

Thai University Students in Japan:
Academic, Social and Cultural Difficulties and
Adjustments

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VICHAI Passaporn

51109602

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Abstract

This thesis explores the difficulties and adjustments of Thai international students in Japan. I first examine the international students' problem issues in Japan and the government policies. Then, introduce the international academic adjustment model as a conceptual framework. Based on the model, the semi-structured interviews with 31 Thai students from 5 universities were conducted.

This research found that Thai students faced various academic and socio-cultural difficulties as they adjusted to studying in. Specifically, it was found academic difficulties include language barriers, unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, insufficient knowledge in the field of study, relationship distance with professors and insufficient support from the university. Socio-cultural challenges include insufficient Japanese language proficiency, and difficulties in interacting socially with Japanese. Students in different groups encountered different levels of difficulties. Graduate students showed a better general academic adjustment than undergraduates, while the latter adjust more quickly to socio-cultural dynamics.

In coping with the difficulties, students were more likely to seek help from their co-national friends rather than approach professors or student affairs staff. The coping strategies adopted by students might be a reflection from the poorly prepared measures put in place to help international students. The government and universities should consider student's perspectives in policymaking. It is also necessary for the prospective students to prepare for these difficulties in advance.

要約

日本の高等教育においては近年国際化と留学生の増加が進み、留学生が抱える問題と要望を認識する必要が出て来ている。本論文は日本の大学におけるタイ人留学生の適応問題に焦点を当て研究する。この研究ではアカデミック・アジャストメント・モデルと呼ばれる留学生の適応に関するモデルを修正の上で用い、5つの大学から計31人のタイ人留学生に半構造的インタビューを行った。

日本での学習と生活に関するインタビューを行った結果、タイ人留学生は学業面と社会文化的な側面の両面で様々な問題に直面していることが分かった。学業面での問題は、言語障壁や自国とは異なる教育システム、研究分野の知識・理解不足、教師との親密感や大学からのサポート不足などが挙げられる。また社会文化的な問題には、日本語能力不足と日本人との関係がある。更に分かったことは、大学院生と学部生ではそれぞれ学業面と社会文化的側面との適応性に正反対の結果が見受けられたことである。つまり大学院生は学部生より学業面で適応しやすいが、学部生は院生より

社会文化的適応に優れていることが判明した。

学生達は自らが抱える適応性の問題を解決するため、その糸口を教師やスーパーバイザーに相談するのではなく、同じ出身国の学生に助けを求める傾向がある。このような傾向の原因は留学生へのサポートシステムが不足しているからではないかと考えられる。よって政府と大学の双方ともが留学生へのプログラムやシステムを見直すべきである。特に今後重要となるのは、政府と大学は留学生が抱える学業面と社会文化的面への適応性を念頭に置いた政策をより強く打ち出すことで、未来の留学生たちに同じ適応性での問題を繰り返さないことである。

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Long criticized for being closed to foreign influences, in July 2008, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) with the other 5 ministries; namely, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs settled on a general framework to open the country to foreign immigration. This plan sets a long term goal of eventually accepting 300,000 international university students by 2020 (MEXT, 2008). The government considers accepting international students as playing a significant role in strengthening international goodwill; deepening mutual understanding and friendly relations through the formation of human networks; contributing internationally to human resource development; creating an international environment for university and school campuses; and perhaps most importantly as a human resource that can be developed to contribute to the Japanese economy Japan (Ministry of Justice, 2010). In addition to these benefits, the plan is also seen as a policy solution to deal with Japan's low birthrate and aging population problems. Moreover, the plan is also be seen as a response to the criticism that Japan has failed to make a contribution to world-wide education needs commensurate with her financial position (Goodman, 2005).

The current plan for increasing the number of foreign tertiary students in

Japan marks the second time that the Japanese government has attempted to recruit international students. In 1983, the first attempt was made to accept 100,000 international students. The 2008 plan differs from the one in 1983. The previous plan does not focus only on how to increase the number, but it also includes the efforts by the government to support students more comprehensively, beginning with encouraging them to study in Japan and continuing support services, throughout their working lives after graduation. MEXT introduced the objectives of the current policy, divided into five areas:

1. To invite international students to study in Japan and motivate them to studying in Japan and expansion of one stop services
2. To improve entrance and screening procedures including entrance examination and admission to Japanese university and Japanese culture
3. To promote the globalization of universities. - to make universities more attractive to both foreign and domestic students
4. To create an environment of tolerance– to make efforts to create an environment where students feel at ease and can

1 It was claimed that there are some significant differences between the old 1983 plan and the new 2008 plan. Shao (2008) pointed the three differences out which are; 1.) The 1983 was a passive plan aimed to help other Asian countries, but the 2008 is very active plan as a national strategy for economic development. 2.) The purpose was changed from helping other countries to exporting education model. 3.) The expectation towards international students changed from a link between Japan and other countries to permanent foreign workers that can contribute to Japanese society.

concentrate on their studies

5. To promote the social acceptance of students after graduation/completion and in doing so contribute to the globalization of Japanese society as a whole

(Higher Education Bureau, MEXT, 2009)

The number of international students in Japan has been increasing continuously. According to the Ministry of Justice (2009), the number of registered college students exceeded 100,000 for the first time at the end of 2002, and reached 138,514 as of the end of 2008 with an increase of 6,054 or 4.6%, compared with the end of 2007.

Although the goal of eventually recruiting 300,000 international students may seem overly ambitious to be achieved by the 2020 target, the broader focus of this plan is directly linked improve scholarship supported and self-financed overseas students to study and even work after graduation in Japan, leading to the increasing numbers of students. The current plan's goals coincide with international students' plea for a better understanding of their needs, in order to create a hospitable environment, and be able to recruit more international students in the future.

Focusing on the experiences and needs of Thai students studying in Japan as a case study, this research attempts to explore the adjustment strategies and difficulties of international students, studying and living in Japan's unique culture. I hope that the research will bring out the students' perspectives in order to

contribute to the Japanese education stakeholders involved including the government, university, as well as students who all want the new policy to succeed for everyone's mutual benefit.

1.2 Previous Studies Concerning International Students in Japan

University creates a diverse learning community where students have both the time and space for personal growth through exposure to new and different ideas, people and lifestyles (Thom, 2010: 157). In addition to the personal and profession growth opportunities, unavoidably, students have to deal with anxiety and fear in adjusting to a new academic and social environment. Apart from the stress of adapting to different academic responsibilities, which is the common problem for most students irrespective of whether they are domestic or international, foreign students are additionally confronted with adjusting to their new cultural environment. As a non-English speaking country and long history for being unaccommodating to foreigners (Lim, 2009: 9), Japan seems to be basically disadvantaged in attracting international academics and students. Students from Asian countries, where some common values are shared, also face difficulties in adjusting to Japanese life. The Japanese language barrier is the main problem faced by students from ASEAN countries, and high cost of living appears to be another major problem facing East Asian students (Sato, 2010: 111). It is expected that the government, university, as well as local organizations can help by providing support to meet these needs and improve the lives and cultural adjustments of international students.

Many supporters seem to be prepared for a large influx of international students, but it cannot be said that they are doing enough. Many students are suffering from the limited financial support, expensive house rental fees as well as academic stress. According to Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama and Fujihara, Japan has actively recruited international students although essential policies and measures for international students, including accommodation, language learning, counseling services and even scholarship information, have not been properly prepared. As a result, many students leave Japan with the disappointment in Japanese university system (Tanaka et. al., 1994: 56). Even though their study was conducted over 15 years before this study, their conclusions remain relevant to the present situation.

The issue of international students in Japan had not been seriously studied until 1990s, when the Nakasone government announced the 1983 international students plan and the number of international student started to increase dramatically in 1980s (Tanaka et. al., 1990). Even though Japan currently has a very short literature on international students' adaptation and adjustment strategies, compared to the Western countries looking at the same issues, what literature there is does identify some of the major concerns and will be presented in subsequent chapters.

1.2.1 Socio-Cultural Struggles

Shigematsu examined the feelings of 96 Korean students regarding relationships with Japanese hosts by asking the students to write free-answer

responses on stress, general living condition and health issues. The answers were divided into three main categories. Economic matter was the first category, which catalogued complaints about the hardships of financing their education, the high cost of living, steep monetary exchange rates and the need to take a part time job that may have negatively affected their health or study habits. The second category examined academic aspects of student adjustment; including the merits and demerits of studying abroad compared to studying in the students' home country, freedom, the excitement of new experiences in a new environment, and experiencing cultural differences. In the same section, some students wrote about the difficulties of research, the lack of adequate faculty guidance and a general inability to enjoy life in Japan due to combined academic and financial pressure. This final group of responses students experienced in Japanese society and human relations was the main focus of Shigematsu's study (Shigematsu, 2002).

The data related to Japanese society responded by students were divided into four themes as listed below;

1. **Moral vs. Prejudiced** – some students expressed that high importance on maintaining cultural manners, minding rule, and national ideas of morality in Japanese society made a positive impression on students studying in Japan. Students felt that the Japanese cultural sense of responsibility made it easier for them to live in Japan. However, some students felt that the complex rules and Japanese customs had created a Japan that was only suitable for those born into it. Perceptions of strong group-consciousness of the Japanese were mentioned as a barrier for international students that

negatively affected their studies and lives in Japan.

2. **Diligent vs. Inhuman** – while some students admired the hard work ethos and sense of responsibility of Japanese, some students negatively viewed those attitudes as a combination of poor communication skills; lack of human relations; spiritual emptiness; and a general lack of interpersonal contact, interest or attempt to understand foreign people.
3. **True feelings vs. Behaviors** – many students mentioned that a problem in their relationship with Japanese is the distinction between true feelings (private feelings) and formal behavior (what people will to express to public). Students also claimed that it was difficult to establish relationship with Japanese people or even trust them because of these barriers.
4. **Resignation vs. Perseverance** – this theme discussed how students coped with the conflict or problems they faced in Japan. Some students felt that if a problem is too big to overcome so they just simply resigned themselves from the problematic situation, hurry graduation and escaped from Japan. Some students simply rejected adapting to Japanese culture because they felt they had been rejected by Japanese society first. On the other hand, some students tried to develop a more open perspective.

(Shigematsu, 2002: 78-81)

Shigematsu's research concluded that understanding the cultural differences between students' and Japanese culture is a very important issue that the government should concern about. To help students' financial problems, the

government can simply help solving by providing the scholarship or financial grants or loans. However, human relation difficulties are more difficult to resolve and still remain a problem for Japan that should be studied more thoroughly if it hopes to successfully increase both the number and quality of international students into the country.

1.2.2 International Student Stresses

International students' stress is caused by many factors. Those stressors have been classified variously in different researches (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Moyer, 1987; Yo & Matsubara, 1990). Yo and Matsubara grouped stressors into six factors; sickness and death, language problems, everyday problems, academic problems, relationship problems, and environmental differences (Yo & Matsubara, 1990: 1-11). Based on these groupings, Jou and Fukada (1996) investigated the unique stress factors and the influence of stressors for Chinese students in Japan. Jou and Fukada classified the stressors experienced by Chinese students into five somewhat overlapping factors; 1) interpersonal problems; 2) academic problems; 3) health/living problems; 4) financial anxiety; and 5) environmental problems. Focusing on the academic problems, the stressors for students included progress in research, presentations for major courses, thesis writing, classes, the possibility of graduation late or having to remain an extra year, preparation for a college entrance examination or a graduate course, and a lack of improvement in Japanese language abilities (Jou & Fukada, 1996: 504-505).

The study found that the academic problems score positively correlated

with all other stressors. This finding indicates the high priority on academic achievement Chinese students placed in their lives as a whole. Moreover, according to the research, "the higher the academic stressor score was, the higher the scores of the other four factors" (Jou & Fukada, 1996: 507).

1.2.3 Social Support and Adaptation

Tanaka, Takai, Minami, and Fujihara studied social network formation of newly arriving international students in Hiroshima University and found a positive impact of social networks on students' lives. The study revealed that new students were concerned and felt uncomfortable about their academic life, Japanese language ability, social skills and these concerns were reflected in change to their mental and physical condition. However, social networks among those students able to establish positive relationships with Japanese were beneficial in several ways. In the study, those supports included more positive attitudes toward language, culture, study, consultation, amusement, money, and information (Tanaka et. al., 1990).

In terms of academic adjustments, the importance on support from Japanese professors, Japanese students, other foreign students and off-campus Japanese friends were also examined in the study on social support systems available for Chinese students adjusting to life and study in Japan (Jou & Fukada, 1995). It was found that the more support was needed, the poorer students' adjustment was, and on the contrary, the more support was actually received, the better students' adjustment was. Moreover, it was also reported that Chinese

students needed the least support from off-campus Japanese friends and received the most support from other foreign students (Jou & Fukada, 1995: 310). The students who received the support from Japanese professors reported the better adjustment. Therefore they suggest that because the research and study are the main goals of students studying in Japan, professors would have more influence than other three sources. Therefore, the study of Jou and Fukada recommended that increased support from professors could improve students' overall adjustments considerably.

1.2.4 Perceived Problems of Asian International Students in Japan

Suhara studied the particular barriers of 488 respondents from Asian international students in Japan by surveying on the condition of self-financed students (Suhara, 1996). The results of the survey showed that in the students overall comfort with life in Japan financial and accommodation problems played an important role. This is consistent with other studies, which had similar results (Ebuchi, 1991; Jou & Fukada, 1996; Shao, 2008; Zhang, 2009). However, the study also mentioned other aspects related to these main problems. Following Suhara's survey outcomes, these problems are, therefore, reviewed in the following section.

1. Financial and employment problem

Compared to other Asian countries, Japan has very high cost of living. While the average monthly expense of Japanese university students in 1987 was

¥125,800, international students' average expense in Suhara's study was ¥99,000 and about half of them had less than the average (Suhara, 1996: 109). Even though some financial support was provided, students commented that it is difficult to get the scholarship, especially for first and second year students. Moreover, there was also a comment from one student that in the case of the prestigious *Monbusho* scholarship, where the Japanese government provides a large amount of money to one student; the same amount would be more suitable to support two students (Suhara, 1996: 110).

Due to financial difficulties, international students turned to part-time jobs to support their lives in Japan. Based on a 2007 JASSO's survey, 71.1% of international students held at least one part-time job accepted that having a part-time job was important to support their cost of living in Japan (JASSO, 2007: 20). Currently, about 81% of international students in Japan are doing part-time work (JASSO, 2007: 17). However, JASSO's survey only focused on the financial aspects of student's working part time focusing on income and working hours, but it did not closely examine any negative experience of students regarding employment and working condition.

Finding part-time job is not easy for every student. Many students experienced being refused employment based on the fact that they were international students and couldn't speak the necessary level of Japanese. These experiences made them feel that they are being discriminated against based on their nationality (Suhara, 1996: 114). Moreover, according to Suhara's experience as an advisor for international students, some students faced far worse situations

in their part time jobs such as not being paid properly (Suhara, 1996: 193-194). Even in the present, student related organizations such as, The Asian Students Culture Association warn the students about not being paid properly for their part time jobs².

Even though some studies indicated that there is no significant relationship between working and academic achievement (Furr& Elling, 2000; Bradley, 2006), students who work are likely to report that the employment frequently interferes their academic progress (Furr& Elling, 2000: 464). Similarly, Suhara also gives a voice to a Malaysian student exhausted from the part-time job which steals her study time. She said "I need the true student life. Did I come to Japan to study or to work?? I don't know!!" (Suhara, 1996: 143). It seems to be difficult for self-financed international students to live in Japan. Son studied the attitudes of Chinese students towards Japan and concluded that many self- financed Chinese students have negative image of Japan because of the bad experiences and the hard time they experienced in their part-time jobs (Son, 2004: 226).

1. Accommodation Problems

As previously mentioned, housing is another common problem faced by international students in Japan. Many students have been denied housing by the real estate agents for the same reason some students are denied part-time employment -- that they are not Japanese. Some students found accommodations through the real estate agents were rented housing that did not match with their

² See Japan Study Support- Guide for International Students: <http://www.jpss.jp/en/life/5/4/>

expectation or felt that the rent exceeded their expected budget (Suhara, 1996: 190-191). More than half of students complained that their rooms are expensive, very small and/or far from school (Suhara, 1996: 117). Rather than going to real estate agents, many students seek housing from friends' recommendations (Suhara, 1996: 114-118). Asian international students felt that they were not accepted as tenants because the perceived Japanese to be cautious when dealing with foreigners and they often hold biased opinions on Asian international students from poorer countries (Shao, 2008: 7).

The above problem may be less like to occur if international students and Japanese students cohabited. Nevertheless, some students commented that they cannot get along well with Japanese because they do not have open minds, and they have the more formal relationships to be shallow (Suhara, 1996: 118).

2. Problems Concerning Campus Life and Relationships with Japanese

As mentioned earlier, international students find it difficult to befriend Japanese. Suhara describes difficulties as: different interests, the lack of interest in foreign students on the part of the Japanese, and a lack of Japanese language proficiency for international students. Regarding divergent interests, Suhara explained that Japanese and international students have different view towards university. Japanese students study hard until they are accepted by the university, and they spend most of their time in the university relaxing and enjoying life before starting the hard work again after the graduation. However, for international students it is different and university is less a place to enjoy oneself

than a place to study diligently. This difference of perception, then, leads to the different lifestyles and different ways of behaving at school (Suhara, 1996: 197-198).

The problem concerning the uneasy relationship between Japanese students and international students has been mentioned in various studies. Many international students, who cannot or do not want to get along with Japanese and society, choose to stay together either as an international group or group of students from one country and finally end up with little cultural adjustment or improvement in the Japanese language (Pearson-Evens, 2006).

From the above summary of Suhara's study on the barriers of Asian international students in Japan, it needs to be noted that he did not explicitly mention Japanese language proficiency in his survey but it did exist as a problem in each of the issues he did focus upon. Japanese ability affected the chance to get part-time employment, build relationships with Japanese, and even the possibility of getting adequate housing. Therefore, we can confidently state that language ability is another determinate on the success or failure of international students' lives in Japan.

1.3 International student policies in Japan

Japan aims to recruit international students for study in Japan and it was found that Japanese students sponsored by the government to study abroad were often fewer than international students sponsored from the same country, and these Japanese students received smaller scholarships (Chu, Chu & Jin, 2010).

