



Cultural Transition Experiences of Southeast Asian Third Culture Individuals: Basis for Developing Cultural Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the cultural identity of sojourner Southeast Asian Third Culture Individuals (TCIs) studying in Philippine private universities through the exploration of their cultural transition experiences. In doing this, Pollock and Van Reken's Third Culture Kid Identity Model and Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory were applied. A descriptive research design was utilized in answering the specific research questions. Questionnaires were administered to 20 TCI respondents, between ages 18-27, who migrated to the Philippines and stayed for at least 1 year. The respondents came from 4 different countries in Southeast Asia. Research data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. This study found that TCIs developed hidden immigrant identity and mirror identity, and experienced cultural integration. Transition difficulties encountered by the TCIs revolved around economic loss, career security, and life satisfaction. This study aimed to contribute to the development of a deeper understanding on how sojourner Southeast Asian TCIs in the Philippines experience cultural transition, which would help address their cultural transition issues and concerns through the formulation of the basis for developing a cultural program. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that it must be anchored on the real-life experiences of the TCIs, must facilitate mutual understanding of cultures (culture of host country and culture of TCI's home country), and must offer ways on how TCIs could improve self-adjustments.

Keywords: acculturation, cultural identity, cultural integration, sojourners, transition difficulties

Introduction

There has been a wide recognition that the population of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) in today's highly globalized and interconnected world has been increasingly growing. In 2015, there were 244 million people who lived outside their country of citizenship (United Nations Population Fund, 2018).

The life transition of leaving one's home country for an education in another country comes with challenging issues that a sojourner may encounter that include academic, social, emotional, and personal adjustments (Mattanah, Hancock & Brand, 2004; as cited in Bont, 2012). For TCKs, cultural transition is one of the most challenging life experiences that impacts their sense of identity and academic success (Morales, 2017). It has been noted that many TCKs suffer from identity confusion (Pollock, 2000; as cited in Martin, 2003). Quick (2010; as cited in Jennison-Smith, 2011) reported that a big number of Third Culture Kids did not persist to graduation while those who did, often ended up moving to different universities three to nine times to complete their bachelor's degree.

Meanwhile, cultural transition has also become a major challenge for the school, not only for the sojourners (Morales, 2015). It is believed that school not only affects sojourners' transition experiences but also their sense of identity. Researches that took into consideration the perspectives of TCKs mainly explored challenges towards

successful adaptation into their new social environment, while not considering the positive coping strategies for successful adaptation.

As there are sojourners Southeast Asian TCKs transitioning to the Philippines to obtain university education, there is a need to explore and deepen understanding on the unique process of transition that they experience. It is important to understand this transition experience in order to address their multi-dimensional needs that can help them persist to complete their university education.

Apparently, the first cultural transition experience of TCKs has not been given serious attention. There is no research study conducted yet that exclusively explored the first cultural transition experiences of TCKs. Lastly, the researcher observed that in TCK research, there has been little interest given to the study of cultural transition experiences of sojourner Southeast Asians TCKS as one group of TCK population, which results in the paucity of knowledge on their unique transition needs and concerns.

Hence, to address those aforementioned research gaps, the researcher examined the first cultural transition experiences of sojourner Southeast Asian TCKs studying in Philippine universities. The purpose of this study was to determine their cultural identity. Determining the cultural identity of this group of population is the first essential step in helping them to achieve academic success; because educators cannot help an individual whom they do not really know.

It is widely believed that in studies where TCKs are involved, an awareness on the notion of “culture iceberg” that highlights the importance of understanding the culture lying beneath the surface is much needed. This study also sought to determine the common themes that are relevant to their real-life experiences as TCKs, which include cultural adaptation, and perceived transition difficulties.

Literature Review

A. Cultural Transition, Acculturation, and Adaptation

Examining the process of cultural transition and adjustment from the viewpoint of acculturation offers a broad base for exploring the topic of this research. Berry et al. (2006; as cited in Naraghi, 2013) explained that acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of the contact of a group or groups from different cultural contexts. Cultural transition happens when a person moves from one cultural environment to another cultural context. Thus, cultural transition involves acculturation. That is, it leads to some form of change in the cultural patterns of one or more groups. The changes being experienced by an individual in the new cultural environment following the cultural transition might lead to feelings of stress or might reveal the lack of his/her cultural skills. To avoid the stressful situation and the lack of culture skills to achieve stability, he/she will respond by looking for cognitive, behavioral or affective measures. The process on how the person copes with the changes is explained as the individual’s adjustment, which is also called as adaptation. According to Berry (2001; as cited in Bergstrom, 2010), the result of acculturation is relative to the two factors that influence such process: 1) the degree of connection to the culture of origin; and 2) the degree of connection with the new cultural environment. The interplay of these factors could lead to four unique styles of acculturation that people adopt: 1) assimilation; 2) integration; 3) marginalization; and 4) separation.

Cultural assimilation occurs when an individual does not want to keep his/her native culture and chooses to accommodate the dominant culture in the new environment. Cultural integration happens when a person chooses to retain his/her home culture and to hold on to the culture of the host society. Cultural marginalization occurs when the person is not able to maintain his/her culture of origin and at the same time is not interested to become involved with the new cultural environment. Lastly, cultural separation occurs when the person chooses not to participate with the dominant culture and only desires an involvement with his/her culture of origin. The study of Janzen (2012) revealed that Third Culture Kids (TCKs) did not always immediately choose to accommodate new culture due to their fear of losing their own identity. However, studies pointed out that style of acculturation is not absolutely dependent on the choice of the transitioning individual. For instance, unless the host environment is accommodating to cultural diversity and receptive of those who come from different cultural backgrounds, cultural integration is not possible. Berry et al. (2006) noted in their study that majority of the youth who immigrated and the youth originally from the host country adopted an approach of integration while the minority

adopted the approach of assimilation. According to Yu et al. (2007), successful integration is dependent on both the transitioning individual and the host environment. Studies showed that the transitioning person will likely experience social competence and a higher sense of psychological well-being when the transition leads to cultural integration.

