Comparing the Intercultural Adaptation Experiences of Four Western Expatriates in Malaysia

Amira Sariyati Firdaus
University of Malaya, Malaysia
amira_firdaus@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Expatriates sojourn-experiences may effect their perceptions of Malaysia, which in turn may influence their assessment of and feelings about Malaysian societies, markets and politics. The negative or positive opinions that expatriates have of Malaysia will be relayed to their governments, their media and their corporations, perhaps influencing the opinions and stances of their policy makers towards Malaysia. Intensive interviews are conducted with four Western expatriates in Malaysia. Their adaptation experiences are compared with issues and concepts presented in several past literature on sojourner adaptation.

Keywords: *Sojourners, sojourner adaptation, intercultural communication, Western expatriates*

INTRODUCTION

This study was conceived with the realization that a large number of professional, corporate, media and diplomatic expatriates currently reside and work in Malaysia. Coming from the upper echelons of society, expatriates generally have access to policy makers in their home-countries as direct advisers, or indirectly as 'windows' to Malaysia. These people's sojourn-experiences may effect their perceptions of Malaysia, which in turn may influence their views of Malaysian societies, markets and politics. The negative or positive opinions that expatriates have of Malaysia will be relayed to their governments, their media and their corporations, perhaps influencing the opinions and stances of their policy makers. The global economic, strategic and military clout that some countries posses mean that their trade and foreign policies can have profound effects on Malaysia's strategic, economic and security interests.

Based on such logic, a sensible proactive prerogative would be for Malaysians to forge lasting and intimate bonds with foreign expatriates. Intimacy with Malaysians will mean greater possibility of these expatriates negotiating their own (journalistic, corporate, trade, diplomatic missions) interests to not be detrimental to their Malaysian friends, as well as other Malaysians in general.

In a highly volatile world as today, powerful foreign expatriates are a viable defense against economic or military sanctions. They can be our best friends or our worst enemies. How we treat them, and the image of Malaysia and Malaysians that we portray to them can influence their perception of us, and indirectly influence their leaders' positions concerning us that being said, the idealism of such logic is not lost upon this author.

It must also be noted that this study harbors no illusions about the actual extent that expatriates influence their countries' international policies. Issues of international relations are highly complex and to date there is yet a viable way to ensure 'world peace and prosperity'. Nonetheless, it must also be noted that policy makers often depend on the advice and opinions of those they deem to be experienced or knowledgeable. Foreign expatriates will go home with practical experience, first-hand knowledge and informed opinions of their host-countries. These are opinions that policy makers are likely to seek.

With the premise that expatriates have access to their home-countries' policy makers, whose policies are important to Malaysia's well being, this paper posits that understanding the adaptation process of these expatriates is an initial step towards influencing their countries' policies towards Malaysia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is essentially a qualitative exploratory study with a main focus on adaptation. It may be loosely likened to a grounded analysis of the fit between 'real' discernible individuals and aggregated-respondents of past studies.

Several different conceptualizations of adaptation have been mentioned in literature, but a convergent view of adaptation is that it is an on-going, continuous process. It begins before a sojourner even arrives in his host-country, with his expectations of, and whatever prior information he may have about, the host-country. And the process continues even after a sojourner has returned to his home-county, as the foreign norms and values that he may have adopted would influence readjustment to his own host-culture. Adaptation includes, but is not limited to, a sojourner's experiences with, and perceptions of, a country's peoples, norms and values, beliefs, institutions, social structure and even geophysical environment.

This qualitative study hopes to empathize with some Western expatriates' intercultural experiences in Malaysia, and to capture their feelings and opinions of Malaysia.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

- To gain a practical appreciation of issues highlighted in adaptation literature and to determine if subjects' adjustment to Malaysian culture is reflective of past findings on sojourner adjustment.
- To asses subjects' opinions of Malaysian society.

METHODOLOGY

Literature indicates that studying homogenous groups of sojourners provides more relevant information on adaptation issues (Navara and James 2002). Following such logic, this study focuses on the experience of Western expatriates.

Intensive one-on-one interviews were conducted with four Western expatriates from different backgrounds. Due to time and resource limitations, the sample chosen was a convenience sample drawn from mutual acquaintances. Therefore, homogeneity is limited to the subjects' 'Western' heritage and their high socio-economic status in Malaysia.

Through mutual acquaintances, this researcher was introduced to the following subjects*:

- *Vaan – Dutch pilot*
  Vaan works as a base manager for a leading local airline company in Miri, Sarawak. He has been flying with the same company for about seven years. He more or less shares the same employment scheme as his local colleagues but is also paid an additional expatriate allowance. He previously sojourned in the United States as a foreign student at the tertiary level. Prior to his own sojourn in Miri, Vaan's parents also lived and worked in Miri as expatriates of an oil company. Vaan is 33 and single, and lives alone in a reasonably-priced apartment in a non-descript neighborhood.

