

The Impact of School Support on International Students Cross-Cultural Adaptability, Psychological Resilience and Satisfaction

Xinzhi Wang¹ & Shengxiang She
Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Thailand.

Junaidi Junaidi
Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo, Kota Palopo, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia

Abstract: International students have become a significant sociocultural phenomenon globally, frequently associated with independence and empowerment. However, school support and students' mobility constrained, including cross-cultural adaptability which effect students' educational experience and ability to integrate into the host culture. The large number of international students has greatly sped up the modernization of Chinese universities' administration and made schools more welcoming to people from different cultures. This internationalization enhances academic standards, boosts global rankings, and promotes research collaboration. Additionally, it strengthens China's soft power and contributes to local economies by creating job opportunities, increasing cultural exchange, and attracting foreign investment. This study proposes an integrated model to investigate the impact of school support on the international students' satisfaction in China, with cross-cultural adaptability as a mediator and psychological resilience as a moderator variable. A total of 455 international students were recruited for an online survey study, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. School support has a positive effect on student satisfaction and psychological resilience. Furthermore, psychological resilience also plays a pivotal role in both cross-cultural adaptability and student satisfaction. Cross-cultural adaptability addresses the relationship between school support and students' satisfaction with the school environment. The study offers theoretical contributions by extending the student integration theory and provides practical implications for universities aiming to promote international student experiences through integrated support and resilience-building programs, such as mentorship initiatives and workshops that enhance cultural adaptation and academic success.

Keywords: International students, student satisfaction, school support, psychological resilience, cross-cultural adaptability

Today, the internationalization of higher education has expanded rapidly, with millions of students pursuing academic opportunities across national borders. This global phenomenon

¹Corresponding author: a doctoral Student in Department of Management Science, Institute of Science Innovation and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok 10120, Thailand. E-mail; 669240300287@mail.rmutk.ac.th

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has transformed universities into multicultural learning spaces, where the success of students increasingly depends on their academic aptitude and the support provided by educational institutions (De Leersnyder et al., 2022; Hang & Zhang, 2023; Kunschak & Strotmann, 2023). However, some international students have a struggle, such as cultural dissonance, language barriers, and emotional isolation. These issues can undermine their ability to adapt and thrive in new academic environments. Therefore, institutions that host international students must invest in comprehensive support systems to foster adjustment and well-being (Ammigan et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2024; Penman et al., 2021). School support plays a dual role in the lives of international students: as a structural element of academic institutions and as a psychological resource that fosters a sense of belonging. In addition, a student's positive perception of the university as supportive and responsive to their personal and social needs has a crucial role in strengthening academic engagement and satisfaction (Anis et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2021; Zhong, 2022). It is essential for universities to create inclusive and supportive environments that address the unique challenges these students face, thereby enhancing their academic success and overall well-being.

Support mechanisms such as academic advising, mentorship programs, language assistance, orientation sessions, and culturally aware counseling services have consistently demonstrated their effectiveness in alleviating acculturative stress among international students (Chen et al., 2023; O'Connell & Resuli, 2020). These resources offer vital guidance, emotional support, and practical tools for navigating unfamiliar academic and cultural contexts. Some studies demonstrate that university support is tailored to the unique cultural backgrounds and specific needs of international students (Beri et al., 2025; Li et al., 2023; Matschke, 2022). When support services are culturally sensitive and easily accessible, they bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, enabling international students to integrate more smoothly into the international institution. Additionally, school support aids in comprehending and adapting to local academic standards, which frequently diverge significantly from those in students' countries of origin (Lu et al., 2024; Shepard & Rose, 2023). Culturally responsive practices, such as staff training in intercultural communication and inclusive programming, are crucial for fostering a welcoming and supportive university environment. An educational institution reduces acculturative stress and promotes academic success by addressing the diverse challenges faced by international students.

International students encounter a constellation of challenges when studying abroad, including cultural dissonance, language barriers, academic adjustment difficulties, and emotional isolation (Ammigan et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2024). These challenges can significantly undermine students' ability to adapt and thrive, potentially affecting their academic performance, psychological well-being, and overall satisfaction (Penman et al., 2021; Shamad et al., 2023). China has emerged as a significant destination in this landscape, hosting approximately 500,000 international students annually and ranking among the top three host countries worldwide (Ministry of Education of China, 2023). Chinese universities are still developing comprehensive support frameworks tailored to the diverse needs of international students, in contrast to well-established host countries that have decades of experience in providing such support. This context presents both challenges and opportunities for understanding how institutional support influences international student outcomes, particularly in areas such as academic performance, social integration, and overall satisfaction with the educational experience.