David Pollock (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; as cited in Long, 2016) identified and explained the five stages of a normal transition cycle as follows: 1) the involvement stage; 2) the leaving stage; 3) the transition stage; 4) the entering stage; and 5) the re-involvement stage. In the involvement stage, the individual is in a situation where he or she feels suited and settled in the new environment. In the leaving stage, the person is in a situation where he or she is preparing for a next transfer. The person during this stage initiates the practice of mental and emotional detachment wherein he or she starts to separate from others as a preparation to the next transition. In the transition stage, emotional distress takes place caused by leaving the old community and by the new uncertainties of searching for one's place in the new environment. In the entering stage, the individual experiences the need to figure out how to become a part of the new community where all roles and relationships are new or different. In the re-involvement stage, the person feels comfortable with the roles and relationships he or she may have in the new community and feels that he or she is an accepted member.

In sum, there are four acculturation styles that a person in transition can adopt namely assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation. In this study, the researcher aimed to determine the style of acculturation that sojourner Southeast Asian Third Culture Kids adopt during the transition, entering, and re-involvement stages.

B. Cultural Identity

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) share similar characteristics. According to Pollock and Van Reken (2009; as cited in Janzen, 2012), there are two major realities that influence the life of a TCK: 1) experiencing a cross-cultural world; and 2) experiencing a mobile world. The first reality means that the TCKs have a real-life personal experience of different cultures that have become an important part of their lives. The second reality means that TCKs are people who travel from one country to another and are surrounded by individuals whose life is characterized by a high level of social mobility. It is an accepted fact that there are many individuals today who form multiple identities due to their repeated exposures to different cultures. For instance, a person who is immersed into a different culture may experience conflicting cultural values. Considering that TCKs are still in their developmental years during this cultural exposure, the tendency is for them to adapt and integrate the elements of the new culture to their original culture that will result in the formation of the so-called third culture (Arnett, 2002; as cited in Sellers, 2011).

Pollock and Van Reken (2009; as cited in Janzen, 2012) enumerated the different cultural identities of Third Culture Kids as follows: 1) foreigner; 2) adopted; 3) hidden immigrant; and 4) mirror. In the foreigner's identity, the TCK does not look similar with the other members of the culture, nor does he or she think similar to them, which is a common sentiment for a TCK in the host culture knowing that his or her cultural background is different from what others possess. In the adopted identity, the TCK does not look like the other members of the culture, but thinks like them. In the hidden immigrant identity, the TCK looks like the other members of the culture, but thinks differently. For instance, it happens when a TCK returns to his or her passport country for an education. In this situation, the TCK looks like his or her classmates, peers, or friends, but does not think like them. This is termed in TCK literature as the reverse culture shock. In the mirror identity, the TCK looks like the other members of the culture and also thinks like them.

Martin (2003) conducted a qualitative study involving 5 TCK participants to identify their significant needs while re-entering secondary education in Australia. The study revealed that participants wanted to be treated as individuals not different from their peers. The participants unanimously viewed being a TCK as a very positive experience.

Walters (2006) explained that establishing a sense of identity is one of the greatest challenges TCKs have. Identity development is an intricate process that is being shaped by multiple factors. Thus, for TCKs, it is more stressful due to the unique challenges brought by transition process itself that forces them to concentrate more on adjusting and adapting rather than establishing a sense of who they are (Hisano, 2015).

The study of Wu and Koolash (2011) investigated the impacts of growing up in different cultures to the sense of identity and sense of belonging of TCKs. The study examined the life stories of 11 TCKs who all returned to Sweden after living abroad. The result of the study showed that TCK's sense of identity is about knowing who they are as a unique person and their sense of belonging is not tied to a place but to their sense of home in their relationships with family and friends.

In a qualitative study conducted by Moore and Barker (2011) that investigated the cultural identity of 19 TCK participants from 6 different countries, it was revealed that TCKs were more inclined to hold a multicultural identity than a confused cultural identity. The study also revealed that TCK participants were competent intercultural communicators who viewed their experience as beneficial but lacking in clear sense of belonging.

Using phenomenology, Valencia (n.d.) studied how TCKs form their identity using internet and mobile technology and how it impacts their multi-cultural identity formation. In this study, she involved participants who had migrated in at least one or more host countries during their developmental years with an expected repatriation. The study revealed that TCKs used these technologies as tools to guide their behavior and to maintain social interaction in bridging the cultural gap between the home and host culture. The study also found that TCKs struggled to figure out where they truly belong and experienced difficulty in forming their identity due to their multicultural mobile lifestyle that resulted in 'identity crisis'.

Long (2016) conducted a study on the lived experiences of Chinese TCK students who were educated in a Western-curriculum international school in an attempt to understand better their cross-cultural identity. Long found four significant themes from the analysis of the lived experiences of the participants: 1) Language in the development of identity is important since it affects the communication between TCKs, family, and school; 2) TCK identity is a mixture of East and West culture formed as cultural expectations that were placed on them and which they placed upon themselves; 3) the role of family and family expectations are an important aspect of identity development; 4) the academic environment plays an important role in the development of TCK identity since it changes the sense of "who they are".

In the study of Walters (2006), she explored gender as an aspect of identity to examine how women who grow up in multiple cultures approach adulthood and develop a sense of identity. The study revealed different themes of identity development which include 1) disruption of transition; 2) stability of spirituality; 3) voice of the outsider; 4) need of a future international lifestyle; 5) silencing of voice; 6) power of normalization within the common group; and 7) value in establishing independence.

In sum, the above-mentioned identities, foreigner, adopted, hidden immigrant, and mirror were found to be the cultural identities that individuals in cross-cultural transition may hold. The literature presented above revealed that previous studies have not classified the cultural identities of Third Culture Kids into existing typology of cultural identity such as that introduced by Pollock and Van Reken (2001). In addition, the literature revealed the lack of researches that present the cultural identity of the Southeast Asian TCKs, which this present research sought to address. In this study, the interest of the researcher was to determine the cultural identity of the sojourner Southeast Asian TCKs relative to the perceptions they have of themselves and place it under the aforementioned typology of cultural identity.