Japan began its first coordinated attempt to increase the number of international students studying in Japan in 1983 when it released the clearly named: "Plan to Accept 100,000 International Students" during the Nakasone government. The plan aimed at promoting mutual understanding between Japan and other countries, together with contributing to human resource cultivation for developing countries. The target was reached in 2003 when almost 110,000 students enrolled in Japanese higher education. This achievement was caused by and encouraged rapid growth of the number of international students, especially from mainland China. Chinese students account for two-thirds of the total students studying in Japanese universities, and students from all Asian countries (including China) account for 93% of the total international students in Japan (Newby. et. al., 2009: 80).

In 2008, the "300,000 International Students" plan was presented by the Fukuda government. This plan aims at recruiting 200,000 more international students by 2020. As previously mentioned, from the past to the present international students in Japan have faced many problems. Therefore, to correspond to the "300,000 International Students" plan and improve the situation of international students, the government, with the cooperation from universities and other organizations, has created many policies supporting international students. The policies reviewed here include: information and preparation support before departure; scholarship and financial support; accommodation assistance; and academic related support (JASSO, 2009; JASSO, 2010; JSPS, 2010; MEXT, 2004; MEXT, 2009; MEXT, 2010).

1.3.1 Preparation and information support

In April 2004, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) was established by the Japanese government in order to provide comprehensive support to the students, both in Japan and in overseas countries. JASSO is the main organization providing information about Japan and Japanese universities to the students interested in studying in Japan. A remarkable activity by JASSO is the Japan Education Fair which is held every year in Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and China. The activity is organized to give the general program information sessions and seminars, including lectures by former students, individual consultation for concerns about studying in Japan, and academic information at the booths set up by JASSO, universities and other educational institutions (MEXT, 2004). Today Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) has its overseas representative offices in four countries; Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Malaysia, and provides the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (EJU) representatives in thirteen countries, in Asia and Russia (JASSO, 2010)³.

Despite impressive funding, operating representative offices in four countries might not be sufficient to reach the level of a "one stop service" for studying abroad like the British Council, which operates in 110 countries worldwide with 8.5 million annual visitors (Shao, 2008:9).

In the case of foreign government sponsored students, the Japanese government assists by providing preparatory education, including language study

³ Retrieved from *Overseas Representatives Office-JASSO*:http://www.jasso.go.jp/about/jeic_e.html. and *EJU Overseas Representatives-JASSO*: http://www.jasso.go.jp/eju/contact_e.html, on January 26, 2010.

and further cooperation with universities and institutions as required. Currently, this commitment covers the students from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, The United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. In addition, the Northeast Normal University in Changchun, Jilin Province, China hosts the Japanese university preparatory program for its students before study in Japan (MEXT, 2009).

1.3.2 Scholarship and Financial Support

Scholarship and financial support are important factor influencing the increase of international students. Scholarships make a very big difference in the lives of students it is awarded to. The most well-known one is the *Monbusho* scholarship given directly by the Japanese government. Since the program was started in 1954, the scholarship has been awarded to 62,000 international students from 160 countries and regions over the world. According to JASSO, there are seven types of scholarship included in the program, which are for 1) Young Leader's Program (YLP) students or students who have practical work experience (1 year); 2) Research students (up to 2 years); 3) Teacher training students (up to 1.5 years); 4) Undergraduate students (5 to 7 years); 5) College of Technology students (4 years); 6) Specialized training college students (3 years); and 7) Japanese Studies students (1 academic year). The students receive the monthly allowance differently according to the type of scholarship. The Young Leader's Program (YLP) students are allotted ¥258,000, research students and teacher training students are allowed approximately ¥155,000 and the others are allowed

¥125,000. All scholarship types include tuition fees, transportation costs and Japanese language training before enrolling in the academic program, with the exception of the Young Leader's Program (YLP) students and Japanese Studies students (JASSO, 2009).

Apart from the directly funded government supported scholarship, there are also scholarships given by JASSO, prefectural, local, private organizations. As a whole, 89.9% of international students in Japan are privately financed, while the government scholarship benefits only 7.6% of all international students. In order to support the majority of students, JASSO created the "Honor Scholarship⁴" for qualified students in undergraduate and graduate level. Moreover, JASSO also provides the financial support up to ¥80,000 per month for the short-term exchange students under the agreement between Japanese university and home university abroad (JASSO, 2009).

Besides, the Japanese local government and private organizations also provide specific scholarships to students studying in either specific geographic districts or in specific academic disciplines. As of December 2009, there are more than 229 scholarship programs organized by 46 foundations throughout the country. About 3,800 students benefited by these local government scholarship programs in 2008 (JASSO, 2009).

1.3.3 Accommodation Assistance

Japan has a high population density, especially in the big cities. It is even

⁴ The scholarship allows 65,000 JPY per month for graduate students and 48,000 JPY for undergraduate and pre-college language students.

more difficult for international students to find the reasonably priced and safe accommodation due to limited financial resources and government support. In addition to monthly or weekly rent students need to find a guarantor and pay expensive advance deposit and the management fees (known as key money) to the real estate agent (Shao, 2008:7). Therefore, in order to ensure the availability of and low-rent housing for international students, the government advises universities and local public organizations to provide housing. As of May 2009, there are 31,429 international students (23.7%) living in the public housing. However, the remaining 101,291 students (76.3%) are still living in the private rented housing (JASSO, 2009).

1.3.4 Academic Related Support

According to the 2008, "300,000 International Students Plan", leading universities across the country have been chosen as core universities to sponsor internationalization, known as Global 30 Project. The policy aim of this project is to elevate Japan's international competitiveness amongst the world's top universities and to create an attractive environment for international students. The selected universities will receive annual financial assistance of ¥200 to 400 million over the next 5 years and, with this aid each university attempt to recruit 3,000 to 8,000 international students (JSPS, 2010; MEXT, 2010). To process the grant selection, the Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) established the Global 30 committee, consisting of members from various academic institutions. In order to be selected, each university has to invest their efforts in three main

areas; 1) an academic curriculum that provides classes in English, 2) a proper system and environment for international students and 3) a strategic promotion of international cooperation. Up to 2009, 13 universities were selected; seven of them national universities and six private⁵.

However, even though many leading universities are now providing the courses and degrees in English, the *Monbusho* scholarship students are still provided with intensive Japanese language training for six to twelve months before enrolling in the their respective universities normal academic program.

As summary, the main problems facing international students in Japan, as determined from the literature, are socio-cultural problems, financial problems, and academic & language related problems. Social relations and language ability seem to be the most important issues in the international students' adaptation to life and study in Japan. Language proficiency has strong impact on academic achievement, and also opens the door to part time working chances during the study period and employment opportunities upon graduation. Moreover, language is the key tool for establishing the relationship with local Japanese people. When they create social networks, they receive various support; for instances, information about part-time job and accommodation opportunities, language, study, consultation, and even money, from different networks. The student's

5 The selected national universities are Tohoku University, University of Tsukuba, University of Tokyo, Nagoya University, Kyoto University, Nagoya University, Osaka University and Kyushu University. The selected private universities are Keio University, Sophia University, Meiji University, Waseda University, Doshisha University and Ritsumeikan University (Retrieved January 26, 2010, from University of Tsukuba: http://www.global.tsukuba.ac.jp/en/what's/what's_1_e.htm).

relationship with their professors also leads to the better academic adjustment and relationships with Japanese friends helps student to develop a deeper understanding about Japanese society, feel comfortable to live and study in Japan, as well as advance their language skills.

Even though the Japanese government is trying to ease the living and study conditions of international students by providing the information about studying in Japan through scholarship and financial support, accommodation assistance, and other academic support through universities, the human relation and other socio-cultural problems are more complicated and cannot be solved simply.

All the problems mentioned in the previous studies are strongly interrelated. It is logical that the students with different levels of language proficiency and different social relation experience differently in Japan. As a result, students approach the difficulty and problems differently. One important variable in the how students adjust is their nationality, which often defines the "cultural distance" (Church, 1982: 547). It is assumed that adjustment will be more difficult for visitors coming from home cultures that are more different from the host culture (Church, 1982: 547). Therefore, if we want to examine the lives of international students in Japan by studying a group of students from a particular country, choosing the country is the very important issue that we have to be concerned with.

1.4 Spotlight on Thai Students

Due to the fact that the majority of international students in Japan are

Chinese (JASSO, 2009; Newby et.al., 2009), many studies on international students in Japan focus on these Chinese students as case studies, as reviewed previously. While the studies on Chinese students are expected to provide the significant implications for other international students and for Japan's internationalization of education, this research sees that the unique situations faced by Chinese students in Japan cannot be generalized to explain the experiences of international students from other places.

Focusing on the Japanese language education in China, the number of Chinese studying Japanese language accounts for 22.7% of all Japanese language learners oversea, second only to Korea with 26.4% (Japan Foundation, 2010). In China, Japanese began being studied widely in 1970s and it has since been included into many primary and secondary school curriculum. In some schools, Japanese is taught as the first foreign language, prior to English. In addition, Japanese teaching programs are broadcasted on television and radio as well. Unsurprisingly, Japan Foundation reported that Japanese learning in China is special and distinctive, based not only on the high number, but also the high level of both Japanese learners and teachers (Japan Foundation, 2006b).

The importance of language proficiency in the intercultural adaptation was also recognized by many researchers (Church, 1982, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, Lewthwaite, 1996, Dunn, 2006, Zhang, 2009). Based on these studies, this research proposes that students' adjustment should be studied from the various viewpoints, not only the viewpoints of Chinese students. It considers that perhaps Thai students are more suggestive to the general situation of international

students' adjustment in Japan, in terms of language proficiency. Moreover, Thai students seem to share more common characteristics to other international students from Southeast Asian countries.

Similar to other countries, the Japanese language in Thailand is offered as a second or even third foreign language in elementary and secondary school, and not every student in the country has access to Japanese language education. Japanese language is without question the primary language used in all aspects of Japanese life. Functional Japanese is crucial for students who seek part-time work or full time employment in Japan. It is necessary for international students to be able to communicate in both Japanese and English, which is quite a challenge for international students who are not first language speakers of either of them.

In Thailand, for instance, the majority of Thai educational institutions use the Thai language as the L1 for instruction, English as the first foreign language and Japanese as a second foreign language is an option provided in few secondary schools. For school in Thailand not using Thai as the primary language, international schools providing education in English are account for 1.5% of all educational institutions in Thailand⁶.

Chaisamrej studied acculturation and communication techniques of Thai students studying in American universities and found that language difficulty caused high stress for many students. Many Thai students were afraid of confrontation with host nationals because of poor listening, speaking and discussion skills, in addition, they admitted that it took longer time for them

⁶ Management Formation System (2010). *Statistics of school, student and teacher, categorized by school type*. Retrieved on November 16, 2010 from Office of the Private Education Commission: http://203.146.75.17/opecmis/statFull_1.php?year=2553

compared to other English native classmates to finish a paper or read an article. From Chaisamrej's study, language ability does not only play an important factor for academic achievement, but it is also a tool for friendship establishment and successful integration into host society (Chaisamrej, 2005: 175-176).

Continuing the discussion on Japanese language education in Thailand, according to a survey conducted by The Japan Foundation (2006a), French and German are normally provided in Thai secondary school as an elective foreign language course. As of 2006, there were 296 schools providing French courses and 38 schools for German course. The number of secondary school providing Japanese language course is not mentioned but it can be implied that there are less than 38 places. As such there are not many students who are already fluent in both English and Japanese prior to the enrollment in university in Japan.

Moreover, Thai and Japanese languages are different in many aspects. There are no Chinese characters used in the Thai language and Chinese characters are not widely used in Thai society with the exception of the Chinese-Thai population. Grammatically, the word order in Japanese is opposite of that of Thai and English. For many international students, learning Japanese does not only mean remembering characters and word meanings, but it also includes comprehending and reorganizing a very different linguistic structure.

1.5 Thai Students and Japan

The history of Thai students in Japan started in 1897 when the first batch of Thai students, supported by scholarship from the King of Thailand (TSAJ,

2010) came to Japan. Later in 1954, the Japanese government implemented a policy giving scholarships to international students, the number of Thai students increased.

After the second half of 1980s, the number of Thai students increased sharply, due to the strong economic growth in Thailand, a growing interest in benefiting from Japan's strong economic, and technological prowess, and the implementation of the Japanese governments "100,000 international students" plan, declared in 1983 as described previously. With the fear that it might not be able to achieve the plan, Japan began to alter the visa restrictions to ease student immigration entry after the number of international students' visas was declined in 1996. This resulted in a rapid increase of Thai students, especially of self-financed students, journeying to Japan in the same year. Additionally, some students who had intended to study in the US also decided to instead study in Japan due to security reasons and the implementation of stricter American visa policies after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack.

From the past to the present, many Thai graduates of Japanese universities have played important roles in the country's development. Famous former Thai students to have studied in Japan include the present Governor of Bank of Thailand Mrs. Tarisa Watanagase, former Finance Minister Dr. Thanong Bidhaya, former Communications Minister Thanpuying Lersak Sombatsiri, the President of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL) Associate Professor Dr. Kitti Tiresesth, former Finance Minister Dr. Sommai Huntrakul, and former Agriculture Minister Dr. Preeda Kannasutra. The contributions of these famous

former students underline the quality and charismatic impact a Japanese university education in the eyes of Thai people.

As of 2009, there are 2,360 Thai students studying in Japan, accounting for 1.8% of all international students in the country the sixth largest national student body by country behind China, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia (JASSO, 2009). Focusing only on the number of students with "College Student" status in the alien registration, there are 2,502 Thai students registered in 2008, an increase of 552 students from 1,950 in 2004. The number presents the significant increase of 28% within four years (Ministry of Justice, 2009). Currently, Japan is ranked in the top five countries chosen as a study abroad destination for Thai students (UIS, 2010).

Outside of the classroom, Thailand and Japan have been important economic partners. Japanese companies dramatically moved much of their manufacturing operations and started subsidiaries in Thailand in 1980s. In 2007, 32.5% of all foreign direct investment in Thailand was from Japan making it Thailand's largest trading partner (MOFA, 2010). Japan and Thailand signed the Japan-Thailand Economic Partnership Agreement (JTEPA), which has been in effect since November 2007. Both countries are expecting to enhance and increase the trade, investment and cooperation. Moreover, Japan has joined hands with in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a member (with China and South Korea) as an ASEAN +3 (APT) country and has further participated in not only economic but political, security and socio-cultural cooperation as well. This all means that highly-skilled Thai students and graduates who can

communicate in Japanese will become a valuable resource for both Thailand and Japan in future strengthening of cooperation and relations. Therefore, it is important to study the adaptation and difficulty of Thai students, which will provide for the future cultural and economic facilitators between the two countries.

1.6 Aim of the Study and Research Questions

University students have to deal with academic adjustment in new educational environments. For international students, the adjustment can be more complicated and stressful than for domestic students. Besides the study, they also have to learn to live with the new culture in the new country. This research presumes that, far from home, international students face various difficulties in living and studying in Japan. By studying the case of Thai students in Japan, this study attempts to explore the difficulties and the adjustments to those difficulties of Thai students striving for academic success in the socio-cultural setting of Japan by posing the following research questions;

1. What are the difficulties for Thais studying and living in Japan?
2. How do they cope with those difficulties?

These two questions seek to unveil the difficulties Thai students feel are the barriers to academic success and achievement in socio-cultural adaptation. I hope that this study will contribute to the literature on international education by providing original study on Thai students in Japan as analyzed from the

perspective of a Thai student who herself lives and studies in country. Moreover, this study is expected to be, more or less, a useful reference for students, especially Thai and other Asian students who expect to might in Japan in the future.

1.7 Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 has introduced the issue of International students in Japan by providing a brief review of literature on international students' problem issues and the Japanese government's policies. In the latter half of the first chapter, I focused on Thai students and studying in Japan.

The issue of international student is very broad and has many aspects to study. In order to shape the scope for this study, Chapter 2 provides an international academic adjustment model and a social network pattern used in this research as the theoretical framework for data collection and analysis. From the theoretical framework, the methodology and case study design are explained.

Chapter 3 and 4 analyze the results of interview. Chapter 3 describes the research findings, followed by Chapter 4 which analyzes the difficulties in adjustment of Thai students in Japan. These results will be related to the accepted related theories and previous research, and discussions on the results of this research generate practical policy recommendations as conclusion in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework:

A Guide to the Case Study of Thai Students in Japan

From Chapter 1, we have seen that international students in Japan have faced various problems in adjusting to their lives as students in Japanese universities; and that the Japanese government and other institutions are making efforts at supporting and welcoming more international students to Japan. This second chapter introduces the previous studies on cross-cultural adaptation and presents the theoretical framework used in this study. Also in this chapter, cross-cultural adaptation is examined from various perspectives and approaches. The academic adjustment approach will be applied by using Dunn's modified International Academic Adjustment Model.

2.1 Cross-Cultural Adaptations Perspectives

It should be noted here that both adjustment and adaptation have similar definitions. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary⁷, to adapt is defined as "to become adjusted to new conditions" while to adjust is defined as "to become or make somebody or something suited to new conditions or to adapt oneself". Therefore, both terms are used interchangeable

Studies on cross-cultural adaptations of international students and workers have been examined from different approaches. Guzman and Burke (2003) divided these studies into four categories depending on the perspective of research.

⁷ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (5th edition). (1995). New York: Oxford University Press.

The first group are the studies generate generalized stages of cross-cultural adaptation, including the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993), the four stages of culture shock (Oberg, 1996), the five stages process of experiential learning (Pederson, 1995), the U-curve model of cross-cultural adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955), the W-curve model (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963), and the model of acculturation stress (Anderson, 1994).

The second group of studies is those analyzing problems, faced by international students and workers including communication barriers, financial problems and cultural differences (Church, 1982; Eui, 1975; Harre, 1995; Hull, 1978; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Spaulding & Flack, 1976; Yeung, 1980).

The third group is the predictors of cross-cultural adjustment such as, the adaptability, openness and intercultural understanding of the immigrant (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983; Cui & Awa, 1992; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977; Hammer, Nishida, & Jezek, 1988; Hannigan, 1990; Kealey & Ruben, 1983; Klemp, 1979).

The fourth and final group of studies examines the performance criteria of different cultural environments (Arthur & Bennett, 1995; Benson, 1978; Hawes & Kealey, 1980; Hopkins, 1982; Hough & Dunnette, 1992; Stoner, Aram, & Rubin, 1972; Vulpe, Kealey, Protheroe, & MacDonald, 2001; Westwood & Barker, 1990; Wiseman, 2002).