The rapid growth in the international student population has prompted Chinese universities to implement reforms in academic programming, student services, and campus life (Chen et al., 2025; Ge et al., 2024). Efforts to internationalize curricula, expand English-medium instruction, and enhance intercultural engagement are increasingly visible (Shuangyun, 2021). Nevertheless, some international students continue to report difficulties in

accessing academic resources, participating in campus life, and forming meaningful connections with domestic peers (Lashari et al., 2025). The language barriers and limited familiarity with local administrative processes lead to psychological resilience among international students. Comprehensive services such as orientation programs, language support, counseling, and mentorship can help mitigate adaptation challenges and foster a sense of belonging. As Chinese universities strive to enhance their global reputation, prioritizing the well-being and satisfaction of international students is crucial. Chinese universities can improve academic and social outcomes for international students to promote campus diversity and international collaboration by investing in responsive and inclusive support structures.

Although there is a growing body of literature that stresses the importance of school support, cross-cultural adaptability, and psychological resilience in improving the experiences of international students, there has been little empirical research on how these three factors work together in a single model, especially for international students studying in emerging host countries like China. Most prior studies have focused on students in Western or highly developed academic systems, overlooking the distinct cultural, institutional, and psychological challenges faced by international students. It also emerged across diverse contexts, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, consistently demonstrating that international students face unique challenges requiring targeted institutional responses (San & Guo, 2023; Xiang et al., 2025). Furthermore, little is known about how psychological resilience moderates effects on school support or how cross-cultural adaptability functions as a pathway linking support to student satisfaction.

The distinct cultural, institutional, and linguistic characteristics of Chinese higher education may produce unique dynamics that Western-centric theories fail to capture (Mao, 2024; Lu et al., 2024). The examination of psychological resilience as a moderating variable in international education research remains insufficient. Existing studies predominantly position psychological resilience as either an independent variable predicting student outcomes or as a dependent variable influenced by external factors. However, the role of psychological resilience in moderating how students respond to institutional support has received limited attention. This theoretical gap is critical because understanding how individual psychological resources interact with external support systems can inform more effective intervention strategies. The aim of this research is to validate this gap with a model that gives insight into some important questions: Does school support have a positive effect on students' satisfaction, or is its impact largely mediated by students' adaptive capacities? Are students with higher resilience more likely to benefit from the same institutional support than their less-resilient peers? Addressing these gaps is critical for developing inclusive support strategies for institutional and student psychological dimensions.

This research has several theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, beyond institutional support, students' ability to adapt to new and unfamiliar cultures is another crucial factor that influences international students' satisfaction. Secondly, it examines the mediating role of cross-cultural adaptability and psychological resilience as mediators in the relationships between school support and students' satisfaction during the learning process. This method helps turn the resources given by the school into valuable results related to emotional, thinking, and behavior skills that allow students to build mutual relationships in different cultural settings. Consequently, psychological resilience and cross-cultural adaptability are not merely outcomes of support; they are processes that render support effective.

Literature Review

Student Integration Theory

Student Integration Theory (SIT) offers a fundamental framework for comprehending student persistence and satisfaction in higher education (Tinto, 1993). The theory emphasizes the significance of both academic integration and social integration with the curriculum, while social integration involves peer relationships and a sense of belonging (Longmuir et al., 2022). It implies students are more likely to succeed and feel satisfied when they develop strong academic connections (e.g., meaningful interactions with faculty and curriculum) and social bonds (e.g., peer relationships and a sense of belonging) within their institution (see figure 1). A central premise of SIT is that institutions play an essential role in facilitating student integration by providing supportive environments that promote student involvement and adjustment. Prior studies across regions, including studies in Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Australia, demonstrate that international students face unique integration challenges stemming from cultural distance, language barriers, and unfamiliar academic conventions (Beri et al., 2025; Cipolletta et al., 2021). These findings suggest that institutional support may function differently for international students compared to domestic students, necessitating culturally responsive support mechanisms. It encompasses cross-cultural settings, which emphasize the requirement for culturally responsive support structures to address the unique needs of international students (Junaidi et al., 2025; Rezaei et al., 2020). Furthermore, personal attributes like psychological resilience and adaptability play an important part in determining students' responses to institutional environments. These personal traits work together with outside support to influence how well students feel they fit in, especially in terms of their happiness, which is a key sign of how well they adjust academically and socially.

Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is a comprehensive measure reflecting how individuals perceive their educational experiences relative to their expectations, encompassing aspects such as academic quality, social integration, and emotional well-being (Hossain et al., 2022; Mammadov & Wald, 2025). It is influenced by a range of institutional factors, including the quality of instruction, accessibility of support services, and campus resources. Individual attributes, such as adaptability and resilience, also have a major influence on satisfaction levels. For instance, students who demonstrate high adaptability are generally better equipped to handle academic challenges and cultural transitions, allowing them to engage more meaningfully with their environment. Psychological resilience enables students to recover from setbacks, persist through adversity, and maintain a positive outlook during their academic journey (Cuellar, 2023; Singh, 2021). Moreover, academic performance and the ability to navigate cultural differences, build supportive relationships, and preserve psychological health closely correlate with student satisfaction. Furthermore, cross-cultural adaptability empowers students to thrive in diverse settings, while emotional and social support networks contribute significantly to their sense of belonging and overall well-being. Ultimately, student satisfaction arises from the dynamic interplay between institutional support, students' coping capacities, and their ability to manage multifaceted challenges.