- *Ameer – British journalist*
  Ameer is actually of Pakistani descent, but has lived on his own in Britain since the age of ten. This researcher takes the liberty of placing the 'Westerner' label on him because he has been, in his own words, "completely Anglo-cised". Ameer has worked as a foreign correspondent for two renowned British news media publications. He has been in Malaysia for five years. Prior to Malaysia, Ameer has worked as a foreign correspondent in at least 11 different countries. Ameer is in his late forties or early fifties. He lives alone in an upscale expatriate neighborhood in Kuala Lumpur. Ameer is divorced and has no children.

- *Linda and Kirk – Australian diplomat and accompanying spouse*
  Linda is a mid-level ranking diplomat who has had a prior posting in India. Her husband Kirk is currently completing his Honours degree in psychology (presumably through distance learning), and is a stay-at-home father. Prior to marriage, Kirk worked in London for six months. Linda and Kirk have a four year old daughter. They live in an upscale expatriate condominium complex. The family has been in Kuala Lumpur for four years and will be leaving for Australia four weeks from the date of this study's interview. (Linda and Kirk were interviewed separately and in their own capacity as individual sojourners).

LITERATURE REVIEW
Adaptation Variables

Numerous factors are linked to sojourner adaptation in host environments, with different researchers looking at adaptation from different angles. Within the broad range of variables attributed to sojourner adaptation, most seem to fall into either one of two categories;

psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation, the two most fundamental elements of adjustment (Ward & Chang 1997: 526). Most studies, however, seem to focus more on psychological adaptation, indicating that it may be the more complex between the two. In addition, sociocultural adjustment literature often cite or refer to psychological adjustment findings. While some researchers indicate that the two dimensions of adaptation are correlated, others see psychological and sociocultural adjustment as mutually independent, asserting that an individual may know how to navigate his ways in social situations, but may not necessarily be psychologically contented, and vice versa. The extent to which these two dimensions are related is a point of contention.

Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustments

Ward and various colleagues make clear distinctions between the two concepts. In their point of view, while psychological and sociocultural adjustment may be related, they are determined by different types of variables.

"Psychological adjustment" is defined as psychological wellbeing and emotional satisfaction in a new cultural environment (Oguri & Gudykunst 2002). It is best viewed within a "stress and coping framework" where personality, life changes, and social support are influential factors. "Sociocultural adjustment" on the other hand, is defined as "sojourners' ability to 'fit in' or effectively interact with members of host culture" (Oguri & Gudykunst 2002). Culture-specific skills, the ability to negotiate the host culture, and general intercultural competence facilitate sociocultural adjustment. This dimension of adjustment can be viewed through a social learning context. Sociocultural adjustment variables include quality of contact with host nationals, length of residence in new culture, cultural identity, and cultural distance. (Ward & Chang 1997: 526-527)

Cultural Fit and Adaptation

Cultural distance is the perceived degree of difference between home and host culture and is thought by some to be a relatively strong variable of sojourner adaptation (Ward & Chang 1997: 531). The concept of cultural fit goes further by 'operationalizing' cultural distance. Cultural fit measures the congruence between a sojourner's personality and host-culture norms. Ward and Chang (1997) investigate cultural fit of American sojourners in Singapore.

In defining adjustment and looking at situational and cultural influences on it, the researchers merge both issues of psychological and sociocultural adjustment to focus on the issues of "cultural fit". The study posits that "the cultural fit between a sojourner's personality profile and host culture norms facilitates psychological wellbeing". The cultural fit construct acknowledges the importance the person-situation interaction in influencing adjustment. The more a sojourner's personality fit with the norms of the host-culture, the better adjusted he will be.

The study hypothesized and found that:

- Extraversion (having an extrovert personality) is unrelated to either psychological or sociocultural adjustment
- Discrepancies between sojourner extraversion and host-culture norms is related to higher levels of psychological distress**.**
- Psychological and sociocultural adjustment are significantly correlated.

The study deviates from other personality-adjustment literature that view extraversion as being an indicator of adaptability. By highlighting the cross between personal factors and situational factors, these findings explain why previous studies found weak links between personality and adaptation. The researchers posit that it is not personality per se that predicts adjustment, rather it is the congruence (i.e. fit) between personality and host-culture norms that predicts adjustment.