C. Transition Difficulties

Third Culture Kids are likely to encounter difficulties while transitioning to college (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; as cited in Janzen, 2012). According to Janzen (2012), the return of TCKs to their passport country to pursue college education can be a difficult adjustment after living most of their lives in a country with a different culture. Schmidt (2017) conducted a case study to explore the English language experiences of immersed TCKs, age 18 and older, upon their return to United States. The study revealed that participants experienced difficulties, in general, lack of confidence, and shifting identities.

Janzen (2012) conducted a study with 7 TCK participants who returned to United States for their college education. In this study, it was revealed that TCKs encountered a number of communication concerns during their transition to college. In the classroom level, the TCKs experienced different levels of adjustment challenges that

included verbal and non-verbal communication with their teachers and peers, which resulted in increased frustrations and fear of embarrassment. Also, it was found that the TCK participants did not want to stand out in their class.

TCKs high mobility experience enables them to become more accommodating and understanding of multiple cultures and languages; more flexible, adaptable, and comfortable with travels. However, Pollock and Ven Reken (2001; as cited in Sellers, 2011) reported that it had a long-term implication for TCKs which include restlessness due to the potential difficulty in settling down in a single location and rootlessness because of the feeling of not belonging anywhere. In the study of Wertsch (1991; as cited in Fail et al., 2004a), she concluded that a high mobility lifestyle had long-lasting negative impacts.

Lijadi (2015) studied how the TCKs constructed meanings about their high mobility lifestyle and how their 'sense of place' influenced their identity construction using qualitative inquiry. In this study, adolescent TCKs claimed that there were frequent changes to which they needed to deal with and that "they longed for direction for their future".

In a phenomenological study conducted by Benjamin (2017) in Prague, the individuals, 13 to 17 years old, who migrated from one country to another for several times were called 'hypermobile youths.' In this study, one-on-one semi structured interviews were conducted with eight individuals who had moved internationally multiple times during their childhood. In this study, the following significant themes emerged from the interpretation of participants' experiences of hypermobility: 1) the youths' dominant feelings of ephemerality and uncertainty of their everyday lives and relationships; 2) the youths' various adjustment mechanisms to cope with the psychological strain as a result of major life changes; 3) the youths' resort to multi-voiced biographical narratives in understanding and describing themselves; and 4) the youths' feelings of connectedness based on self-created imageries, personal memories and (trans-generational) family narratives.

According to Hobfoll and Spielberg (1992; as cited in Hisano, 2015), during transitions TCKs are affected with negative experiences which include 1) threat of resource loss; 2) actual loss of resources; or 3) failure to gain resources after investment. These losses are seen in the areas of friendship, access, language, or education. Oftentimes, these losses are hidden making TCKs experience a hard time to process such loss and deal with this unresolved grief. The inability to share their ups and downs with other individuals usually leads to an intentional isolation, avoidance of friendships, detachment from relationship and other commitments, and superficial living in any culture (Sellers, 2011).

Fletcher (1995; as cited in Sellers, 2011) reported that TCKs have inclination to be highly motivated for educational achievement. The study of Useem, Useem, Cottrell, and Jordan (1999; as cited in Sellers, 2011) that surveyed 680 participants on the long-term impact of TCK experience, found that TCKs were four times more likely to finish a baccalaureate degree than their counterparts. However, this higher chance of attending university for education among TCKs often decreased to half and a frequent move to multiple universities before completing the degree (Schiffler, 2005; as cited in Janzen, 2012).

In sum, the literature presented the major challenges that TCKs experience during transition such as developing a sense of identity, persistence to graduate, coping with mobility, experiencing problems in building relationships, feeling of being misunderstood, wanting to be accepted, and dealing with loss, which are found to affect the development of their self-definition and cultural adjustment. Likewise, the present study, aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by the sojourner Southeast Asian themselves as they commonly experienced, but its focus was on the 3 stages (transition, entering, and re-involvement) of their first cross-cultural transition to better understand their unique needs and concerns.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the cultural identity of sojourner Southeast Asian Third Culture Kids studying in Philippine universities through the exploration of their cultural transition experience. Determining the cultural identity of this group of population is the first essential step in helping them to achieve academic success; because educators cannot help an individual whom they do not really know. It is widely believed that in studies

where Third Culture Kids are involved, an awareness on the notion of “culture iceberg” that highlights the importance of understanding the culture that is beneath the surface is much needed.

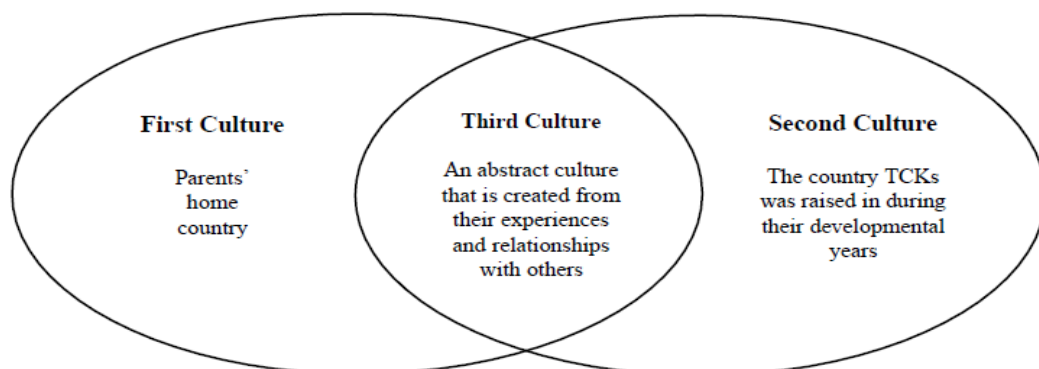
Theoretical Framework

As a group of population, TCKs have a unique cultural perspectives and experiences (LaBass, 2015). For purposes of clarity, it has to be made known that TCKs or TCIs are sometimes also being referred to as Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) (Byntter, 2012; as cited in Tranter, 2018). However, for purposes of consistency in the term usage, the researcher adopted the term TCI. The literature on TCIs revealed that there are various types of TCIs that emerge due to the continuous globalization of societies and increasing mobilization of people. One issue that the researcher found was that there is no TCK or TCI sub-terms that can be used to refer to those individuals who have just experienced singular cultural transition. Apparently, when TCI researchers talked about TCIs in their works, they were referring only to those individuals who had made or experienced multiple cross-cultural transfers.

