

# Embracing a Cross-Cultural Journey in Taiwan: The Psychological Adjustment and Well-being of International Students

*Wang Ting-Hao, Counseling Psychologist*

The adaptation to a new environment with a different culture can be both exciting and challenging. As an international student of National Taiwan University (NTU), you may experience various pressures and opportunities. To help you manage those psychological challenges on campus, we have listed some common stressors and provided some coping strategies in this article. The goal is to empower you to navigate possible difficulties with a growth mindset and self-compassion.

## Navigating Cultural Differences, Difficulties, and Emotional Adjustments

Embarking on a new chapter in Taiwan can be exhilarating. However, you may experience feelings of homesickness, loneliness, anxiety, or cultural shock. These are common reactions while encountering unfamiliar social customs and societal norms. It is essential to recognize that these feelings are a natural part of the adjustment process. Some common challenges that you might face include:

- **Homesickness and Loneliness:** Missing your family, friends, and familiar surroundings of hometown is a natural part of the adjustment process when you are in an educational environment with a different culture. The initial excitement of being in a new place can gradually be overshadowed by a longing for the comfort and security of home.
- **Academic Performance:** The pressure to excel academically in NTU for international students might create considerable stress and anxiety due to expectations from both themselves and their families. Moreover, comprehending the material taught in Chinese is an additional challenge.
- **Culture Shock:** Encountering different social norms, values, and lifestyles can be disorienting. The way people interact, the food, the pace of life, and even the weather may contribute to a feeling of cultural dissonance; and then, lead to feelings of confusion and frustration. It takes time to adapt oneself to a new cultural environment.
- **Language Barriers and Social Interaction Pressures:** Building a new social support system in different cultures may not be easy. Establishing close relationships with peers in Taiwan may take time due to cultural and language disparities.
- **Long-Distance Relationships:** Maintaining intimate relationships with your partner who is far away can be particularly challenging. Time zone

differences, communication issues, and the lack of physical closeness are all considerable challenges.

## Facing Cross-Cultural Adaptation Difficulties with Self-Compassion and Growth Mindset

To effectively regulate these challenges, it's crucial to adopt strategies that foster psychological resilience and well-being. Two powerful concepts to help you navigate this transition are Self-Compassion and the Growth Mindset.

- **Self-Compassion:** Self-compassion involves being kind and understanding toward yourself during times of difficulty. Instead of criticizing yourself for not adapting quickly enough, validate your struggles with mindfulness and treat yourself with the same care and kindness you would offer to a friend.
- **Growth Mindset:** A growth mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and learning. This perspective helps you view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. Embracing a growth mindset can enhance your ability to adapt to new situations and overcome difficulties.

## Suggestions for Psychological Adjustments and Cultural Adaptation

Here are some practical tips and resources to help you manage the pressures and stressors experienced in Taiwan:

1. **Cultivating Self-Compassion and Growth Mindset:** Adapting to a new culture or environment sometimes may make one feel frustrated, anxious, depressed, exhausted, or uncomfortable. Embracing the spirit of self-compassion and a growth mindset would be helpful in coping with these challenges. For instance, imagine a dear friend facing the same situation as you do. What would you say and do to help them feel better? Now, apply that same kindness and empathy to yourself; in short, to face stressors with the compassion you would offer to a close friend, to validate your feelings without criticism, and to view challenges as opportunities for growth.
2. **Build a Support System:** To connect with other international or local students who understand your cultural background and experiences; to join in student organizations or social activities that interest you; and to reach out to trustworthy classmates and/or faculties if you need support or encounter unfriendly prejudices on campus. A support system acts as a safety net and helps you get through challenges during adaptation process. To share beautiful moments and feelings with those you trust would reduce loneliness significantly. (More information on student clubs can be found at:  
[https://osa\\_activity.ntu.edu.tw/en/club/index](https://osa_activity.ntu.edu.tw/en/club/index)  
[/https://ann.cc.ntu.edu.tw/eng/index.asp](https://ann.cc.ntu.edu.tw/eng/index.asp))

3. **Stay Connected:** Regularly communicate with trusted family members and friends back home to provide emotional support.
4. **Manage Academic Difficulties and Resources:** To seek guidance from academic advisors or faculties if you encounter difficulties. It is quite common for NTU students to form study groups with classmates to enhance understanding and to share different perspectives. You may organize a group of your own or to join one that suits you.
5. **Maintain Balance:** Leisure time matters! Make time for hobbies that bring you enjoyment, exercise regularly and relax adequately to maintain a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and personal well-being.
6. **Seek Professional Assistance:** The NTU Student Counseling Center offers psychological support for international students, including English individual counseling services and workshops. Professional counselors provide a supportive and safe environment, along with strategies to help you cope with stressors and emotional distress. You are more than welcome to visit NTU Student Counseling Center. (More information on intake online booking can be found at: <https://my.ntu.edu.tw/counsel/eng/notice.html>)

### **Cross-Cultural Psychological Adjustment Takes Time, but You Are Not Alone**

Studying at NTU as an international student is a journey filled with both challenges and opportunities. If you find yourself struggling, please do not hesitate to seek help from NTU Student Counseling Center or other guidance resources on campus. We value your well-being and are here ready to support you.