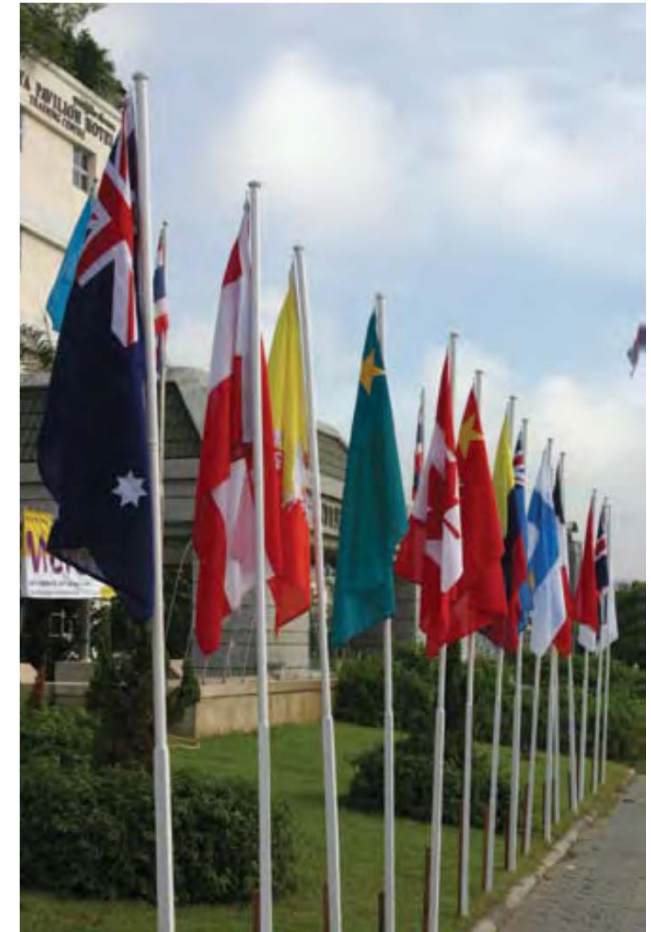# International Student Adjustment to Universities in Thailand

Overview:

Brief Literature Review

Variables of Adjustment

Implications and Discussion

Defining "Internationalization"

- This discussion will use the working definition developed by DeWit and Knight who claimed "Internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution".

International Student Mobility

Youth and student segment is over 20% of international travelers and the biggest spenders (UNTWO, 2008)

The youth and student segment has grown 3-5% annually and spending increases 8% annually (UNTWO, 2008)

In 2009, almost 3.7 million tertiary students enrolled outside their country of citizenship, representing an increase of more than 6% on the previous year (OECD, 2011).
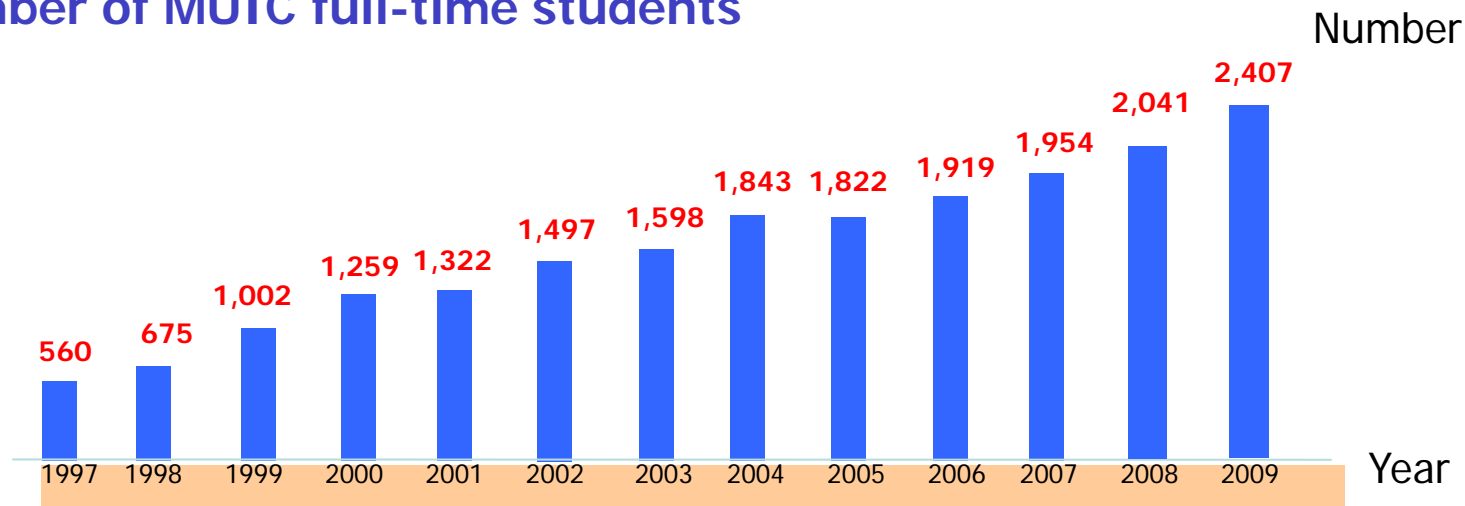
Expected to increase dramatically following AEC 2015 (2016?)

