EXPLORING ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES
OF AN INDIAN MIGRANT LIVING IN THAILAND

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Abstract

Since the world becomes more multicultural, cultural conflict or cultural clash is highly concerned by researchers who actively identify the factors or causes of the conflict as well as suggesting potential and fruitful ways of coping with it. To extend this line of research, this study, therefore, aims at investigating acculturation strategies used by a migrant living in multicultural context and her ways of dealing with challenges or difficulties during her adaptation process. This study employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interview. An Indian migrant living in Thailand for thirty years was purposively selected as a case study. The interview was conducted via Zoom application since the COVID-19 is still in serious condition. The Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies including *separation, integration, assimilation,* and *marginalization* were employed as an analytical framework. The results reveal that separation and integration strategies were predominant but in different situations and periods of time. Contacting original or home culture when experiencing cultural conflict can reduce stress and confusion. However, being open-minded to new things and balanced between two cultures seem to be effective ways of stay in multicultural community.

Keywords: Acculturation Strategies; Indian Migrant; Intercultural Encounter

Introduction

The necessity of cultural adaptation has been still raised as a question among of researchers who aim to investigate how people acculturate themselves into a new and

unfamiliar environment. Since the globalization has been introduced and people have been communicated or travel globally, people have received many new challenges in self-adaptation and conflicts due to global communication. During communication across the globe and culture, conflict is seen as inevitable output occurring during or after people's confrontation because they might not recognize its existence or know how to handle and avoid the conflict as Rosenthal (1984) and Kwak (2003) who state that immigrants have more conflicts than non-immigrants. This means that the individuals who move to new places have more opportunity to experience more conflicts than those who do not.

To extend this line of research, this study, therefore, investigate how an Indian migrant adapts herself when first arriving and during her stay in Thailand. Moreover, her ways of dealing with cultural differences will also be explored if she confronts with difficulty in acculturating into her unfamiliar environment. This study employs qualitative approach by using in-dept interview as an instrument. Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies are selected as an analytical framework together with the notions of culture and culture shock. The results of this study can shed light on factors affecting on either success or failure in dealing with cultural adaptation and how a person deals with challenges during acculturating process.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate acculturation strategies of an Indian migrant living in Thailand.

2. To investigate how she dealt with challenges or difficulties during her adaptation process.

Research Questions

1. What are acculturation strategies used by an Indian migrant living in Thailand?

2. How did she deal with challenges or difficulties during her adaptation process?

Literature Review

What is culture?

The definitions of culture seem to be complicated. Many scholars have been defined the definitions of culture differently. According to Tylor (1871), culture can be described as complex things including knowledge, belief, art, ethics, regulation, tradition, and other potentials and natures received by humans as a member of society. Statman (2018) adds that, culture is a different group of thought which separates from each person to another person

and varies depending on community and contexts. Moreover, Hofstede (2001) emphasizes that culture is something people have to learn throughout their lifespan through social interaction. From aforementioned definitions, culture is not an innate feature, it is something to be learned through social interaction and the culture acquired by individual varies depending on community where you belong to. For example, in Thai culture, "wai" is a form of communication and a traditional greeting in Thailand and people do not "wai" to another person since they were born, but they learn how to "wai" through social interaction and Thai "wai" is believed as something good in Thai contexts but may not have significant in other contexts.

Therefore, as discussed above, culture, in this study, refers to beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that have been passed on from generation to the next generation which distinguish individual as a member of a particular group from another. Hence, to avoid miscommunication and cultural clash, people need to learn or get to know their new or unfamiliar culture for better understanding and well acculturating. Furthermore, with the coming of globalization era, people from different cultures are able to contact more easily, so meeting each other can make the culture more complex since people who are from different cultures interact with each other and the conflicts become an inevitable thing Hence, it is worth investigating the factors and causes of conflicts and way of coping with the conflicts for better cultural management.

Acculturation strategies: Four ways of adjusting to a new culture

Acculturation strategies are an adaptation of overseas students, immigrants, and refugees applying to live in the country where they move in. Acculturation strategies can be divided into four types by Berry (1997) including *integration, assimilation, separation,* and *marginalization*. As shown in Figure 1, the acculturation model of Berry (1997) is two-dimensional. The dimensions consist of the maintenance of heritage culture and cultural adaptation (relation sought among groups). The maintenance of heritage culture is a kind that immigrants choose to maintain their own culture, also maybe reject the host culture, while cultural adaptation (relation sought among the group) is a kind in which the immigrants decide to adapt to the new culture, and maybe, abandon their own culture.

