, but also promotes their adaptation to mainstream culture.

Social Support as a Mediator

A strong link between psychological capital and social support cannot be ignored in exploring psychological capital and individual sociocultural adaptation. A study by Hao Y. (2016) pointed out that there is a significant positive correlation between social support and positive psychological capital (Hao Y., 2016). Individuals with high perceptions of social support are more likely to have high levels of positive psychological capital, which suggests that they are better able to utilise and perceive support from the outside world, which in turn leads to a positive mindset and the ability to cope with challenges. Yusoff's (2011) study showed that there is a significant relationship between self-efficacy (as a key dimension of psychological capital) and international students' perceived social support (especially from friends and significant others) have a significant positive correlation (Yusoff et al., 2011). This finding supports the notion that individuals with higher levels of psychological capital are more likely to receive and perceive more social support. Individuals with high psychological capital are more inclined to establish and maintain positive social relationships, thus gaining more emotional, informational, and instrumental support during cross-cultural adaptation. These social support resources not only help to alleviate the stress caused by culture shock, but also provide international students with strategies and resources to adapt to the new environment and facilitate their sociocultural adaptation process.

Social support is widely recognised as one of the key factors influencing adaptation effects. Cao et al.'s (2021) study clearly indicated that social support from peers of the same nationality became the main social resource for Chinese international students when they faced academic pressure, which significantly facilitated their sociocultural adaptation (Cao et al., 2021). All of these studies provide new perspectives for understanding the mechanism of social support's role in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Yusoff's (2011) study found a synergistic effect between self-efficacy and social support in cross-cultural adaptation, suggesting that there is a strong link between internal psychological factors and external social support, which work together in the process of students' adaptation (Yusoff et al., 2011). Some studies have confirmed significant correlations between psychological capital and social support, and between social support and sociocultural adaptation. However, in the field of international students' sociocultural adaptation, existing studies on the specific mediating role of social support between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation and its mechanisms are still insufficiently in-depth. In particular, most of the existing studies focus on the relationship between a single dimension of psychological capital and social support, and less on how psychological capital synergises with social support, which in turn influences the process of sociocultural adaptation. In addition, the possible differences in social support as a mediating variable and its mechanism of action in different cultural contexts have not been fully explored.

Therefore, this study is expected to fill this gap. By exploring in depth the mechanism of social support's role between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation, it may provide more specific and comprehensive theoretical guidance and practical suggestions for higher education institutions and cross-cultural adaptation programmes, in order to facilitate international students' smoother integration into new cultural environments and achieve comprehensive cross-cultural adaptation.

The current study

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory is one of the more well-developed theories of cross-cultural adaptation research from a communication perspective (Kim, 2001). The theory has been widely used in the field of cross-cultural communication research since its inception. Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory suggests that cross-cultural adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that involves the transformation of an individual's psychological, behavioural and social dimensions in a new cultural environment. Figure 1 illustrates Kim's model of cross-cultural adaptation.

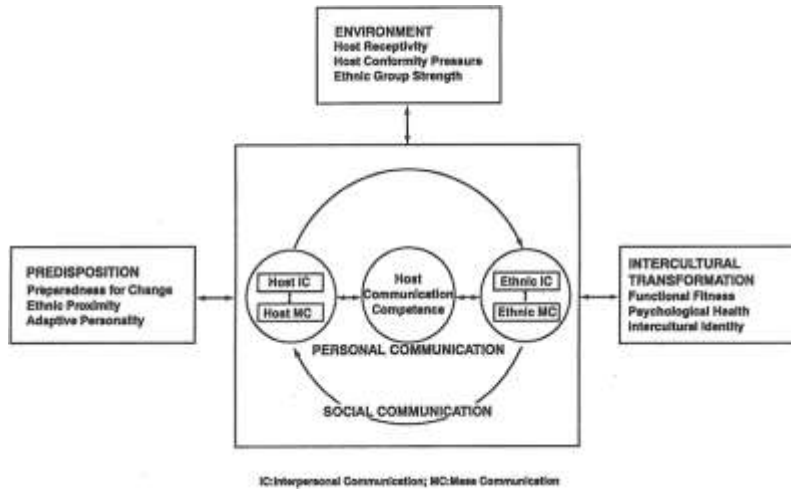


Figure 1:- The structure of cross-cultural adaptation.