However, there are several critiques on all of the perspectives that have been taken to date. Guzman and Burke, for instance, commented that

"stage theories of cross-cultural adjustment discuss

stages without clearly delineating criteria for successful cross-cultural adjustment and performance within the respective stages. In regard to the study of international student and worker problems, the problems faced by students and workers in a foreign environment are often identified...without conceptually defining these problems in terms of variables that could be measured, such as performance dimensions and associated actions or behaviors. In addition, despite the wide variety of factors hypothesized as predictors of cross-cultural adjustment, there are few studies examining the usefulness of these predictors..."
(Guzman and Burke, 2003: 660).

Several other studies question and refute stage theorists' assumptions that every person begins a cross-cultural experience with honeymoon stage eventually achieves the feeling of satisfaction. The study of Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998) reported that Japanese students faced a lot of adjustment problems in New Zealand from the beginning of their sojourn, which should be a honeymoon stage according to the stage theorists. In addition, Ayano (2006) studied the experiences of Japanese students in Britain and found that her samples suffered from psychological strain throughout their year abroad, and could not identify a distinct honeymoon stage or a significant positive cultural or personal adjustment.

Even though the current literature can capture useful social and cultural perspectives concerning cross-cultural adjustment of international students, none of them focuses on the factors that influenced *academic* adjustment which should be the prime goal of students. This study differs from the perspectives mentioned above and focuses specifically on adjustment factors that relate to academic achievement and, therefore, Jennifer Wu Dunn's 2006 International Academic Model is adopted as the theoretical framework.

2.2 Academic Adjustment Model

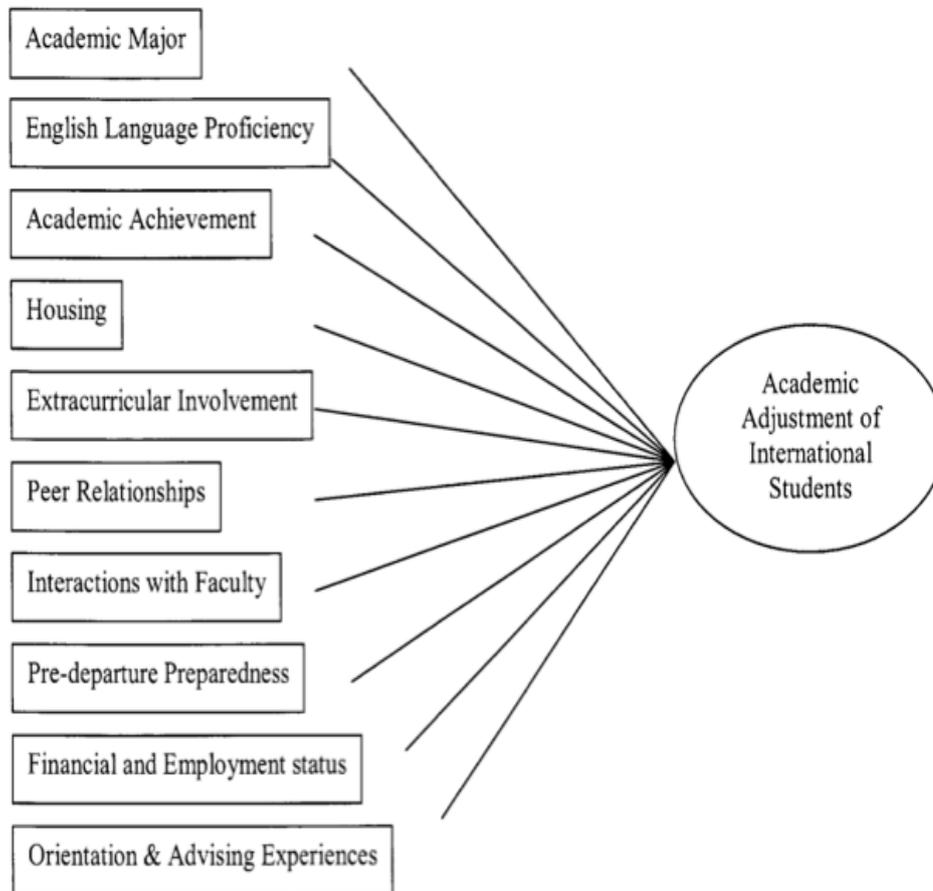
The International Academic adjustment model was proposed by Jennifer Wu Dunn (2006) in her research on academic adjustment of Chinese students in the United States. The model was developed after a review of adjustment issues conducted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). Dunn developed the model while adhering to the fundamental fact that international students are, first of all, students and by concentrating to this fact her study differs considerably from other studies on the cultural adaptation strategies of migrating students.

Dunn concluded that international students' difficulties arose because they identify themselves primarily as students and only secondarily as a foreigner (Dunn, 2006: 6-7). Therefore, her model emphasizes the elements related to adjusting to the academic environment that defines a students' life. Dunn's study asserts that fitting in an academic environment is crucial for all students to complete their educational and career goals. However, this universal students' struggle becomes more complex and difficult for international students due to the

additional cross-cultural factors which can lead to the additional problems not faced by domestic students.

Based on these perspectives she tested her new model by surveying 225 mainland Chinese graduate students enrolled in the University of Minnesota. Dunn found that the ten factors in her theoretical model strongly correlated with and could even predict the successful academic adjustments of international students. Following up on Dunn's successful research, Zhang Wei adopted the International Academic Adjustment Model as a guideline for further testing using data collected in the study on academic adaptation experiences of Chinese students in Japan in 2009 (Zhang, 2009).

Figure1: International Academic Adjustment Model by Jennifer Wu Dunn

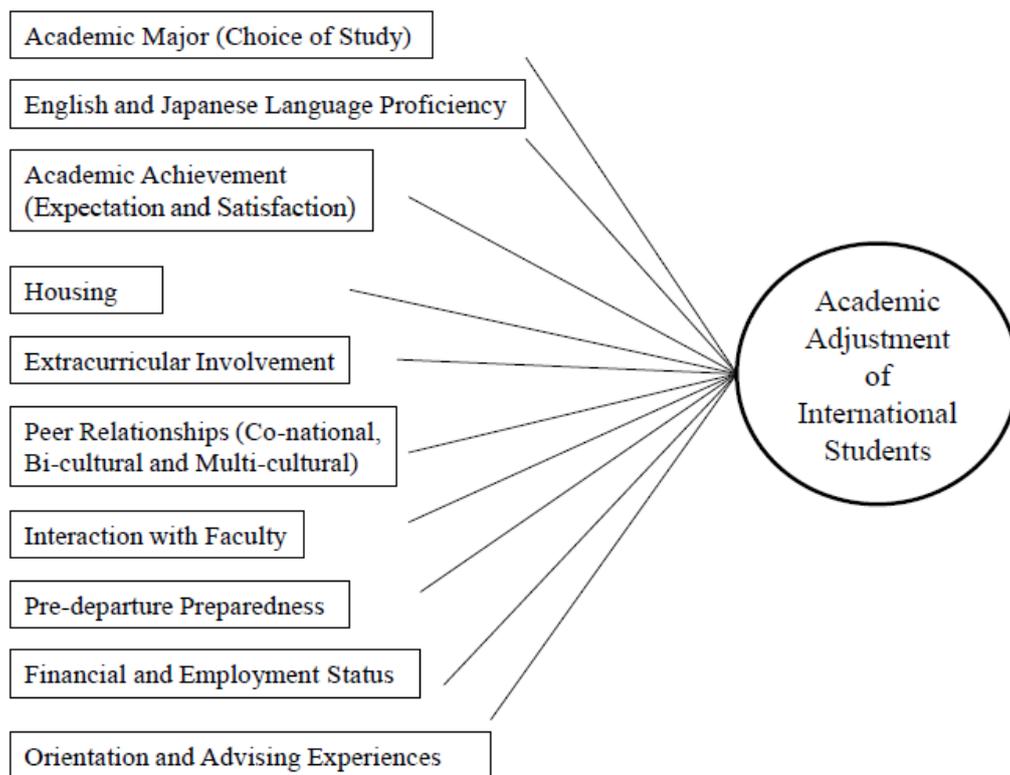


Source: Dunn, 2006: 19

Based on success of the two studies above, this research similarly employs the International Academic Adjustment Model as a theoretical and methodological framework to explore the adjustment of Thai students in Japan. The framework allows study over a wide range of adaption factors, and is well suited contextually into the problem issues and policies as reviewed in the previous chapter. Moreover, its applicability has been used to analyze international students in the same host country (Japan) and was recently developed. However to make the model fit with this study, some definitions were modified for each factor of adaption. All

definitions are based on Dunn's model explanation (Dunn, 2006) and Zhang Wei's study (Zhang, 2009). The factors examined and the redefinitions of some factors for use in this study are discussed presently;

Figure 2: Modified International Academic Adjustment Model



Academic Major: Dunn found that the students' choice of academic major have an impact on international students' adjustment. She referred to the previous studies that students from different majors have different study skills sets. Moreover, majors tend to have impact on students' class attendance (Dunn, 2006: 20-21). Zhang Wei defined this factor as the relevance of current major to the

previous field of study (Zhang, 2009: 25). Based on Zhang's definition, the academic major in this research refers to the choice of study, the relevance of the current study to the student's previous education, and the reason for the choice in case that the present study is different from previous one.

English and Japanese Language Proficiency: in the original Academic Adjustment Model, Dunn proposed that English Language Proficiency as an important adjustment factor. She referred to many studies which found that language is a serious barrier for international students (Dunn, 2006: 21-23). Corresponding to Dunn's literature review, Zhang understandably changed the English Language Proficiency component to Japanese Language Proficiency because the language environment in academic and social life for his/her target group was Japanese (Zhang, 2009: 24). However, in this research, I will examine both English and Japanese language proficiency, because these are the two main languages used by Thai students studying in Japanese universities. The studied populations are all studying in Japan's leading universities marked out for internationalization where English is primarily used in academic life, and Japanese is used in social and work life.

Academic Achievement: Dunn's defines academic achievement in terms of academic performance and grades, which she sees as relevance to overall academic satisfaction (Dunn, 2006: 23-24). In order to find the correlation between Grade Point Average (GPA) and academic achievement, Dunn included questions about GPA in the questionnaire (Dunn, 2006: p.40). Taking a different approach, Zhang does not focus on GPA, she considered the level of Academic

Achievement as the student's self-perception of academic expectation and adaption status in self-perception (Zhang, 2009: 26). Based on Zhang's definition, this research attempts to examine the academic expectation, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction from the students' viewpoint rather than simply from grade performance as Dunn chose as an indicator.

Housing: Dunn explained that for American college students, distance from the residence to campus plays significantly positive role on academic attainment. Moreover, for international students, roommate choice also affects the cross-cultural adjustment (Dunn, 2006: 24-25). Extending from Dunn's factor explanation, Zhang also included how students found for their accommodations, the level of convenience, and problems with the accommodation in her study (Zhang, 2009: 24). It should be noted that for both studies, "housing" referred to the living environment, accommodation searching, housing services, and real estate agency, difficulties and inconvenience in living, as well as the issue of roommate compatibility.

Extracurricular Involvement: Dunn referred to three types of social networks defined by Bochner, Mcleod and Lin (1977) to explain that interpersonal networks and social interaction positively related to international students' overall level of adjustment (Dunn, 2006: 25-26). Differing from Dunn, Zhang focused on the content and frequency in which international students were involved in the extracurricular activities organized within the university (Zhang, 2009: 26). For this research I extend from Zhang's indicators and define a student's level of extracurricular involvement to extracurricular activities both on and off campus,

and how their perception of those activities.

Peer Relationships: Dunn emphasized the importance of social participation and isolation in academic adjustment. For international students, social interaction with domestic students was also mentioned as an important factor (Dunn, 2006: 26-29). Zhang did not adopt the social participation and isolation concepts from Dunn. She focused on on-campus (in-class) relationships; how students interact and cooperate (Zhang, 2009: 25). In this research, Zhang's concept is combined with Dunn's definition of the Extracurricular Involvement and refers to all types of relationships built up since moving to Japan. Therefore this study does not only include friends made in classroom, but also friendship networks built through club activities, the local community outside classroom, and the co-national network as well. Further detail on co-national network will be explained later in *2.3 Social Networks and Adjustment*.

Interaction with Faculty: Dunn felt that interaction with faculty increases a student's degree of social integration. Moreover, the wide differences between students' expectations and those of teachers, as well as culturally and personally different teaching and learning styles of both the teacher and the student can negatively impact international students' general level of adjustment (Dunn, 2006: 29-31). Following Dunn, Zhang covered all of these issues in her study (Zhang, 2009: 25), and as the methodology is sound this study will as well. Therefore, the Interaction with Faculty factor refers to the student's experiences from interaction with professors and the extent to which students seek help from their professors. It also covers the problems in student-professor relations

including differences in learning method and communication barriers.

Pre-departure Preparedness: Dunn pointed out that differences between the academic culture of home country and that of host country, and the prior knowledge about academic programs influence the degree of adjustment problems of international students (Dunn, 2006: 31-32). These issues are similar to Zhang's definition for the Academic Major. What Zhang defined as Pre-departure Preparedness was the preparation for a future life in the host country before the departure (Zhang, 2009: 24). In this part, I combine Dunn's awareness in the previous experiences model with Zhang's definition; and in this research the Pre-departure Preparedness refers to the process of decision making students have before traveling to Japan. Moreover, I also examine the previous experiences that each interviewed student has had living abroad, where it is assumed that more international experience and preparation will similarly relieve the stress and increase the departing student's confidence about living and studying in Japan.

Financial and Employment Status: Financial concerns are ranked highest amongst international students' problems. Dunn referred to many previous studies to present the positive correlation between financial resource availability and academic success. Moreover, international students, who cannot get financial aid, face increased stresses which often negatively affect their overall living conditions (Dunn, 2006: 32-34). Based on what Dunn found, Zhang focused on the part-time work (Zhang, 2009: 26), as a common phenomenon among students in Japan. In this research, a students' financial and employment status refers to how students finance their living in Japan. It includes the issue of financial sponsor, scholarship,

financial problems, spending, and part-time job work. Additionally, part time work might be related to how students manage their time and experience Japanese working culture.

Orientation and Advising Experiences: Dunn mentioned that orientation programs, which are common at American universities, are the other important factor in international students' academic and social adjustment (Dunn, 2006: 34-35). Based on Dunn's study, Zhang examined the orientation programs and materials provided by the university (Zhang, 2009: 25). In this research, I include professors and senior students as information providers as well.

2.3 Social Networks and Adjustment

Collective identifications are important in the conceptual frameworks of sociology and social anthropology. According to Jenkins (2008), without talking about them, we cannot think sociologically in any way. The studies of both Dunn and Zhang Wei found that extracurricular activities and peer relationships significantly contributed to the positive adjustment of students. Dunn found that participating in extracurricular "as a result [of participating in extracurricular activities], students may gain more confidence in social settings and build their own social support network...feel more comfortable while interacting with peer students and faculty in academic settings" (Dunn, 2006: p.59). Dunn found that students, who have better relationship with American peers, earned higher grades. Consistently, Zhang Wei mentioned that students who made Japanese friends found them helpful in providing useful information and deepening the

understanding about Japanese society (Zhang, 2009: 59).

From the studies mentioned above, we can see that social networks are an important factor in cross-cultural academic adjustment of international students. International students receive support and learn behavior patterns from these peer networks and their adjustment is highly facilitated by these contacts. However, the issue of peer network utilization was barely included in the previous two studies. Dunn only briefly mentioned the level of correlation between peer network and the adjustment, while Zhang focused more on academic problem issues. Therefore, in addition to the academic adjustment model, I will include Bochner's three networks (as described below) and their functions in this research as well.

Bochner, Mcleod and Lin (1997: 277) hypothesized that international students' different goals and needs are met through the various non-academic activities the students join with various functionally distinct networks. Three distinct interpersonal networks are formed in the model of friendship formation namely: mono-cultural, bi-cultural and multi-cultural networks (Bochner, Mcleod & Lin, 1997: 277).

The mono-cultural network groups of students from the same country play a role of affirming existing cultural identity and loyalties through activities such as shopping, cooking and private problem consulting. This network is the primary group oriented and should not be discourage from forming because it creates a collectively constructed understanding of the host society through discussion, sharing, and emotional support (Hendrickson and Rosen, 2008: 5-6). Often mono-cultural network groups were the closest friends and the first group students asked

for help and support when they could not solve problems themselves (Zhang, 2009: 85).

Nevertheless, it does not mean that social networks always have a positive effect. The study of Ayano (2006) found out that Japanese students in Britain sought help for coping with the stress by listening to Japanese music, talking to Japanese friends or being in the Japanese network, and calling someone in their home country. In holding such strong ties, they seemed afraid of being isolated from the co-national community and afraid of making friends with host nationals because they do not want to destroy the co-national social network's group harmony.

Contrary to the first group, the bi-cultural network built between international students and host countries' students is an instrumental aid for language study and academic work. Social contact with host-nationals seems to be the most important variable in transnational coping process (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Therefore, I hypothesize that a Thai student who builds stronger relationships with Japanese in bi-cultural network tends to be more satisfied with life in Japan, less homesick, and generally face fewer difficulties in living and is more likely to improve Japanese language skills.

Multi-cultural network can be formed easily among international students due to the binding trait that they are all foreigners. It is more for pleasure and fun; for example, international students from various countries going to cultural events together. Students find advantages in establishing multi-cultural networks that,

"...First, when the study abroad experience is

over one has friends from all over the world and having foreign friends is linked to increased complexity of an individual's cognitive map. Second, one has the opportunity to not only learn about the host culture but learn about other cultures as well. Third, there is a certain sense of commonality that makes one feel like they are not alone in a new environment. Fourth, many international students have indicated that they feel embarrassed and self-conscious about their accent, thus speaking with multi-nationals is less intimidating while still allowing for language learning to occur" (Hendrickson and Rosen, 2008:7-8).

Pearson-Evens (2006) found the three important themes mirroring international students' adjustments by studying students' diaries; social networks, food habits, and language use. Interestingly, the study discovered how international students created groups to express their identity as *gaijin* or foreigners. Students in *gaijin* networks share the common experience of being foreigners in Japan. Even though this multi-ethnic group can facilitate adjustments at the early stage, later on some students become emotionally dependent on it and develop few contacts with host culture. Moreover, it appears that students use

gaijin networks as places for releasing their stress by expressing their negative views towards the host society.

At this point we can state confidently that created ethnic(s) groups not only function as the help-providers, but also a social net for students to feel secure in knowing that at least they are similar to some the other students in a similar situation and that they are not the only ones facing the stress. Thus, the balance of contact between the ethnic and host networks is another important issue to be considered. Otherwise, the very tight cohesion and too much collectivity will become a barrier for further integration with the host nationals; it creates psycho-socio-cultural distance, slowing down of language ability and understanding development, and finally the students remain on the periphery of the host culture, with no integration to it (Lewthwaite, 1997).