Cultural Adaptation (relationship sought among groups)

		Low	High
Maintenance of heritage culture	High	Separation	Integration
	Low	Marginalization	Assimilation

Figure1 The two-dimensional acculturation model of Berry (1997)

According to Figure 1, *integration* is a state where people accept both the host and their own culture. They apply their life to the host culture and maintain their own culture. Second, *assimilation* is a state where people accept the host culture, meanwhile refuse their own culture. Third, *separation* is a state of those who prefer to apply their own culture but refuse the host culture. Last, *marginalization* is a state of those who are not interested in any culture whether host or their own culture. As Berry (2001) says the changing of the four strategies based on the bidirectional model, there is depends on two distinctive issues as well. There are the immigrants who accept or are contrary to their own culture, and the immigrants who accept or are contrary to the host culture. That is why these four strategies emerge.

Furthermore, Ryder et. al. (2000) identify that the two-dimensional model is based on two main assumptions. First, is the difference in the individual identity, behavior, or attitude because there are the main factors that influence the culture of humans. Another is the ability of individual multiple cultural identities. That is the more immigrants have multiple cultural identities, it will help them easier to adapt to their new culture. Also, it will make more strength on their adaptation.

Moreover, Berry (2001) admitted that the transformation of acculturation strategies emerges from individual differences: the ability of communication, religion, child raise-up, and lifestyle. At the beginning of arrival in the host society, if they cannot apply their life in any strategies, they will be in a state of "culture shock". It seems like a negative word that most

people always think about depression, stress, or nervousness. Berry (2001) says that in his opinion it refers to both positive and negative adaptation. It is simply that people might face bad and good adaptation. In addition, Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki (1989) found that most immigrants prefer integration strategies for adaptation. Assimilation and separation are the following strategies, whereas marginalization is the last strategy that the immigrants use for adaptation.

Culture Shock

According to Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2020), culture shock is confusing, uncertain, and emotional stress for people who experience a new environment, country, or culture. They will face this feeling when people move to a new country, residence, workplace, even school. Additionally, Furham (2012) describes that it is the feeling of disorientation when people immediately change their culture or lifestyle. The emotion occurred from various factors such as unfamiliar norms, strange food, a different language, and new hometown. Mostly, culture shock can be separated into four-stage: honeymoon stage, culture shock stage, adjustment stage, and adaption stage as demonstrated in Figure 2.
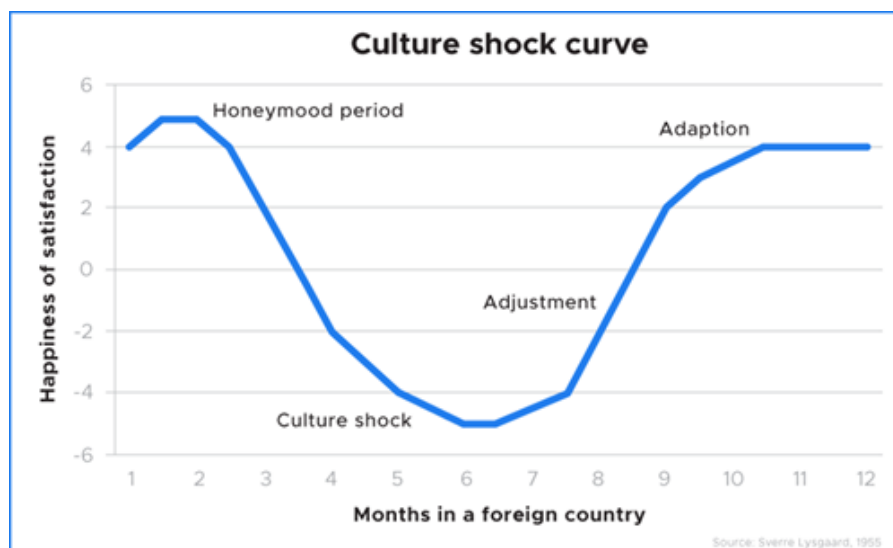

