

The Stages of Culture Shock: The Experience Of First Time Living In Netherlands By Indonesian Students Of Maastricht University

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Abstract

Culture shock is the part of a cross-cultural understanding issue. It relates with the experiences during the phases of the newcomer to the host culture. The four phases of phases are used to know the process of adaptation. This article uses the four distinct phases: honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance of culture shock by Sverre Lysgaard. It is used the qualitative descriptive method to describe the experiences of the subjects in each phase. Two Indonesian students have received the OTS scholarship (Orange Tulip Scholarship) to take one-year study for a master degree in Maastricht University Netherland started from December 2023 until August 2024 become informants. The result showed that they encountered positive aspects in honeymoon phase by exploring the places, food, the architecture and the admiration of the local mindset, the frustration phase showed that they had some challenges in unpredictable weather, less variation food, the high cost of living, the language and the education system. The self-awareness has finally helped them to survive and accept the culture. The help of local and Indonesian friends who live in the Netherlands are also the main support system in adjusting the process.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to understand different culture is defined as cross cultural understanding. The ability in recognizing, interpreting, and correctly reacting to people, incidencing, or situations that are open to misunderstanding due to cultural differences (Yulianti, 2015). Culture, as defined by Mavianti, Harviani, and Gunawan (2020), is an evolving way of life shaped by various intricate aspects, including conventions and language, that are shared by a community and transmitted to subsequent generations. Culture is a part of human life. Each community has its own culture. Individuals with a shared history, experience, and geography create a culture. Culture consists of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, language, and lifestyle shared by a particular group of people. The culture is conveyed through elements like food, festivals, music, art, laws, traditions, rituals, and language. Culture cannot be instructed. It can be understood through experience. Culture is the intricate entirety that encompasses knowledge, beliefs, arts, ethics, laws, traditions, and all other abilities and practices gained by individuals as participants in society (Tylor, 1871). As stated, habits belong to the part of the culture. Mostly Indonesians use the right hand to eat. They believe that food

taste better by eating using hands. In contrast, this habit may not be acceptable for people in western countries. They might think this as a disgusting or bad manner.

The contradictive way of life is often hard for people who move to certain country. Residing in an unfamiliar setting can be quite challenging for people who lack understanding of it and its culture. It's entirely distinct from merely traveling or taking a vacation in another country or location. This phenomenon is referred to as culture shock. Culture shock occurs when individuals feel anxious due to their inability to speak the language, comprehend the customs, or understand the people they encounter in everyday life. Numerous factors contribute to culture shock. Among them are language obstacles, anxiety, stress, frustration, food concerns, and issues of value. An individual might discover that certain cherished and strongly held beliefs and values about life might not hold the same significance for members of their new host culture (Pujiyanti, 2014). It can also affect personal and social relationships, psychological aspects, and numerous other domains. To reduce the effects of culture shock. People need to understand how to manage it by studying the phases of culture shock and cultural adaptation. Those phases are commonly felt by individuals residing in the new surroundings. Culture shock can be characterized by at least four distinct stages: honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance (Sverre Lysgaard, 1955). During the honeymoon phase (the initial weeks), newcomers are captivated by the unfamiliar culture. The following stage is the frustration phase (typically around three months, varying by individual), when the disparities between the old and new cultures become evident and can lead to stressful situations. The third phase is adjustment, where people are attempting to understand their surroundings, establish routines, and acclimate to the new culture. The final phase is acceptance, during which individuals-although it may take weeks, months, or years-ultimately come to terms with the condition or situation.