Apart from the academic adjustment, studying how Thai students make use of each social network and how each network facilitates their adjustment might allow us to understand the difficulties and how students seek for support through these networks. Moreover, I will also include the role of Thai Students' Association in Japan (TSAJ) and Thai students' community, which have not been included in studies on international students in Japan.

2.4 Research Design

This study utilizes qualitative research method and case study approach to explore the adjustment experiences of Thai students in Japan. The qualitative approach seeks to explore the phenomena, describe the variations by using semi-

structured methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation (Mack et. al., 2005). This approach helps us to study the phenomena which are simply impossible to quantify (Silverman, 2006: 43). Qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves and is especially useful in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations (Mack et. al., 2005).

Different from the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach is very helpful in confirming the hypotheses about the phenomena and describing the general characteristic of population by adopting the highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and structured observation. It allows us to establish the correlations between variables, as Dunn (2006) did in her development of the International Academic Adjustment Model.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have their own strengths in conducting social research. However, the qualitative method seems to be more suitable for meeting the research objectives of this study, which aims at understanding the adjustment of Thai students from their own perspectives by gaining detailed information about their experiences and opinions. In order to gain the detailed information about students' experience, the semi-structured interview that can provides the episode of student life is adopted. This research was conducted after Zhang Wei's study, in which the same approach and same model were adopted. Based on the rich data gained by this approach, we can also see to what extent the International Academic Adjustment Model proposed by Dunn

(2006) is applicable to the case of Thai students in Japan.

2.4.1 Interview Guidelines

This research uses a case study methodology to explore the cross-cultural adjustment experiences of Thai students in Japan. The case study approach is well suited to this study because it "provides an analysis and process which illuminates the theoretical issues being studied" (Hartley, 2004: 323). The study attempts to understand the adjustment experiences of Thai students in Japan by using Thai students studying in the universities, which have been selected as core universities for education internationalization in Japan under the Global 30 policy as studied cases.

This data collection process for this research began in August 2010 and lasted for seven months, until February 2011. The research was divided into two steps, first identifying stakeholders and making connections with them and secondly conducting interview with the stakeholders and target study group for real data collection. Between August and September 2010, connections were established the connection with Thai university students in the Kanto and Kansai areas through Thai Students' Association in Japan (TSAJ). They introduced me their friends who later became the interviewees. The snowball sampling technique was used in approaching the interviewees. For each interview, open-ended interviews were conducted which, "allow the interviewee the freedom to talk and ascribe meaning" (Noaks and Wincup 2004, as cited in Silverman, 2006: 110).

Two types of interview were used in this research. Out of 31 total

interviews, 12 were conducted in person and other 19 cases were conducted by telephone. Both in-person and on-phone interviews were conducted in the same procedure. All interviews were guided by the same interview questions, and each interview lasted between 40-60 minutes. The telephone interviews were conducted with the advance appointment. This second step lasted for approximately one month, from January to February, 2011.

As an interview guideline, some questions were adopted from Zhang Wei's study (2009: 125-126). This was chosen because her study was also conducted with international students in Japan, and the questions remained relevant to this study, despite the fact that her study population was Chinese students rather than Thai. Furthermore her research outcome showed that her interview questions were effective in explaining the same targeted social phenomenon as described in this study's research questions. However, I adjusted some questions to make them more suitable for my study's needs (as described in Section 2.2 *Academic Adjustment Model*). Also additional questions were added based on the literature (as described in 2.3 *Social Network and Adjustment*).

All guideline questions were designed to uniquely target the adjustment factors as proposed by Dunn (2006) in the International Academic Adjustment Model. Each question is associated with a particular factor in the model, as shown in the Table 1.

Table1: Association between adjustment factors and interview question

Factors	Questions
Pre-departure Preparedness	-Why did you choose to study in Japan? -How did you make the decision and preparation for study in Japan? Any difficulties, stress, and expectations before coming to Japan?
Orientation and Advising Experiences / Interaction with Faculty	-How do you find the orientation provided by university, professors and senior students useful? -Which orientation program did you find most useful?
Academic Major/ Academic Achievement	-How did you choose the current study? -Expectations about academic achievement.
Financial and Employment Status	-How do you finance your study? -Could you tell about your part-time job, working environment, working schedule, problem, and payment?
Extracurricular Activity Involvement	-Could you tell about your participation in any extracurricular activity? -How do you feel about it?
Extracurricular Activity Involvement / Peer Relationships	-How do you find Thai Students' Association in Japan (TSAJ) or Thai Community in your university useful for your live and study in Japan?
Housing	-Could you tell about your accommodation, roommate / how you chose the accommodation? -Do you have any comment about housing service in Japan and your living place?
Peer Relationships	-Could you tell about your friends (best friend, Japanese friends, international friends, etc.)?
Peer Relationships	-How did you meet and how does each group play role in your living and study in Japan?
English and Japanese Language Proficiency	-Where do you study English and Japanese? -How do you evaluate your language proficiency (English and Japanese)?

Factors	Questions
Interaction with Faculty / Peer Relationships	-Normally when do you have problems what do you do? -How did you cope with that situation? How was the result?
	-What was your most difficult and stressful situation faced during studying in Japan? -Why do you consider it most difficult and stressful? -How did you cope with that situation? How was the result? -How do you recommend the university or the Japanese government to improve the policy or the action about international students? -How do you advise Thai students who are going to study in Japan in the future?

The responses to the questions in the last row were considered the most important because they directly related to the research questions of this study (as described in *1.6 Aim of the Study and Research Questions*). Two questions about the further improvement and the advice for the future students are also included to find out students' opinions towards the present state of Japanese higher education as perceived by Thai students.

In analyzing data, the similar answers to each question was categorized and summarized as the key, which will be later discussed to answer the research questions and see whether the adjustment of Thai students differs significantly from the previous studies on other national groups of university students on similar cultural and academic adoption issues. Additionally, key data will be also used to analyze how each factor is interrelated to each other in the case of Thai

students in Japan and to what extent this model can be adapted to the case being studied.

2.4.2 Demographic Profile of Interviewees⁸

Participants in this research consisted of 31 Thai students from five universities. These universities have been selected as core universities for education internationalization in Japan under the Global 30 policy and are recognized as university with a large number of Thai students. Looking at Thai students in each university, A University is ranked first, followed by D University and B University. E University is ranked as the fourth, and C University is ranked as the sixth⁹. Out of 31 interviewees, 17 are currently enrolled in A University, located on Kyushu Island. A University is now recognized as the most international university in Japan with nearly 3,000 international students from more than 90 countries. Another 11 students are from B University, C University, and D University, in the Kansai and Kanto area. These three universities are national universities where many Thai students on scholarship study. The final group of students is from E University in Kanto area. E University has the stated aim to promote the internationalization of its education. Reflecting this goal at the present, there are almost 100 Thai students¹⁰, both self-financed and scholarship

8 In this thesis, interviewees' names and universities name are all concealed. Pseudonyms for universities are used for the ethics of confidentiality.

9 The university ranked as the fifth is located in Tokyo. Considering the geographical balance, this research chose two universities from Kanto and the other two from Kansai. Information on number of Thai students in each university by Mr. Warin Sukcharoen, the Minister Counselor, Office of Education Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy, Tokyo, presented in the meeting with Thai students in Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) on May 23, 2010.

10 As of fall 2010.

students enrolled in E University.

As of May 1, 2010 there were 228 Thai students studying in A University, which accounting for approximately 10% of all Thai university students currently in Japan and because over 90% of these students are undergraduate students I decided to conduct interviews with undergraduate students mainly in A University and with graduate students in the other four universities where the majority of Thai students were enrolled in graduate programs.

The age range of participants ranged from 17 to 31 years old. Three students were under 20, the majority (58%) of participants are between 20 and 25, and the remaining 10 participants (32%), are over 25 years old. With regards to sex 17 of 31 are male, and the rest of 14 are female.

In this research, age is considered as a variable. However, rather than using age in analyzing the primary data, educational level will be more emphasized because it can similarly account for age, maturity, length of education, as well as amount of university experience of interviewees. Gender might be also a variable. Nevertheless, this research could not find any significant relation between students' degree of adjustment and gender, however this might be the result of a relatively limited sample size.

In this research, participants' names and university names are concealed in order to assure the confidentiality. During the connection making in August and September 2010, some questions were asked to some students as trial. It appeared that those students felt uncomfortable to share their difficulties and negative points of the university. They felt more comfortable to express their opinions

towards universities when I assured them that all names would be concealed. Therefore, in the data collection in February, I decided not to disclose the names. Moreover, this research aims to understand the difficulties of international students in general, not in a particular university. Students' opinions and the explanations on their situations are considered to be more important than names.

Table 2: Number of students based on university and level of education

University	Level of Education			Total
	Undergraduate	Post Graduate		
		Master	Ph. D.	
A	15	2	-	17
B	-	2	3	5
C	-	-	3	3
D	1	1	1	3
E	-	3	-	3
Total	16	8	7	31

Dunn (2006) and Zhang (2009) found strong relationships between students' demographic characteristics and their degree of adaptation. The result showed that the older students having been in the university and the host country longer are more academically adjusted (Dunn, 2006: 50-51, Zhang, 2009: 103-104). Inspired by the previous studies, this research attempts to find the difference in adjustment problems of students in undergraduate and graduate level. Table 2

above shows the number of participants divided by educational level. The percentage of undergraduate student is 51% and that of graduate student accounts for 49% of all participants. In the case of Thai students in Japan, half of students enrolled in the university are graduate students, while the other half are undergraduate students.¹¹ In order to understand the situation of Thai students as a whole, neither group can be ignored. Designing the study to cover students in different degree programs allows us to see the whole picture of their difficulties in the university. However, there is a limitation about the balance of undergraduate and graduate participants in each university. More than 90% of Thai students in A University are undergraduate students. On the other hand, the majority of Thai students in other four universities are graduate students. The participants from other universities were introduced by graduate students who are active members in the TSAJ. Moreover, the period of interview was during the school's vacation period, when most of undergraduate students had gone back to their home country. Therefore, the accessibility to undergraduate students in those four universities was limited.

¹¹ Information by Mr. Warin Sukcharoen, the Minister Counselor, Office of Education Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy, Tokyo, presented in the meeting with Thai students in Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) on May 23, 2010.

Table 3: Students' length of stay in Japan

Years	Student (person)
Less than 1	7
1-2 year (s)	7
2-4 years	11
4-6 years	6

The table above shows the length of stay in Japan of the participants. This research hoped to interview students with differing lengths of stay in order to analyze differences in experience between newcomers and longer term Japanese residents. Moreover, those who have lived in Japan for more than two years were also expected to provide more suggestions towards the universities, and future students, and to Japanese society in general.

Table 4: Students' previous study abroad experience

Years	Student (person)
6 months – 1 year	17
More than 1 years	4
Never	10

The correlation between language proficiency and successful adaptation has been recognized by many researchers (Church, 1982, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, Lewthwaite, 1996, Dunn, 2006). In this research, 24 participants were

enrolled in English programs. Even though they are studying in Japanese universities, it was assumed that students with longer study abroad experiences would have better language skills which, in turn, would improve academic adjustment. Therefore, the students with and without study abroad experiences will be compared to find the difference in academic difficulty faced by each group. Out of 31 students 21 (65%) of participants, had studied abroad before their departure to Japan; and 17 students spent six months to one year abroad during high school in America, Singapore, Canada, UK and Japan as exchange students. Two undergraduate students had lived in Australia and New Zealand for almost ten years until they graduated high school. One Master student graduated high school from New Zealand and the other Master student did her first Master degree in Australia.

Table 5: Student's financial source

Financial source	Student (person)
Full support from Thai or Japanese government	10
Full support from other organization	4
Self-financed (including those who are partly supported by tuition reductions)	17

Zhang examined the difference in adjustment level between self-financed and full scholarship students and found that self-financed students possibly suffer from financial problems and therefore had a more difficult time adapting (Zhang,

2009: 96, 105). Following her findings, this research expects to find the difference in difficulties encountered by students of both groups. It covers students' with full scholarships interviewed in this research account for 45% of all participants. In this context, "full scholarship students" refers to those whose scholarship fully covers the tuition fee as well as and monthly living expense (allowance) until the recipient graduates and obtains a degree stipulated in the scholarship conditions.

Chapter 3: Life in Japan: Interviews with Thai Students

This chapter aims to categorize and summarize the data collected from the interviews. The similar responses of the interviewees will be grouped together and the findings will be organized in seven categories, based on the Academic Adaptation Model and interview questions (Table 1). The categorization was done to organize the factors and see how they relate to students' difficulties. Those seven categories are 1) Pre-departure Preparedness and Orientation & Advising Experience, 2) Housing, 3) Peer Relationships, 4) Extracurricular Involvement, 5) Financial and Employment Status, 6) Academic Difficulty and Achievement, and 7) Suggestions for University and Future Students.

In this chapter, participants' names and university names are all concealed for confidentiality. For undergraduate students, academic year is mentioned together with educational level. The academic year allows us to see trends in the different ideas, activities and coping behaviors of newcomers and longer term student residents. These differences can be clearly found in *3.3.2 Relationship with Japanese* and *3.4 Extracurricular Involvement*. Moreover, we this chapter discusses the common problems encountered by students in various years.

3.1 Pre-departure Preparedness, Orientation & Advising Experience

The preparations and stress before departure to Japan are divided into two categories: preparation and stress relating to academic work; and secondly problems related to living in Japan.

3.1.1 Preparation and Stress Relating to Academic Work

The preparation and stress relating to study can be further separated into the preparation and stress regarding language and academic program.

Language

All participants expressed that they were worried about the Japanese language, mostly because they thought it is the only language used in Japan, and as such would be vitally important for living in Japan. With the exception of two graduate students, all of the students had studied Japanese for at least two months before the departure even though 24 students (77%) only use English in their studies. The two students who did not study Japanese before departure said that the reason for not studying Japanese was that they were too busy with their pre-departure work. It was not because they did not want to study. Attaining fluency of Japanese as third language was a leading expectation of all students, especially those in undergraduate and Master level. The expectation of improved language ability was a primary reason for choosing Japan as a study destination.

Most of the students were less concerned about their English ability, especially those who had previous study-abroad experiences and 21 students (68%) of interviewees had studied abroad prior to their journey to Japan. For those who had no experience studying abroad, they were both worried and excited about living in Japan and communicating in Japanese, so they too were less concerned with their English proficiency.

Academic Programs

Most of the participants did not have stress regarding their disciplinary study. Some students believed that they would be able to study and pass classes based on the fact that they had at least passed the exam and been accepted to the university already. Moreover, there are many Thai students who have successfully graduated from and are presently enrolled in Japanese universities. Therefore, studying in Japan was not seen as an insurmountable academic challenge. One doctoral student made the point that students might not be able to imagine how the university and classes would be, so they do not know what to worry about. That is why he was not stressed regarding the difficulty of the academic work.

I believe that every student has the ability to study because we all passed the screening process so it means we are qualified.

(Doctoral student, B University).

I did not have any stress regarding the study because I could not imagine how it would be. I just thought that many international students graduated, so I can also do the same thing (Doctoral student, D University).

I did not have any stress regarding the study because it is the English program, which I can understand the language. I think the class in university is new to every student, so everyone is the

same. Moreover, there are many Thai students studying here, so I have no fear (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

However, four graduate students who had been working full time before enrolling in the higher courses were concerned that they might not be able to keep up with the in-class discussions because they had not touched upon what they called "academic things" for quite some time after finishing their undergraduate educations.

I had only a month for preparation after making the decision to come to Japan. I did not prepare myself by learning Japanese, but I read the books and articles relating to the study. I tried to recall the theories I previously learnt. Actually, the professor, who interviewed me, recommended me to do that (Master student, E University).

The professor in the university where I graduated recommended a scholarship for me. He also contacted the professor in Japan who is now my supervisor for me. Before coming here, he provided me a lot of information on the study. I recalled what I studied previously in the university by reading and talking to him (Doctoral student, C University).

3.1.2 Preparation and Stress Relating to Living

Most of the participants, especially the undergraduate students, were concerned about the living independently. Even though they had had experience studying abroad, they lived with a host family or in an on-campus dormitory purposely arranged for international students.

I had lived in Australia with my family for ten years. However, I did not think I am already grown-up or ready to live alone, even though I have experience living abroad. This time is not the same because I have to live without family now (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

I spent two or three vacations abroad when I was in high school. I had no worries about the study or university because I imagined that it might be similar to other international universities. I was a little bit worried about living without my family. It is true that I previously went abroad several times, but I stayed with my relatives. I had never experienced living by myself in a dormitory (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

One common concern was about cooking in Japan. Students considered that basic cooking skills are necessary for living abroad, even though some of

them usually eat out. All students were familiar with preparing Thai food from Thai ingredients especially using instant chili paste and many of them were taught how to cook by their mother.

Surprisingly, students did not express any worries about living in Japanese society and appears that they had a positive image of Japan upon departure. Moreover, 12 students or 38% of participants had been to Japan previously as tourists before studying in Japan which had allowed them to build an initial image of Japanese society. They expected that living in Japan might not be so difficult because it is more developed economically compared to Thailand. Therefore, none of the participants mentioned difficulties in preparation relating to clothes, medicine, and other general living goods that can be bought in Japan.

Regarding family influence on studying in Japan 18 students, both undergraduate and graduate students, said that they made the decision about studying in Japan with their family and family was one influencing factor in choosing the country. The reasons their parents agreed with their decision to study in Japan were varied and included relative proximity from Thailand, Japan's reputation a safe and security country, and chance to learn the Japanese language, which is needed in the global market.

Family was not the only influence in deciding the destination country, 7 undergraduate students said that the process of decision making with their parents' advice influenced their choice of major as well. The support and consent from the family are highly explanatory to why self-financed students were less likely to not encounter financial problems (See 3.5 *Financial and Employment Status*).

My sister got the Monbusho scholarship and came to Japan prior to me, so my parents know Japan quite well. They encouraged me to apply for the same scholarship and come to Japan (Doctoral student, B University)

My parents and I agreed that I should study abroad after getting a bachelor degree in Thailand. I chose Japan because I personally like this country and I have several Japanese friends. We got to know each other in England. My parents agreed because Japan is a very safe country and they know I have friends here (Master student, E University).