Figure2 Stages of culture shock

According to Figure 2, *honeymoon stage* is the stage that immigrants are joining with the new surroundings. The immigrants will be excited and happy as it is an adventure in their life. For short-term immigration, this stage will be great for them, while long-term immigration

will end and face the next stage. For example, the tourist will be excited about the new place where they visit. And the immigrants will be amazed at their new lifestyle. Next stage is called *culture shock stage.* It is when the immigrants face a new environment, their happiness or joy will be reduced. Then, their boredom, irritation, and confusion will occur. It might be a result of language communication, misunderstanding from different cultures, or a different mindset. The symptom is depression, sickness, and irritation. For example, oversea students might misunderstand different languages then they will be dispirited about their studies. Also, for people who work in a new environment, it might be a barrier to their work. As a result, the immigrants face the stressful and depression. After a certain period of time of experiencing challenges and state of confusion, the immigrants move into adjustment stage. Their depression is reduced, and adaptation skills are increased. As a result, the immigrants feel like it is their home. Sometimes, they might don't understand some manner or culture, but they feel more familiar. So, it will be more convenient for them. Last, adaption stage is when immigrants are better able to adapt to their life and are happier in their new country or environment. Also, they completely understand the new culture. Moreover, their behavior, beliefs, or attitude will be changed in their new culture.

Variables of Immigrants' adaptation

There are many variables for immigrants' adaptation. Period of immigration, cultural distance and ethnocentrism are considered as distinctive variables among scholars.

Period of immigration

Time is an important factor that changes immigrant adaptation. It always changes due to global growth. The period can be divided into two types: long-term, and short-term. For the long-term, it is a term of immigrants or refugees with extensive experience. Since they are immigrating for so long, it is easy to adapt the host culture to their own culture. Short-term, it is a term for overseas students or tourism with short experience. As Lee and Tse (1994) say, the distance of immigrants impacts an immigrant's identity for adaptation.

Cultural distance

Distance of culture means similarity between the host's culture and the immigrants' culture. If they are quite similar, it is easy for immigrants to adapt. For example, Thai people move to China, it is simple for their adaptation than they move to London, which is so much distance between their cultures. "Immigrants with a more intense and cohesive cultural identity will tend to acculturate less" (Juan-Vigaray, Sarabia-Sanchez, & Garau-vadell, 2013, p.116).

Ethnocentrism

When immigrants move into the host country, they will be just a minority in that society. Sometimes, ethnocentrism makes it difficult to adapt to their culture. Therefore, in a high ethnocentrism society, the host culture prefers immigrants to forsake their own culture. This issue led to conflict between majority and minority in that society for adaptation (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal, 1997). Therefore, it seems to be a bit racist. The higher ethnocentrism, the more difficult it is to adapt.

Research Methodology

A participant

The participant recruited is a 58-year-old Indian woman who migrated from India and has lived in Thailand for 30 years. She was born in India and had to move to Thailand since her husband got a job offered working in Thailand. Their two kids were brought with them too. She and her family are Hindu. At the time she moved, she was around 30 years old, and she recognized herself as friendly, socialize and kind person. Her children study at an international school in Thailand. Usually, she goes back to India to visit her relatives four times a year. She always keeps in touch with them. Her husband is working at a shipping company in Thailand. And she is working for an organization in Thailand too, where her most colleagues are Thai. Moreover, at her company, the Thai language is widely used for communication. At first, she could not understand a single Thai word; she only speaks Hindi and English languages. Now, she can understand and can use the Thai language for basic communication.

Data collection

Due to the Covid-19 situation, the online in-depth interview was conducted via the ZOOM application for two times. The overall duration of each the interview was approximate one hour. The interviewee was asked for consent of interview recording and the interviews were then transcribed for further investigation.

Data analysis

After transcribing the interview data, content analysis was applied. Also, the concept of acculturation strategies was used to analyzed during the analysis.

Research Findings

The finding obtained from in-depth interviews are described according to the research questions respectively. Ethically, the interviewer is anonymously presented, so to easily identity, the interviewer is presented in an artificial name as "Marah".

RQ1: What are acculturation strategies used by an Indian migrant living in Thailand?

After interviewing, the acculturation strategies Marah has used can be summarized and explained in terms of two periods of time: *firs arrival* and *during the stay*.