School Support

School support is defined as the range of academic, emotional, administrative, and social resources provided by educational institutions to assist students in achieving academic success (Collie et al., 2024; Mieziene et al., 2022). It includes academic guidance, counseling services, cultural integration programs, and institutional responsiveness aimed at fostering

student adjustment and well-being. School support becomes a vital external resource, particularly for students navigating foreign environments such as unfamiliar teaching styles, language difficulties, and cultural dissonance (Chen et al., 2025; Mao et al., 2023). It proves that school support contributes to both institutional services and students' psychological well-being. One essential function of school support is its role in enhancing psychological resilience. A supportive educational environment through emotional encouragement, mentoring, and access to mental health services can help students to manage their emotions and motivation (McLean et al., 2022; Nygaard et al., 2022; Worsley et al., 2022). International students are more likely to feel safe, valued, and able to handle problems when the students' school meets their emotional and academic needs. As a result, school support helps students build their psychological resilience to boost confidence and encourages them to use coping strategies, which can lead to improved academic performance and overall well-being.

School support also contributes directly to students' cross-cultural adaptability. Institutions that offer orientation programs, language support, culturally inclusive events, and faculty trained in intercultural sensitivity create environments where students can gradually adapt to new cultural norms and expectations (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Hang & Zhang, 2023). These efforts reduce the sense of cultural distance and foster more effective intercultural interactions. For individuals who may face substantial disparities in classroom culture and communication standards, structured support can offer crucial pathways to integration (Sotardi, 2022). Thus, school support eases the process of adjustment and actively fosters intercultural competence. Students who feel that their institution cares for their holistic development academically, socially, and emotionally tend to evaluate personal educational experiences more positively, which correlates to satisfaction during the learning process (Munir et al., 2025; Pong, 2021). A strong sense of institutional support makes students feel like they belong, boosts their motivation, and makes them more committed to their academic goals. In a cross-cultural context, the perceived fairness, accessibility, and responsiveness of support services strongly influence satisfaction. Hence, school support emerges not just as a background factor but as a central determinant of student experience and cultural adaptability.

H1. School support has a positive effect on students' satisfaction.

H2. School support has a positive effect on students' cross-cultural adaptability.

Cross-Cultural adaptability

Cross-cultural adaptability refers to an individual's ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings by adjusting cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally (Han et al., 2022; Mammadov & Wald, 2025). For international students, particularly from developing countries, it is a critical skill that determines how well they integrate into new academic, social, and cultural environments. International students in China frequently encounter obstacles, including language barriers, unfamiliar academic conventions, and cultural misinterpretations, necessitating elevated cultural sensitivity and adaptive behavior. Previous research demonstrates that higher cross-cultural adaptability is associated with lower levels of stress, stronger social relationships, and greater academic persistence (Han et al., 2022; Troy et al., 2022). The students' adaptability at the university significantly impacts their satisfaction (Feraco et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2022). School support, in particular, can serve as an enabler by facilitating structured interactions and reducing ambiguity in the host environment. Although cross-cultural adaptability is not a direct cause of institutional support, it functions as a mediating mechanism through which support translates into improved psychological and academic outcomes. Students with greater adaptability are more likely to feel competent, engaged, and ultimately satisfied in their educational journey.

H3a Cross-cultural adaptability has a positive effect on student satisfaction.

H3b Cross-cultural adaptability has a positive role in mediating school support and international students' satisfaction.