In this study, such unique cultural experiences are of utmost importance. Again, it was the assumption of this study that singular and multiple cross-cultural transition have different meanings for individuals. Nonetheless, in understanding the first cultural transition experiences of the TCIs, the researcher considered two significant theoretical perspectives: Third Culture Kid Identity Model and the Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory.

Studies on TCKs are mostly framed within the foundational theory of Useem and Useem (1963) called model of Third Culture Kid identity, which was further refined by Pollock and Van Reken (2001). Figure 1 shows the concept of Third Culture formation. The first culture is the culture of the country where the parent(s) of TCK originates while the second culture is the culture of the country where the TCK migrated and lived, which is outside of the parent(s)' country of origin (Hisano, 2015). The amalgamation of the first and second culture is the third culture (Morales, 2015). Third culture is neither the first culture nor the second culture; but the culture between two cultures (Walters and Faith, 2009; as cited in Hisano, 2015).

Figure 1. The Third Culture Model (Van Reken, 1996: as cited in Janzen, 2012)

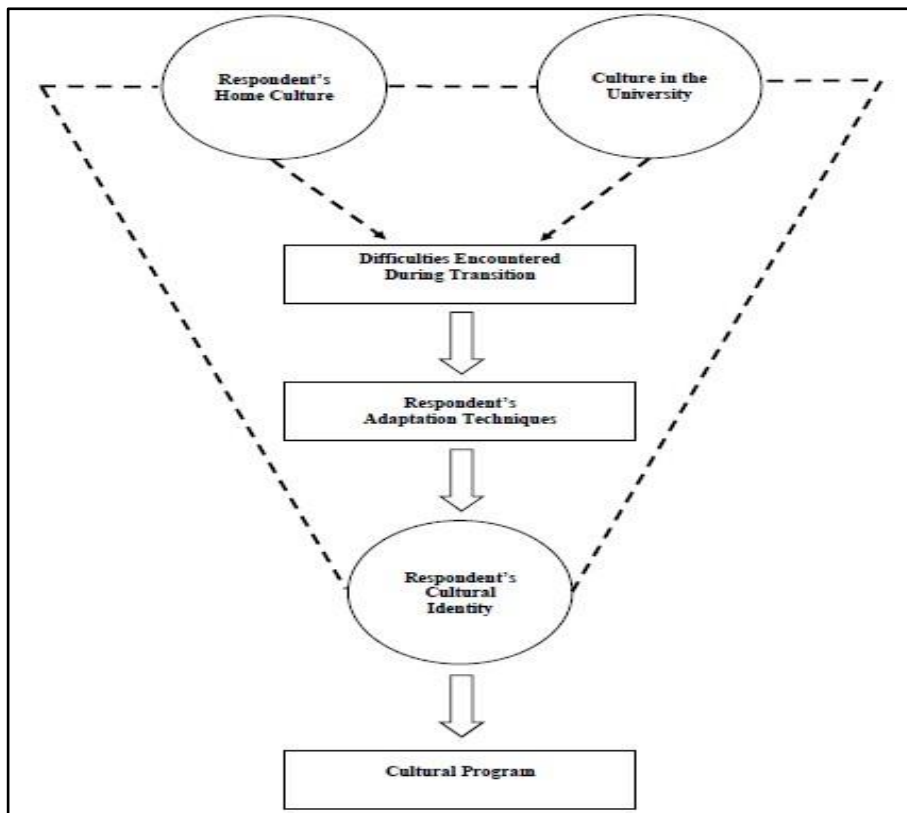


This study was also guided by Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory introduced by Young Yun Kim (2001). In this theory, the struggle of an individual to feel or achieve stability amidst adversarial environmental conditions is viewed as a natural human tendency. In this study, such struggle of the individual to attain equilibrium was examined through the adaptation techniques that TCIs practiced during the 3 stages of their cultural transition: transition stage, entering, and re-involvement. In addition, the so-called adversarial environmental conditions being referred to by Kim was understood in this study as the transition difficulties that TCIs encountered. The theory further argued that an essential step in this adaptation process is the ability to communicate competently and actively engage in the social communication process of the host culture based on its norms and practices. Finally, it argued that as the individual undergoes the process of adaptation, a gradual identity formation occurs that results in an increasingly intercultural personhood. In this study, the identities formed by the TCIs were identified based on their personal views on their cultural identity.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher adopted Kim's (2001) Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory in understanding the difficulties encountered by the respondents during transition and the adaptation techniques they used as they experience the acculturation of their home culture and the culture in the university (host culture) as they struggle to achieve personal stability to fit in that new environment. However, in this study, the researcher did not look into the communication competence of the respondents in using Filipino language. The researcher presumed that the respondents are exposed in English language in the universities where they study. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study that presents the application of the theories to the present research problem.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework



Likewise, the cultural identity (third culture) that the respondents formed and developed in their new environment would be understood using the same theoretical perspective. For this reason, Kim's (2001) theory of cross-cultural adaptation gives meaning to Pollock and Van Reken's (2001) Third Culture Kid identity model. Applying these theories to the present study on sojourners Southeast Asian TCIs would allow them to understand their shared experiences as international students. At the same time, teachers and educators who mentor them would understand well their unique transition needs. Also, their parents would understand better the identity that they hold. Consequently, the themes of cultural transition experiences will serve as basis in developing a cultural program that will address the unique needs of sojourner Southeast Asian TCIs.

Methodology and Methods

A. Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design to answer the research questions. According to Nasaji (2015) descriptive research is used to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics, by collecting data that may be analyzed quantitatively by determining the frequencies, percentages, averages, etc. In this study, the researcher aimed to describe the cultural identity that sojourner Southeast Asian Third Culture Individuals developed vis-a-vis their cultural transition experience? Specifically, this study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What was the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. age;
 - 1.2. gender;

- 1.3. home country;
- 1.4. institutional affiliation; and
- 1.5. length of time spent in the Philippines?
2. What difficulties were encountered by the respondents during:
 - 2.1. transition stage;
 - 2.2. entering stage; and
 - 2.3. re-involvement stage?
3. What were the adaptation techniques used by the respondents during:
 - 3.1. transition stage;
 - 3.2. entering stage; and
 - 3.3. re-involvement stage?
4. How did the respondents view their cultural identity?
5. What were the bases for developing cultural program?