1) Acculturation strategies used during the period of her first arrival in Thailand

On Marah's first period of time in Thailand, separation strategy was often used when she faced with something which is different from what she normally did in her culture. For example, she found Thai foods very different from the Indian ones as statement below.

"When I was in India, I heard that Thai foods are very famous for their favors, techniques, and styles. Therefore, my first thing that I did after landing was tasting Thai foods. I tried Som Tam (papaya salad) and Tom Yum Kung (spicy soup with prawn) since they are always recommended in many travel websites and books. I thinks I'm not into it because they are too spicy, and I think it's weird putting raw papaya in a meat dish. You know I suspended having Thai food for a while and kept eating Indian food. I admitted that Indian food contains a lot of spices, but Thai food is hotter in terms of taste."

Apart from food, language is also a barrier during this period. Marah uses English and cannot understand Thai language at all. This is not a problem until she hired a Thai maid and started working in a Thai company. She narrated that

"I didn't understand Thai, and I thought, at the first time, this wouldn't cause a problem since I believed that Thais may use and understand English a least just for communication since English is widely accepted as an international language. I didn't have any language problem until I hired a Thai maid. Her performances were great, but she couldn't understand English, and I couldn't understand Thai as well. Our conversation didn't go well, and I was a bit tired using a lot of gesture along with my words. With this difficulty, my husband therefore took the role of chatting with the

maid. Moreover, language problem happened not only at my home, but also at my organization. Most of my colleagues are Thai and English seems not to be their priority. At the beginning of my work, I tried to speak English with the hope that they would understand my English."

However, Thai traditions are favored by Marah, and she employs Integration strategy to acculturate with Thai tradition. This is because cultural distance is low. She told us that

"I enoy Thai traditions so much especially Songkran, and Loy Krathong. This is because some Thai traditions are similar and occurr during the same period. For example, Songkran Day on 13-15 April in Thailand and Vaisakhi on 14 April in India. Vaisakhi is the day that Indian people joy with fun and happiness, as well as celebrating the new year also. Songkran Day is also a day when Thai people cerebrate Thai new year. Another one is Loy Krathong and Deepawali. Deepawali is the day that Indian people light the lamp and, play fire to celebrate lord Rama that comes to the world. Thailand also celebrates Loy Krathong at the same period, between October and November. So, I am very happy to cerebrate both traditions at the same time."

In addition to this, there are other issues she was uncomfortable with such as personalities of Thai people, time-oriented issue and sometimes she was discriminated since she is Indian. To elaborate, Thai people, for Marah, are not straightforward person. She sometimes interprets the messages differently. The other issue that shocks her is time orientation when meeting with Thai people. She eagerly told us about time conflict as follow.

"You know, I used to have a meet with my Thai colleague. We agreed to meet at 1 p.m. for important discussion. I quicky did my things at home and left so early in order for being on time. OMG! I had waited her for 30 minutes. She arrived at 1.30 p.m. and pretended that there is nothing. You know, I have never experienced situation like this only one time, but many times with many Thai people. I admitted that I was shocked by this."

However, after six months of exploring new culture, Marah's life moved to the next phrase. She felt more familiar with Thai culture. Some cultures that she struggled with were

relieved based on her duration of living and interaction with locals. The circumstances and the strategies she used in the next phrased are elaborated in the following section.

2) Acculturation strategies used during the period of her stay in Thailand

Marah's life has changed after six months. She started to negotiate and compromise with language, food, and some behaviors. She recognizes the importance of understanding and practicing the host culture. Cultural adaptation facilitates her in socializing and networking. However, she insists that acculturating into new culture or environment does not mean she leaves her root and culture behind and assimilate herself as a member of a new culture. For her, maintaining two cultures is the best way since when she goes back to India, her process of adapting herself back to Indian culture will be much easier.

Marah also gives an interesting and thought-provoking idea on that to be accepted by the host members, or to be accepted as a new member, it is not essential to lose our identities. We can be both and balance both cultures in a particular situation. At the end of interview, Marah told us a memorable statement that

"Today I have roti and curry at home, tomorrow I will eat papaya salad at my office, or I can have pizza in the following day. Again, yesterday I went to mosque; today I can visit a temple. I can't imagine how happy my life would be."