From Becoming Intercultural:

An Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (p. 87), by Y. Y. Kim, 2001, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

This process has been summarised as the dynamic cycle of 'stress-adaptation-growth', in which individuals, when faced with the challenges of a new cultural environment, first experience the stress of culture shock, and then gradually reduce the stress through adaptive behaviours, and ultimately achieve personal growth (Kim, 2001). In this regard, social support, as an important external resource, may play an irreplaceable role in mitigating culture shock and promoting adaptive behaviours in the process of sociocultural adaptation.

Psychological capital, as an internal psychological resource, may also have a significant impact on the process of cross-cultural adaptation, and Kim's theory (2001) emphasises the importance of individual psychological factors in the adaptation process, of which psychological capital is an important component. Sociocultural adaptation is one of the core objectives of the cross-cultural adaptation process, which involves the behavioural adjustment and social interaction of individuals in the new cultural environment. Kim's theory (2001) clearly points out the influence of social environment factors on cross-cultural adaptation, and social support, as an important part of the environment factors, plays an important role in facilitating sociocultural adaptation (Kim, 2001).

Kim's cross-cultural adaptation framework builds a profound and practical theoretical cornerstone that parses the process of individual adjustment in cross-cultural environments, providing a valuable research perspective for understanding and facilitating personal adaptation and growth in international exchanges. Based on this framework, this study aims to understand and explore the mechanism of social support between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation. It provides some valuable references for enhancing individuals' psychological capital and thus promoting their sociocultural adaptation in new cultural environments. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H1: Psychological capital has a positive effect on the sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students.

H2: Social support mediates the positive relationship between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation among Chinese international students.

Methodology:-

Participants

This study is a quantitative research. Stratified sampling and non-probability sampling techniques were used for the survey. A total of 122 valid questionnaires completed by international students from mainland China were collected from private and public universities located in Malaysia. During the survey period, 135 questionnaires were distributed. 13 students did not submit the completed questionnaires as required and the recovery rate was 90.37%.

Instrument

A self-report questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of three scales with additional basic socio-demographic items such as age, gender, degree pursued and nature of higher education institution.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-12)

The measurement of individual psychological capital was carried out employing the PCQ-12 scale (Avey, Avolio, & Luthans, 2007). This scale represents a simplified version of the PCQ-24 (Avey, Avolio, & Luthans, 2007). Both instruments are designed to assess a complex, higher-order construct known as 'psychological capital' or 'PsyCap'. The questionnaire consists of 12 assessment items covering the dimensions of Self-efficiency, hope, resilience and optimism. A 6-point Likert scale was used. Luthans et al. have tested the validity and reliability of the questionnaire in a previous study (Avey, Avolio, & Luthans, 2007). Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.937$ for the PCQ-12 scale in this study.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Social support was assessed using the Social Support Scale (Zimet et al., 1988). It describes the development of a self-reported subjective assessment of social support scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The scale contains 12 items which are categorised into three dimensions - family, friends and significant others. Each dimension contains the same number of questions. Scores are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Lower scores indicate lower levels of perceived social support. Research has shown that the MSPSS has good internal and retest reliability and moderate construct validity. In this study, the MSPSS scale had a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.931$.

Social Adaptation Scale (SAS)

The Sociocultural adaptation Scale measures the sociocultural adaptation of international students (Demes1 and Geeraert, 2014). The scale contains 12 items. It is scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. Lower scores indicate greater challenges in sociocultural adaptation. In this study, the internal consistency of the 12-item scale in measurement was 0.966.

Data analysis

This study used IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows version 29 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y., USA) for statistical analysis. The normality of the data was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test, which showed that the significance level was less than 0.05 and the hypothesis of 0 was rejected, therefore, the data did not conform to normal distribution. To measure PCQ-12, MSPSS and SAS, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's α coefficient for all the instruments was higher than 0.7, which indicates that the reliability of the scales is satisfactory and at an acceptable level.

Table 1:- Reliability of the Instruments.

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
PCQ-12	0.937	12
MSPSS	0.931	12
SAS	0.966	12

In the descriptive and inferential analyses, non-parametric tests were used to test for differences in sociocultural adaptation scores across demographic characteristics. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to measure the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the data in depth through SmartPLS 4.0 software in order to construct and test the mediation model and corresponding hypotheses.