B. Respondents of the Study

The researcher deliberately took into account the following requirements as criteria for inclusion. In this study, the respondent should:

1. be a student in a private university whose passport country is not Philippines;
2. have stayed in the Philippines for at least 1 year;
3. have gone only to one country, which is Philippines;
4. be willing to participate and share his/her personal experiences on the topic being investigated by the researcher; and
5. be able to express his/her ideas clearly using English language.

The researcher chose to include only respondents that are not Filipino TCIs despite being a Southeast Asian because of the following reasons: 1) This study did not focus on the experience of TCIs returning to home country, but looked into the experiences of the respondents transitioning to second culture; and 2) the researcher assumed that cultural adjustment was not a major concern for Filipino TCIs since Philippines was their home country, thus, focusing instead the study's attention on non-Filipino Southeast Asian TCIs.

Moreover, the respondents included were also those who have gone only to one country from their home country, because the researcher believed that the respondents' first transition to the second culture would help them clearly explain, describe, and recall their experiences.

Also, the study required that the respondents should come from private university, because the researcher learned that more non-Filipino Southeast Asian TCIs enrolled in private universities than in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs).

C. Sampling Technique

All the research respondents were recruited using purposive sampling. The researcher selected purposive sampling considered by Espeseth (2013), Patton (2002; as cited in Gatto, 2009), and Kruger (1988: as cited in Groenewald, 2004) as the most important type of non-probability sampling in determining the primary research respondents based on the researcher's judgment by looking for those who "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" and those who can best meet the purposes of the study. Hence, using purposive sampling, the researcher involved in this study a sample size of 20 non-Filipino Southeast Asian TCKs studying at private universities, composed of 13 males and 7 females, aged 18 to 27.

D. Research Instruments

The respondents were asked to accomplish the questionnaires. The questionnaire was subjected to a reliability test, which generated a Cronbach Alpha of 0.992. The questionnaire consisted of 5 parts. The introductory part required the respondents to input their personal information with regard to their age, gender, home country, institutional affiliation, and length of time spent in the Philippines, which determined the overall demographic

profile of the research respondents. The first part inquired on the adaptation techniques (16 items) that were practiced by the respondents during the different stages of their cultural transition. The second part asked about the views of the respondents on their own cultural identity (15 items). The third part explored on the difficulties encountered (29 items) by the respondents during their cultural transition. The final part asked on the view of the respondents on the characteristics of an effective cultural program (10 items).

E. Data Analysis

In the analysis of quantitative data, the researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to obtain accurate results for descriptive statistics.

To determine the demographic profile and the cultural identity developed by the respondents, frequency and percentage of the given data set were identified. For the analysis of the respondents' adaptation techniques, views on cultural identity, difficulties encountered, and views on the characteristics of an effective cultural program, the weighted mean was determined.

Discussion

1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that the respondents satisfied all the criteria for inclusion, especially in terms of age, home country, and length of time spent in the Philippines, except 3 (15.0%) who had been staying in the Philippines for less than a year during the time of their participation in this research study.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-20 years old	5	25.0
21-23 years old	12	60.0
24-26 years old	2	10.0
27-29 years old	1	5.0
Total	20	100

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	13	65.0
Female	7	35.0
Total	20	100

Home Country	Frequency	Percent
Indonesia	12	60.0
Malaysia	5	25.0
Myanmar	2	10.0
Vietnam	1	5.0
Total	20	100

Institutional Affiliation	Frequency	Percent
Adventist University of the Philippines	18	90.0
Centro Escolar University – Manila	2	10.0
Total	20	100

Length of Time Spent in the Philippines	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 year	3	15.0
1-3 years	3	15.0
4-6 years	9	45.0
7-9 years	5	25.0
Total	20	100

The sample population comprised of 20 foreign students whose home countries are from Southeast Asia. The majority of the respondents (60.0%) were between ages 21 and 23. From these respondents, 13 (65.0%) were males and 7 (35.0%) were females (N=20). With regard to the home country, 12 (60.0%) were from Indonesia, 5 (25.0%), from Malaysia, 2 (10.0%), from Myanmar, and 1 (5.0%), from Vietnam. The respondents were recruited from 2 universities. 18 (90.0%) of them were foreign students from the Adventist University of the Philippines while the other 2 (10.0%) were foreign students studying at Centro Escolar University-Manila. In terms of the length of time spent by the respondents in the Philippines, 9 (45.0%) had already stayed in the country from 4 to 6 years, 5 (25.0%), from 7 to 9 years, and 3 (15.0%), from 1 to 3 years.

2. Difficulties Encountered by the Respondents

2.1. Transition Stage

It can be recalled that during transition stage, difficulties like emotional distress occurs due to the new uncertainties that a transitioning individual faces in the new environment as a result of leaving his/her old community. In this stage, difficulties that could be encountered by a transitioning individual are those that have immediate impact to him/her upon arrival to the new community.

The data results showed that the respondents did not regret leaving their home country as a reason for the relationships they lost (1.95), but rather accepted losses such as those that were economic in nature and were part of leaving (2.65). To forget and deal with those losses in their life, they spent their time in activities (2.70), and asked for helpful advice (2.65).

Table 2. Dealing with Loss

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I regret leaving my home country for the relationships that I lost	1.95	Disagree
I accepted to myself that economic losses are part of leaving	2.65	Agree
I spend my time in activities that would make me forget the time I wasted	2.70	Agree
I ask for advice to help me deal with my losses in life	2.65	Agree
Overall	2.49	Disagree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

Meanwhile, the results pointed out that in spite of being separated from their family, the respondents were able to maintain a fine state of psychological wellness. As shown on Table 3, the respondents disagreed that they should have not left their home country, as expressed in the mean score of 1.90. The transfer of the respondents to the Philippines did not result in the feeling of worthlessness (2.25) or feeling of failure (2.30). The respondents did not think that their migration to the Philippines led them to having no direction life (2.25). The respondents did not also agree that they did not have much to be proud of themselves (2.25).