Psychological Resilience

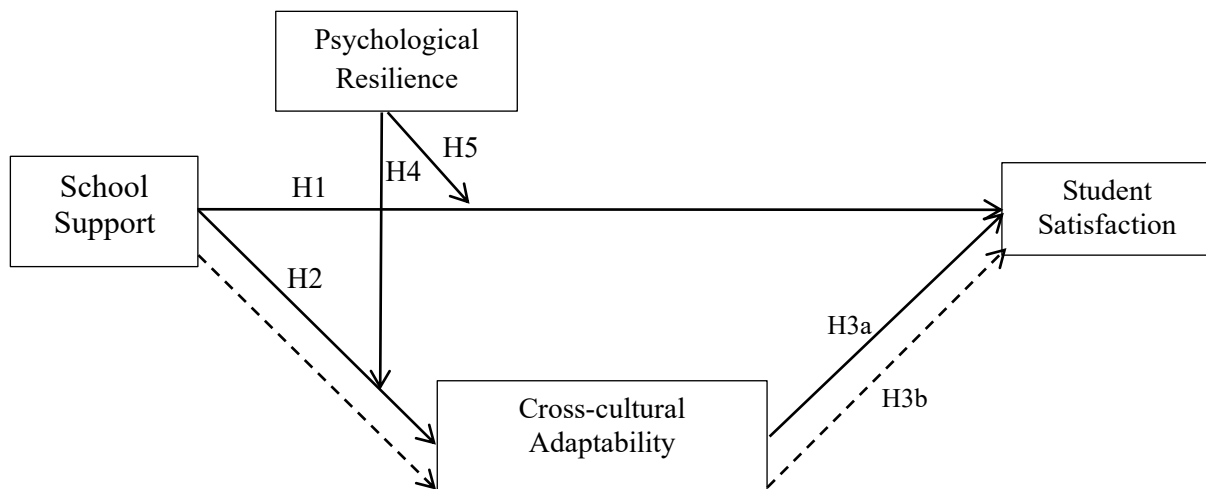
Psychological resilience, defined as the capacity to maintain mental health and recover from adversity, adds another layer of complexity to the adjustment process (Dalmış et al., 2025; Zábó et al., 2023). It also encompasses an individual's capacity to recover from adversity and maintain psychological well-being (Nishimi et al., 2021; Zábó et al., 2023). This internal psychological resource moderates the relationship between school support and student satisfaction. Therefore, psychological resilience is expected to moderate the relationship between school support and outcomes such as adaptability and satisfaction. In essence, students with higher levels of resilience may derive more substantial benefits from the same levels of institutional support, emphasizing the interplay between individual and environmental factors in international student success. For some international students, particularly those adjusting to unfamiliar cultural and academic settings, resilience operates as a psychological buffer that helps mitigate the negative effects of cultural dissonance, academic pressure, and social issues. However, students with high psychological resilience are more likely to appraise these stressors as manageable and interpret difficulties as opportunities for personal growth (Cheraghian, 2023; Kuranova et al., 2021).

Psychologically resilient individuals are more open to novelty, more tolerant of ambiguity, and better equipped to adjust their behaviors and expectations in culturally diverse environments (Cuellar, 2023; Troy et al., 2022). Their cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation enable students to navigate cultural differences with greater ease, which in turn facilitates smoother academic and social integration. It plays a predictive role in promoting cross-cultural adaptability among international students (Pearson et al., 2025). Students who demonstrate higher levels of resilience are better able to manage stress, maintain motivation, and cope with academic and social demands. This capacity to sustain stability amid pressure reveals a favorable assessment of their educational experiences and an enhanced sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction (Chen et al., 2023; Fullerton et al., 2021).

H4. Psychological resilience positively moderates the relationship between school support and students' cross-cultural adaptability.

H5. Psychological resilience positively moderates the relationship between school support and students' satisfaction.

Figure. 1
Research framework.



Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among school support, cross-cultural adaptability, psychological resilience, and student satisfaction among international students in Chinese universities. The cross-sectional approach was selected because it allows for efficient data collection from a diverse sample and is appropriate for testing theoretically derived hypotheses about relationships among variables (Hair et al., 2019). A preliminary test and pilot study were conducted to ensure clarity and appropriateness of the item wording and to reduce potential instrument bias. The purpose of the pretest was to ascertain participants' comprehension of each item and to implement requisite modifications to mitigate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The questionnaire items were adapted to fit the research context and underwent twelve rounds of independent pilot testing, with three participants per round, allowing for iterative refinement based on participant feedback. Additionally, a field test was conducted to confirm the comprehensibility of the final questionnaire version.

Measures

The structural equation modeling (SEM) was selected for its ability to assess multiple interrelated constructs simultaneously, offering a robust framework to integrate psychological, behavioral, and contextual variables relevant to international student experiences. Cross-Cultural adaptation was measured using items adapted from De Leersnyder et al. (2022) and Huang et al., (2024), Student satisfaction from Wong and Chapman (2022), psychological resilience refers to Xiang et al. (2025), and school support from Cho and Yu (2015) (See appendix).

Sample and data collection

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling combined with snowball techniques. Initial contact was established through international student offices at five Chinese universities located in different regions (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, and Wuhan). These universities were selected to represent diverse institutional types (comprehensive universities and technical universities) and geographic locations, enhancing the generalizability of findings. International student officers distributed survey invitations through email lists, WeChat groups, and bulletin boards. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey link with eligible peers, facilitating snowball recruitment. Inclusion criteria required participants to be: (1) currently enrolled as international students at Chinese universities; (2) at least 18 years of age; (3) residing in China for at least three months to ensure adequate exposure to the host environment; and (4) proficient in English, as the survey was administered in English.

A total of 20 participants per construct was considered adequate to confirm the quality of the measurement instrument, reduce ambiguity, and minimize errors in participant responses (Hair Jr. et al., 2019). Furthermore, a total of 120 international students were recruited during the pilot test, which was adequate for preliminary statistical analysis, including the assessment of reliability and construct validity. The formal surveys were collected through an anonymous and online survey conducted between May 1st, 2025 and June 30th, 2025. There were 455 valid responses from a total of 493 collected samples, indicating a completion rate of 92.3% (see table 1).