Results:-

Before embarking on a detailed exploration, we conducted a preliminary assessment of the sociocultural adaptation status of the participants in this study. In order to get a more precise picture of their level of adaptation, we calculated the median sociocultural adaptation score. The results showed that the median sociocultural adaptation was 4.83 (3.64, 5.25). Chinese students' sociocultural adaptation was in the upper middle level.

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics are shown in Table 2. In this survey, we focused on age, gender, degree pursued, and the nature of the university attended, and we expected to find out whether there were differences in their levels of sociocultural adaptation by means of variance analyses. However, the results of the data analysis showed that the p-value for all of them, whether it was age, gender, degree pursued, or the nature of the

university attended, was greater than 0.05. That is to say, the participants did not show a significant difference in their sociocultural adaptation level in terms of these demographic characteristics.

Table 2:- Main Descriptive Characteristics and the Differences in SA (N=122).

Characteristics		N	Percent	M= (Min, Max)	Mann-Whitney U	Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig.
					Z	H	
Gander	Male	59	48.4	4.8333 (3.5000, 5.2500)	-0.713	/	0.476
	Female	63	51.6	4.8333 (3.8333, 5.2500)			
Age	18-25	54	44.3	4.8333 (3.5625, 5.1667)	/	0.686	0.710
	26-30	43	35.2	4.8333 (4.0833, 5.3333)			
	31-35	25	20.5	4.9167 (3.1667, 5.6667)			
Degree	Undergraduate	50	41.0	4.8333 (3.6458, 5.1667)	/	3.191	0.203
	Masters	44	36.1	4.8333 (2.1042, 5.3125)			
	Doctoral students	28	23.0	4.8750 (4.2083, 5.7292)			
Institute	Public Universities	53	43.4	4.8333 (3.8750, 5.2500)	-0.558	/	0.577
	Private Universities	69	56.6	4.8333 (3.5417, 5.3333)			

Note: SA (Sociocultural Adaptation)

Spearman's Correlation Analysis

According to the results of Spearman's correlation analysis (see Table 3), we found a two-by-two positive correlation between psychological capital, social support, and sociocultural adaptation, all of which reached the level of significance under the two-tailed test. The correlation coefficient between psychological capital and social support is $r_s = 0.495$, indicating a significant positive correlation between the two, i.e., individuals with higher levels of psychological capital tend to receive more social support. Meanwhile, the correlation coefficient between social support and sociocultural adaptation is $r_s = 0.568$, which also shows a significant positive correlation. This means that individuals with more social support perform better on sociocultural adaptation. Notably, the correlation coefficient between psychological capital and sociocultural adaptation reaches $r_s = 0.779$, indicating a strong positive relationship. In other words, individuals who are rich in psychological capital show a significant advantage in sociocultural adaptation.

Table 3:- Spearman's Correlation Between Independent, Mediator and Dependent Variable.

Variable	Spearman's rho		
	Correlation Coefficient		
	Psychological Capital	Social Support	Sociocultural Adaptation
Psychological Capital	1		
Social Support	.495**	1	
Sociocultural Adaptation	.779**	.568**	1

Note: N=122. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Test of the Measure Model