Individuals who are unable to adapt to a new environment or culture might dismiss all things unfamiliar and overemphasize the benefits of their own culture. The writer illustrates a case of culture shock from her experience when she was tasked with helping two Americans (from Texas) who visited Malang, East Java in 2016. During their stay in Indonesia, one year is the profound moment which means that they experience the dynamic of culture shock. The euphoria of the coming the new country has made them felt blessed because of the warm attitude of Indonesian people and the beauty of nature. Unfortunately, the stressful moment is experienced by both of them. The first person had a problem dealing with her personality. She became quiet and often sad. She said that she felt annoy when Indonesians yelling at her by saying "bule" or white. In this case, the word "bule" as white is not acceptable for some Americans. This shows as the act of racism. In addition, she also got harassment because of her look as a white. The second person had a problem dealing with the language. Bahasa became more challenging to her. She made some mistakes in spelling Indonesian word for example the word "pusing" becomes "pusang" and "siapa" becomes "siapo" and so many other words. By having some Indonesians friends could finally help them to adjust with the culture. The phases from the feeling of excitement up to the feeling of sadness are really interesting to be analyzed because those phases belong to the process of someone to grow better or to adapt to the new culture in order to survive. It does not take a minute for people to change or to adapt with the new situation but it is more than that. As stated by Dolly Parton that we cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails. The adjustment is the process to grow better in a new place.

The phases of culture shock may happen to people who become new comers in certain countries. It is interesting to view each phase especially knowing the details of the experiences of the newcomers or people who live abroad. In this research, the writer elaborates the experiences of culture shock by two Indonesians students who took master degree at Maastricht University in Netherland.

The detail of experiences will be explained based on the stages of culture shock and how do they deal with it.

Thus, by gaining cross-cultural understanding, people learn to appreciate or respect different cultures to enhance their tolerance. Regrettably, individuals frequently believe that their approach is the correct one. Believing that another person is incorrect or disrespectful for not adhering to our traditions and values results in cross-cultural miscommunication.

Literature Review

The Stages of Culture Shock



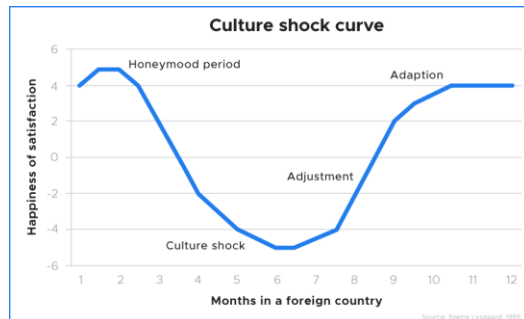
The Stages of Shock Culture and Cultural Adjustment

(Dewi, 2021) defines culture shock as the sense of disorientation felt by an individual who is unexpectedly confronted with a different culture, lifestyle, or belief system. Culture shock can leave those experiencing it feeling confused, anxious, or downcast.

Culture shock can be characterized by at least one of four unique stages: honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, and mastery. In the honeymoon phase, the contrasts between the old and new culture are viewed through a romantic lens. In the initial weeks, many individuals are captivated by the new culture. They connect with locals who communicate in their language and who are courteous to outsiders. This time is brimming with insights and fresh findings. Similar to many honeymoon phases, this stage will ultimately conclude. After a while (typically about three months, varying by person), distinctions between the familiar and new culture become noticeable and can lead to anxiety. This signifies the stage of negotiation.

Enthusiasm might ultimately transition into negative emotions such as frustration and anger when an individual repeatedly faces adverse occurrences that could be viewed as odd and insulting to their cultural perspective. However, the key transformation during this period is communication. Individuals adapting to a different culture frequently experience loneliness and homesickness, as they are still acclimating to the new surroundings and encounter unfamiliar people daily. Eventually, after a period, one becomes familiar with the new culture and establishes routines, indicating the adjustment phase. In most situations, one is aware of what to anticipate, and the host nation no longer seems that unfamiliar. One starts to focus on essential living once more, and situations return to a

more typical state. One begins to cultivate problem-solving abilities for navigating the culture and starts to embrace the culture's practices with an optimistic mindset. The culture starts to become understandable, leading to fewer negative reactions and responses towards it. At the mastery level, individuals can engage completely and confidently in the host culture. Mastery does not equate to complete transformation. Individuals frequently retain various characteristics from their previous culture, including accents and languages. It is commonly known as the biculturalism phase.