Table 1.
Respondent demographic

Demographic Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	205	45.05
Female	250	54.95
Current Study Level		
Diploma	64	14.07
Bachelor	196	43.08
Master	162	35.6
Doctor	33	7.25

All participants provided informed consent prior to enrollment in the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in the research. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University on November 27, 2024 and number R 743 / 2024 and was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the proposed model and the research hypotheses. The data were analyzed using two statistical programs: SPSS version 22 and AMOS version 22. This study employed the two-stage approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, the measurement model was estimated with CFA to test reliabilities and validities of the research constructs. Then, the structural model was used to test the strength

and direction of the proposed relationships among research constructs. Consequently, the first step involves testing the measurement model via a confirmatory factor analysis, and the second step involves testing a series of structural models, including the hypothesized model. Furthermore, this study applied the common method variance (CMV) procedure, using both preventive strategies and post-hoc detection techniques, to minimize bias due to self-reported data. Finally, to examine the mediating role of cross-cultural adaptability, this study employed the bootstrapping method suggested by Hayes (2018), which enables the assessment of indirect effects with greater statistical precision.

Results and Discussions

The following table shows the correlation matrix between several constructs related to this study. The correlations between these constructs show a fairly close relationship between school support, Cross-culture adaptability, Psychological resilience and international students' satisfaction. Each correlation number listed below the diagonal is a Pearson correlation indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between the constructs (see table 2). The diagonal shows the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct.

Table 2.

Correlation matrix for measurement scales

Constructs	Mean	SD	SS	CCA	PR	SCT
SS	5.21	0.799	0.787			
CCA	5.45	0.760	0.713**	0.793		
PR	5.67	0.579	0.528**	0.428**	0.828	
ST	5.55	0.841	0.365**	0.613**	0.513**	0.769

Note: SS: School Support, CCA: Cross-culture adaptability, PR: Psychological resilience, ST: Students' satisfaction Diagonal elements are the square roots of the AVE for each construct Pearson correlations are shown below the diagonal. Significant at *: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$

The results given in Table 2 show that all the items of all the variables loaded significantly, and, therefore, no item was deleted. The values of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) are significantly above the threshold value, indicating that inter-item reliability exists among the items of each variable in this study (See Tables 3).

Table 3.*Measurement results*

Constructs	MLE factor measurement error	estimates loading/	Squared multiple correlation (SMC)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's α
School Support				0.862	0.646	0.892
SS1	0.829	0.313	0.687			
SS2	0.859	0.262	0.738			
SS3	0.846	0.284	0.716			
SS4	0.821	0.326	0.674			
SS5	0.710	0.496	0.504			
SS6	0.747	0.442	0.558			
Cross culture-adaptability				0.926	0.610	0.866
CCA1	0.787	0.381	0.619			
CCA2	0.846	0.284	0.716			
CCA3	0.820	0.328	0.672			
CCA4	0.641	0.589	0.411			
CCA5	0.760	0.422	0.578			
CCA6	0.847	0.283	0.717			
CCA7	0.768	0.410	0.590			
CCA8	0.761	0.421	0.579			
Psychological Resilience				0.753	0.594	0.765
PR1	0.752	0.436	0.564			
PR2	0.783	0.367	0.633			
PR3	0.775	0.399	0.601			
PR4	0.852	0.274	0.726			
PR5	0.779	0.393	0.607			
PR6	0.696	0.516	0.484			
PR7	0.792	0.242	0.758			
Student Satisfaction				0.773	0.661	0.826
SCT1	0.604	0.335	0.635			
SCT3	0.631	0.398	0.602			
SCT5	0.653	0.574	0.426			
SCT6	0.655	0.571	0.429			
SCT7	0.798	0.363	0.637			
SCT8	0.760	0.422	0.578			
SCT9	0.833	0.306	0.694			

Note. Model fit: $\chi^2/df = 3.851$, GFI = 0.914, NFI = 0.929, CFI = 0.934, IFI = 0.935, and

Structural Model

The fit of data to the proposed model was adequate (Hair Jr et al., 2019): $\chi^2 3.853$, GFI = 0.906, NFI = 0.929, CFI = 0.934, IFI = 0.925, and RMSEA = 0.052. This study confirms that school support has a positive and significant effect on international students satisfaction in China ($\gamma_{11} = 0.511$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. However, school support does not have a significant effect on international students' cross-cultural adaptability ($\gamma_{12} = 0.083$, $p > 0.05$), H2 is unsupported. Furthermore, this study further confirms that cross-cultural adaptability has a positive effect on international students satisfaction ($\beta_{21} = 0.074$, $p < 0.05$) to support H3a (see table 4).

Table 4.

Proposed model results

Hypotheses	Symbol	Path			Coefficients	Test results
H1	γ_{11}	School	→	Student Satisfaction	0.511***	Supported
H2	γ_{12}	School	→	Cross-Cultural	0.083	Unsupporte
H3a	β_{21}	Cross-Cultural	→	Student Satisfaction	0.074*	Supported

Note: Significant at *: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$

Mediation Effect

Although school support has a positive effect on students' satisfaction, the indirect results showed that the relationship of school support to students' satisfaction was unmediated by cross-cultural adaptability (see Table 5), hence H3b was unsupported. It means that the influence of school support on how satisfied international students feel does not depend on their ability to adapt to different cultural environments. In other words, when schools provide resources, encouragement, or assistance, students' satisfaction increases regardless of their adaptability to different cultures. Therefore, schools should improve student satisfaction and strengthen school support systems. These findings demonstrate the vital role of psychological resilience as a mechanism for school support and student satisfaction, while cross-cultural adaptability appears less pronounced in the mediating process.