I entered a university in Thailand already but I did not like the program, so I quit and my mother suggested the university in Japan. My mother got the information from her friend who sent a daughter to this university (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

3.1.3 Orientation & Advising Experience

Thai students had different pre and post-departure orientation and advising experiences which varied depending on student's university and scholarship program. Orientation was be divided into two main types which are 1) the orientation prior to the journey, conducted by the Japanese Embassy in Thailand

(for *Monbusho* scholarship recipients) and liaison office of the university (A and B University students), and 2) the post-arrival orientation in Japan, conducted by the university, faculty and more senior Thai students (all students respondents).

Amongst the 31 students, 23 students were provided with a pre-departure orientation, which offered information about life in Japan and what to bring to Japan. Some more senior Thai students who are currently enrolled in, or who had graduated from a Japanese university also attended the orientation. All 23 students pointed out that talking to the senior students was the most effective way to get the information they needed about studying in Japan. For the other 8 students who did not have the pre-departure orientation, they asked for advice from the supervisors and more senior Thai students who are studying at the same university.

A self-financed student from Kyushu who attended a pre-departure orientation said:

I gained most information from more senior Thais. They came to the orientation held by the Thai office of the university. In the orientation, the office just provided the overall image of the university and they spoke from the viewpoint of the university. However, information from students is different because they are actually studying there. They know what to bring and what to prepare as the insider (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

When it comes to orientations conducted by the university, all students pointed out that they got the information about course registration, on-campus services and school facilities. Graduate students got advice about course selection and useful textbooks from their supervisors, while undergraduate students got this academic advice from more senior Thai students.

All students mentioned that there is a consulting room for international students provided by their respective universities. However, they did not gain any advice regarding daily life from it. Nine students, accounting for 29% of participants commented that the consulting room or international students' center is useful when the students can communicate in Japanese because it is staff by Japanese, and most of them would not communicate in English. Mostly, students used this service when they wanted to get the information regarding local exchange or student activities after the initial arrival period.

One exceptional case is the case of a master student from D University. The university manages a program where local volunteers play the host role, taking care of international students. The student said that through this program he established a local network, which he found to be useful for his study and where he could learn more about Japanese culture.

3.2 Housing

In the interview, the issue of housing was examined in three aspects: decision making, rental service, and satisfaction, as well as comments about housing in general. Almost every student had similar recollections of their first

year in Japan when they lived in a dormitory provided by the university or the residential housing arranged directly by JASSO. Nevertheless, these places have a limited length of stay, so students had to find new accommodation on their own.

Two master students from E University exceptional early housing experiences. They have been living in a service apartment since their first year. They reported that the university also introduced a dormitory but that it was quite far from the campus. Normally, on-campus dormitory are suggested to self-financial students because it they are usually cheaper and scholarship students are offered a more expensive option.

3.2.1 Decision Making

Eleven out of 17 students, or 65% of participants living in Kyushu, are sharing a room with at least one roommate and 73% of them are living with Thais. The rent per person is cheaper for shared apartments. Students said they feel comfortable living with a co-national with whom they can share feelings and problems with, as well as spend time with. On the other hand, students in more urbanized Kanto and Kansai found it more difficult to find a rental apartment for several persons.

Normally the number of service apartments for international students is limited; especially for those whose guarantor is the university, not a Japanese person. The owners do not want international students to rent their apartment. It is even more

difficult to rent a shared room which is usually for family. We are not family, just friends (Doctoral student, B University).

Two students living in Tokyo volunteered that in the big city even though they could have rented shared accommodations, the monthly rent per person would not have been cheaper. Therefore, students living in big cities often choose to live alone, which seems to be the most convenient way to rent the apartment. Students who live alone tended to search for the apartment in the same area as their co-nations (colloquially referred to a little-Thailand) and often spend time together for dinner with co-nationals.

Regardless of the number of people living together, each student interviewed considers convenience as the first priority for housing and cost second. Students searched for convenient housing in terms of geographic distance from the university, transportation access, and nearby places to eat and shop. The apartment where they are now living in was not always the most convenient nor the cheapest, but they try to balance the two factors of economy and convenience.

3.2.2 Rental Services

Eight students arranged their own real estate agents, while six had Japanese speaking friends (either fluent foreigners or native Japanese), choose the apartments and finalize the rental contracts for them. Three students did not search for new accommodations, and instead continued renting a room from friends or seniors. No students moved into furnished apartments. Most inherited

old furniture from Thai students who were going to graduate. This is one way that newer and older students utilized their co-national network: to gain material support for living when they need it and pass to others when they don't.

The students who searched for the accommodation by themselves found that documents and contract making procedures were a major problem, due to their limited Japanese language proficiency. An undergraduate (2nd year) student from A University suggested that the real estate agents should help international students by providing English documents and help contacting other related service (electricity, gas, and etc.).

I was very stressed and worried about moving into an apartment. There were many documents and long procedures to complete. I had to contact the electricity company, gas company and so on by myself. And all these things have to be done in Japanese (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

In order to meet the requirements, the university serves as the role of guarantor for international students and I think this is very good. But, I think the further help with signing contract documents should be provided also. In my case, I do not understand Japanese so I had to sign the documents I did not understand (Master student, E University).

3.2.3 Satisfaction and Comments

Overall, students are satisfied with their apartments. However, three students mentioned that their rooms are small and the walls are too thin. Noise from adjoining rooms is often unavoidable. Four students commented that they like the design and function of the room, finding that even though the physical space is limited, the toilet, kitchen and bedroom are properly equipped and functionally separated.

For students living in JASSO provided apartments and on-campus dormitories, they are all satisfied with the level security, comfort, and convenience. However, two undergraduate students commented that there are many rules to follow. One of them said:

I sometimes study with my friend until late night. I want my friend to stay with me but it is impossible. I think it would be better if we could do that. Actually, they should allow the registration for guest to stay...one night per time, for example (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

3.3 Peer Relationships

This section discusses Thai students' relationships with three different peer groups, divided by nationality. Those three groups are their relationships with Thai students, host nation students (Japanese), and with other international students.

3.3.1 Relationship with Thai Students

All students mentioned that their closest friends are Thai with whom they spend most of their free time together. Students living in shared apartments mostly live with Thai roommates and students living alone tend to find apartments in the same area, so that they can spend time after school together (See *3.2.1 Decision Making*). Apart from sharing their private lives, Thai friends also influence the study and class registration. Undergraduate and master students expressed that they usually take the same classes as each other and will study for them together. It can be seen from the following quotes that, to Thai students, co-national friends do not only mean someone to have fun with, but they are also serve as surrogate family members and study partners.

Thai students study together because we have to help each other search for the meaning of unfamiliar Japanese words. If we study separately, we cannot follow the class (Master student, B University).

It is common to have a Thai best friend because we can talk and understand each other easily. I do not frequently hang out with Japanese or other international students because I do not know if it is going to be as fun as hanging out with Thai friends (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

I have dinner with my close Thai friends several times a week. We cook and eat together. During the meal, we share a lot about the problems studying and living here. I feel relaxed because all sisters and brothers here always care for me and give me good suggestions (Master student, A University).

My best friend and I have known each other since we were in university in Thailand. She has been my best friend for many years. When I have a problem here, I always talk with her. She came to Japan before me so she is the one who provided me with a lot of information and help about living in Japan (Master student, E University).

Apart from private relationship, Thai students have gathered in more formalized groups such as the Thai Students' Association in Japan under the Royal Patronage (TSAJ) and other established networks of Thai students across Japan. The association is run by the committee of administrative members and regional staff. The student president is chosen in an annual presidential election¹², and appoints the administrative members and establishes his own working team. The regional staffs are the representatives of Thai students' community in each area, or branches of TSAJ. As of November 2010, there are 17 representatives from 17 out of the 47 prefectures around Japan.

12 The election is held via TSAJ community in the website. All Thai students in Japan can register for the ID name and password and vote for president.

Thai students in Japan have conducted many activities through this student association. The annual activities held by TSAJ include the Thai-Japan International Academic Conference (TJIA), Sports Day, and Ski Trip. TJIA is the biggest activity because it is organized with the collaboration of many other Thai-Japanese organizations, including the Royal Thai Embassy in Japan, the Royal Thai Consulate-General in Japan, The Thailand Research Fund (TRF), The National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), The National Innovation Agency (NIA), Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (TISTR), Japan-Thailand Economic Cooperation Society (JTEC), Old Japan Student Association in Thailand (OJSAT), Association of Thai Professionals in Japan (ATPIJ), and universities from both Thailand and Japan. The conference forges the links and facilitates knowledge exchange between Thai and Japanese students and researchers.

Out of the 31 students interviewed, six students are playing active roles as TSAJ committee members, and four out of six members are scholarship students. The other seven students expressed that they have participated in TSAJ activities and they could expand their Thai student networks through those activities. However, the rest of the students, or 42% of participants, said that they have never or rarely heard of TSAJ and do not feel a part of the association, even though TSAJ is actually open to all Thai students, and all Thai students in Japan are automatically included as member. One student commented that he feels TSAJ is a group of government scholarship students. The reason why self-financed students may feel left out of the TSAJ might relate to the organization

history of the organization which was founded by a group of King Scholarship students, and reestablished by students receiving Thai government or *Monbusho* scholarships.

I once came to Japan as an exchange student. At that time I joined the web community and also the activities. I felt this is the group of scholarship students, not exchange students. Even though now I am a university student (sponsored by MEXT), I do not feel it is really useful (Master scholarship student, B University).

I feel good to be an active member of TSAJ because I have things to do. I feel important here. But for other students who do not think they are in the association, I think because they think they have no role to play so they feel the distance between TSAJ and themselves (Undergraduate 4th year self-financed student, A University).

Students involving themselves with the TSAJ expressed that the TSAJ and its activities are useful in terms of social networking and friendship establishment. Three students linked the benefit of joining TSAJ to the chance to travel around Japan, and another four mentioned that the network of Thai students will be useful for their job hunting and future career options.

I am a committee member of TSAJ. As for the viewpoint of activity organizer, I think joining TSAJ gives me the experience of working with different people. I also have a chance to know many people and I think this network will be useful for my future career (Doctoral student, D University).

I am a committee member of TSAJ. I admit that it does not help my study but I think it is a useful network to get information, free accommodation when traveling, and second-hand stuff (Doctoral student, B University).

I joined TJIA last year and some companies, where TSAJ members are working, came and gave recruitment information in the conference. I also talked to many professors and researchers from Thailand and other universities in Japan. I think Thai students, including undergraduate students, should join TSAJ activities to broaden the network (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

I think TJIA is useful for students in terms of network establishment, but not really practical in academics. We cannot expect deep discussion amongst students. The scope of the conference is too broad but this cannot be helped because our

studies are different. I joined TJIA with no academic expectations, just for a chance to meet other students (Doctoral student, B University).

From the interviews above, it can be seen that relationships with Thai students in both private and organization levels positively relates to students' overall adjustment. Private relationships seem to have more effect on academic adjustment. Moreover, the quotes above also show that Thai students utilize their private relationships to cope with academic and socio-cultural difficulties. Further details on coping strategies will be written in *3.6.3 Coping Strategies*. Apart from the level of private relationships, however, , this research cannot generalize the significance of the TSAJ as an essential component in academic adjustment, or in coping with academic difficulties of Thai students for Thai students' However, for the active members and activities participants, TSAJ can function as a tool for social adjustment. It allows students to expand their Thai students' network, which can be useful for developing social or post-graduation connections in and out of Japan, or as an facilitator to find other Thai students' activities, which help students relax from stress. Thai students can enjoy their time in Japan more with TSAJ through its activities and contacting with new Thai friends.

Apart from TSAJ, the other organization that seems to have more impact on Thai undergraduate students in A university is Thai Community, a branch of TSAJ in Oita prefecture. Thai students in A university formed a student organization called Thai Community and was formally registered with the A

University in 2005. Four years later in 2009, it became a part of TSAJ and that was the first time Thai students in A University started establishing relationships with Thai students studying in other prefectures. Unsurprisingly, many students feel that they are in Thai Community in A university, but not part of the greater in TSAJ.

The biggest activity of Thai community is Thai week, which is held once a year with the aim to encourage the unity among Thai students, to promote Thai culture, and increase the mutual understanding amongst students and in the locality.

Similar to TSAJ, students feel that it is a chance that students can work together, and get closer to each other as co-nationals. Moreover, students also expressed that extracurricular activities and experiences such as working in team, time management and self adjustment, gained from activities can contribute to the job hunting and career life in the future.

However, different from TSAJ, Thai students in A university feel that Thai Community has a positive influence on their lives and study in Japan. In A university, students establish friendship with those in different academic years through participating in activities of Thai Community. Those who do not participate in any activity will lose contact and be ignored by the majority of Thai students. Moreover, the hierarchy of power in the Thai expat student community is also based upon their respective performance and contribution to Thai Community,. Senior students use individual performances in the community to evaluate the ability of junior students. Concern over being accepted as a part of

Thai Community, some students spend so much time participating in its activities that it leads to time management problem in conflict with their studies or other obligations. Some students reflected upon their difficulty with time management and self-control as a warning for future Thai students.

3.3.2 Relationship with Japanese Students

Compared to graduate students, undergraduate students seem to have more chances to interact and make acquaintances with Japanese students through clubs and other extracurricular activities. Students involved in club activities tend to have more Japanese friends and feel more comfortable interacting with Japanese. Moreover, as would be expected increased contact with Japanese students also has a positive relation to the improvement of students' Japanese language proficiency. Students can also activate their Japanese friend networks to help for language study and practice. However, club membership in Japan can be extremely time consuming and requires regular attendance which are tall barriers for some students, especially those who have part-time jobs or are in their senior years (3rd and 4th year). Also involvement in club some activities, also decreases the chance to establish relationship with Japanese students if they are not recruiting Japanese members, such as the co-national based organizations described above.

I try to get to build acquaintances with Japanese and learn Japanese language as much as I can, so I decided to join an academic club named Model UN. We model the UN meeting and

discuss world problems as if we are the real representative of that country. In the beginning it was very tough because I had to study and prepare for discussion and I had to do it in Japanese. After half a year, I felt more comfortable and I also got many Japanese friends from this club (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

I have several Japanese friends but we are not really close. They are friends of my friend. I can ask them to check my Japanese homework but we do not hang out. I think I do not have many Japanese friends because I am not involved in any club (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

I do not have close Japanese friends because I do not belong to any club. My friends do that and they have many Japanese friends. I do not have enough time because I have a part-time job. Being Involved in the club takes much time; it requires active participation (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

For graduate students who mostly do not often spend time in extracurricular activities, they make friends with Japanese students more academic settings such as classes, labs and seminars. However, they said their

relationships are often not close. They do not talk frequently about their private lives, but more about their academic work.

I am not involved in any extracurricular activity because I think I am too old. I am now focusing on my studies and I have no interest in those activities. My Japanese friends are the in-class friends. We discuss about the academic work and our research, but we do not have that kind of private or close relationship, unlike the undergraduate students (Master student, E University).

I have Japanese friends who are in the same lab, but actually we do not really talk. We focus on our own work and it does not need any discussion. I think if I studied social sciences or art, we would talk more (Doctoral student, B University).

Moreover 14 students, or 45% of participants, found that establishing relationships with Japanese is difficult due to language and cultural barriers. Some students said that they feel Japanese people keep distance from them, so they do not feel close consider each other to be friends.

I think Japanese people have two levels of friend, one is the superficial level and the other one is the real friend level.

Everyone can be in the first level because Japanese people are friendly and polite. But they do not trust you as a friend. You have to wait until he or she trusts you and open the door for you to enter the real friend level. It takes time, establishing the friendship is difficult, but I think this is how Japanese people are (Undergraduate 4th year student, D University).

Japanese people do not open up. They do not express what they are really thinking so I do not understand their thoughts. This is the problem, especially when we work together (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

I think it is about the language ability. I do not have close Japanese friends because I do not know how and what to talk to them and Japanese students also think the same way with international students. They have no confidence to speak English. I think this is why international and Japanese students do not talk (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

I do not feel making friend with Japanese is difficult because I do not expect to be close friends. I know that I am an international student, so it is impossible to be like Japanese. I am ok with the position I am in (Master student, E University).

On the other hand, several students mentioned that establishing relationship with Japanese was not difficult. They expressed their comments that communicating with Japanese is not the matter of language, but as a matter of “sense” (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University). It is frequently said that Japanese people have "*Omote* (front)" and "*Ura* (back)", but their true feelings can be understood without being said if you get used to being with Japanese (Undergraduate 4th year, A University).

3.3.3 Relationship with International Students

Most students identified the relationship with international students as "in-class" or "extracurricular activity" friends in that they share the same hobby or interest, but they do not frequently “hang out” and sometimes just have class or group gatherings.

I got to know most of my international friends from the exchange activity. We often meet in activities for international students. If I have free time, I go to the international students' center because I am a volunteer, and I meet them there. We sometimes have lunch together, but for dinner I spend time with Thai friends (Doctoral student, B University).

Students with previous study abroad experiences found it easier to establish friendships with international students. These experiences allow them to

become more comfortable in speaking English which further allowed their connection to other international students. Moreover, these students could also share their experiences abroad with national students of the previous host country which allows them to communicate with each other more easily.

For me, establishing friendship with American students is easy, easier than with Japanese. Some American friends came to me because they know I used to study there. Sometimes, we share the problems we faced in Japan and talk about how Japan is different from America (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

Different from students with study abroad experience, an undergraduate student without this experience found it is difficult to establish relationships with international students because she has no confidence in her English proficiency. She mentioned the relation of English proficiency and chance to establish friendship. According to her, establishing relationships with international friends is especially difficult for new students who have no experience of studying abroad.

Apart from Thai friends, I have some Indonesian friends who are living on the same floor (in the dormitory), and some other international friends, introduced by my Thai friends. Communicating in foreign languages is the big problem for me.

Being not good at Japanese and English limits the chance to make friends (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

3.4 Extracurricular Involvement

As previously stated the undergraduates are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities. They participate in sports, traditional music and dance clubs and volunteer organization. Participating in these activities does not often only mean belonging to a group, but it is linked with the socio-cultural adjustment of students. They commented that through the activities, they get to know Japanese friends, learn the Japanese working style and, most importantly according to them, improve their Japanese language skills. However, 4 out of 6 students in their 3rd and 4th year are involved in extracurricular activities, said that they quit the club activity because they wanted to focus on studying and job hunting.