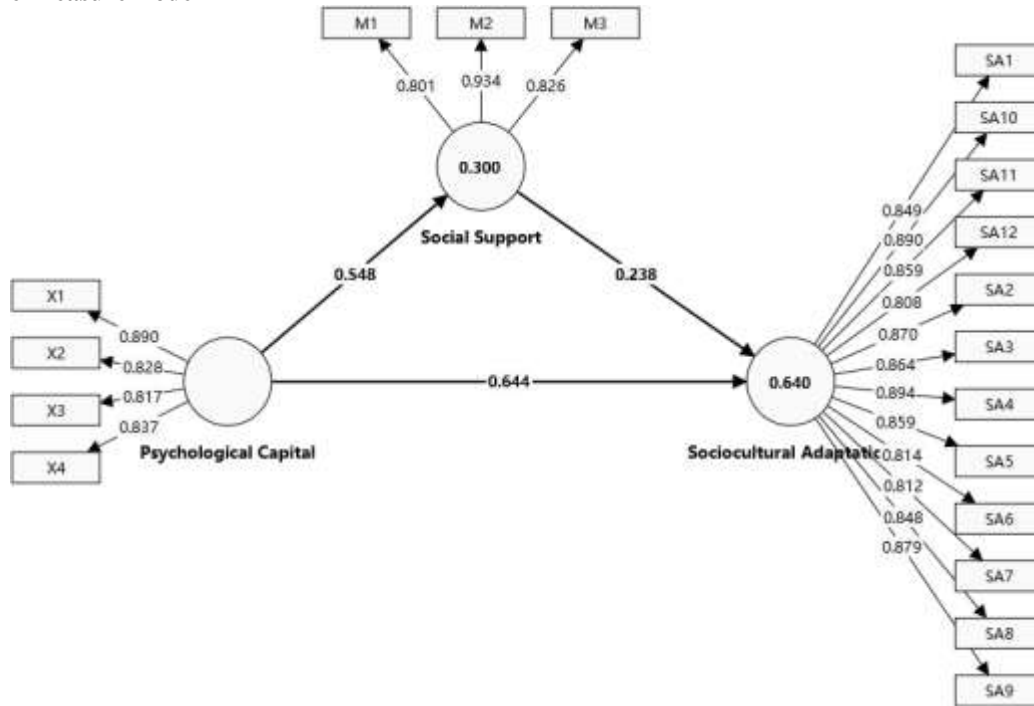


Figure 2:- Measure Model.

Figure 2 illustrates the measurement model for this study with all Factor loading between 0.801 to 0.934, which is above 0.7. Construct reliability (CR) values are above 0.708 and Average variance extracted (AVE) values are above 0.5. Tables 4 to 6 show the results of the assessment of the measurement model. The reliability and validity of the data were verified. The value of Multicollinearity < 5.0, so there is no problem of multicollinearity in the predictor variables (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Table 4:- Measurement model parameter evaluation.

Component	CR (> 0.708)	AVE (> 0.5)
Psychological Capital	0.875	0.712
Social Support	0.854	0.733
Sociocultural Adaptation	0.968	0.730

Table 5:- Results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion for the Measure Model.

	Psychological Capital	Social Support	Sociocultural Adaptation
Psychological Capital	0.844		
Social Support	0.548	0.856	
Sociocultural Adaptation	0.775	0.591	0.854

Table 6:- Results of the HTMT Ratio for the Measure Model.

	Psychological Capital	Social Support	Sociocultural Adaptation
Psychological Capital			
Social Support	0.612		
Sociocultural Adaptation	0.839	0.643	

Test of the Structure Model

Estimates of the structural model relationships were obtained by running the PLS-SEM calculation programme in SmartPLS 4.0. The explanatory power of the research model can be determined by testing the R² values of the constructs. As shown in Figure 3, in this model, psychological capital explained 64% of the variance in sociocultural adaptation. In contrast, psychological capital contributed 30% of the variance in cultural intelligence.

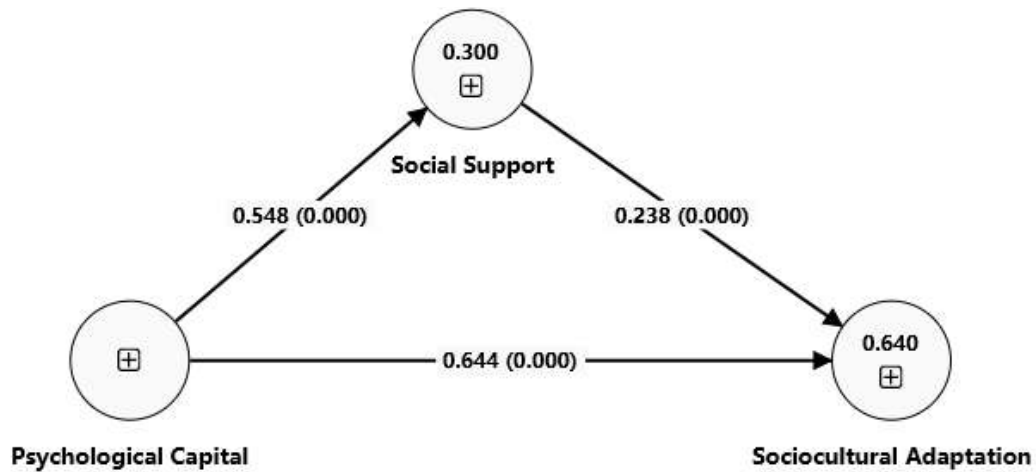


Figure 3:- Structure Model.

