



Acculturation and adaptation of employees from Anglo-culture countries in Thailand

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 15 August 2023

Revised 22 February 2024

Accepted 18 March 2024

Available online 27 June 2025

Keywords:

acculturation,
psychological adaptation,
sociocultural adaptation

Abstract

Research on acculturation has primarily focused on international migration to Western countries. This study fills in this research gap by examining acculturation and psychological and sociocultural adaptation among employees from Anglo-culture countries (i.e., the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, and England) in Thailand. Data were collected from 109 employees currently working in Thailand using an online survey. The findings showed that integration whereby individuals both maintain their heritage culture and adapt to the Thai culture was the acculturation strategy adopted by the majority of foreign employees. Additionally, hierarchical regression analyses found that psychological domain of adaptation was predicted by a longer length of residence in Thailand, lower heritage culture maintenance, higher mainstream culture adoption, lower frequency of communication in Thailand, and higher interaction with Thais at work. Sociocultural domain of adaptation was predicted only by a longer length of residence and higher mainstream culture adoption. Findings are discussed in relation to acculturation research conducted in other national contexts. The present research provides recommendations for future studies to broaden the literature on acculturation in the Thai context.

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Introduction

In the 21st-century workplace, where the importance of internationalization and global business is growing, individuals around the world are becoming more interrelated and connected. The prevalence of both temporary and permanent migration is on the rise, not only in Western

countries but also in developing nations (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/International Labour Organization [OECD/ILO], 2018) including Thailand. In 2023, there were approximately 2.7 million foreigners working in Thailand, making an increase from approximately 2.4 in 2022 (DOE, 2023). While general labor workers,

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<https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2025.46.2.38>

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operating through the MOU system (i.e., from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) constituted 91 percent of the total foreign workforce, the skilled labor group, comprising 6 percent, can facilitate knowledge exchange between foreigners and local employees and foster cross-border knowledge transfer (Hsu et al., 2021; Liu, 2019). This can contribute to the success of organizations in the global market (OECD/ILO, 2017).

However, living and working abroad can be a stressful life event for foreign employees. Challenges such as language and communication barriers, relationships with supervisors and colleagues, and differences in workplace culture may impede successful adaptation to the host country (Lai et al., 2007). Employees who cannot cope with these challenges are more likely to experience lower psychosocial well-being (Ward et al., 2001). For decades, attention has been paid to the topic of acculturation, referring to the process of changes that individuals undergo while living in a new country (Berry, 1997). This concept is examined to understand how foreigners can live and work successfully in the host country. Generally, among acculturation strategies, integration has been shown to positively lead to psychological adaptation (i.e., how well one feels in the country) and sociocultural adaptation (how well one can fit in into the country) (Sam & Berry, 2010). Foreign employees who adapt to the host country well are more likely to show higher life satisfaction and higher job performance.

Although the literature on acculturation and adaptation is extensive, past research has primarily focused on foreign groups in Western countries (Berry, 2017). Consequently, knowledge on acculturation in Southeast Asia, such as in Thailand, remains limited. The present research aims to broaden the literature on acculturation by: (1) exploring Berry's acculturation strategies of foreign employees from Anglo-culture countries in Thailand and (2) investigating how acculturation-related variables are related to psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

According to the GLOBE project (House et al., 2013), the Anglo-culture group consists of seven countries, namely, Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and the USA. The culture in Anglo countries is shown to be different from the culture of Thailand. Specifically, cultural practices of Anglo countries are highly performance-oriented but relatively low in in-group collectivism. In contrast, Thailand is less assertive and future-oriented, but the nation likely accepts power differences to a greater extent. Given that cultural distance has been found to influence cultural learning (Bierwaczek & Waldzus, 2016),

the differences between Anglo culture and Thai culture may impede an individual's ability to learn and adapt to the Thai mainstream culture. Together, the findings of this research provide insights into the phenomenon of acculturation in Thailand, a topic significantly limited in the study of the foreign employee population.