Identity Conflict

Identity is conceptualized as a social-psychological construct that suggests to a person what values are important and what behaviors are appropriate. Socialization is significant to the formation of identity, especially in the sense that one identifies with his culture or community. **Identity conflict** occurs when a sojourner has "personal and affective commitment to two or more incompatible identity components" (Leong & Ward 2000) that are each shaped by the cultures from which these identity components originate. Leong and Ward cite Baumeister (1986) who suggests that identity conflict may occur in one of two ways:

- When multiple components of identity demanding conflicting behavioral prescriptions.
- When social circumstances demand that a sojourner integrate a foreign and incompatible component of identity with his existing identity, a situation most relevant to sojourners.

Leong and Ward study identity and acculturation among People's Republic of China sojourners in Singapore. Their objective is to construct a predictive model of identity by looking at the variables that predict identity conflict. They find that personal traits suggest resilience in the face of identity conflict.

Measures of individual difference indicate that "tolerance of ambiguity" and "attributional complexity" are negatively correlated with identity conflict. More tolerant individuals are better able to appreciate different perspectives, tolerate uncertainty and deal with inconsistencies between his home and host cultures. Individuals with higher attributional complexity are better at critical reflection and better able to analyze incompatible situations. They are also better able to appreciate the different dispositions and circumstances of other individuals and other cultures.

Group-reference variables such co-national identification and amount of contact with host nationals also plays a role in mitigating or promoting identity conflict. Individuals who identify strongly with their home-culture navigate identity conflicts by referring to and adopting their home-culture behavioral prescriptions and by retaining his home-culture identity. The lesser the contact a sojourner has with host nationals, the less he faces situations of identity conflict.

On the other hand, cultural distance, co-national relations and length of residence in host country were not related to identity conflict.

In their investigation of identity conflict, Leong and Ward mention that that interdependent self-construals often precede identity conflict. The more a person sees himself as interconnected to others, the greater the need for conformity with his environment. This may perhaps also be related to the stress of being under perceived pressure to negotiate

norms and values that conflict with one's home culture, which in turn may induce difficulties in psychological adaptation.

Self Construals and Communiation Styles

In a study that actually focuses on self construals, Oguri and Gudykunst (2002) actually found self construal to be influential on adaptation. Their study is an extension to Ward and colleauge's (1991, 1990) psychological and sociocultural adjustment model. Oguri and Gudykunst focus on the match between sojourner self construals and communication styles and self construals and communication styles predominant in the host culture. It examines Asian students' adjustment in the United States.

Self construal refers to a person's perception of himself, either as interconnected to others, or as a separate individual. Communication styles of host nationals and sojourners reflect their self construals. High-context and low-context communication are an indicator of communication styles. Similar self construals predict that a sojourner will be psychologically well-adapted in the host culture. This conceptualization of communication styles is somewhat similar to Deal's emphasis on individualist and collectivist traits (Deal 2002a.), except that it focuses on the individual's personality rather than the cultural background of the person.

The study found that students with independent self construals were psychologically better adjusted as compared to those with interdependent self construals. It found that 'use of direct communication' and 'positive perceptions of silence' were the only communication styles that predicted Asians' sociocultural adjustment in the United States. It also concluded that variables predicting each dimension of adjustment sometimes overlap (rejecting Ward's contention that different variables predict psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Ward & Chang 1997)).

Person-Situation Intercultural Interaction

Ward and colleagues caution that certain aspects of sojourner adaptation must be carefully interpreted. For one, many studies seem to over-generalize sojourners and their adjustment patterns within giving sufficient thought to specific person-situation interactions involved (Ward & Chang 1997). Who the sojourner is, and why he is in a particular country, will greatly influence the stressors and coping methods involved, and thus, the degree of his adjustment. Navara and James (2002) reiterate this caution in highlighting the different coping trends between different homogenous groups of sojourners.

Groups of Sojourners Previously Study

Sojourner literature mostly focus on international students and on expatriates. Some attention is also given to diplomats, military personal, aid workers and families of sojourners. Navara and James (2002) propose that research on sojourner adaptation should be cautious in differentiating between homogenous groups of sojourners.

In their study on Christian missionaries in Nepal, Navara and James found that different homogenous groups of sojourners face different stressors and employ different coping mechanisms in their adaptation to host society.

Navara and James place missionary workers as being in the middle of an assimilation continuum, where they have high contact with host nationals but are not highly assimilated into host culture.

The study found that missionaries were less satisfied with their postings as compared to other expatriates. The authors attribute this to their frequent contact with host nationals, their lower social status (as compared to other expatriates), and perceived lack of culturally similar interaction and support. The study also discovered that not differentiating between missionaries and non-missionaries indicated similar coping strategies, while separately analyzing the two groups led to different patterns of adjustment. This methodologically important finding of the study indicates that "examining heterogeneous groups can generate misleading results".