Table 3. Psychological Wellness

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I feel worthless at times.	2.25	Disagree
I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	2.30	Disagree
I think that I should not have left my home country.	1.90	Disagree
I feel that my life does not have a clear direction.	2.25	Disagree
I feel I have not much to be proud of.	2.25	Disagree
Overall	2.19	Disagree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

The respondents, generally, had not experienced discrimination, which had been attested by the mean scores of data results shown on Table 4. The respondents strongly disagreed (1.75) that people in their community had put them in isolation nor people laughed at their language accent or the way they spoke (1.75). They believed that they were not discriminated, teased, or insulted because of their ethnic backgrounds (1.95), but rather felt that people in the community accepted them for who they were (3.15).

Table 4. Perceived Discrimination

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I have been teased or insulted because of my ethnic background.	1.95	Disagree
People accept me for who I am.	3.15	Agree
People tend to put me in isolation.	1.75	Strongly Disagree
People laugh at the way I speak because of my accent.	1.75	Strongly Disagree
Overall	2.15	Disagree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

2.2. Entering Stage

During the entering stage of cultural transition, the transitioning individual does various ways to understand his/her new social environment, in which roles and relationships are new and different, in order to fit in and to become a part of it.

Table 5. Security/Certainty

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I am worried about my life and career here.	2.80	Agree
I do not feel the need to finish my studies.	1.50	Strongly Disagree
I am interested in building friendly relationships	3.25	Agree
I feel secure when I am with people of different ethnic backgrounds.	3.05	Agree
Overall	2.65	Agree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

As indicated on Table 5, the respondents reported that they were worried about their life and career in the Philippines (2.80), but they also expressed their strong belief on the need for them to finish their studies. While the respondents felt some pressures in getting themselves involved in the activities in their communities, which were described in the succeeding paragraphs, they explained that their participation or involvement in those activities was a manifestation of their interests in building friendly relations with others (3.25). It was revealed that the respondents felt secured being with people of different ethnic backgrounds (3.05).

Shown on Table 6 are the results on the views of the respondents on themselves relative to their self-esteem. The lowest mean score (2.15) meant that they did not believe they developed a negative attitude toward themselves, nor believed that they had a weak understanding of who they were (2.30). In spite of these, the respondents agreed that they were not confident to talk publicly (2.65) and that they were hesitant to take on leadership roles (2.90).

Table 6. Self-esteem

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I take a negative attitude to myself.	2.15	Disagree
I am not confident to talk publicly.	2.65	Agree
I have a weak understanding of who I am.	2.30	Disagree
I am hesitant to take a leadership role.	2.90	Agree
Overall	2.50	Disagree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

2.3. Re-involvement Stage

In cultural transition, the re-involvement stage is a period in which a transitioning individual begins to feel comfortable with the roles and relationships in the new community, and considers himself/herself as an accepted member.

Table 7. Belongingness

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I feel that I do not belong to any group	1.55	Strongly Disagree
People make me feel that I am not alone.	3.40	Strongly Agree
I like the feeling of being detached from people	2.05	Disagree
I do not feel comfortable around people.	1.85	Disagree
Overall	2.21	Disagree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

Table 7 shows that the respondents strongly disagreed that they felt not belonging to any group in their community (1.55). Instead, it was found that people they interacted and socialized with made them feel that they were not alone in their new community (3.40). The respondents disagreed that they did not feel comfortable being with people around (1.85) and also disagreed that they liked the feeling of being detached or isolated from the people in their community (2.05).

Table 8. Life Satisfaction

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I feel that I could be whatever I want to be in this new place.	2.80	Agree
I am contented with all the things I have now.	2.80	Agree
There are times when I feel something in my life is lacking.	3.25	Agree
I think I could live a better life somewhere else.	2.95	Agree
Overall	2.95	Agree

Note: 3.50-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.50-3.49 (agree), 1.50-2.49 (disagree), 1.00-1.49 (strongly disagree)

The respondents also reported feelings of slight discontentment in life as indicated by the highest mean score of 3.25 (see Table 8). They admitted that there were moments when they felt that something in their life was lacking. It was likely that it was one of the reasons why the respondents believed that they could have lived a better life somewhere else (2.95).

3. Adaptation Techniques Used by the Respondents

3.1. Transition Stage

During the transition stage, chatting with their family and friends on internet, and entertaining themselves (for them not to feel sad) were the most practiced adjustment techniques by the respondents as evident in their mean score of 3.40 and 3.15, respectively; while the least practiced technique was watching movies for them to forget the situation in their new cultural environment (2.75).

Table 9. Respondents' Adaptation Techniques During Transition Stage

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I watch movies to forget the situation.	2.75	Agree
I entertain myself for me not to feel sad.	3.15	Agree
I chat with my family and friends on internet.	3.40	Strongly agree
I visit interesting places to divert my attention.	2.95	Agree
I think about the memories I had with my friends.	3.10	Agree
Overall	3.07	Agree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

3.2. Entering Stage

During entering stage, the adaptation techniques practiced by the respondents were seeking advice from people they can trust and getting themselves familiar with the people and places in the community.

Table 10. Respondents' Adaptation Techniques During Entering Stage

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I seek advice from people I can trust.	3.30	Strongly Agree
I take time to study the local language.	3.05	Agree
I get myself familiar with the people and places I see.	3.25	Agree
I do extra research to understand better the new culture.	2.65	Agree
I participate in the activities of our school and community.	2.80	Agree
Overall	3.01	Agree

As shown on Table 10, seeking advice from people they can trust had the highest mean score of 3.30, which implied the respondents' acts of communication with the people in their new community. Getting themselves

familiar with the people and places in the community as part of understanding it more was also mostly practiced by the respondents as indicated by the second highest mean score of 3.25, and with a mean score of 3.05, studying the local language, also meant that it was a common practice among the respondents. However, based on the listed items on the table, data showed that doing extra research for them to understand better the Philippine culture was the least practiced technique of adjustment for them (2.65).