Literature Review

Acculturation and Adaptation

Acculturation defines a process of cultural changes as a result of intergroup contact (Berry, 1997). At an individual level, foreign employees can choose the degree to which they wish to adapt to the new culture and simultaneously the degree to which they decide to hold on to their heritage culture. Berry (1997) describes these psychological attitudes as acculturation strategies which consist of two domains. In the first domain known as heritage culture maintenance, foreign employees need to consider whether they choose to maintain one's own culture. On the other hand, the second dimension known as mainstream culture adoption explains that foreign employees need to consider whether they wish to adopt the dominant culture of the host country. This also includes contact participation with the majority group. These two cultural domains are formed independently and are positioned orthogonally to each other, thus creating four acculturation strategies.

The first acculturation strategy, integration, describes a strategy in which an individual chooses to participate in the larger society while maintaining one's heritage culture. Next, assimilation occurs when an individual decides to neglect one's own identity but chooses to adapt to the dominant culture. On the other hand, individuals who endorse separation would maintain their own identity but avoid social contact with the host country. Last, marginalization describes a strategy in which an individual does not wish to be involved in either culture. Taken together, acculturation strategies describe the extent to which a foreign employee chooses to endorse a new culture in the host country and to maintain one's heritage culture.

While acculturation orientations describe how individuals choose to acculturate, the concept of adaptation explains how well individuals adapt in the new country during the process of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). Adaptation defines "changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands" (Berry, 1997, p. 13). This can be considered

as the outcome of acculturation. Built upon the works of Ward and colleagues, Berry (1997) distinguished between psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological dimension concerns the psychological and emotional aspects such as stress and well-being, whereas sociocultural domains concerns the behavioral aspect such as the ability to fit in to the new environments and establish new relationships (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). In other words, the former refers to satisfaction with life and well-being, while the latter refers to the degree to which an individual acquires necessary skills to effectively live in the new country.

Sam and Berry (2010) further explained that acculturation strategies and adaptation are related and cited empirical works to support that, in general, integration is found to be the optimal strategy as it is associated with highest level psychological well-being and behaviors. On the contrary, marginalization is often associated with poor adaptation. However, acculturation is a two-way process whereby an optimal strategy depends on the societal context including how majorities prefer foreigners to acculturate. For example, Montreuil and Bourhis (2001) showed that majorities prefer 'valued' immigrants (i.e., those who share similar culture with the host country) and 'devalued' immigrants (i.e., those who share different culture with the host country) to acculturate differently in which integration is preferred for 'valued' than 'devalued' immigrants. As described by the Interactive Acculturation Model (Bourhis et al., 1997), foreigners whose acculturation strategy differs from the majority's preference (i.e., how majorities prefer foreigners to acculturate) may not adapt well in the host country. Hence, an optimal acculturation strategy for successful adaptation may differ across countries and depend on foreigners' ethnicity or nationality.

Although there is a lack of research on acculturation among foreign employees in Thailand, Aung et al. (2020) examined the effects of the four acculturation strategies on health-related risky behaviors among Myanmar migrant workers (i.e., general labor group through the MOU system) in Thailand. It was found that acculturation orientations were related to alcohol consumption in which those who adopted an integration orientation reported higher frequency of alcohol consumption. In addition, majority of Myanmar migrant workers endorsed separation (51.7%), followed by integration (43.2%), assimilation (3.1%), and marginalization (1.9%), respectively. The high proportion of separation may be due to the social exclusion migrant workers experience from the host community (United Nations Network on Migration, 2024). Negative attitudes and discriminatory

treatments likely compelled them to endorse a separation strategy rather than a more positive strategy such as integration. On the other hand, foreign employees from Anglo-culture countries may be perceived differently and more positively by Thais, as they are not labeled as low-skilled labor. Therefore, it is likely that the majority of foreign employees in Thailand may endorse positive strategies, such as integration and assimilation.