Mediation Analysis

The results of the data analysis showed that the direct effects model was significant and all direct effects were significantly non-zero at the 95% confidence level. Specifically, psychological capital has a significant positive effect on sociocultural adaptation in the PCQ -> SA model. Therefore, H1 is supported. In addition, psychological capital has a similarly significant positive effect on social support, and social support has a similarly significant positive effect on sociocultural adaptation. The coefficients for these effects are detailed in Tables 7 to 9.

Table 7:- Results of Direct Effects.

Relationships	βvalues	tstatistics	pvalues	95% CI LL	95% CI UI	Result
PCQ ->SS	0.238	4.076	0.000	0.125	0.353	Significant
SS -> SA	0.548	9.089	0.000	0.409	0.648	Significant
PCQ -> SA	0.644	13.406	0.000	0.543	0.735	Significant

Note: PCQ: Psychological Capital; SS: Social Support; SA:Sociocultural Adaptation.

Further analysis of the mediating effects revealed that social support (SS), as a mediating variable in the PCQ -> SS -> SA model, all significantly conveyed the indirect effect of psychological capital (PCQ) on sociocultural adaptation (SA). Social support enhances the effect of psychological capital on sociocultural adaptation from 0.644 to 0.775, with a mediating effect of 0.130. Moderate size partial mediating effect of social support was found. H2 is partially supported. Psychological capital not only contributes directly to sociocultural adaptation, but also indirectly enhances sociocultural adaptation through the mediating path of enhanced social support. The specific values and significance levels of the relevant mediating effects are listed in Tables 8-9.

Table 8:- Calculation Results of Indirect Effects.

Relationships	Total effect (c)	Direct effect (c')	Indirect effect
	βvalues		
PCQ -> SA	0.775	0.644	0.130

Table 9:- Results of Mediating Effects (Indirect Effects).

Relationships	βvalues	tstatistics	pvalues	95% CI LL	95% CI UI	Result
PCQ ->SS -> SA	0.130	3.664	0.000	0.068	0.206	Medium

Discussion:-

The results of the current study suggest that psychological capital (PCQ) as a positive psychological resource has a positive impact on sociocultural adaptation (SA) of Chinese students in Malaysia. This is consistent with Hypothesis 1 and is in line with the theory of cross-cultural adaptation as well as some previous studies. Cross-cultural adaptation studies of several different groups, from migrant children to ethnic minority students to international

students coming to China (Yang, M., 2018; Yeet al., 2019), have pointed out that psychological capital (including self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism) effectively contributes to the process of adapting to new environments by enhancing the individual's positive psychological attributes.

Chinese students have been known for their diligence since ancient times, and this quality is especially prominent when they face a new environment. Diligence not only motivates them to invest more time and energy in learning and mastering new languages and cultures, but more importantly, it gives them an indomitable spirit of continuous exploration. This spirit is highly compatible with the resilience element of psychological capital, enabling them to quickly adjust their mindset and persistently seek solutions when they encounter setbacks and difficulties. It is this combination of diligence and resilience that allows Chinese students to show extraordinary perseverance and determination in overcoming language barriers and coping with academic pressures.

Family as the first environment for individual growth may play an important role in the development of achievement motivation and self-efficacy among Chinese students. Many Chinese families value investment in education and encourage their children to pursue academic achievement and career development. Parents' expectations and support become a source of motivation for children to keep moving forward. At the same time, the sharing of successes and role models in the family further enhances children's sense of self-efficacy. This intrinsic drive motivates them to set clear goals for themselves and make plans to achieve them accordingly. In their study life in Malaysia, they believe that they can overcome all difficulties and successfully adapt to the new environment. This belief not only enhanced their self-confidence, but also motivated them to adopt a more proactive attitude in facing cultural differences and social challenges. Elements of psychological capital, such as self-efficacy and hope, interacted with the high achievement motivation of the Chinese students to form a strong psychological support for their adaptation to the new environment.

Diligence and resilience give Chinese students the courage and strength to overcome difficulties, while high achievement motivation and self-efficacy stimulate their intrinsic motivation to pursue success and adapt to new environments. These attributes are not only valuable assets of Chinese students, but also provide new perspectives and insights for cross-cultural adaptation research.