Host Nationals' Role in Facilitating Adaptation

While most literature deal with sojourner-based adaptation issues, Deal (2002b) focuses on host-nationals' role in facilitating sojourner adjustment. Deal's paper looks at the problems and solutions in cross-cultural adaptation of Southeast Asian students in the United States. He gives much attention to "role of the host environment in facilitating this process…and… the cultural familiarity and sensitivity necessary for counselors, faculty, and host students to communicate effectively with students from Asia in general specifically Southeast Asia". Deal cites a number of scholars' works in asserting that a understanding of cross-cultural adaptation theories helps host country counselors, faculty and students to effectively interact with international students.

The paper discusses the adaptation process, citing Kim (1988) who asserts the sojourner's willingness to "participate in host society communicative processes", and Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) who apply uncertainty reduction theory to intercultural adaptation. Deal also touches Ishiyama and Westwood's (1992) self-validation model highlighting the components of self-validation such as "security, competence, meaning in life, self worth and identity" that sojourners attempt to acquire after the initial stress of cultural adaptation.

The heart of the paper outlines several ways of facilitating cross-cultural adaptations. He cites Martin (1989) and Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) and Kim (1988) on the importance of prior knowledge of host culture in the sojourners' subsequent cultural adaptation. Deal stresses that sojourners need to understand the nature of the host environment such is in its "receptivity to strangers" and the host environment's expectations of sojourner conformity to its language, values and norms.

Deals mainly focuses on the host environment's role in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation. He cites Erickson (1992) in advancing the need for formal orientation upon arrival and throughout the student's sojourn, by university faculty and existing students, with greater emphasis on counselors (and academic advisors).

Deals cites Charles and Stewart (1991) in highlighting cultural differences that counselors need to be aware of, namely, language limitations, cultural influences on social practices, values, and even culturally influenced learning processes. He also cites Fernandez (1988) and Gim et al. (1991) in the need for cultural sensitivity of academic counselors and sojourner acculturation, stressing the different world views of Americans and Asians. Deal then cites Ishimaya and Westwood's (1992) call for counselors to gain knowledge about the sojourner student's language and culture.

Deals ends his paper citing Kim (1988) and Marks (1987) on reentry preparation issues. Students return to their countries "not wholly a part of their old culture nor wholly separated from it", and therefore need to be aware of the changes in behavior and thinking that they have

undergone. They also need to "develop new communication skills, and to integrate their new skills of all kinds as well as their new perceptions into their home culture. Universities can prepare students for reentry by "improving or initiating substantial two-way communication with international alumni (who are able to) provide integral knowledge about the specifics of the reentry process.

Deals paper is informative for the sojourner's hosts, and indirectly sheds light on issues that sojourners themselves need to understand.

THEORIES

It is difficult to isolate particular theories that have been employed in adaptation studies as most studies do not highlight any particular theoretical frameworks. Nonetheless, three 'theoretical' foundations bear distinction.

The U-Curve Model

Although none of the studies included in this literature review attempts to prove the U-Curve model, its importance as a foundational perspective of sojourner adaptation cannot be ignored. The model hypothesizes that there are several stages of intercultural adjustments. Upon a sojourner's entry into a new culture, there is a feeling of elation and this period is termed the 'honeymoon' phase. This is followed by the 'crisis' stage where sojourners generally begin to experience the difficulties of navigating themselves through mundane situations. It is characterized by a general psychological feeling of stress. As they begin to understand the norms and ways of the host-culture, they enter the adaptation phase, where the stress gradually alleviates. This is followed by a stage of psychological comfort where the sojourner easily fits into his new cultural environment, while still retaining ties to his home-culture.

This model is criticized lack of empirical support in its conceptualization. Several empirical studies find the model to be somewhat inaccurate, especially in its prediction of the initial-entry 'honeymoon' stage.

Stress and Coping Framework

As mentioned earlier, the stress and coping framework is suitable for investigation of psychological adjustment. The perspective "considers culture contact and change as (a) stressful life event" (Ward & Rana-Dueba 2000) which can be moderated or magnified by the characteristics of the cross-cultural situation and a sojourner's own personal characteristics. These situation and personal elements are investigated to find the possible stressors that sojourners encounter, coping mechanisms employed to deal with stressful or ambiguous situations, and the success of these coping strategies.

Individualist-Collectivist Cultural Continuum

Deal (2002b) argues that the individualism-collectivist cultural construct is a useful theoretical framework to apply to intercultural training.