Predictors of Acculturation and Adaptation

The literature demonstrates that individual or demographic characteristics have an impact on the acculturation process, including adaptation. For example, females may be more likely to experience lower psychological adaptation (Ward et al., 2001), but findings regarding gender differences remain inconsistent, possibly influenced by gender inequality within the host country (Han et al., 2022). Intention for a permanent stay has been shown to influence motivation to adopt mainstream cultural practices. For example, Adams and van de Vijver (2015) noted that research on acculturation has shown that acculturation among immigrants may be different from sojourners due to reason of moving (i.e., forced and voluntary) and length of stay. A permanent stay may influence immigrants to consider adapting more to the host culture compared to sojourners. In line with this, expatriates and self-initiated expatriates may face different levels of difficulties as self-initiated expatriates often lack resources and support from the organization (i.e., relocation allowances and training prior to the relocation) compared to expatriates. In addition, length of time in the host country and previous experience of living abroad or international experience can influence the degree of adaptation (Berry, 1997).

In terms of predictors of psychological and sociocultural adaptation, this study examined four variables, which were the two dimensions of acculturation (i.e., heritage culture maintenance and mainstream culture adaption), proficiency in the mainstream language (or proficiency in Thai), frequency of using the mainstream language (or frequency of using Thai), and intercultural contact with Thais both at work and outside work. These variables were also labelled as acculturation-related variables. For example, a recent meta-analysis of expatriate adjustment by Han et al. (2022) showed that language ability or a host-country language ability is a significant predictor of how well one can socialize and interact with host nationals. Thus, it is assumed that these four acculturation-related variables would be positively associated with the two dimensions of adaptation.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 109 employees from Anglo-culture countries currently working in an organization in Thailand (39.4% American, 20.2% British, 18.3% South African, 12.8% Australian, 7.3% Irish, and 1.8% Canadian). The inclusion criteria were: (1) having American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African, Irish, or British nationality; (2) were born in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, or the United Kingdom; (3) currently working and employed by an organization; (4) currently working in Thailand and having lived in Thailand for at least 2 weeks; and (5) at least 18 years old.

Table 1 provides demographic characteristics of the participants. The majority of participants were males, Whites, married, had at least a Bachelor's degree, and considered themselves as self-initiated expatriates. The length of time in Thailand ranged from 7 months to 50 years. A number of previous experiences abroad ranged from 0 to more than 20.

The data are a part of the larger project examining acculturation and work and life-related outcomes among Anglo-culture countries and Japan. Ethics approval for the project was issued by Chulalongkorn University's Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Participants, Group 1 (Project No. 650161).

Table 1 Demographic variables of participants in the sample

Variables	Percentage
Ethnicity	
White	89.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	7.3%
Black or African American	1.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.8%
Asian	1.8%
Hispanic or Latino	0.9%
Other	0.9%
Gender	
Male	53.2%
Female	35.8%
Other	5.5%
Prefer not to say	3.7%
Married or living with a partner	54.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	84.4%
Self-initiated expatriates	74.3%
Length of time in Thailand (years)	$M = 8.90$ ($SD = 8.20$)
Intention for a permanent stay	43.1%
Number of previous experiences abroad	$M = 4.66$ ($SD = 4.76$)

Procedure

An online, cross-sectional survey was employed using a convenient snowball sampling technique. Invitations were sent to association groups and societies supporting international employees in Thailand. The study was also promoted on expatriate-related websites and social media pages. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were then able to complete the survey. Data collection occurred from January to June 2023.

Measures

The online questionnaire was in English as it is the primary language used in Anglo-culture countries.

Acculturation Orientations. The Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA) by Ryder et al. (2000) was adopted to measure the two dimensions of acculturation (i.e., heritage culture maintenance or HCM and mainstream culture adoption or MCA). Ten items measured HCM, and 10 items measured MCA using 10 identical domains of culture. Examples of items were, "I enjoy social activities with people from the same heritage culture as myself" for HCM, and "I enjoy social activities with typical Thai people" for MCA. Participants were asked to rate the items as a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. In this sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for HCM and MCA were .88 and .84, respectively.