Number of MUIC full-time students

Number

Year	Number
1997	560
1998	675
1999	1,002
2000	1,259
2001	1,322
2002	1,497
2003	1,598
2004	1,843
2005	1,822
2006	1,919
2007	1,954
2008	2,041
2009	2,407

Year

- Number of students increased 1.8 % (2006)
- Number of students increased 15.2 % (2007)
- Number of students increased 15.2 % (2008)

As of October 20 2012 student numbers reached over 3,000

International Students

There are many dimensions in enhancing the internationalization of an institution, but student retention is a fundamental aspect of the internationalization process.

Knowledge and information about this in Asia and Thailand in particular is limited

Therefore it is critical that institutions understand what factors are involved in student perception of and reaction to Thailand including student stress, anxiety, adjustment and their overall impression of life in the host country.

In regard to culture shock, Janssens (1995) identifies four stages namely;

- stage 1 is the honeymoon stage,
- stage 2 is the negative experience and escalating problems stage,
- stage 3 is the adjustment stage and
- stage 4 is the mastery stage which occurs between 1 and 1 and a half years abroad.

Effects of Acculturative Stress?

Psychosomatic ailments, anxiety, depression, psychosocial dysfunction, cultural marginality, poor self-concept, eating disorders (as cited in Kuo, B.C.H. and Roysircar, 2005)

Other than common causes of international stress, what specifically is causing this in Thailand?

Thai Culture

- **Power Distance & Greng jai-** A well established hierarchy

- **Collectivism**- The 'we' is stronger than the 'I'. Thai admin, staff and students look to the 'we' for direction

- **Uncertainty Avoidance-** norms, traditions, rules and regulations help many find their place in stability

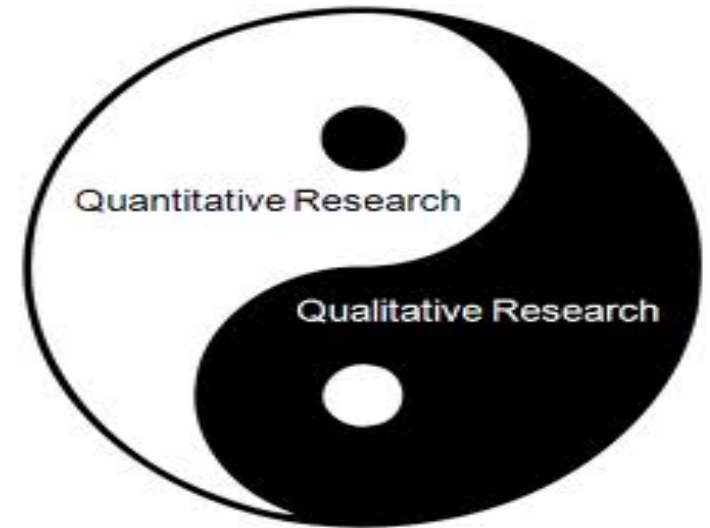- **Femininity**- Harmony over conflict

Thai Culture

- In Thai culture feelings take precedence over reason

- High context communication patterns

- Group orientation and team work

- '*Sanook*' or fun in the office place

- A spirit of celebration

- An avoidance of accountability (Hallinger and Kantamara, 2000)