Deal sees communication skills as being developed through the long process of socialization in one's own culture, and posits that new communication skills need to be learned to succeed in an different type of culture. He asserts that theory should be used as a training method because theory is able "to illuminate, explain, and predict" and cites a number of other researchers in this. The goal of his work is to "determine whether the application of

(the individualist - collectivist construct) of communication theory is useful in intercultural training, and if so, in what ways they have proven most effective."

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Their perceptions, experiences and behaviors of the subjects corroborate with literature emphases and findings. Cultural-fit (see 4.1.3.1), attributional complexity (see 4.1.3.2), contact with other expatriates and perceived receptivity of Malaysians seem to facilitate positive adjustment. On the other hand, cultural distance (see 4.1.3.1), lack of attributional complexity and superficial interaction with Malaysians (contact with host-nationals) seem to instigate negative perceptions. Psychological adaptation issues are brought up much more often than sociocultural adjustment. Negative or positive sociocultural adaptation experiences are generally mediated by what each interviewee perceived to be stressors, and how they coped with these stressors. In other words, sociocultural adaptation is determined by psychological adaptation.

Types of Intercultural Adaptation

A sojourner's adaptation to host-culture can usually be described in one of four ways. Isolation indicates that the sojourner chooses not to participate in his surrounding environment, but keeps within the confines of his own home-nationals. Within the expatriate community, the existence of an expatriate enclave indicates isolation. Marginalization, on the other hand, indicates that although a sojourner may wish to interact with his host-environment, locals do not allow him to do so. Acculturation indicates that a sojourner has adopted certain aspects of his host-culture. Duality indicates that a sojourner fully practices both his home-culture and his host-culture, but does so in different distinct settings.

However, it is actually rather difficult to place individual expatriates into any one of these categories. Rather, what the subjects indicate, from their observable behaviors, reported perceptions and reported experiences, is that elements of different types of intercultural adaptation can co-exist within the same person.

That being said, however, duality does not seem to be reflective of this study's subjects. This may be due to the fact that none of these individuals indicate that they have experienced situations that produced identity conflict (see 4.1.3.2). Thus they are more or less free from pressures of having to choose between conforming to host-culture or retaining home-culture practices or values that may not be the norm in Malaysia. The fact that Malaysia is very tolerant of Western norms, to the point of actually adopting many such norms and values, is a factor for this lack of pressure. Thus to a very large degree, expatriates are free to reject or adopt whatever Malaysian cultural norms that they wish, without having to confine their original cultures to the home.

Positive Adjustment

On the whole, all four subjects indicate that they have adjusted rather well to Malaysia. The high socio-economic status that they enjoy, coupled with the general high standard of modern living in Malaysia, and the accompanying ease of obtaining cultural products (i.e. foods, media, clothes, leisure, electronic gadgets etc) normally available in their home-cultures, have made living in Malaysia a positive experience.

Kirk

Kirk seems to be the best adjusted, and there is a very psychological basis for his adaptation to Malaysian culture.

Indicating positive adjustment to Malaysian culture, Kirk reports to enjoying his sojourn in Kuala Lumpur as a 'Malaysian' city. *You can kid yourself and pretend that you are in a Western country, but you're not.* He seems to be interested in taking full advantage of being in a non Western country.

Kirk reports to enjoying the spiritual and religious side of Malaysia, which he reports is missing in Australia, and makes a point to pay his respects to sacred sites, regardless of its religious affiliations. He reports to feeling honored at having being invited to a Hindu ceremony held by an accident victim that he had saved. He was happy to have a chance of actually attending a religious ceremony, because although he is curious about different religions, "I don't like to go in [mosques and temples] and gawk". He finds it somewhat disrespectful to be taking pictures and treating sacred places as tourist sites. He also reports fasting during Ramadhan for spiritual reasons although he is not a Muslim. He also reports breaking his fast with dates. Kirk relates his feeling of solidarity with others who were breaking their fast at a restaurant one Ramadhan night. "I didn't know anybody, and nobody at the restaurant knew me…but I felt attuned to all those people breaking their fast".

Kirk possesses exceptional attributional complexity. He demonstrates this in the views that he holds about the social world in general. He gives an example that even if two people were standing side by side looking at the Petronas Twin Towers, each person may be 'seeing' something completely different. Kirk is somewhat of a philosopher in the sense that he finds deeper meaning of the social world. What most other people are happy to judge at face value, Kirk will reflect upon without making judgment. For example, he mentions the strict laws of the East Coast states which are deemed intolerant by some Westerners who are upset by them, but Kirk felt that to really be tolerant, "you have to be tolerant of other people's intolerance". Such views have made it easy for Kirk to navigate his way around whatever cultural differences there may be between Malaysians and himself.