I am in a volunteer club, which aims to improve the quality of life and educational standards in rural Thailand. We go to Thailand every year and during the trip I work as the cooperator and interpreter. My Japanese ability has improved a lot (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

I used to join many clubs but I did not feel that I really belong to them because I did not take any of them seriously. When I

became the third year student, I quit all activities. The study became harder and senior students do not go to the club anymore (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

For graduate students, they do not often participate in club activities but choose to participate in exchange activities such as and home stay programs, provided by the university. As such their main expectation is not language ability improvement, but to travel and experience Japanese culture. Extracurricular activities are not seen as duties but as enjoyable breaks. They often do not participate in clubs with other Japanese students because they feel club activities are geared towards undergraduate students, are concerned with things outside their interests, or simply don't have enough time.

3.5 Financial and Employment Status

To examine the financial and employment status, the students interviewed can be divided into two groups according to the financial sponsor: scholarship students, those student's whose tuition fees and living expenses (monthly allowance) are covered either by the Japanese or Thai governments or by an organization apart from the parents, and self-financed student, supported by their families.

3.5.1 Scholarship students

Of the participants 45% or 14 students are full scholarship students with 10

of them supported by the Japanese government and are referred to as the *Monbusho* students. All 14 students are receiving full tuition fees as well as a monthly allowance ranging from ¥150,000 to ¥180,000 monthly, depending on the sponsor and educational level of the recipient. They commented that the money is sufficient for the minimum living expenses, but they have to cut down on entertainment costs or pay for those expenses on their own. However, the appropriate amount of monthly allowance seems to be an issue that the scholarship provider may need to be considered about.

The *Monbusho* scholarship for research students in 2006, MEXT granted ¥175,000 month allowances to each recipient throughout the term of their scholarship (MEXT, 2005). Under the fiscal year 2010 budget, each recipient, who enrolled in a Master's program, was provided ¥154,000, and ¥155,000 was provided for those enrolled in a Doctoral program in 2011 (MEXT, 2010). For 2012, under the fiscal 2011 budget, MEXT provided ¥152,000 for recipients enrolling in a Master's program, and ¥153,000 for those in a Doctoral program (MEXT, 2011). Monthly allowance from MEXT is subject to change, depending on the economic status and annual budget.

According to the Japan Student Services Organization, JASSO (JASSO, 2010: 41), the national average monthly expense (including academic fees) of an international student is ¥138,000. The survey also shows that the cost of living in Kanto and other big cities¹³ is significantly higher than that in other areas. However, some *Monbusho* students commented that decreasing their monthly

¹³ ¥152,000 in Kanto area, ¥132,000 in Chubu area, ¥133,000 in Kinki area and ¥115,000 in Kyushu area (JASSO, 2010: 41).

allowance will make students' life more difficult, especially in the case of graduate students who have to spend more money on textbooks and research, and students who live in big cities. Moreover, as international students, they consider traveling in Japan is also an important part of their student life.

The Monbusho Doctoral student gets almost the same amount of money with Master students. I think we should get a higher amount because the level of study and the research expense are different (Doctoral student, B University).

I am receiving the Monbusho scholarship. The amount is okay but I do not want MEXT to decrease because even now the students, especially those who are in a big city, cannot save any money. For me, when I want to use the extra money for travel and buy things, I get support from my family and I also work as a research assistant (Doctoral student, C University).

MEXT is cutting the amount of allowance and it has been decreasing every year. Actually it is sufficient but in the reality we, international students, also want to travel and get more experience. It is impossible to just study and stay in the house all time. We also need entertainment (Doctoral student, B University).

As mentioned by students above, part-time jobs are another major source for extra money. It did not appear that students need to work particularly hard or have a difficult time doing part-time jobs. They tend to choose on-campus work; for example, teaching assistant (TA) or research assistant (RA) in the lab, which is academically useful for them and at the same time allows them to spend adequate time on their studies. For the off-campus work, they choose jobs where international students are needed and that allow them to flexibly adjust their working schedule to fit their academic commitments.

I used to work five hours a day in a Thai restaurant, but I quit after two months because it negatively affected my studies. Now I am teaching Thai in a language school three days a week and not more than two hours a day. I am okay with my schedule now. I can still concentrate on my study and have some money for entertainment. I think this is enough. (Master student, B University)

I work as a TA (teaching assistant) and I also teach Thai language off-campus. I have no problems about time management because TA work takes several hours a week and language teaching is just temporary work. These two works are not my main source of income. (Doctoral student, D University)

3.5.2 Self-Financed Students

Seventeen students involved in this research came to Japan relying on financial support for living expenses from their parents or relatives. Most of them, except for a Doctoral Student from Kansai, are receiving a tuition reduction or tuition exemption from their university. Seven of them later received a partial scholarship for living expenses, which vary from ¥20,000 to ¥65,000 per month, from the JASSO and the local government of the city they are living in. Those who do not get any scholarships try to find part time jobs, by seeking for information from university bulletin boards and other Thai students who used to work in a given place previously. Working on campus seems to also be the popular choice among self-financed students. Six of them are working as teaching assistants (TA), on-campus dormitory's resident assistants (RA), computer and media rooms' system assistants (SA), examination proctors, and as university's student staff for exchange activities.

Many students insisted that they do not want their part-time job to interrupt their study or private time much. Two students mentioned that they quit their job after getting a scholarship. Four students do not work part-time because they think they should focus on only one thing---- studying.

I am also a self-financed student. I later got a scholarship for tuition fee. For my living expenses, at first when I was a research student, I worked several jobs. I did anything I was asked to do. But when I became a Doctoral student, I started

earning by doing research and selling the interior plans I designed (Doctoral student, C University).

I used to have two jobs: one at a donut shop and the other one at the cafeteria. I quit the latter first because I did not want to work on Saturday. I needed the free time. When I was asked to do overtime work or change the schedule, I felt awkward to say no. I later quit the job at the donut shop because I got the honors scholarship. The only one problem I had is the time. The places I worked for wanted international students. So I think they welcomed and got along with international students quite well (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

I do not have a part-time job. Actually I have never done any. I prefer spending my free time in the way I like. I get financial support from my family (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

I do not have a part-time job because I do not think I could manage the time well, I know myself. I want to do my best in school. My parents sent me here to study, not to work (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

I sometimes work as a proctor. It is just temporary work but I do not have to spend time searching for off-campus work. The university will announce when people are needed (Master student, A University).

I started a part-time job because I wanted to travel and I did not want to use my mother's money for that. The money sent from my family is for the tuition fee. I am working at a restaurant in an aquarium. The working schedule is from 10:00 to 15:00 on weekends. My friend introduced me to replace her. I am satisfied with the hourly wage and environment. People get used to working with international students. Actually they recruited international students (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

From the interviews above, we can see that both groups are satisfied with their current employment status and working conditions. Two main reasons are: 1) they, especially graduate students, work on campus where the jobs are a part of and helpful in their studies, and 2) they work for the place where international students are needed and welcomed for one reason or another.

Interestingly, the interviews did not find that students linked working part-time with social and cultural adjustment, which differs from their perceptions of extracurricular activities. Rather than mentioning part-time jobs as a way to learn

about Japanese culture, meeting people, or as a way to improve their Japanese skills, several students said part-time jobs do not relate to their Japanese language improvement.

I do not think I have a problem at work. I understand what they say to me because my responsibility is actually the same every week. However, I do not think my Japanese is improving. We just use the same set of vocabularies (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

I am now working at a Thai restaurant. Overall I am okay with this working place and people. I work 20 hours a week. Sometimes I cannot understand what the customer ordered. Language is still my problem. I just know the words frequently used because it is the routine work. Because I do not understand Japanese well, I do not know what other staff think about me. They might be kind to me, but when Japanese staff start talking, I do not know what they are talking about. They might talk behind my back (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

3.6 Academic Difficulties and Achievements

This research has no intention in asking about or accessing the academic grades of the students involved. Rather than doing this, this research aims to

examine how the students perceive their own academic achievement relative to their prior expectations as part of their cultural adjustment. The issues examined in this section include: 1) academic goals and expectation, 2) academic difficulties, and 3) coping strategies.

3.6.1 Academic Goals and Expectations

All students expressed their academic expectation was to graduate and obtain a degree within the expected time. Graduate students considered their academic achievement as defined by the quality of their research, thesis and published articles whereas undergraduate students considered acceptable grades and a GPA with no F to define academic success. Most of the students (with the exception of two graduate students) expressed that being fluent in Japanese was one of their educational goals. For those graduate students, they reported that their goal was gaining as much knowledge in their field as possible and specializing in their discipline.

Additionally, some undergraduate students expressed their further academic expectations as being prepared to get a job offer in Japan upon graduation, being “grown-up” and gaining the different social-cultural experiences from those living in Thailand.

3.6.2 Academic Difficulties

The students were asked about the most difficult and stressful situation in their study at the university. The difficulties most commonly mentioned by

students are the English and Japanese language barriers, thesis dissertation writing difficulties, unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, insufficient knowledge in their field of study, self management, distance with professors, or insufficient support from their university. The particulars of these difficulties are discussed in the following subsection.

Language Barriers

A small number, 14 students, expressed their adjustment achievement as not good or fair because they are not satisfied with the language ability in both English and Japanese. For undergraduate students, most of the students wanted to improve their writing and speaking skills. Even though many of them have experienced studying abroad before, they did not have to write or speak English in an academic style. Being an exchange student previously did help social-cultural adaptation, but not academic adjustment. For graduate students, they felt that better writing skills would help them write academic articles in leading journals with better quality.

Several graduate students are forced to read textbooks and talk to their supervisors in Japanese, even though they are studying in an English-based program. For the students in a Japanese program, they found that a one- year or six-month Japanese language course provided by the university was not adequate enough for studying in the university. There are many more technical terms used in class and they cannot keep up with native speaking Japanese students and feel that they have to study twice as much as the native students. Moreover, they said

they have insufficient Japanese ability to write academic papers.

My professor assigned me many Japanese textbooks and I had to learn the technical terms from them. I try to compare those books with the Thai textbooks I have, otherwise I cannot make fast progress. I have to compose the papers in Japanese. I am so worried about this, but my professor promised me that he will not let me work alone (Master student, D University).

Writing Thesis or Dissertation

Six graduate students and two undergraduate students in their senior year expressed their concerns about composing their thesis or dissertation. Two Master students from Tokyo said in the same way that a thesis is supposed to be their academic "Masterpiece" so they want to do their best. Four students said the most difficult part of composing a thesis is choosing the topic and getting approval from the supervisor.

I am now writing my thesis. My supervisor just approved the topic. I am very glad and I think I can make good progress from now on. I have nothing to worry about now, just continue my work, because I think I have passed the most stressful part, which is choosing the topic, already (Master student, E University).

I am worried about my research topic. The topic I want to do is difficult and there are not many journals publishing the article on this topic. My supervisor also said that but I still want to continue this (Doctoral student, B University).

Unfamiliar Teaching and Learning Approaches

Eleven students expressed that teaching and learning approaches, especially by their Japanese professors in the university are unfamiliar. Undergraduate and master students were more stressed by the different teaching methods and in-class interaction with professors, compared to doctoral students. They are not familiar with the academic procedures of discussion, presentation, writing reports, and independent study.

I do not like writing reports because I do not know if the professor likes my ideas. There is no right or wrong in expressing the idea, but how can I know if I can get a good evaluation? (Master student, A University).

I am not good at writing reports because I do not know what to write. At first I wanted to write an undergraduate thesis, but I changed my mind because even a 1,000 word report is difficult for me (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

I am not good at discussion, especially with other international students. It is difficult to express my ideas. Different people have different backgrounds. I think it is difficult to understand each other (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

It took half a year for me to adjust to studying in Japan. I have studied in Australia before and it is totally different. In Australia and in Thailand, the class focuses more on teaching, so we gained knowledge from the professor. Here, we are expected to study before coming to class and what we do in class is discussion, so we gained the analytical skill (Master student, E University).

On the other hand, doctoral students feel more unfamiliar with the working style of Japanese. Nine graduate students or 60% of all graduate participants said that they have to study at school; even though they can do some work at home. Sometimes, they feel forced to be at school, in the lab or seminar room, even though they have finished their work and have nothing to do. Some students mentioned this working style as an unwritten "rule" that all students have to follow.

Insufficient Knowledge in the Study Field

Except for engineering and students studying physical sciences,

students mentioned that they are unfamiliar to the class and subject they are studying. Some students, especially undergraduate students, are new to the disciplines they are and do not know which class they should take because there are many classes provided.

I am in the Asia Pacific Studies program, which provides many classes. I think the scope of the program is too broad. I do not know what should I study, so I just follow my friends (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

I am now studying in the management program, but I am not good at accounting. I have no basic knowledge about math, so I suffered from this subject. I also brought Thai textbooks here and read them together with the textbooks used in class (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

I am studying economics. At first I did not know what to choose for my major, so my supervisor recommended that I should focus on theoretical economics. However, I later realized that I do not suit this field. I am not good at math, which is necessary for studying in this major. I suffer a lot (Master student, B University).

I graduated from the faculty of economics in Thailand. I am now studying in the program of Asia Pacific Studies. At first I focused on international relations, but after attending the seminar class and listening to the presentations for a semester, I realized that I do not like this field. I changed my major to education (Master student, E University).

However, Master students who are more familiar with their field commented that the university should provide a wide-range program with many subjects because students' interests are different, so they can choose the classes they are interested in.

An exceptional case is that of a doctoral student studying engineering. He said he suffers from his studies, but it does not mean that he lacks knowledge in the research or the field. He realized after enrolling in the program that he simply does not like doing research! Additionally, he might not pursue further academic work after graduation.

Distance with Professors

Both undergraduate and graduate students feel there is distance between professors and themselves. The undergraduate students felt uncomfortable to approach the professors, even for academic problems. The graduate students feel more comfortable to talk to the professors about their studies, but they also felt uncomfortable talking about more private issues. More details on the distance

with professors will be described below in *3.6.3 Coping Strategies*.

3.6.3 Coping Strategies

The process of academic adaptation is a process of coping with academic difficulties (Zhang, 2009: 83). The majority of students interviewed in this research have of coping strategies in their academic adaptation. The undergraduate students generally followed a two steps coping strategy. When they had problems they first turned to their Thai friends who are taking the same classes or to other more senior Thais who may have faced a similar situation. When they feel that they, even with friends, cannot cope with that problem, they seek help from their professor. However, their professor only be approached after "good preparation" and "good consideration" of the problem.

The graduate students adopt different strategies. When they encounter academic difficulties, they approach their professor first. Based on their professor's, they then try to solve the problem on their own through individual work. Help from friends is needed more for mental support and support for other difficulties in daily life than for academic issues. These coping strategies will be described in the following part.

3.6.3.1 Undergraduate Students

Thirteen undergraduate students, which accounted for 81% of undergraduate participants in the study, said that when they have problems regarding their studies and life in Japan, they turn to Thai friends or more senior

Thai students first. They commented that asking friends is easier and faster than trying to solve the difficulties on their own. They do not choose to approach the professors for help because they are worried that they will not understand the professor's explanation and the idea of talking to the professor sounds difficult, and they do not want the professor to think that they don't understand simply because they are for not concentrating in class.

I always ask friends if I do not understand the lesson. We are students so friends know why I do not understand and explain things to me with easy words. They can also explain things from various viewpoints which are different from the professors' viewpoint (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

I do not talk to professors outside class because I am not close to them. When I do not understand anything, I ask friends or try to find the answer myself. Approaching a professor comes last. I think students in the university level have no need to be close to professors, only in-class is enough (Undergraduate 2nd year student, A University).

I do not ask professors because I do not want to be blamed for not understanding. I am afraid of what professors will say. What if I do not understand that? For private problems, I choose to

talk to my friends and family, I do not know which professor I should talk to (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

I do not approach the professor because it takes time. If I ask my friend, I can get the answer in short time. But if I go to the professor, I have to prepare what to ask, put things in the proper words and also prepare my own solution (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

3.6.3.2 Graduate Students

The graduate students more effectively utilize the opportunity to contact the professors as a learning strategy. They form closer relationship with professors because they need to consult with them and work with their supervisor closely and often they know exactly whom to talk with for different needs. However, when they were asked if they feel close to the professors, 67% answered no. They consider that the relationship with the professors to be purely for academic purposes, but apart from that, they do not talk or consult with them on private issues.

I consider communicating with a professor as one of the most difficult things. He is Japanese so he communicates in Japanese style; less words but much in meaning. He does not explain things much, so I do not understand clearly what he wants. It

has been like this for years, so I do not want to talk to him. Just academic consulting is enough (Doctoral student, D University).

I have two supervisors, but I rarely talk privately to either of them. One professor looks busy and the other one is still young, the students do not like to talk to him. He just graduated from a Doctoral course, so he does not know how to talk and deal with the students. We do not really believe that he can help us with our problems. I prefer consulting with the first one about the progress of work. Actually, I approach senior students in the same lab. They can help me about both academic and private problems (Doctoral student, B University).

I feel that my professor is very strict, so I do not talk to him in private. Actually I want to be closer to him, but there is something making me uncomfortable (Doctoral student, B University).

3.7 Suggestions from Interviewees

The suggestions and comments from students can be divided into two categories: 1) the suggestions for universities to be more helpful and 2) for Thai students who will come to study in Japan in the future.

3.7.1 Recommendations for universities action to ease international students' academic problems

English-Speaking Staff and Faculty

Nearly half (41%) of participants mentioned a lack of English-speaking human resources in various positions throughout the university as the main issue that universities should consider when hiring new faculty. Universities should increase the number of English-speaking staff, or improve the English proficiency of current staff in order to sufficiently respond to the language needs of international students whose numbers have been increasing in recent years.

Not many university staff can speak English and that is not enough for all international students. Moreover, the documents, for example tuition fee payment warning and registration documents, are in Japanese. There is orientation in English provided, but actually when it comes to the real situation, what they said in orientation cannot help because everything is in Japanese (Master student, E University).

I had a problem about the credit and taking class, so I went to the student office. The staff there could not speak English, and did not know about international students. I think the

qualification of staff is very important if they want the university to be international (Undergraduate 4th year student, A University).

Some students commented that the universities are not ready to admit international students, due to the lack of an examination system for international students for leading universities in Tokyo and the lack of English speaking professors in a University in Kyushu. Additionally, Doctoral students from Kansai also commented that even though they are enrolled in English programs, they are forced by their supervisors to communicate in Japanese. They told that that they have to pass the Japanese Language Proficiency Test at level 3 or higher and one student, who is currently writing academic works in English, was also assigned to read a Japanese textbook. All of these difficulties reflect the difference in the focus of universities' to become more international and professors who are unwilling or unable to follow this policy. Aiming to be international, universities try to open English programs and welcome more international students, but professors seem to be more interested in academic and research, rather than creating an international study environment by using English. Therefore, before applying any policy to open up programs to foreign English based students, Japanese universities should consider the qualifications, quantity and interest of staff and faculty capable of achieving this goal and developing a corresponding policy of action.