Table 5.

Mediation result

Direct effect			B	T	95% CI	
School Support	→	Student Satisfaction	0.511	10.785***	(0.413, 0.531)	
Indirect effect			B	SE	95% CI	
School Support	→	Cross-Cultural Adaptability	Student Satisfaction	0.006	0.008	(0.022, 0.023)

Note: Significant at *: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, ***: $p < 0.001$

Moderation result

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the significant role of psychological resilience in moderating the relationships between school support and international student satisfaction to support supports H4. This means that students who are more psychologically resilient can use school support to make themselves happier. Psychological resilience not only influences student satisfaction but also moderates the relationship between school support and the cross-cultural adaptability of international students, thereby supporting H5. The results show that school support does not have same effect on all students' ability to adapt to different cultures. These results highlight the dual moderating role of psychological resilience. It not only strengthens the positive impact of school support on student satisfaction but also enhances the adaptability of international students in cross-cultural settings.

Figure 2
Moderating effect analysis 1

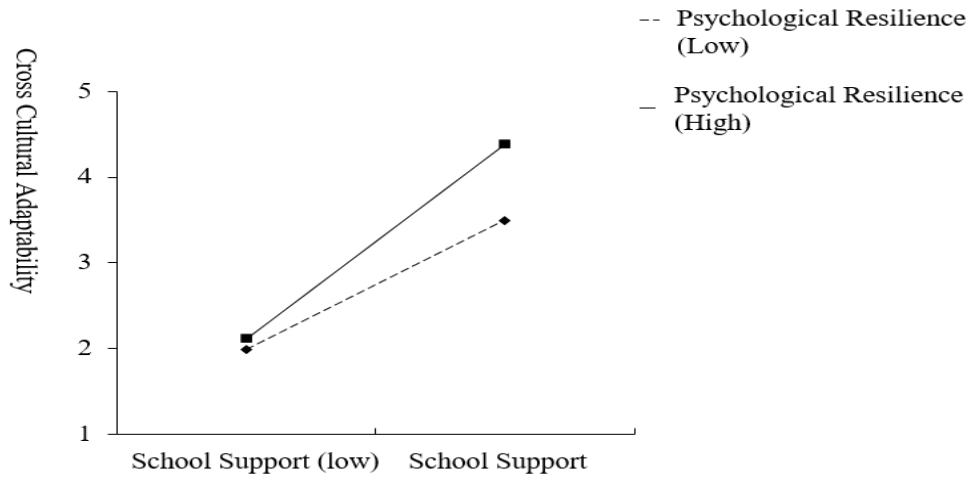
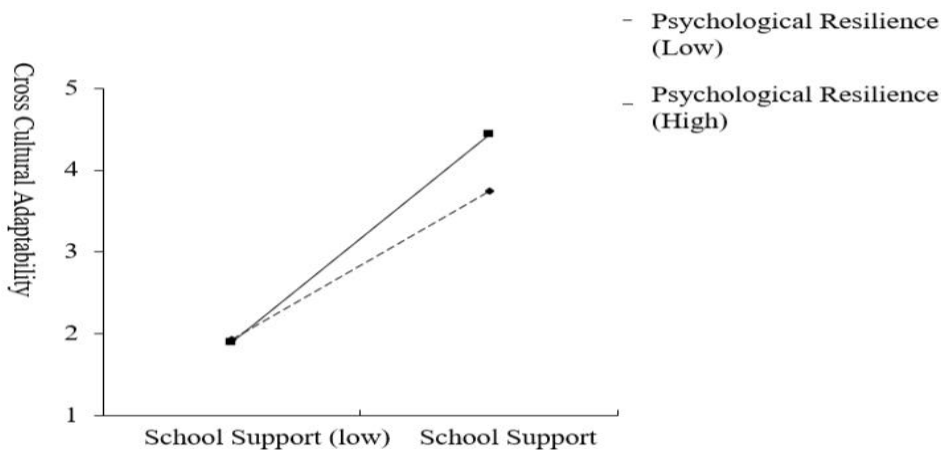


Figure 3
Moderating effect analysis 2



Discussion

School support has a positive effect on international students' satisfaction. This finding contradicts several prior studies that have emphasized the importance of institutional support in enhancing students' ability to navigate and adjust to new cultural environments (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Hang & Zhang, 2023). The results suggest that the presence of school support does not necessarily develop intercultural competence among students. A possible explanation is that cross-cultural adaptability is shaped more by individual-level factors, such as personality traits, than by diverse environments (Feraco et al., 2022; Feraco et al., 2023). Additionally, it is plausible that international students need informal support networks, such as co-national communities or religious groups, to overcome cultural challenges. These peer-based strategies with regard to school support foster intercultural adjustment. Therefore, institutions should consider supplementing structural support with experiential learning approaches, including cultural immersion programs, intercultural dialogue, and mentoring schemes aimed at strengthening students' real-world cultural engagement. In contrast, this study confirmed that school support does not have a positive effect on international students' cross-cultural

adaptability. This finding reinforces a well-documented theoretical perspective in the literature, which positions institutional support as a critical external resource that enables students to develop reciprocity relationships among international students. In addition, academic counseling, faculty approachability, inclusive university environments, and culturally responsive administration contribute to students' psychological well-being (Scheffers, 2026).