Besides his attributional complexity, cultural fit and cultural similarities may also be influential factors in Kirk's adjustment to Malaysia. Kirk is from Queensland, where he says being "laid back" is a way of life. He perceives the Malaysian "tidak apa" attitude to be similar to the laid back nature of native Queenslanders. He also feels that the weather in Queensland, and the weather in Malaysia are quite similar.

Negative Perceptions and Experiences
Ameer

In a very crude ranking of the best-adjusted expatriate, if Kirk is the best-adjusted, Ameer (the British journalist) seems to be the least-adjusted. A number of stressors and the coping strategies he uses to deal with them, demonstrate a relatively more negative experience of Malaysia, as compared to other subjects.

There are several intercultural issues that Ameer feels particularly strong about, namely time orientation and certain personal interaction norms. These issues indicate cultural distance and a lack of cultural fit, as well as a certain element of ethnocentricity.

He is very upset by Malaysian "casualness" about time. This is related to his perception of Malaysians as being inconsiderate. He sees this as a problem that cuts across social classes.

Ameer reports to having respect for the practices and values of different cultures. However, this tolerance is not extended to norms and values that he finds extremely inconsiderate. Ameer is unforgiving of Malaysian tardiness, casualness, and inconsideration of others. Although efforts were made to suggest the possibility of a different world view in which British concepts of manners are alien, and are thus difficult for Malaysians to abide, Ameer was unable to accept such a notion. His passionate feelings indicate a trace of ethnocentricity. It is interesting, although unsurprising, that his ethnocentricity is very British and not Pakistani at all. A Pakistani world view may not find issue with the things that upset Ameer very much.

It upsets him that Malaysian can be late or simply fail to show up for appointments without even the courtesy of informing others of their possible tardiness. He sees this as being very inconsiderate, and doesn't understand how Malaysians tolerate it among themselves. It also upsets him that Malaysians make 'promises' that they do not keep. He asserts that British cultural rules dictate that if a person says that they "will call" or "will drop by", then they must do so. It upsets him that Malaysians break such 'promises' with ease, and without thought.

Ameer also finds issue with the fact that Malaysians in general are not fastidious about saying 'please', 'thank you' and 'I'm sorry'. However, it does not seem to upset him as much as the different time orientation and the 'casualness'.

Ameer's adaptation to Malaysian culture seems to be a combination of isolationism, marginalization and acculturation. His disapproval of certain Malaysian ways (discussed above), and even his dislike for Malaysian food, necessitates a certain degree of isolationism, if not from Malaysians, at least from things that are culturally Malaysian. His ethnocentricity probably draws him more towards experiences and people who are more like him, and away from Malaysian cultural experiences. This may also be the reason that he exudes a very British air about him, despite having lived in so many different countries as a foreign correspondent.

Ameer perceives Malaysians as seeing him "not as a fellow Asian, but as a Western expatriate". Ameer also perceives Malaysians as being difficult to get close to. Beyond the superficial level of friendly and warm acquaintances, "you can't really just call up a Malaysian and chat". (Two other Malaysians have reported to this researcher that they too have heard of such complaints from foreigners.) Ameer's perceptions of host-nationals' receptivity to him, and to other expatriates in general, contribute to a slight feeling of marginalization.

Comparing Ameer and Linda

Although Linda generally agrees with Ameer that it is difficult to get informally invited into a Malaysian home, it does not seem to bother her. Linda sees this as just something cultural that can't really be articulated. In this sense, although Ameer feels somewhat marginalized by this phenomenon, Linda does not.

Similarly, Ameer's displeasure with the common Malaysian failure of following through with promises to keep in touch, is viewed quite differently by Linda. She does not see it as an issue, as she perceives it to have the same linguistic value as the term "I'll see you", which she views as a form of saying good bye, and not a promise to meet up.

Linda is also not particular bothered by what Ameer terms the 'casualness' of Malaysians. She accepts that she is not able to "get as much done" within a day in Malaysia as compared to Australia because of the more relaxed attitude that Malaysians have towards

time. She just attunes herself and has learned to "not schedule meetings back to back with Malaysians" so that the flow of her day doesn't get disturbed by unnecessary rescheduling and disappointment or anger. That being said, when faced with a deadline, or when her schedule has been upset because of someone else's tardiness, Linda does get upset. However, there is an element of cultural-fit in the way Linda deals with these stressors. Like many Malaysians, she is upset for the time being, but gets over it, and is able to resume a normal relationship with the tardy person. (This is quite contrary to Ameer's inability to forgive such social discrepancies.)