Methodology

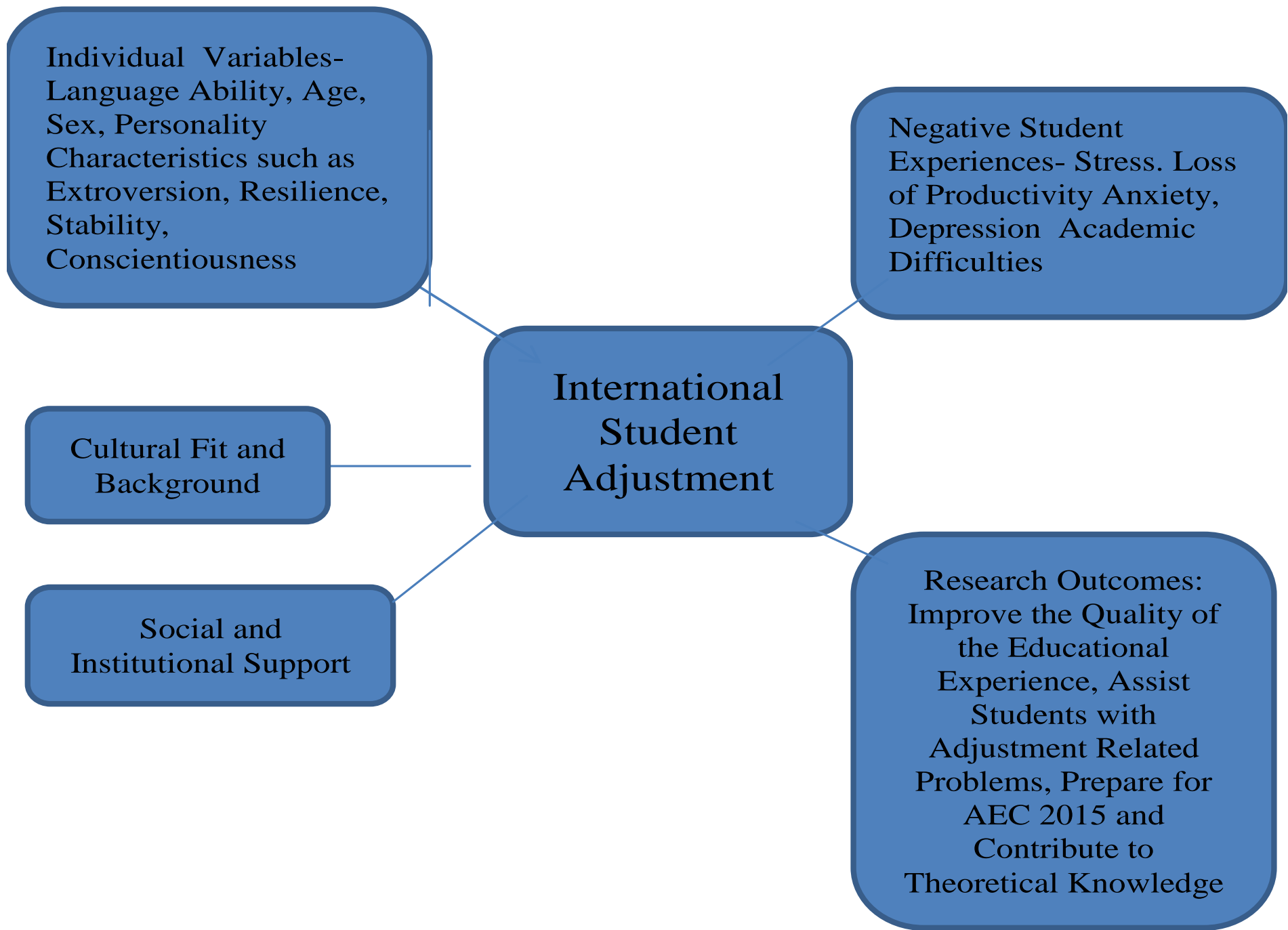Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research