Professors teaching English class should be fluent in English. I cannot understand some professors' English. I think there should be the standard for professors' language proficiency (Undergraduate 3rd year student, A University).

All professors teaching English classes should communicate in English all time, not sometimes in Japanese (Undergraduate 1st year student, A University).

The university should allow the entrance examination in English for international students. It is impossible for students to be fluent within six months. If there is no separation between domestic and international students, they should make the English version of exam questions (Doctoral student, D University).

Integration of Students

Both undergraduate students and graduate students commented that their universities should arrange activities that contribute to the integration of international students and Japanese students. Students consider doing so would be one way to make Japanese friends, practice their Japanese, and seek help in daily life (for example, how to use the bank and post office's services, how to get to important or interesting places etc.). Moreover, activities that gather international

students together once in the university are also needed. A master student from B University suggested that:

When I came here I did not know who I should make friends with, I did not know who to talk to. Thai students' network is the only possible way to make friend. The university should arrange the activity that international students can get to know each other, so when we become friends, we will not feel lonely (Master student, B University).

3.7.2 for Future Students

Japanese Language Training

All students suggested that those who want to study in Japan should at least learn basic Japanese before their departure. Even though there are courses provided by the university, basic Japanese skills are needed for simple daily tasks at places such as the bank or post office as well as in conducting the other daily interactions that need to be done life. Moreover, some students commented that students with Japanese ability can catch up with the class very fast. The teachers teach very fast because there is often a lot of content to cover in a limited time.

A Master student expressed her regret for not studying Japanese saying:

I had thought that I am in the English program, and I will use

only English so I do not have to study Japanese. However, I realized that actually Japanese is very important. I think I would enjoy more and live my life easier, only if I knew Japanese, I realized that I missed many good chances to learn and understand Japanese people and Japanese people deeply (Master student, E University).

Self Preparation

The suggestions given by those interviewed for future Thai students coming to Japan suggestions for improving time management, self-control, self-realization, and future planning. Many students considered time management and self-discipline to be very important in study abroad context because there is often no one to stimulate them to study. They have to be responsible and know "when to do what" themselves. Otherwise, a timely graduation will not be possible.

Two Master students recommended that students should know what they want to study and consider what they have studied before. Professors do not focus on teaching, but allow students to work on their own. Therefore, joining the class with no background knowledge is not recommended (Master student, A and E Universities).

Two Doctoral students recommended the scholarship students to think about their future plans if their scholarships are cancelled in case they are not accepted to the university or they cannot graduate in time. One mentioned that many scholarship students whose scholarships were cancelled do not know what

to do and are just playing around in Japan.

3.8 Summary

We can see from the interviews that students related each factor in the model to their study and living in Japan. Moreover, we can see that most of the factors also relate to the socio-cultural adjustment and not just academic issues. This section summarizes all interview data in the table, showing the relations of the factors in the model and the answers of interviewees.

Table6: Relations of the factors in the International Academic Adjustment Model and the answers of interviewees in this research

Factors	Impacts on Adjustment and Difficulty	
	Academic	Socio-cultural
Academic Major	Insufficient knowledge, Unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches	
English and Japanese Language Proficiency	Problem about academic Japanese and English,	Difficulties in searching apartment, doing daily business and establishing friendships
Academic Achievement	Expect to obtain degree, Write a qualified thesis, Get good GPA	Expect to be fluent in Japanese and job offer
Housing	Near campus	Near shopping place, Convenient access
Extracurricular Involvement	Language improvement, Difficulty in time management	Language improvement, Learn Japanese people and culture
Peer Relationships	Study partner (Thai), Helper in language study (Japanese)	Connections (TSAJ), Activities (International and Japanese)
Interaction with Faculty	Academic helper but feel uncomfortable to approach professor	

Factors	Impacts on Adjustment and Difficulty	
	Academic	Socio-cultural
Pre-departure Preparedness	Study language, Talk to professors, Review textbooks	Study language, Learn dependently living skills
Financial and Employment Status	Have enough money for study, Do not have to spend study time on part-time job.	Able to afford the convenient housing, travel, and entertainment
Orientation and Advising Experiences	Academic orientation (by university)	Talk to senior students, Get information on life in Japan (by the Embassy and liaison office)

Some common academic difficulties found in the table above are language barriers, unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, insufficient knowledge in the study field, and distance between students and professors. For socio-cultural difficulties, Japanese language barrier and relationship with Japanese friends are the issues concerned much by students. The social and academic support from the university might be the other issue to concern about because it has impact on the orientation provided to students and how students seek help when they face difficulties.

In the previous study of Zhang (2009), the difficulties of Chinese students in Japan were explained by focusing only on the academic issues; however, in this research both academic and socio-cultural issues are included. They will be discussed and analyzed in the next Chapter.

Chapter 4: Behind the Problems: Problem Clarification and Analysis

This chapter discusses analysis the adjustment problems faced by Thai students documented in Chapter 3 with the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. The problems discussed in this Chapter are divided into two groups; academic difficulties and socio-cultural difficulties, based on the relations of the factors in the International Academic Adjustment Model and the answers of interviewees summarized in Chapter 3 (See Table 6).

Moreover, it will discuss how the students in the demographic groups have faced different difficulties. From the previous chapter, we have shown that the level of their stress and difficulties, as well as their coping strategies seem to be different according to the educational level, personal background, and other environmental influences. The demographic information tables in Chapter 2 (Tables 2, 4, and 5) will be used as a guide in comparing and contrasting the answers given by undergraduate students & graduate students; scholarship students & self-financed students; and students having previous study abroad experiences & those without such experiences.

4.1 Academic Difficulties

The main academic difficulties mentioned in interviews can be summarized as language barriers, unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, insufficient knowledge in the study field, and distance between students and professors and insufficient social and academic support from the university.

Language Barrier

Language proficiency is very important in the adjustment, as seen from the interviews that students perceive their adjustment achievement by considering their language ability, especially Japanese and secondarily in English. The correlation of language proficiency and positive intercultural adaptation has been recognized by many researchers (Church, 1982, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, Lewthwaite, 1996, Dunn, 2006). Japanese language proficiency can be considered as a stressor in the adjustment process and also as an issue that relates to other difficulties such as writing academic paper, understanding lectures, taking exams, and reading textbooks. Actually, Japanese language barrier is not only the problem of Thai students in this research, but it is the main common problem faced by students from many countries, especially those from ASEAN countries (Sato, 2010). Zhang also mentioned language skills are very important for successful academic adjustment. She found that academic writing skills had the most considerable influence on Chinese students' adjustment, because it directly relates to dissertation writing and research progress (Zhang, 2009: 95).

Similar to the experiences Thai students in this research, other international students, notably from Asian countries, found that the Japanese language courses were ill-equipped to help them to deal with mainstream courses. Even though they spent a year in Japanese language classes before beginning their academic work, they stated that it was a struggle to keep up with native speakers (Lee-Cunin, 2009: 28).

Regarding the English language barrier, undergraduate and master students

responded that writing reports and participating in in-class discussions are their major English language difficulties. Nevertheless, the reason for these difficulties might not be solely the language ability. It is true that the majority of Thai students in Thailand are not academically trained in English, but more than half of participants had either studied in America, Australia or some other English-speaking countries before moving to Japan. Therefore, rather than saying that the difficulties are caused by insufficient English ability, it is actually other issues that are considered as the reason for these difficulties which include unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches

Unfamiliar Teaching and Learning Approaches

The finding that Thai students participating in this research are not good at writing and discussions matches the findings of Chaisamrej (2005). She found that Thai students in the American university are familiar to the teaching-learning style that the role of teacher (or professor) is emphasized as the center in providing knowledge (Chaisamrej, 2005: 176). Therefore, the academic difficulties happen because students are not prepared to play an interactive role in class. The unfamiliarity in playing with taking an interactive role in class leads to the unfamiliarity in dependent study, critical thinking, questioning, word arranging and expressing opinions, which are required skills for both writing reports and taking part in academic discussions.

Unfamiliar teaching and study approaches also lead an expectation gap between the professors and students; where the Thai student expect to rely on the

professor, but the professor plays the role of advisor and expects student to study independently (Dunn, 2006, Zhang, 2009). Moreover, the lack of interaction in class might increase the distance between the students and professors, especially for undergraduate students.

Regarding the different expectation of professors and students, Lee-Cunin presented an interesting result of a case study of students' experiences in the faculty of Economics at Shiga University (Lee-Cunin, 1999: 83-98) and it might help explain this difficulty for Thai students. Some students in her study made a distinction between teacher and lecturer that, "lecturers give assignments and the students who attend courses and submit the assignments given to them can only obtain high grades.... lecturers are not so keen to care about students" (Lee-Cunin, 1999: 85). This comment shows that students admired professors who encourage them to study and provided them every answer. However, university is about learning self-discipline, and being able to form independent thoughts. Students are expected to manage and be responsible for their academic and social life (Lee-Cunin, 1999: 84-85).

Compared to undergraduate and master students, doctoral students are more settled down and feel comfortable with their academic activities. One unfamiliar learning style mentioned by them was is to sit in a Japanese lab or seminar room all day. Even though it is not considered as the big problem as they are all following what they consider to be unwritten rules, they consider this to be unnecessary and, frankly, annoying. This general opinion about Japan's rules and the need to follow Japanese cultural rules was also recognized by Shigematsu

(2002) that many students felt that Japanese society had high expectations and complex manners decorum. However, unlike Shigematsu's study, the students did not express negative opinions about these rules or felt they adversely affected their studies in this research.

Insufficient Knowledge in the Study Field / Unfamiliar Field

Some students found that that they are unfamiliar with the subjects they are studying, and some do not know which subject they should study. On the other hand, the students in science and engineering programs, who continued studying in the same major, did not face difficulties relating to the major or study field. Zhang commented that the previous educational experiences, which correspond to the "Academic Major" factors in the framework, greatly influenced students' academic adaptation (Zhang, 2009:98-99). Contrary to Zhang's findings, this research found that the difficulties related to the major or study field mainly caused by the lack of prior knowledge in some fields before enrolling in university, as seen in the cases of undergraduate students, and a master student who chose the research field without understanding the fundamental background knowledge of this field. This relates to the factor "Advising and Orientation Experiences".

Actually, the difficulty in understanding classes due to the insufficient knowledge before enrolling in the university also happened to Japanese students studying in the US. Lee-Cunin's *Monbusho* survey, conducted in 1995, found that 32.4% of undergraduate students stated that they experienced difficulties in understanding classes because the subjects they were taking were not covered in

their high school curriculum (Lee-Cunin, 1999:87). The *Monbusho* study recommended that universities should provide a foundation for students to acquire the academic ability needed for the specialized fields (Lee-Cunin, 1998: 87).

Distance with the Professors

Difficulties that arose because of a distance between students and professors were reflected in the coping strategies adopted by students (See 3.6.3 *Coping Strategies*). In the previous chapter, two different coping strategies were adopted by undergraduate and graduate students were discussed. The undergraduate students choose to seek help from friends first and then approach the professors if they cannot solve that problem. The graduate students choose to approach the professors when they have the academic problem, however, when it comes to the problem relating to their daily life, they also turned to friends, usually co-nationals.

It can be clearly seen from the coping strategies adopted by Thai students that they keep distance from professors. Graduate students choose to approach professors only when they have academic problem, while undergraduate students choose to approach friends.

Zhang (2009) explained that Chinese students feel reluctant to approach professors because students presumed that the professors would probably be preoccupied with classes, lectures, research, and meetings, so they did not want to disturb the professor. This also seems to be a rule in communicating with professors (Zhang, 2009: 101).

On the contrary, being uncomfortable to talk to professors seems to be the main cause of distance in this case. Undergraduate students mentioned that friends can explain things from a similar viewpoint as the student which make distances seem shorter. Some graduate students choose to approach senior students or research assistants, who can help solving both academic and private problems. It seems like they do not expect that professor can understand them as closely as their friends or seniors might.

Communication between professors and students is always an important factor, and it can also enhance or devalue students' perception of university experience (Lee-Cunin, 2003: 18-21). Lee-Cunin conducted a survey of Japanese students' perceptions at Shiga University during 1998-1999 and in that survey, students were asked questions about how much contact they had with faculty members. This set of questions had 100 percent response rate, which indicated the importance of the topic to students (Lee-Cunin, 2003: 18-19).

Lee-Cunin found that less than half of students involved in the survey talked with faculty members outside the classroom and more than 82% of students had never made appointment to see a faculty member. The students who had never visited a faculty member outside the class stated that they had no reason to make appointment and/or felt anxious about communicating with faculty members on one-to one basis (Lee-Cunin, 2003: 19). Students may have preconceived ideas about professors, given their high social status, so they feel uncomfortable to talk to them (Lee-Cunin, 2003: 19-20). In this way this study found that Thai students' conceptions are similar to Lee-Cunin's findings.

In order to create a better relationship between professors and students, Lee-Cunin's work recommends that the in-class discussions should be increased. Students seemed to be looking for a closer relationship with professors where shared discussions could take place but they were waiting for professor to initiate such a relationship first. This is why students in Lee-Cunin's survey stated that they enjoyed the seminar classes most and wished to have more (Lee-Cunin, 2003: 20). However, in the case of international students, the in-class discussions might just be a sort of silence and create more uncomfortable feeling because students have no confidence in their language ability. The lack of language confidence was also mentioned as a problem in academic adjustment by Thai students in this research.

Zhang suggested that the openly offered guidance might be useful for the students, as they tend to adopt the passive role in approaching the professors for help (Zhang, 2009: 102). At the same time, professors should recognize the limitations of international students and appreciate different styles of thinking and interaction (Dunn, 2006: 61), in order to decrease the distance.

Insufficient Support from the University

One common problem shared by students from all universities is the insufficient support from the university. Even though the five universities covered in this research were all chosen as pilot universities in Japan's policy to improve education internationalization, however their rigid systems and human resources do not cater well to the needs of international students. Japan is known as a non-English speaking country, so the universities seem to be the only place students

can rely on. Nevertheless, the problems such as professors forcing students to communicate in Japanese, universities sending documents in Japanese, and university staff responsible for students affairs cannot communicate in English, are still widespread. These situations make Japan a difficult place for international students to come and study, even though the government and universities are trying to promote the international programs. These problems correspond to Tanaka et al.'s (1994) statement that Japan has actively recruited international students despite the fact that its policies and measures regarding international student support have never been properly prepared (p. 56). Moreover, this might be the reason why students choose to turn to friends when it comes to the socio-cultural problems, rather than consulting the professor or university's international students support center.

In Zhang's study, the insufficient support mainly focused on the lack of adequate guidance of learning and research. Zhang felt that it might be the failure of the students themselves in effectively approaching professors and utilizing what academic support was provided (Zhang, 2009: 96-97). Zhang did not mention the support for international students because her participants were all enrolling in the same programs as domestic Japanese students.

Financial difficulties were found to be a major student problem in Zhang's study. Nevertheless, it was not found in this research using Thai students as a case study. Zhang's found that financial pressure is a major concern of students (Zhang, 2009: 95). Students in her study have to work part-time or even full time and

some students cannot attend the classes because of a stressful working schedule (p. 107). The absence of financial problem in this research contradicts many previous studies, which found that it as the main problem for international students in Japan (Ebuchi, 1991, Jou & Fukada, 1996, Shao, 2008, Zhang, 2009, Sato, 2010). This is due to the fact that many students involved in this research are scholarship students, and those who are not are receiving a tuition reduction from the university, as well as financial support from their family. This familial financial support and the decision to study abroad and choice of study destination are found to have the positive relationship (Nattavud, 2004: 357). The support from family can either limit or expand the choice of country. Therefore, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the students do not encounter financial stress because they came to Japan with the consent from their family, which is able to financially support them until graduation.

4.2 Socio-Cultural Difficulties

The difficulties mentioned are 1) Japanese language barrier, which has the greatest impact on other difficulties in daily life; such as, accommodation renting, and contacting affairs at the bank and post office, and 2) relationship with Japanese friends.

Language Barrier

It is found that most of students have no difficulty regarding communication in English with international friends. Some students might not be

confident speaking in English, but there was no response mentioning speaking English difficulty. What students perceive as a linguistic barrier in daily life is Japanese, especially for newcomers, students in English-based programs, and graduate students who are not obliged to learn Japanese.

Zhang (2009) did not mention any language difficulty in everyday life. Chinese students in her study did not encounter this problem because most of them were undergraduate students majoring in Japanese language before coming to Japan (Zhang, 2009: 98) and they are studying in Japanese program. This difference corresponds to the assumption I presumed in *1.4 Language Educational Background and Difference of Chinese Students*.

Zhang (2009) mentioned that students found it is difficult to rent the inexpensive and convenient housing (Zhang, 2009: 55-56). Different from Zhang's study, housing difficulty for Thai students was not due to financial cost, rather difficulties arose from their limited language skills in communicating with real estate agent and understanding many documents associated with renting in Japan. Moreover, some students also find difficult to establish friendship with Japanese because of the Japanese language difficulty. The correlation between language proficiency and housing as well as relationship with Japanese friends agrees with Suhara's survey that Japanese language proficiency relates to every other problem issue (Suhara, 1996).

Relationship with Japanese

The relationship with Japanese seems to be difficult for many students,

due to the lack of Japanese language ability and difference in the way of thinking and a lack of common interests. These reasons are similar to those mentioned in Suhara's study (Suhara, 1996). Suhara saw the lack of Japanese language proficiency of international students and the lack of genuine interest in foreign students by Japanese are amongst the main reasons, but, in this research, the students mentioned the lack of English ability of Japanese students and the limited opportunities for Japanese and international students to interact.

Some students do not feel close with their Japanese relations because Japanese people do not frankly express their thoughts and tend to maintain emotional distance. The difficulty regarding the true feelings and behaviors of Japanese corresponds to the human relation problem mentioned by Shigematsu (2002). This research also found that undergraduate students who participate in the extracurricular activities tend to have more Japanese friends and be closer to those friends, compared to the students who are not involve in any out of school social activities. This is what Shigematsu (2002) mentioned in the study as the same interests of international and Japanese students.