Although in the cases above Linda demonstrates a certain attributional complexity that Ameer lacks, Linda also exhibits some ethnocentrism in her assessment of cultural 'oddities'. She demonstrates that she finds it incredulous and somewhat amusing that Malaysian media are not allowed to show images of female underarms. Although efforts were made to relate the ruling to the different perceptions that different cultures may have of female underarms, Linda displays difficulty in placing such information in a cultural context. Just as Ameer is unable to accept a different worldview of manners, Linda is also unable to accept a different worldview of sensuality.

Adopting Malaysian Norms and Values: Linda and Kirk's Acculturation

As mentioned earlier, Kirk seems has an exceptional ability to reflect upon his experiences in a philosophical manner. On the whole, Linda too possesses attributional complexity, demonstrated by her coping strategy of explaining unusual situations as nothing more than a difference in culture. "You have to understand that it's just the culture". A Malaysian friend present at Linda's interview offers that Linda "has always been sensitive to other people's culture". This may explain Linda and Kirk's acculturation.

Kirk has adopted the Malay habit of bringing one's right hand to the heart following a hand shake. He says this, and not wearing shoes in the house, are "gifts from Malaysia" that he will keep even when he returns to Australia. His wife, Linda, also plans to go barefoot at home in Australia.

Linda reports to being influenced by Malaysian standards of 'decency' in dressing. She says that she no longer feels comfortable wearing shorts, short skirts or spaghetti string tops in public. Linda narrates an incident while vacationing at home in Australia when she insisted that a bikini-like top she owned was just an undergarment despite an Aunt's praise of it as a nice outfit for outings. A sentence that her husband Kirk uttered: "Some of the apparels that some of the young women here [. . .] its like they're not wearing anything!" may be a sign of his current agreement with the general Malaysian standards of 'decency'.

Linda reports to being very careful and considerate in her dressing when she goes into *kampungs* so as to not offend anyone. She also does not get offended when men speak to her husband instead of her. Linda asserts that a Western woman may easily perceive a man's refusal to address her as an insult. However, Linda understands this to be a sign of respect of her as a woman.

Both Linda and Kirk are unhappy with the way Malaysians drive in general. While Kirk takes a more laid back and philosophical view of it as something he simply had to get used to, Linda unapologetically and consciously criticizes tail-gaiting, failure to signal, and other traffic violations, citing that such practices were simply dangerous. She is very passionate in her disapproval of Malaysian driving habits, and of the lack of enforcement on the part of

Malaysian authorities. However, Linda admits that she has unfortunately picked up some of these "bad habit"s and will have to unlearn them when she returns to Australia or else she "will lose my license in like five minutes!".

Linda and Kirk's Isolation

Elements of isolation are also present is both Kirk and Linda's adjustment. Linda's admits to having more expatriate friends than Malaysian friends, and Kirk claims that "you have to make a conscious effort to get out of the expatriate circle" (indicating his membership in an expatriate enclave). He goes out clubbing with Malaysian friends that he made while working at an Australian diplomatic office. (He no longer works, presumably so that he can concentrate on finishing his Honours in psychology).

Also indicating an element of isolation, Linda indicates that her expatriate neighbors and workmates make up the bulk of her social circle. She reports that they often visit one another at home for very informal gatherings such as watching television or snacking. In all her four years of being in Malaysia, Linda claims to have yet been invited to a Malaysian home. However, she counts at least five Malaysian friends whom she sometimes meets up with outside. These are people she has met through work, and are generally from wealthy families and are rather Westernized.

Linda and Kirks' four year old daughter attends an elite kindergarten with other Malaysian children. To the best of her parents' knowledge, she is the only foreign child there. It is unclear if this is part of Kirk's efforts to "get out of the expatriate circle", if it is merely a coincidence.

Going Malaysian: Vaan. Dutch Pilot

Vaan, the Dutch pilot exhibits some general Malaysian tendencies. He avoids confrontation, is very respectful of the hierarchical rankings of others, and shares the Malaysian time orientation. These conclusions were made based on this researcher's limited acquaintance with him, and hearsay from mutual acquaintances.

In having to refuse this researcher a second appointment with him (an earlier interview had been conducted to discuss his organization), Vaan did not directly say "no" although he was unable to make time. He seems to feel more comfortable saying "call me next week" or "I'll let you know as soon as possible". This is demonstrative of a collectivist norm of avoiding confrontation and saving 'face'. In this case it may be Vaan's desire to not offend this researcher.