Mixed Methods-

- Quantitative: Survey
- Ward and Kennedy's Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (1994)—Adapted for Thailand
- Used to gather information about general causes of MUIC international student stress. Looking for similarities and differences with existing patterns.

- Qualitative:
- In-depth interviews: Structured and qualitative.
- Well-adjusted and poorly adjusted students.
- Students from collectivist and individualist cultures.

Data

Qualitative
"It was great fun"

Quantitive

Discrete
5

Continuous
3.265...
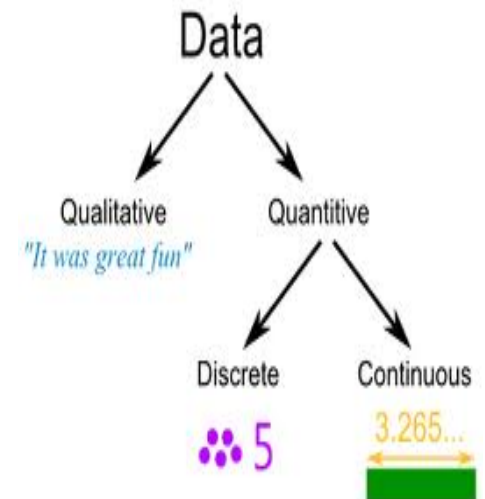
Results to Date

- Students from more collectivist cultures are less willing to seek social support in dealing with their stressful events than students from more individualist cultures

- Perceived discrimination is common among other SE Asian students (contrary to 'Cultural Fit" theories)

- Students from more collectivist cultures expected and found social support seeking to be less effective than those from individualist cultures

- Male students adjust more easily than female students

- The more extroverted the student, the more adjustment is reported

Individual Variables- Language Ability, Age, Sex, Personality Characteristics such as Extroversion, Resilience, Stability, Conscientiousness

Negative Student Experiences- Stress. Loss of Productivity Anxiety, Depression Academic Difficulties

Cultural Fit and Background

International Student Adjustment

Social and Institutional Support

Research Outcomes: Improve the Quality of the Educational Experience, Assist Students with Adjustment Related Problems, Prepare for AEC 2015 and Contribute to Theoretical Knowledge

Discussion of Implications for Practice

- Preventing problems in international student populations:
  - Organizational structure
  - Culture specific services

- Identifying problems in students,
  - Proactive strategies for counselors, teachers
  - Treating problems among students
    - Adaptive coping strategies, stress-reduction techniques
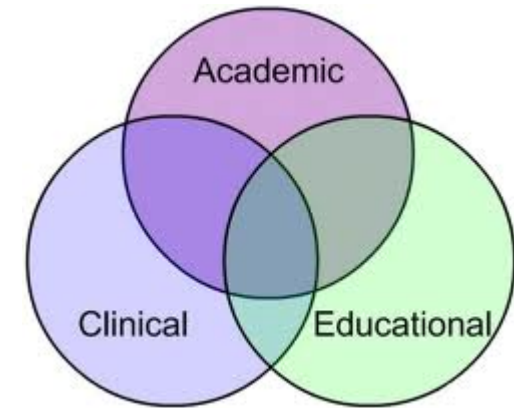
Conclusion

- International student mobility will continue to increase.

- International students need a variety of activities for adequate socialization.

- Adaptation is important for academic success.

- Schools must take the special needs of international students seriously or risk loss of enrollment and subsequent problems

For a complete reference list or if you have any additional questions or comments, please contact me:

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