Thesis
Exploring the challenges for expatriate student adjustment.

Gary R Jones
B.B.A & MMktg.
UON ID: C3025436

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration
Date of submission: 18/07/2014
DECLARATION

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Gary R Jones
## Thesis Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and overview ................................................................. 1  
1.0 Overview, Rationale and Purpose ................................................................. 1  
1.1 Structure of the thesis ................................................................................. 2

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework ................................................................. 6  
2.0 Introduction - overview .............................................................................. 6  
  2.0.1 Summary of the study context and rationale ........................................... 7  
2.1 The Globalisation of Education and International Student Adjustment .......... 7  
  2.2.1 The case of Chinese international students ............................................. 10  
  2.2.2 Cultural adjustment challenges .............................................................. 11  
  2.2.3 Other adjustment challenges, performance and failure ......................... 13  
2.3 University input into sojourn students’ adjustment ...................................... 15  
2.4 Sojourn student adjustment factors ............................................................. 17  
2.5 Building a research framework for this study based on extant research ......... 18  
  2.5.1 Anticipatory adjustments and initial experience ........................................ 19  
  2.5.2 Initial adjustment ..................................................................................... 22  
  2.5.3 Interaction/socio-cultural adjustment ...................................................... 23  
  2.5.4 Learning adjustment ................................................................................ 24  
  2.5.5 General adjustment ................................................................................ 27  
2.6 Summary ....................................................................................................... 28  
  2.6.1 Exploratory model of the research factors .............................................. 29

Chapter 3 – Research methodology .............................................................. 31  
3.1 Introduction and Method Overview .............................................................. 31  
3.2 Research Purpose, Question and Objectives .............................................. 32  
3.3 Study design overview .............................................................................. 33  
  3.3.1 Unit of analysis and purposive sampling ............................................... 34  
3.4 Validity and reliability ............................................................................... 36  
3.5 The sample .................................................................................................. 37  
3.6 Interview design .......................................................................................... 38
3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings ......................................................... 38

Chapter 4: Findings .................................................................................................. 40

4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 40

4.2 University assistance for sojourn students’ adjustment ...................................... 41
  4.2.1 Students’ perceptions of university assistance .............................................. 42

4.3 Anticipatory adjustments and initial experience on arrival ................................. 49
  4.3.1 Language expectation and initial experience ................................................ 50
  4.3.2 Learning expectation and initial experience .................................................. 57
  4.3.3 Culture expectation and initial experience ...................................................... 64
  4.3.4 Findings summary of anticipatory adjustment, and initial experience .......... 68

4.4 Ongoing interaction and socio-cultural adjustment ............................................ 69
  4.4.1 Findings summary of ongoing interaction and socio-cultural adjustment ....... 73

4.5 Ongoing learning adjustment; Difference in culture of learning ......................... 74
  4.5.1 Lecturer/Student relationship ........................................................................ 78
  4.5.2 Learning methods .......................................................................................... 79
  4.5.3 Assessment criteria ...................................................................................... 82
  4.5.4 Plagiarism and referencing ......................................................................... 83
  4.5.5 Findings summary of ongoing learning adjustment ....................................... 83

4.6 Language adjustment and learning adjustment .................................................... 85

4.7 General adjustment ............................................................................................ 86

4.8 Reported stressors ............................................................................................... 87

4.9 Findings summary ............................................................................................... 90

Chapter 5: Discussions, Implications and Conclusions ........................................... 93

Discussions & Implications ...................................................................................... 93

5.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 93

5.2 Anticipatory adjustments and initial experience upon arrival ............................ 94
  5.2.1 Language difficulties .................................................................................... 95
  5.2.2 Culture difficulties ...................................................................................... 96
  5.2.3 Learning difficulties .................................................................................... 97

5.3 University assistance on arrival and ongoing ....................................................... 98

5.4 Ongoing Interaction and socio-cultural adjustment .......................................... 100
List of tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Cultural dimensions comparison table</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>University Assistance: Summary of Data Coding</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Language Preparedness &amp; Initial Adjustment: Summary of data coding</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Learning adjustment expectations: Summary of Data Coding</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Learning adjustment challenges (identified at the outset and ongoing as discussed later in this chapter): Summary of Data Coding</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Anticipatory adjustments, knowledge of host environment: Summary of Data Coding</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Adjustment challenges of the new culture of learning: Summary of Data Coding</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Factors causing most adjustment related stress: Summary of Data Coding</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

With a background of increased globalisation of education services, this thesis examines the adjustment experiences of Chinese student's sojourn to Australia to undertake postgraduate studies. This study has brought together existing literature on expatriate managers and international education and used these to form a suitable framework and reference points for this study to answer the research question - What are the critical challenges for expatriate student adjustment? The purpose of this study was to explore the adjustment of sojourn Chinese international students in Australia, to further assist in the understanding of student perceptions and adjustment processes when attending a university in Australia. A qualitative study was undertaken using basic pattern analysis across interviews with descriptive coding of responses and the data was interpreted based on aggregate analysis. This study has provided reference points of culture including language, cultures of learning and the dimensions of culture to develop an understanding of the students' adjustment processes. The preparedness and adjustment processes of the students were analysed, using a timeline basis, comparing the students' anticipatory adjustments (accurate expectations based on acquired knowledge and may include training) against their students' initial experience upon arrival and ongoing adjustment experiences in the areas of Interaction/socio-cultural adjustment, learning adjustment and general adjustment. The important findings of the study included that a lack of anticipatory adjustments contributed to culture shock; this included an overestimation by the students of their language proficiency and the students had little knowledge of the different culture of learning in Australia, which compounded their culture shock. Culture shock was evident in the early stages of the students' studies and was placated as their English proficiency grew (through language classes held at the university and daily usage) and understanding of different learning requirements of the university compared to those in China. The
students clustered (lived, associated and studied together) as a reaction to culture shock and to minimise adjustment problems. There was poor utilization of the adjustment assistance services offered by the university, other than the language classes and services, a major reason given was their cultural background (low level of Assertiveness and In-Group Collectivism). This exploratory study will assist the management of universities in an understanding of their client base and their quest for educational excellence, by giving rare insights into their customers' perspectives on critical adjustment challenges.