In addition, social support (SS) was found to enhance the effect of psychological capital (PCQ) on sociocultural adaptation (SA). Originally, the direct effect of psychological capital on sociocultural adaptation was 0.644, but after considering social support as a mediating variable, this effect was enhanced to 0.775. The mediating effect size of social support was 0.130, which is a medium level effect. In other words, social support not only contributes directly to sociocultural adaptation, but also indirectly by strengthening the positive influence of psychological capital on sociocultural adaptation. Consistent with previous research, our findings further validate the important role of social support in an individual's sociocultural adaptation to a new sociocultural environment. For example, the study by Song and Chen pointed out that psychological capital has a significant facilitating effect on the cross-cultural adaptation of international students from China, and that social support, as an important external resource, can strengthen this adaptation process (Song & Chen, 2014). Similarly, the study by Razgulin et al. (2024) emphasised the key role of social support in international students' sociocultural adaptation, pointing out that the social support of family and friends can effectively alleviate students' anxiety, thus facilitating their adaptation in the new cultural environment (Razgulin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, our findings align with previous research that has highlighted the complementary roles of psychological capital and social support in sociocultural adaptation (Ye et al., 2019). Psychological capital, as a positive psychological resource within the individual, provides the individual with internal motivation to cope with challenges; while social support, as an external aid, further strengthens this internal motivation, and together they contribute to the smooth progress of sociocultural adaptation.

For this finding, it may be attributed partly to the collectivist cultural background in which Chinese international students are brought up. Collectivist culture emphasises teamwork, mutual support and responsibility, and this cultural background has profoundly influenced the behaviours and ways of thinking of Chinese international students. In a foreign country, facing multiple challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences and academic pressure, Chinese students tend to rely on collective strength to solve problems. They tend to establish a close social network with their compatriots, which not only provides them with emotional support, but also serves as an important platform for information exchange, resource sharing and experience sharing. As shown in a study by

Razgulin et al. in BMC Medical Education, social support plays a significant role in alleviating anxiety among international students, especially when facing emergencies such as the COVID-19 epidemic (Razgulin et al., 2024).

A finding to note in this study is that the demographic characteristics did not show a significant difference in the level of sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students. This result contrasts with some previous studies. In reviewing the literature, we found that demographic characteristic items tend to have a significant effect on the level of sociocultural adaptation (Yang M., 2018; Razgulin et al., 2024). However, in this study, Chinese international students' performance on sociocultural adaptation level did not show significant associations with the key demographic characteristic items of age, gender, education and institution. It is possible that the homogeneity and specificity of the sample had an impact on the findings. This study focuses on a specific group of Chinese international students who may have relatively high levels of homogeneity and specificity in terms of their cultural background, educational experiences and family expectations (Razgulin et al., 2024). This homogeneity and specificity may have influenced our in-depth understanding of the variability of individual characteristics in the process of sociocultural adaptation.

Implication and Limitation

The findings of this study have implications for enhancing sociocultural adaptation. Higher education institutions can use this to develop targeted programmes and support services to strengthen students' psychological resources for successful acculturation. By fostering resilience and promoting social networks, universities can lay a solid foundation for the well-being and academic success of Chinese international students. Support services can consider designing interventions such as mentorship programmes, counselling services and cultural exchange workshops to strengthen social networks, teach coping strategies, and thereby enhance international students' cultural adaptation.

Policymakers can also use these insights to promote inclusive policies and advocate for cross-cultural exchange. Raising awareness of the needs of international students can lead to a more welcoming and supportive environment that facilitates successful international student adjustment.

Future research could focus on the longitudinal tracking of changes in psychological resources and adaptation as a key direction to compensate for the limitations of current cross-sectional studies. Longitudinal tracking will enable a deeper understanding of how individual psychological resources change over time and influence the persistence and stability of sociocultural adaptation. At the same time, future studies could consider including more diverse samples to test the differences in sociocultural adaptation among individuals with different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, thus further enriching and expanding our knowledge in this area.

Conclusion:-

This study provides insights into the relationship and the mechanisms influencing the relationship between positive psychological capital, social support and sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students at Malaysian universities through quantitative research methods. It supported the view that psychological capital plays a positive role in facilitating the successful sociocultural adaptation of Chinese international students to a new sociocultural environment. It was also found that social support played a partially mediating role, helping to transform internal strengths (psychological capital) into external outcomes (sociocultural adaptation). This finding has important implications for university assistance programs that aim to improve the success and well-being of Chinese students abroad by enhancing psychological resources, and it also provides new knowledge for the broader dialogue on cross-cultural education, which can help to develop more effective interventions to ameliorate the stresses of acculturation that international learners face while studying abroad.

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