3.3. Re-involvement Stage

During the re-involvement stage, one of the adaptation techniques practiced by the respondents was sharing foods with their friends, which generated a mean score of 3.50 implying that it was a usual practice being done by the respondents. As can be seen on the Table 11, hanging out with their friends and other people, was also mostly practiced by the respondents as suggested by the mean score of 3.45. The mean score of 3.30 for 'offering help to anyone when needed' also implied that it was commonly practiced by the respondents during the re-involvement stage of their cultural transition.

Table 11. Respondents' Adaptation Techniques During Re-Involvement Stage

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I share my food with my friends.	3.50	Strongly Agree
I offer help to anyone when needed.	3.30	Strongly Agree
I hang out with friends and other people.	3.45	Strongly Agree
I enjoy being a member of the school and community.	3.15	Agree
I join in leading the activities in school and community.	2.60	Agree
Overall	3.20	Agree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

4. Respondents' Views on their Cultural Identity

The analysis of the responses of the respondents on their views on their cultural identity revealed the formation of the so-called 'hidden immigrant identity' and 'mirror identity' among them as TCIs. To reiterate, Pollock and Van Reken (2009; as cited in Janzen, 2012) explained that TCIs with hidden immigrant identity look similar with the other members of the culture, but think differently.

Table 12. Cultural Identity Developed by the Respondents

Respondent	Home Country	Frequency	Percentage	Cultural Identity
R2, R8, R9, R10, R11, R13, R14, R15, R16, R19, R20	Indonesia	11	55.00%	Hidden Immigrant
R3, R4, R5, R6, R7	Malaysia	5	25.00%	Hidden Immigrant
R18	Myanmar	1	5.00 %	Hidden Immigrant
Overall		17	85.00%	Hidden Immigrant
Respondent	Home Country	Frequency	Percentage	Cultural Identity
R12	Indonesia	1	5.00 %	Mirror
R17	Myanmar	1	5.00 %	Mirror
R1	Vietnam	1	5.00 %	Mirror
Overall		3	15.00%	Mirror

*Hidden immigrant - looks similar with the other members of the culture, but thinks differently.

*Mirror – looks like the other members of the culture and also thinks like them.

Hidden Immigrant Identity

Table 12 shows that 85 percent of combined Indonesian, Malaysian, and Burmese respondents directly expressed that they have retained their original cultural identity. The respondents articulated their strong disagreement with 'identifying themselves as a Filipino,' as indicated by the mean score of 1.50 (see Table 13).

Mirror Identity

Another cultural identity that emerged from the examination of the responses was the so-called mirror identity. As described by Pollock and Van Reken (2009; as cited in Janzen, 2012), foreigners who possess mirror identity

are those TCIs that look similar with the other members of the culture, and also think like them. As shown on Table 12, 15 percent of the sample population who came from Indonesia, Myanmar, and Vietnam were identified as TCIs with mirror identity.

Table 13. Respondents' Views on (Self) Cultural Identity

Items	Mean	Interpretation
I identify myself as a Filipino.	1.50	Strongly Disagree
I believe in Filipino customs and traditions.	2.85	Agree
Speaking in Filipino is important to me now.	2.75	Agree
I find Filipino clothing unattractive.	1.80	Disagree
I prefer to live in the Philippines.	1.75	Strongly Disagree
Filipino TV shows are sometimes boring.	2.30	Disagree
I find Filipino music unappealing.	1.70	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy celebrating Philippine holidays.	3.55	Strongly Agree
I find religions in the Philippines important.	3.45	Strongly Agree
I love to cook Filipino cuisine.	2.25	Disagree
Filipino food is delicious.	2.65	Agree
Obeying the laws is important to me.	3.65	Strongly Agree
I find the history of the Philippines necessary to be studied.	2.70	Agree
I practice the Filipino social values.	3.15	Agree
Having conversation with Filipinos is fun.	3.40	Strongly Agree
Overall	2.63	Agree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

Table 13 shows the lowest mean scores that indicated the strong disagreement of the respondents on identifying themselves as a Filipino (1.50) and to prefer to living in the Philippines (1.75). However, clear implications of their efforts to adapt themselves to the cultural environment in the country were manifested in the mean scores they obtained in the following items: obeying the laws (3.65), enjoying Philippine holiday celebrations (3.55), considering religion in the Philippines important (3.45), and having fun conversations with Filipinos (3.40).

5. Bases for Developing Cultural Program

In order to formulate an intervention program that is relevant to the life experiences of the Southeast Asian TCIs, and responsive and effective to their unique needs, it is important to take into consideration their personal views, most especially, on matters that would help them become successful in their social adaptation and academic life. For emphasis, the respondents themselves strongly agreed that a cultural program 'must feature stories on the lives and experiences of international students.' Table 14 shows that it obtained a mean score of 3.40, which indicated a strong expression of support that it must be completely taken into account in the formulation of a cultural program. Moreover, with the same mean score of 3.40, the respondents manifested their strong sense of agreement that a cultural program 'should consider its appropriateness to age, gender, and religion of the students.' In other words, it has to be developmentally-appropriate (age and gender) and culture sensitive (religion).

Table 14. Characteristics of an Effective Cultural Program

Items	Mean	Interpretation
It must be accessible to the students.	3.45	Strongly Agree
It must include discussions on culture and history of the host country.	3.30	Strongly Agree
It should facilitate the learning of the local language.	3.15	Agree
It should emphasize respect for culture and individuals.	3.40	Strongly Agree
It must teach the students various ways to self-adjust.	3.50	Strongly Agree
It must feature stories on the lives and experiences of international students.	3.40	Strongly Agree
It should consider its appropriateness to age, gender, and religion of the students.	3.40	Strongly Agree
It should suggest ways on how to manage emotional/psychological problems.	3.35	Strongly Agree
It must involve two-way understanding of culture between students and local people.	3.45	Strongly Agree

It must feature the social and cultural activities of people in the community.	3.40	Strongly Agree
Overall	3.38	Strongly Agree

Note: 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree), 2.6-3.25 (agree), 1.76-2.5 (disagree), 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree)

It is good and necessary that private universities ensure that convenient support systems are properly set in place, if not to guarantee, then at least to help TCIs have a smooth cultural transition experience. Predicating the initiatives and other efforts on what TCIs see beneficial and effective for them will play a central role in doing such task.