Acculturation-related variables. Questions regarding language and intergroup contact were measured in addition to the acculturation orientations. For language, two questions were assessed, which included: (1) "How proficient is your Thai?" using a 4-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all proficient* to 4 = *very proficient*, and (2) "How often do you speak or communicate in Thai?" using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *never* and 5 = *always*. For intergroup contact, two questions assessing a frequency of interaction with Thais at work and outside work were included using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *never* and 5 = *always*.

Adaptation. The Brief Psychological Adaptation Scale (BPAS) and the Brief Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (BSAS) from Demes and Geeraert (2014) were used to measure psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation, respectively. The BPAS included 8 items, and an item was, for example, "In the last 2 weeks, how often have you felt lonely without your family and friends back home around you (reversed item)." For the BSAS, this included 12 items, and an example was, "How easy or difficult is it for you to adapt to values and beliefs (what people think about religion and politics, what people think is right or wrong). Both scales were presented on

a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *never* and 7 = *always* for the BPAS and 1 = *very difficult* and 7 = *very easy* for the BSAS. In this sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the BPAS were .82 and .84, respectively.

Control variables. Gender, an intention for a permanent stay in the host country, length of residence (or stay), and a number of previous experiences living aboard were included as covariates as they have been shown to be associated with acculturation.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. To explore acculturation strategies of foreign employees, a median-point split approach, as suggested by Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2003), was employed to create the four acculturation orientations according to Berry's (1997) framework. Next, in order to investigate the relationships between acculturation-related variables and psychological and sociocultural adaptation, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Model 1 examined psychological adaptation as the outcome variable, while Model 2 examined sociocultural adaptation. To control for the effects of individual or demographic factors known to influence acculturation, four variables- namely, gender, intention for a permanent stay, length of residence in Thailand, and previous experiences abroad- were entered in Step 1 as control variables. In Step 2, the main effects of heritage culture maintenance, mainstream culture adoption, Thai proficiency, Thai frequency, contact at work, and contact outside work were entered as predictors of the two outcome variables.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are summarized in Table 2.

To explore the four acculturation orientations, the results showed that 77.3 percent endorsed an integration strategy (i.e., higher than the median score on mainstream culture adoption and higher than the median score on heritage culture maintenance), followed by 10.0 percent separation (i.e., lower than the median score on mainstream culture adoption and higher than the median score on heritage culture maintenance), 3.6 percent marginalization (i.e., lower than the median score on mainstream culture adoption and lower than the median score on heritage culture maintenance), and 2.7 percent assimilation (i.e., higher than the median score on mainstream culture adoption and lower than the median score on heritage culture maintenance). Figure 1 shows the level of psychological and sociocultural domains of adaptation across the four acculturation strategy groups.

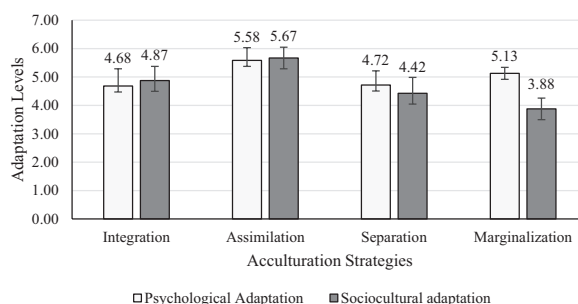


Figure 1 Means and standard deviations of adaptation across the four acculturation strategies