Participating in the extracurricular activities also attributes to a positive improvement in Japanese language abilities. This relationship with the host student is called a bi-cultural network, which plays an instrumental role for language study and academic work (Bochner, Mcleod & Lin, 1997). The more engagement conducted in Japanese more the student builds an understanding of Japanese culture and people. That is why the social contact with host- nationals is agreed to be the most important variable in transnational coping process

(Klineberg & Hull, 1979).

In coping with the difficulties in academic and socio-cultural adjustment, Thai students effectively make use of the co-national friends who share the same language, cultural and educational background. Peer relationships are mentioned as a positive factor to the students' adjustment in the Academic Adjustment Model (Dunn, 2006). This finding corresponds to a previous study that found that better adjustment to the host country can be achieved through discussing and sharing within the mono-cultural network of the visiting (Hendrickson & Rosen, 2008).

However, students in this study mentioned the high cohesion of Thai students can also be a barrier to language learning and experience gaining. This shows the negative effect of the mono-cultural or co-national networks in adaptation. It underlines that the balance of contact between the host networks is another important issue in the cross-cultural adjustment.

In summary, the factors influencing academic difficulties of Thai students in Japan are language proficiency, academic major (as previous educational experiences), Interaction with Faculty, and Orientation & Advising Experiences (in terms of academic field). Factors influencing socio-cultural difficulties are language proficiency, peer relationships and extracurricular involvement. Amongst all factors, language proficiency, as a difficulty and as important reason for other difficulties, and peer relationships (co-national network), as a coping strategy, seem to have the most impact on student's adjustment. The other three factors which have not mentioned in difficulties faced by students are housing,

pre-departure preparedness and financial and employment status. Housing and pre-departure preparedness are found to have least impact on students' adjustment difficulties. Finally, even though the financial and employment problem is not found in this research, financial and employment status is shown to be important factor in the adjustment process. Without financial stresses, students can freely schedule their time, enjoy their leisure, and live in a convenient and safe apartment.

4.3 Comparison of Students in Different Groups

The findings show that each student achieves the different level of adjustment, and each student encounters the different difficulties. The difference in degree of adjustment in each demographic group has been recognized in the previous studies. For instance, the longer student stays in the host society and the university, the better student academically adjusts (Dunn, 2006). The higher academic level students achieve, the better academic adjustment students have (Zhang, 2009). Expanding on Dunn and Zhang's findings, the academic level, scholarship, previous study abroad experience, and university location are considered in the following comparison. These geographic factors were expected to be a variable in this research. However, there was no significant difference between the students in three target areas found. Only the different level of social adaptation caused by differences students' Japanese language ability studying in English and Japanese program was found.

Graduate Students vs. Undergraduate Students

The findings in this research are largely in accordance with the previous studies. The graduate students have the better academic adjustment than the undergraduate students whereas the undergraduate students have the better socio-cultural adjustment and better social skills in contacting with Japanese. Focusing on the graduate students, those who are studying in Japanese programs have better socio-cultural adjustment, compared to those studying in English program. However, the undergraduate students, even studying in the English program, can adjust well due to the more time, opportunity, and interest in extracurricular activities and more chance to contact with Japanese.

Extracurricular involvement, peer relationships, language ability are all positively related. Furthermore, language ability also relates to other difficulties in daily life. This research recommends extracurricular activities as a chance to improve language ability and establish peer networks which lead to better student adjustment.

Learning about Japanese people and Japanese culture through the extracurricular involvement is also an effective strategy for the undergraduate student and some graduate students. Most graduate students do not participate in any activities. The academic goals expected by students are also different, even though they all have the common goal of obtaining the degree they seek. Some students, especially the undergraduate students, expect their experience abroad and Japanese language ability to compliment their academic knowledge, while most graduate students focus their expectations on gaining knowledge in their

field of study. The different expectations students have from the university greatly affect how students involve themselves in the activities and spend their time in Japan. Nevertheless, for the graduate students who expect to reach a Japanese language ability, increasing contact with Japanese peers through the extracurricular involvement is recommended.

Scholarship Students vs. Self-financed students

There is no significant difference in terms of the importance of financial issues between the scholarship students and self-financed students; both groups have not reported having financial difficulty. The scholarship students are provided monthly allowance, which is enough for living expenses. The self-financed students get financial support from their families and some also receive partial support from the governmental as well as private organizations. When students want some extra money, they ask from their family, or earn it themselves by working part-time. For both scholarship and self-financed students, part-time jobs seem to be an optional income source, meaning that they can choose the working hours. Students did not report that part-time jobs were their main source of income or that they have to depend on them to survive. In fact, finding part-time job in Japan is quite difficult for new students who do not know Japanese, and all self-financed students know that they cannot expect earning a lot of money through part-time job during the first year in Japan. Therefore, prior to departure, all students got their parents' consent, which guaranteed the financial support, from their families.

The difference between scholarship and self-financed students found in this research is not directly related to financial status, but the level of involvement with the Thai Students' Association in Japan (TSAJ). Students supported by the same sponsor are normally close to each other, which in turn forms sub-groups within the TSAJ and its sister organizations.

The *Monbusho* scholarship students feel they are a part of TSAJ, and have a stronger attachment to it than the self-financed students, as we can see from its committee and active members, who are mostly the *Monbusho* or Thai government scholarship students. Actually, this attachment actually starts from their orientation sessions prior to the departure to Japan. In the orientations held by the Japanese Embassy in Thailand, senior Thai students who are the active members of TSAJ also participate by providing information to new students. Moreover, there are also meetings of Thai students in different regions in Japan which are also organized by the TSAJ. On the other hand, the TSAJ organization itself is hardly known by self-financed, and non-government scholarship students. Therefore, the students who have fewer chances to connect with TSAJ feel uncomfortable with participating in the association. This uncomfortable feeling blocks the self-financed and non-government scholarship students from effectively utilizing this potentially useful Thai student organization, while the government scholarship students feel free to utilize this organization to expand their Thai peer networks.

Students with Previous Study Abroad Experience vs. Students without Experience

Previous study abroad experience does not always assure a smooth transition towards a happy life in Japan. All students encountered similar stresses and concerns regarding language proficiency and independent living. Even though many students had studied abroad before, their study destinations were to English-speaking countries. Therefore, they had preconception to Japan as a country, where nobody speaks English. Moreover, even students with study abroad experience were concerned about the independent living because studying in the Japanese university means they have to live in Japan without a their family or home networks .

When it comes to their studies, both groups encounter similar academic difficulties. The cause of these academic difficulties is not the English language ability, but the unfamiliarity in teaching and learning approaches. Most of students involving in this research spent time abroad during their high school as exchange students, which allowed them to spend time experiencing cultural and entertaining activities, rather than academic preparation for university.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The number of international students have been increasing in Japan based on Japanese government policies. This phenomenon calls for increased understanding of the students' difficulties in living and studying for all relevant stakeholders. This research examined the difficulties Thai students think the barriers to academic success and achievement in socio-cultural adaptation and how they seek for help or support to get through these struggles. This chapter will conclude the findings of this research and discusses the students' needs and suggestions as practical implications. Finally, it will end with recommendations for further study on international students in Japan.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Here, the International Academic Adjustment Model has been modified to make the model fit with this research. Moreover, literature on social networks was also added into the factor peer relationships in the model, in order to examine three groups of friends, as well as Thai students' community. The details on the model modification are described in *2.2 Academic Adjustment Model*. Despite using a similar framework, the degree of importance for each factors in this study were found to be slightly different from the previous studies of Zhang Wei (2009) and Dunn (2006), due to the difference in group, educational level, national background, and the economic status of participants. Even though this research follows Zhang's study by adopting the same adjustment model, this research adds new insights to the literature by clarifying difficulties related academic and socio-

cultural adjustment, and presenting the influence of student's association, which had not yet been studied.

Difficulties faced by Thai students in Japan can be divided into two categories, academic and socio-cultural difficulties. Academic difficulties include language barriers, unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, insufficient background knowledge in the field of study, emotional and cultural distance with the professors, and insufficient support from the university. All students have the same concern about successfully obtaining a degree, which is their goal of being in Japan. Socio-cultural difficulties are mainly caused by the lack of Japanese language proficiency and the lack of chances to interact with Japanese.

Length of stay in the host society and academic level significantly increases to positive student adjustment. The graduate students show better academic adjustment than the undergraduate students. However, the undergraduate students have better socio-cultural adjustment and better social skills in contacting with Japanese, due to more involvement in extracurricular activities, leading to the chance to improve language ability, establish peer relationships with other students and closely contact with Japanese.

Peer networks, especially a mono-cultural network usually of co-nationals, are very important in student's adjustment. The students often effectively utilize peer networks in coping with academic and socio-cultural difficulties. The undergraduate students seek help from Thai friends or seniors to cope with both academic and non-academic difficulties. The graduate students choose to approach their professors when they encounter academic problems, but they also

turn to their peer networks, and Thai friends, when it comes to non-academic problems.

The Thai Students' Association in Japan (TSAJ) is the largest Thai students' network in Japan, but many students do not feel they are a part of the organization due to the feeling that it belongs to a particular group of students. For those students, TSAJ has no effect on their adjustment. On the contrary, the active members of TSAJ effectively utilize the organization as a place to enjoy activities with new Thai friends and expand their connections in and out of Japan. For the active members and TSAJ activities participants, TSAJ functions as a tool in social adjustment. However, when it comes to academic adjustment and stress, private relationships have more effect on academic adjustment and coping with difficulties.

Financial problems were not found to be important in this research. This is due to the fact that many of the students involved in this research are scholarship students. Those who are not scholarship students came to Japan with the consent and support from their family. Moreover, most of them are receiving tuition reduction from their university. As a rule Thai students do not have to choose between work and study. They quit their part-time job and other activities when they want more time for studying. The absence of financial problems among Thai students differs from other literature on international students in Japan, which mostly focuses on the plight of mainland Chinese students.

Amongst all factors in the International Academic Adjustment Model, language proficiency, academic major (familiarity and sufficient knowledge in the

field), advising & orientation experiences (in terms of academic advice), interaction with faculty, extracurricular involvement, peer relationships, and financial & employment status are factors significantly influencing students' adjustment. Students' perceptions on Academic Achievement influence the way students choose to behave and spend their time in Japan. Housing, pre-departure preparedness and orientation & advising experiences (in terms of advice regarding daily life) are the factors less influencing the students' adjustment. For advices regarding daily life, orientation and advice from Thai students network (Peer Relationships) have much influence.

5.2 Practical Implications

It has been mentioned throughout this research that the adjustment of international students relates to many factors and not only to academic issues, so supporting international students should be done in a holistic way. Here, practical recommendations are given to the three main actors who are involved with international students and the internationalization of universities in Japan: the Japanese government, universities and students. .

5.2.1 for the Government

The Japan Student Service Organization (JASSO) and its overseas representative offices, as information providers, should give more information on each academic program and underline the importance of building a basic understanding in the fields of study. Referring back to *1.3 International Policies*

in Japan, JASSO and its overseas offices are trying to provide information about Japan and universities. Students seem to gain enough information on how to live in Japan. Nevertheless, many students, especially undergraduate students, have an insufficient academic understanding in their field of study or major and it has an impact on their studies as a barrier to academic success. To prevent this academic difficulty, JASSO might increase the role of former and present students in information provision; for example, in the Japan Education Fair, and offer preparatory education for scholarship students. We know from this research that students usually seek help and ask for information from students. Moreover, former and present students have direct experience studying in the fields. Therefore, these students should be effectively used as a tool for increasing the understanding of the field of study for future students.

Regarding the *Monbusho* scholarship issue, students commented the monthly allowance is not enough for non-academic activities. To do those activities, students spend their own money earned from part-time jobs or that they received from their relatives. At present, it is difficult for the government to increase the amount of scholarship money. However, these activities should not be neglected. Students consider local events and extracurricular activity involvement to positively impact their socio-cultural adjustment. Without increasing the monthly allowance, the government can support and encourage scholarship students to participate in extracurricular activities by organizing an annual or semester trip for scholarship students. By joining the trip, students can explore Japan, learn more about Japanese culture, and at the same time they can relax

from studying hard. Moreover, students can also establish a peer network (of students who share the common background as *Monbusho* students), which is considered useful for academic and socio-cultural adjustment.

From this research, there is one question regarding the internationalization policy that the government should carefully consider. Can international students without any Japanese language ability live happily in Japan only English? If we take a look at the policy direction in the present (refer to *1.1 Background Statement* and *1.3.4 Academic Related Support*), we will see that it underlines the globalization of education and internationalized academic system with all classes in English. It is as if international students have no need to learn Japanese at all. However, in reality their lives do not start and end in the classroom. Even though students in English programs do not have to use Japanese in their studies, they still need Japanese language ability to deal with daily affairs, renting an apartment, finding a part-time job, contacting Japanese friends, and so on. Japanese language proficiency is the main socio-cultural difficulty, and at the same time it is one of the factors significantly influencing student's adjustment. Together with promoting the internationalization of Japanese higher education, the government should also standardize the quality of Japanese language education provided to international students and encourage universities to put basic Japanese language in every English program as a compulsory course.

5.2.2 for Universities

University should carefully consider the quality and quantity of language

courses provided to students in each program. Many universities are providing one year Japanese language courses, but the students find that they do not have enough proficiency to study or live comfortably in Japan. For students in a Japanese program, universities should include academic Japanese skills into the language course provided; for instance, academic writing, skim reading, discussion and making presentation. Moreover, the language course period for scholarship students who have to take the university entrance exam should be extended from six months to a year, if possible. For students in an English program, academic Japanese might not be necessary, but the effective basic Japanese course is very important. After finishing the basic course, students should be able to communicate in Japanese in their daily life. However, they should not be forced to read textbooks or consult about academic problems with the professor in Japanese. Being forced to study in Japanese might limit the ability of students.

All universities providing English programs for international students should make sure that the important documents are all published in both Japanese and English. Furthermore, universities should recruit enough English-speaking faculty and support staff to serve international students, which have been increasing in number every year. To achieve the internationalization desired, all professors in English programs have to use English to communicate with students. It appears that some professors still supervise students in Japanese, and treat them as if they are fluent in Japanese. These actions actually go against the internationalization policy promoted by the government and university. Moreover,

they increase the distance between students and professors and prevent students from approaching professors for help.

Universities should also consider offering extracurricular activities tailored for graduate students. Some graduate students want to not only study, but also to integrate themselves with Japanese people and society. However, joining the student clubs (circles) is difficult for them because it is time consuming. Moreover, graduate students have different interests and expectations than undergraduate students. Most graduate students focus their expectations on their field of study, while the undergraduate students expect the extracurricular experience to compliment their academic curriculum. For graduate students, occasional local exchange activity and visits with local volunteer host families are recommended. Referring to the interview in *3.1.3 Orientation & Advising Experience*, it is a very good idea to arrange local volunteers (the hosts) for international students. This activity can effectively help ease students' socio-cultural difficulties. Through communication with the host family, students can learn the Japanese language, feel that they are a part of the local community, and feel freer to establish a local network, and approach for help.

In order to increase the chances for international students to access the proper part-time jobs, universities should arrange more on-campus jobs for the students, if possible. Academic-related jobs, such as teaching assistant (TA) or research assistant (RA) positions, are useful for studying. However, non-academic jobs, such as resident assistant (RA), translator, library staff, and general staff assistant, are also good enough for students to be assured that they can manage

their study schedule, and will be properly paid. Many international students have experienced being refused employment, receiving low wages and even nonpayment for their part time jobs. Moreover, part-time work frequently interferes with study time and academic progress (see *1.2.4 Problems of Asian International Students in Japan*). Different from the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, this research did not find the serious stress or problem regarding part-time work and employment. That is because students involved in this research tend to work on-campus or in places international students are needed. Therefore, they do not encounter overscheduled working, nonpayment or other discrimination towards international students.

5.3.3 for Future Students

This research highly recommends students who want to study in a different major from their previous education to have at least a basic understanding in the field of study before enrolling in the university. Many Thai students suffer from the unfamiliar learning and study approaches in universities. They are required to freely choose the class according to their interests actively participate in discussions, present ideas by writing papers and independently do further study. These approaches are not widely adopted in the Thai educational system, which focuses on teachers giving the knowledge. Background knowledge and understanding in the field can help students to keep up with the class and adapt to the studies easier. Otherwise, students might waste the time sitting in class or suffering from having no idea what they are studying.

The lack of basic understanding in the field of study can reflect the insufficient guidance provided by high schools in Thailand. In order to help students cope with the adjustment difficulty in the higher education, information about field of study, major, as well as a guide on study in the university should be included in the guidance for high school students.

The attempt by the Japanese government to provide information to the prospective students will not be meaningful without the cooperation from students. The prospective students are recommended to attend the guidance session provided by JASSO and the present students in Japan (as suggested in *5.2.1 For the Japanese Government*).

Apart from the background knowledge, this research also recommends students to at least be able to understand and communicate in basic Japanese. Even students with study abroad experience encounter the stress regarding Japanese language proficiency and living in Japan. They consider that Japan is not an English-speaking country, and this consideration is true as this research hoped to show. With English language proficiency alone, students cannot socially and culturally adjust well. Some students with no Japanese ability cannot live their lives freely and feel uncomfortable contacting Japanese.

Finally, students should not only socialize with their co-nationals. If students encounter academic stress or difficulties, they are highly recommended to approach professors for help, because the interactions with faculty and support from professors positively relates to academic adjustment. Students, especially undergraduate students, should keep in mind that guidance from professors cannot

be expected all the time. Moreover, to decrease what students call a "wall" between themselves and Japanese students, students are highly recommended to be involved in the extracurricular activities so that they can spend time with Japanese, practice Japanese and increase mutual understanding.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Study

By interviewing a group of 31 Thai students, this research brought out the in-depth and fruitful findings about the adjustment of international students in the Japanese universities. However, the size of sample and small scale of the study are the limitations in this research. The interviews were conducted during the vacation when most of students were not in Japan, so the accessibility to interviewees was also limited. This limited size of sample might also mask important trends. Significantly this research could not find a meaningful relationship between gender and academic adjustment. Therefore, systematic research with a bigger sample size is recommended.

In order to get the more statistical facts for the improvement of the internationalization of Japanese universities, further study using quantitative methods would be beneficial. A Questionnaire conducted with the larger population will not only test the findings of this research, but also improve and test the applicability of factors in the International Academic Adjustment Model.

After conducting this research, I realized that there are many studies focused on adjustment difficulties and successful adjustment. However, I have not found studies on international students who drop out of universities. It is also

important to find out the reasons for unsuccessful adjustment. And identify unexplored real needs and problems of international students have. This kind of study would be useful for the government and universities to create the proper policies and learning environment for international students.

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