It is important to understand that the academic success not only of the TCIs, but also of the private universities is also dependent on the quality of life- or school-experience that these learning institutions cater to this kind of education stakeholders.

It is also important to understand that the support systems have to be made available and accessible during their entire stay in the university, whether the TCIs ask for them or not. The data analysis findings concurred to this assertion. With a mean score of 3.45, the respondents strongly agreed that a cultural program ‘must be made accessible to the students’ (see Table 14). But, purposeful information to make them aware about the existence of such program has to be made mandatory.

In a similar vein, the respondents rendered their personal views on what must be contained or tackled on a cultural program, and what would make it useful for them. First, it has to deal with the negative feelings such as culture shock, homesickness, and longing of the TCIs to see their relatives and friends as caused by being away from their family and home country. The respondents strongly agreed that a cultural program ‘should suggest ways on how to manage emotional/psychological problems,’ as expressed by the mean score of 3.35.

Second, data results showed that the respondents agreed that a cultural program ‘should facilitate the learning of the local language.’ This was evident in the obtained mean score of 3.15 shown on Table 14. It must include inputs or discussions on culture and history of the host country (Philippines). The respondents expressed their strong agreement on this as reflected on the mean score of 3.30, shown on Table 14.

And third, the cultural program has to open opportunities for both TCIs and local people to have cultural interfaces such as the conduct of cultural presentations and food fairs. The respondents strongly agreed that ‘it must feature the social and cultural activities of people in the community.’ This item obtained a mean score of 3.40. Doing so would close the social gaps between them and the local people, and would lead to mutual respect for cultures, and building of a more inclusive community. In other words, not only the TCIs must know and adjust with the local culture, but also vice-versa. The respondents strongly agreed that ‘it must involve two-way understanding of culture between students and local people.’ This item generated a mean score of 3.45. The respondents strongly agreed that a cultural program ‘should emphasize respect for culture and individuals.’ This item obtained a mean score of 3.40.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were formulated.

1. The respondents satisfied all the criteria for inclusion, especially in terms of age, home country, and length of time spent in the Philippines, except the 3 who had been staying in the Philippines for less than a year during the time of their participation to this research study. The inclusion of Southeast Asian TCIs in a study on cultural transition experiences similar to this present research undertaking produced new knowledge as to the kind of cultural identities they developed as a result of the transition process, the adaptation techniques for successful cultural adjustment, and the transition difficulties accompanying first cultural transition.
2. The respondents encountered difficulties in the 3 stages of their cultural transition, which revolved around and affected their personal, social, and academic functioning, and life satisfaction. While it is true that the TCIs in this study also experienced various transition difficulties, it did not, however, result in the overall lack of confidence or confused identity among them, which contradicted other previous research findings.

This study had not found sufficient evidences to assert that TCIs experienced dominant feelings of ephemerality and/or uncertainty due to cultural transition, as reported by other researchers in their studies.

3. The respondents practiced the acculturation style known as cultural integration as revealed by the adaptation techniques that they performed during the 3 stages of their cultural transition. To reiterate, cultural integration takes place when a transitioning person chooses to retain his/her home culture while adapting to the culture of the host country (Berry (2001; as cited in Bergstrom, 2010). In fact, the respondents' expressions of their willingness to adjust their actual behaviors to adapt well to their new community were compatible and supportive of this view. Therefore, cultural integration, for the most part, was the result of a singular cultural transition.
4. The respondents developed a cultural identity called as immigrant identity, except the other 3 respondents who were identified having a mirror identity. For purposes of recall, Pollock and Van Reken (2009; as cited in Janzen, 2012) explained that TCIs with hidden immigrant identity look similar with the other members of the culture, but thinks differently. And, those who have a mirror identity are TCIs that look similar with the other members of the culture, and also thinks like them. In contrast to other research findings, this study averred that Southeast Asian TCIs, as a subgroup of TCIs, did not experience nor develop identity confusion or shifting identities, which disrupted the findings of many researches that involved TCIs with multiple cultural transition experiences. This confirmed the assumption of this study that first cultural transition holds different meanings compared to multiple transition experiences.
5. The cultural program that has to be crafted to address the difficulties, issues, or concerns of the respondents must be anchored on the real-life experiences of the TCIs, must facilitate mutual understanding of cultures (culture of host country and culture of TCI's home country), and must offer ways on how TCIs could improve self-adjustments.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings and the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were crafted to provide guidance to all university education stakeholders to help TCIs have a smooth cultural transition experience, and to help in developing a responsive and effective cultural program:

1. To future researchers, that similar studies be conducted involving other Southeast Asian TCIs from other universities or learning institutions to strengthen the reliability of the research findings. Researchers may also examine if there would be a significant difference between male and female experiences on cultural transition.
2. To university professors and administrators, to inform their foreign students (Southeast Asian TCIs) about the results of this study, especially on the adaptation techniques to guide the foreign students on their cultural integration, for a smooth cultural transition experience.
3. To university professors, administrators, guidance counselors, and other university personnel, to know and understand the cultural identity of the TCIs enrolled in the university or classes, for them to determine the appropriate approaches that can be practiced or performed when dealing with TCIs, which would greatly help in responding and addressing the unique needs of the TCIs.
4. To university professors, administrators, guidance counselors, and other university personnel, to gain familiarity with the difficulties encountered by the TCIs, as identified and explained in this study, and develop useful and effective solutions to help TCIs resolve those difficulties. Moreover, the university administrators may inform the persons-in-charge in the local communities or local government units about the results of this study, and involve them in the formulation of solutions, activities, or programs that would help create a conducive socio-cultural environment for the TCIs.
5. To university administrators, to inform the person(s)-in-charge (*e.g. guidance counselors, deans, department heads, etc.*) of program development in their respective institutions to refer to the results of this study as a basic reference in crafting a needs- and contexts-based cultural program.

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