Students who are mentally strong can better handle the challenges and stress of adjusting to a new culture. This matches what resilience theory suggests: people with high resilience tend to deal with difficulties positively and form important social connections across different cultures. It demonstrates that psychological resilience link to school support and adapting students' behavior and success in intercultural situations. This belief is supported by earlier research that highlights how important perceived institutional support is for creating positive experiences for international students (Chen et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2024; Hamilton et al., 2021). Supportive school environments help students feel engaged, motivated, and like they belong, which are all key to their satisfaction. Institutional features like inclusive teaching methods, accessible student services, extracurricular activities, and culturally aware teachers help create a well-rounded student experience. Moreover, student integration theory further explains how school support fosters both satisfaction and success among international students. The theory argues that when international students perceive strong support from their university academically, socially, and emotionally to integrate into university environment. Students gain the confidence and coping skills necessary to face the demands of a new academic and cultural environment.

The mediation analysis shows that cross-cultural adaptability significantly mediates the relationship between school support and student satisfaction. It demonstrates that institutional support has a strong correlation to students' psychological resilience, which subsequently influences students' satisfaction. The finding supports the proposition that psychological processes play an essential role in translating external support into student satisfaction (Fullerton et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2024; Sellami et al., 2023). It highlights the importance for colleges and universities to put money into programs that help students develop their mental and emotional skills, like workshops for building resilience, mindfulness activities, and mental health support, which can enhance the advantages of the support systems they already have. While earlier studies have shown that intercultural competence is important for student success, other things like how similar languages are, cultural similarities in the region, or existing communities also matter. Moreover, it is plausible that many students enter the host country already equipped with sufficient intercultural coping mechanisms, which may diminish the added value of institutional efforts in this area. This finding implies that cross-cultural adaptability, while important, may not universally mediate the effect of school support on student satisfaction in all contexts.

Theoretical Implications

The results reveal that institutional factors particularly school support directly enhance students' psychological resilience and overall satisfaction. Psychological resilience emerges as a critical mediating variable, demonstrating how students can leverage institutional support to facilitate personal growth, overcome adaptation challenges, and achieve greater academic and emotional satisfaction. This insight refines and expands SIT by illustrating that psychological integration, encompassing resilience and adaptability, is equally vital alongside academic and social integration for student success. The findings of this study provide significant theoretical advancements to student integration theory (SIT), which traditionally highlights the importance of both academic and social integration as foundations for supporting students' psychological

well-being. This study underscores that successful student integration within academic and social domains is closely tied to the university's proactive commitment to fostering supportive environments. This research extends SIT's explanatory power in the context of international education with regard to integrating the concepts of psychological resilience and cross-cultural adaptability as internal psychological mechanisms. The present study contributes to SIT by providing empirical evidence that school support not only fosters academic and social integration, but also cultivates the psychological resources necessary for international students to thrive in culturally novel and emotionally demanding settings. This more nuanced understanding highlights the need for universities to address psychological integration as an essential dimension, ensuring that students are equipped to navigate the complexities of global higher education environments.

Practical Implications

This study offers valuable practical implications for universities, international student offices, and policymakers involved in managing international education. The demonstrated influence of school support on student satisfaction and psychological resilience highlights the critical need for higher education institutions to develop and maintain comprehensive support systems tailored to international students. Universities are encouraged to invest in culturally sensitive counseling services, resilience-building workshops, and inclusive campus environments that prioritize emotional well-being. Such initiatives can equip students with essential coping skills, enabling them to excel academically and socially within diverse cultural settings. Moreover, while cross-cultural adaptability did not emerge as a significant mediator, its direct positive impact on student satisfaction emphasizes the importance of targeted intercultural engagement strategies. Universities should therefore promote activities such as cultural exchange events, language partnership programs, and training sessions focused on intercultural competence. These initiatives foster meaningful intercultural interactions and facilitate smoother adaptation processes for international students. Additionally, mentorship programs that involve senior international students can provide invaluable peer support, easing the transition and promoting successful adaptation to the host university environment. Collaborative efforts between universities and policymakers are also essential. Joint initiatives could include the development of supportive policies, such as improved access to social services, streamlined administrative procedures, and community integration programs that address the unique needs and aspirations of international students.