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients among variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. HCM	-										
2. MCA	.53**	-									
3. PA	-.16	.16	-								
4. SA	.16	.54**	.61**	-							
5. Prof.	.02	.46**	.10	.10	-						
6. Frequency	-.05	.35**	-.07	-.07	.72**	-					
7. C-work	-.15	.05	.36**	.36**	.14	.07	-				
8. C-outside	-.06	.21*	.17	.17	.39**	.28**	.40**	-			
9. Gender	.02	.09	-.16	-.16	-.02	-.03	-.01	-.09	-		
10. Perm Stay	.06	.28**	.25*	.25*	.16	.15	.11	.24*	-.10	-	
11. Length	.05	.07	.41**	.41**	.21*	.13	.20	.27*	-.33**	.33**	-
12. Exp.	.03	-.02	-.15	-.09	.13	.11	.15	.11	.15	-.15	-.09
M	4.86	4.58	4.70	4.79	2.24	2.59	3.90	3.44			
SD	1.03	1.01	1.06	.84	.99	.95	1.04	1.08			

Note: HCM = heritage culture maintenance, MCA = mainstream culture adoption, PA = psychological adaptation, SA = sociocultural adaptation, Prof. = Thai proficiency, Frequency = frequency of communication in Thai, C-work = interaction with Thais at work, C-outside = interaction with Thais outside work, Perm Stay = intention for a permanency stay, Length = length of residence in Thailand, Exp. = number of previous experiences abroad; Gender: Male = 0, Female = 1; Perm Stay: Temporary or not sure = 0, Permanent = 1.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The results indicated that foreign employees who endorsed an assimilation strategy showed the highest levels of both psychological ($M = 5.58$) and sociocultural adaptation ($M = 5.67$). Marginalization showed higher psychological adaptation, compared to separation and integration, while integration showed higher psychological adaptation, compared to separation and marginalization. However, a statistical analysis such as ANOVA was not performed to test for significant differences in adaptation scores across the four acculturation strategies, due to the small number of participants in the assimilation, separation, and marginalization groups.

Next, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the predictors of psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. The results are presented in Table 3.

In terms of control variables, length of residence predicted psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. For psychological adaptation, significant predictors were heritage culture maintenance, mainstream culture adoption, frequency of communication in Thai, and contact with Thais at work. On the other hand, only mainstream culture adoption was a significant predictor for sociocultural adaptation.

Discussion

To extend knowledge about acculturation in the Southeast Asia, the aims of this study were to explore acculturation strategies and to examine acculturation-

related predictors on psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation in Thailand by focusing on employees from Anglo countries (i.e., the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, England, Ireland, and South Africa). The findings showed that the majority acculturation strategy adopted by foreign employees in Thailand was integration.

In addition, while controlling for covariates, heritage culture maintenance and frequency to communicate in Thai negatively predicted psychological adaptation, whereas mainstream culture adoption and contact with Thai at work positively predicted psychological adaptation. Sociocultural adaptation was positively predicted only by mainstream culture adoption.

First, integration was found to be the primary acculturation strategy among foreign employees from Anglo-culture countries. Second, higher psychological adaptation was predicted by lower heritage culture maintenance and higher mainstream culture adaptation. These results, along with the mean score of the psychological adaptation across the four acculturation strategies, may suggest that foreign employees who choose to strongly endorse Thai culture while neglecting their own heritage culture (i.e., assimilation) are more likely to experience less psychological distress (i.e., higher psychological adaptation). Next, only mainstream culture adoption was found to predict higher sociocultural adaptation. This supports the literature in which adopting the host country's culture can enhance one's ability to fit into the new environment and establish new relationships.

Table 3 Hierarchical multiple regression analyses predicting psychological and sociocultural dimensions of adaptation