Vaan's concern over other people's face is also reflected in his acquiescence to authority, and his respect of hierarchy. Although Vaan reports that he prefers his subordinates to treat him as 'one of the guys', hearsay indicates that he is careful not to take the same liberties with his superiors. Nonetheless, Vaan seems to respect people who stand up to authority, evidenced by his praise of one subordinate who aggressively pointed out mistakes that a much higher ranking officer had made. As for his subordinates' perceptions of him, he is said to be 'afraid' of his superiors, to the extent of sacrificing his and his staff's welfare.

However, it is difficult to determine if Vaan's adoption of Malaysian norms and values (in terms of confrontation, time orientation and respect of authority) is the result of his own personality, or the influence of having lived in Miri for over seven years, or the influence of having had parents who lived and worked in Miri prior to his own sojourn. Nonetheless,

whether his behavior indicates cultural-fit, or is the sign of acculturation, the common values and norms that he now shares with many Malaysians facilitates his feeling of comfort in his host-culture.

Language Problems

With the exception of Ameer, all the other subjects reports having attended Bahasa Melayu classes. Linda and Kirk were tutored while still in Australia, as part of Linda's diplomatic training. Vaan teamed up with several other Dutch expatriates in Miri to pay a tutor. However, all agree that they do not feel a pressing need to learn the language as English is so widely used in Malaysia. Furthermore, they find it hard to practice Malay; most people, when approached in Malay, simply answer in English. Linda notes that Malaysians have a hard time understanding her when she tries to speak in Malay because she had studied a very formal, non-conversational version of the language, and "the [Australian] accent didn't help either". All three of them indicate that their Malay is now rusty.

Malaysian Food

With the exception of Ameer, all subjects indicate that they enjoy Malaysian food. Kirk reports that food selection in Australia is generally not as varied.

Prior Knowledge of Host Country

With the exception of Vaan, none of the other subjects had much prior knowledge of Malaysia. Nonetheless, they report to not having any particular preconceived notions about Malaysia. This may be due to their cosmopolitan experiences gained from work and through acquaintance with the diplomatic and journalistic world. Ameer indicates that he learns more about Malaysia through observation than through participation with Malaysian society.

Reentry Issues

Save for preferring Malaysian weather and the Malaysian Ringgit's purchasing power as compared to the British Pound, Ameer reports no reentry problems when he returns to England for holidays. This could possibly be that his reentries are too short for cultural issues to surface. On the other hand, it may also be indicative of his strong preservation of British culture and identity throughout his sojourn in Malaysia.

Linda believes that she will have to reacquaint herself with the weather in Australia, and is sorry that she will have to take a pay cut, as she will not be paid any overseas allowances back home. As mentioned earlier, Linda indicates that she may have to readjust to Australian driving and dressing norms.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The general conclusions gleaned from interviewing Ameer, Kirk, Linda and Vaan, are that these expatriates have had positive adjustment experiences with traces of acculturation, isolation and marginalization characterizing their adaptation. Whatever difficulties that they may face seem to be the result of varied perceptions of what constitute a stressor, and equally varied coping strategies. Kirk is philosophical and reflective. Linda is practical and sensible. Ameer is set in his ways and unyielding. Limited information on Vaan makes it

somewhat more difficult to make conclusions about him, but he certainly displays more cultural-fit than does Ameer.

While Vaan, Linda and Kirk are rather well acculturized, Ameer presents an anomaly. A meta-conclusion that can be made here is that there may not exist one universal description of a homogenized group of sojourners. This poses a problem for Malaysia in terms formulating strategies to bond with such foreigners. Furthermore, it is difficult to act collectively when even Malaysian society is characterized by so many differences.

Nonetheless, intimate friendships need to be made with expatriates. While it is presumptuous to assume that such friendships will guarantee Malaysia's security and stability, and prosperity in the event of international or foreign threat, Malaysia can at least take comfort in the fact that some of the foreigners it once hosted may stand up for her people.

An obvious shortcoming in making such the above claims based merely on the anecdotes regarding the sociocultural adaptation of four research interviewees is that there is no way to determine what implications (if any) these four individuals' Malaysian experience may have upon their respective countries' official diplomatic views and policies regarding Malaysia. In fact, to claim—as this paper has—that there is any association between the two is highly speculative. However, these tenuous claims may have some merit when one considers the funding—or at least moral support—that governments give to 'people diplomacy' through programs like international student exchange, among other exchanges.

Thus while this paper may be highly superficial research-wise, it may be worthwhile for future research to consider more scientific surveys as well as in-depth ethnographic studies to investigate and understand the implication of international sojourns upon 'soft power' and diplomacy.

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