From her thought and behaviors, it is very obvious that her perspectives and practices are according to integration strategy since she tries to maintain both her home culture and her target one. Also, this can yield an application of its strategies to bride the cultural gap and cultural conflict as well as to strengthen her flexibility in living in a multicultural community.

RQ 2: How did she deal with challenges or difficulties during her adaptation process?

As mentioned in the RQ1's results, at the beginning of her stay, she faced some difficulties in living in Thailand since there were some differences such as food, language, and lifestyle. To minimize cultural conflict, Marah familiarized herself with Indian culture or what she usually did in her culture. She did not deliver negative judgement towards normative practices in the host country. Marah tried to be open-mined person and interculturally compromised with those who are different from her.

Discussion and conclusion

The aims of this study are to investigate acculturation strategies of an Indian migrant living in Thailand and to investigate how she dealt with challenges or difficulties during her adaptation process. In-depth interview with an Indian migrant living in Thailand was conducted. The results reveal that *separation* and *integration* strategies are predominant. They were used in different situations. Separation strategy is often used during her fist six months when Marah faced difficulties and need to avoid cultural conflict. After that, integration strategy is employed since she become competent in dealing with cultural differences.

With the data obtained from the interview, there are some points to de discussed. First, there may be several reasons why assimilation is not the prevalent strategy. Marah's culture and Thai culture are not significantly different. Moreover, she still keeps contacting with her relatives in India. This make her home culture is not faded. To elaborate, closeness between the original and new culture facilitates the integration in the new culture. This then produces less "behavioral shifts" and reduces the "acculturative stress" (Berry et al., 1987), with consequently fewer levels of psychological problems.

Like Thailand, Indian society put an emphasis on harmony, which leads Indian people to pursue a conflict-free and group-oriented system of human relationships. Therefore, integration becomes inevitable or effortless.

According to Berry et al. (2006), Demographic factors such as age, gender and duration have all been identified as possible sources of variation. In the study of Nesdale, Rooney & Smith (1997) that explores the relationship between ethnic identity and psychological distress in Vietnamese adult immigrants in Australia, it is revealed that women had a stronger drive towards integration than men. Women want to belong to and participate in the majority culture. Nesdale et al. (1997) suggested that both Vietnamese women and men had to cope with rejection and discrimination. Men, however, felt this negative attitude of the majority more strongly than women. This can be assumed that Marah's personality and characteristic help her quicky and effectively acculturate into Thai culture.

Finally, it is noticeable that duration can be an important factor for a migrant's adaptation. The longer he or she stay in the particular culture, the more he or she is familiar with it. From Marah interview, it can be seen that duration can affect who she is. This is explained through the concept of identity. According to Johnstone (2008), identity is often perceived by people as something that is natural (and thus predictable) and, thus, identity can

be considered as something people are born with. Several researchers (Camacho, Minelli & Grosseck, 2012; Delahunty, 2012; Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011), nonetheless, perceive identities as something that is plural and dynamic. To elaborate, identity is the dynamic configuration of the defining characteristics of a person (Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011), which can also be redefined over time (Coates, 2004) and space (Delahunty, 2012). For instance, a shy boy can become a brave young man, or males can display feminine characteristics, such as being emotionally expressive and sensitive, while some females may exhibit masculine traits, such as being muscular, dominant, and aggressive in certain situations. Given that, even the biological sex can be flexible (Huffaker & Calvert, 2006). Hence, it is unsurprising to learn the following:

identity is not something that one "has", but rather something that one "does" or "performs" and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourse, and interactions between human beings.

(De Fina, 2011, pp. 265-266)

From De Fina's idea, it indicates that our identity can be changed depending on what situation we are in and who we are interacting with. Therefore, adhering with who we are in terms of original culture will not facilitate us in acculturation process.

Limitations and Recommendations

Since this study employs a case study, the results may not be generalized to all Indian immigrants living in Thailand. This is because there are various factors to take into consideration while analyzing. Moreover, the interview was not conducted through face-to-face communication that interviewee's non-verbal communication is overlooked. With this concern, the further studies can be conducted using quantitative approach, but selecting the participants who contain the mutual characteristics should be carefully concerned. Another suggestion is that further studies can be conducted to investigate a comparison between two groups of migrants possessing different cultural backgrounds.

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