Conclusion

Institutional support plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' academic experiences and overall satisfaction. This support is delivered through a range of mechanisms, including academic advising, counseling services, and diverse extracurricular opportunities, all of which collectively enrich the educational environment. Alongside institutional efforts, cross-cultural adaptability and psychological resilience are essential for ensuring that support systems are truly effective and that students achieve higher levels of satisfaction. Students who possess strong adaptability skills are better able to navigate the challenges of culturally diverse educational settings, manage stress, and build meaningful connections with peers from various backgrounds. Furthermore, the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and government bodies is increasingly recognized in today's globalized academic landscape. Such partnerships are vital for developing targeted programs and policies that enhance students' cultural adaptability, ensuring they are well-prepared to thrive in multicultural learning environments. By jointly fostering supportive, inclusive, and adaptive educational ecosystems,

institutions and policymakers can significantly promote students' academic success, personal growth, and overall satisfaction. This collaborative approach not only benefits international students but also enriches the broader academic community.

Limitations and future study directions

This study has limitations. First, the research focuses exclusively on international students studying in China. Future studies are encouraged to conduct comparative or cross-national analyses involving diverse students. Second, the data for this study were collected using self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce potential biases such as social desirability or subjective interpretation. Future study should apply longitudinal studies, including in-depth interviews, to understand how psychological and institutional factors shape student satisfaction. Third, while this study identifies psychological resilience as a key moderating variable and cross-cultural adaptability as a mediator, it does not explore potential moderating factors that may facilitate this relationship, such as personality traits and prior international experience. Future research could incorporate these factors to develop a more comprehensive model of international student adjustment. Finally, integrating qualitative or mixed-method designs would offer deeper understanding of how students perceive and utilize school support in real-world situations.

Author Contributions

Xinzhi Wang: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing-original draft preparation and writing-review and editing; Shengxiang She: Conceptualization, writing-original draft, validation, and project administration; Junaidi Junaidi: Software, formal analysis, data curation and project administration. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Ethics approval and consent to participate

All participants provided informed consent prior to enrollment in the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in the research. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University on November 27, 2024 and number R 743 / 2024 and was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data Availability Statement

Due to privacy protection, the data and materials are not publicly available but can be provided upon reasonable request to qualified researchers.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes on Contributions

Xinzhi Wang is Ph.D student at Department of Management Science, Institute of Science Innovation and Innovation, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. He is

a lecturer and hold Bachelor and Master degree from University in China. His research on human resource management and education sociology.

Shengxiang She is lecturer in Department of Management Science, Institute of Science Innovation and Innovation, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. He hold Ph.D degree from University in China. He has published some articles and chapters in cross-cultural, intercultural and education with various colleagues.

Junaidi Junaidi is a senior lecturer in Department of Education and Society, Institute of Science Innovation and Innovation, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. He also senior lecturer in Department of Accounting and director of research and society service Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo. He holds Bachelor in STIE Muhammadiyah Palopo and Master of Accounting in Economic and Business Faculty, Islamic University of Indonesia which major in Islamic accounting and finance. PhD in Business Administration from the National Dong Hwa University, ROC Taiwan. His research interests include Business and education cross-cultural and cognitive psychology with various colleagues.

ORCID

Xinzh Wang, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0910-0328>

Shengxiang She, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7975-116X>

Junaidi Junaidi, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1450-193>

Appendix:

School Support

1. My university provided helpful admission guidance, including registration procedures and an introduction to the campus layout.
2. I am satisfied with the accommodation conditions provided by the university (e.g., dormitory size, facilities, and hygiene).
3. University teachers offer support when I face difficulties in my academic or daily life.
4. The university library resources meet my needs for both academic study and personal interests.
5. The international student office handles visa and residence procedures efficiently.
6. The medical facilities at the university meet my needs during illness or health emergencies.

Cross-Cultural adaptation

1. The teaching facilities in my classroom are fully equipped and the environment is comfortable.
2. The food served and price in the school cafeteria tastes good.
3. The library environment is comfortable and convenient for use.
4. My teachers are approachable and easy to communicate with.
5. I find it easy to get along with Chinese people.
6. I have adapted well to the pace of life in China.
7. I am interested in classes that incorporate Chinese cultural elements such as traditional music, painting, or calligraphy.
8. I actively participate in student activities such as clubs and volunteer events.

Student satisfaction

1. I am satisfied with the teaching methods and materials used in my courses.
2. My lecturers are helpful in solving study-related problems.
3. Administrative staff treat students from different religions and races with respect and fairness.
4. The courses I take are relevant to my future career.
5. I often say positive things about my university to others.
6. I would recommend my university to other prospective students.
7. I have received appropriate support to improve my Chinese language skills.

Psychological resilience

1. My family maintains a positive attitude during difficult times.
2. I make new friends easily.
3. I have a clear plan to achieve my future goals.
4. I can always find someone to help me when I need support.
5. I am good at finding solutions when unexpected problems arise.
6. I strongly believe in my own abilities.
7. I accept things that I cannot change.