Variables	Model 1: Psychological Adaptation			Model 2: Sociocultural Adaptation		
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Step 1						
Gender	-.04 (.24)	-.02	-0.18	.26 (.19)	0.15	1.39
Permanent stay intention	.25 (.23)	.12	1.07	.20 (.18)	0.12	1.09
Length of residence	.05 (.02)	.35	3.11**	.04 (.01)	0.39	3.43**
Previous experiences	-.02 (.02)	-.09	-0.90	-.01 (.02)	-0.06	-0.57
		$R^2 = .19$			$R^2 = .19$	
Step 2						
Heritage culture	-.37 (.12)	-.36	-3.04**	-.11 (.09)	-1.18	-1.18
Mainstream culture	.41 (.14)	.39	2.87**	.47 (.11)	4.33	4.33***
Thai proficiency	.09 (.16)	.09	0.59	.02 (.12)	0.13	0.13
Thai frequency	-.37 (.15)	-.33	-2.46*	.02 (.11)	0.21	0.21
Contact at work	.28 (.11)	.27	2.62*	.10 (.08)	1.22	1.22
Contact outside work	-.08 (.11)	-.08	-0.75	.01 (.08)	0.09	0.09
		$\Delta R^2 = .22$			$\Delta R^2 = .27$	

Note: Gender: Male = 0 Female = 1; Perm Stay: Temporary or not sure = 0, Permanent = 1.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Together, the findings are inconsistent with past studies conducted in Western context where integration or heritage culture maintenance is positively related to psychological adaptation (e.g., Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). However, several studies have shown that, in some countries, assimilation strategy may be more beneficial for immigrants and other foreigner groups such as international students. This can be explained by the two-way process of acculturation where majority group's attitudes and behaviors along with the policies of the host country influence the outcomes of foreigner's acculturation strategy (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010). More specifically, positive outcomes such as harmony are often the results of a congruence between a foreigner's acculturation strategy and the majority's preference on how foreigners should manage acculturation (e.g., Piontkowski et al., 2002; Zagefka, & Brown, 2002). Beside the majority's attitudes, the host country's policy on multiculturalism could foster or hinder the outcomes of integration strategy. Embracing one's heritage culture may not lead to a high degree of adaptation in a country whose policies and practices do not value diversity.

The present study has limitations. First, several characteristics of the sample, such as age, location, and professional levels were not included in the study. This may limit the generalizability of the findings. For example, foreign employees in cities such as Bangkok may choose to acculturate differently from those who work in rural areas due to urbanization and the rate of immigration. In addition, the study employed a median-split approach to create the four acculturation strategies. This approach has received criticism as it likely assumes that the 4 strategies exist in a similar manner across countries (Grigoryev & van de Vijver, 2018). In fact, acculturation strategies adopted by foreigners may differ across cultural context.

For example, a study of Bulut and Gayman (2020) found four acculturation strategies among Latino immigrants in Florida, USA, namely, separated, partial separated, bicultural, and marginal strategies. Thus, Berry's strategy of assimilation was missing in this sample. This could possibly be due to the density of a Cuban population within Florida, allowing Latino immigrants to maintain their ethnic identity. Therefore, a person-centered or oriented approach such as latent profile analysis can be used to specifically identify the main acculturation strategies specifically adopted by Anglo-culture foreign employees in Thailand.

More importantly, as described by the two-way process of acculturation, more research on Thai's

attitudes toward foreigners is needed to conclude whether assimilation could be the ideal strategy for foreigners in Thailand. The knowledge on the majority group's preference for how Anglo-culture foreign employees should acculturate would provide a broader understanding of the outcomes of acculturation that should benefit organizations that employ foreign employees and policy makers in Thailand. For instance, organizations can facilitate opportunities for foreign employees to work with local employees to increase intercultural contact that is essential for psychological adaptation. To ensure effective cross-cultural interactions, cultural diversity training can be provided to both groups of employees.

Relatedly, future studies could consider public (e.g., work) and private (e.g., personal life such as interaction with family members) domains of acculturation. For example, Valenzuela and Schwartz (2023) found that acculturation in work settings can be spilled over to acculturation in non-work settings. Despite these limitations, the present study provides evidence of acculturation and adaptation of Anglo-culture foreign employees in Thailand which can contribute to the knowledge of acculturation research.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Fundings

The project was financially supported by Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Research and Innovation (Grant No. RGNS 63-025).

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