The honeymoon Stage

The first stage of culture shock is often overwhelmingly positive. Travelers become infatuated with the language, people, and food in their new surroundings. At this stage, the trip or move seems like the greatest decision ever made and an exciting adventure. The honeymoon phase may take over the entire experience as the later effects of culture shock don't have time to set in. On longer trips, the honeymoon stage will usually phase out eventually.

The frustration Stage

Frustration may be the most difficult stage of culture shock and is probably familiar to anyone who has lived abroad or travels frequently. At this stage, the fatigue of not understanding gestures, signs, and the language sets in and miscommunications may be happening.

The adjustment Stage

Frustrations frequently lessen as travelers start to become more acquainted and at ease with the cultures, individuals, cuisine, and languages of unfamiliar surroundings. Navigating becomes simpler, and supportive friends and communities are formed. Information about local languages might become more noticeable during the adaptation phase.

The acceptance stage

Typically – although it can occur weeks, months, or even years after grappling with the emotional stages mentioned above – the concluding stage of culture shock is acceptance. Acceptance does not imply that new cultures or environments are fully comprehended. Instead, it indicates that total comprehension isn't required to operate and flourish in the new environment. During the acceptance phase, travelers can gather the resources necessary to feel comfortable. While it may be one of the most challenging aspects of traveling, culture shock is equally essential to the experience as the local cuisine, inhabitants, and landscapes. By acknowledging it for what it truly is and

discovering coping strategies, you can stop culture shock from sabotaging an otherwise rewarding experience overseas.

Coping Shock Culture

Culture shock can be avoided by aiming to be more culturally relativistic and adaptable in thought and actions, by fostering a genuine passion for understanding the host culture, and by establishing authentic intercultural connections. (Dewi, 2021) indicates that grasping the culture of different regions could reduce the stress levels of foreigners. Foreigners may appreciate distinct cultures alongside their own. This concerned not just the foreign individual, but also the local population. Effective communication across cultures is a rather simple concept. By adopting the right mindset, engaging with a few knowledgeable cultural informants, understanding some cross-cultural communication principles, and dedicating time to being a participant-observer, an individual will organically cultivate a range of intercultural interaction abilities. As a person progresses along the path of cross-cultural understanding and engagement, they will more swiftly establish ego-identity connections in the new host culture and feel greater comfort within themselves and their environment. They will grow more content and effective in their jobs, at home, or when interacting within the broader community. They will cease to be adversely impacted by unmet expectations. They will grasp more and be comprehended better by others. In summary, they will have developed into bicultural individuals. (Pujiyanti, Zulainti (2014).)

METHOD

The qualitative method is used in this research to provide a broader and deeper understanding the phases of culture shock experienced by two (2) Indonesian students who take master degree at Maastricht University Netherland. Hammersley (2013) stated that qualitative approaches are good for understanding social conditions through observation on how individual understand, experience, interpret and produce relevant aspects that are translated into concrete descriptive narrative.

Non-probability sampling method is used in this research especially snowball or referral sampling. The writer has got the direct access with both of the participants. They are willing to be texted to answer the questions at any time. One of the participants is asked to invite her friend to participate in order to answer the question. Both of them are belong to Indonesian community in Netherlands and also the member of Orange Tulip Scholarships. As stated by Webster (2019) that this sampling is effective for hard-to-reach population. The participants are recruited based on the informed consent. At the beginning of the process, the participants confused with the term Cross Cultural Understanding. Then, the writer gave information about it in detail way to make sure whether they want to be the part of the process. Most of information is about the definition of cross cultural, the stages of culture shock. how long the study will take and the benefit of the study i.e to share the experiences to those who wants to study in Netherlands. Moreover, letting them know that the data will be kept confidential. After getting the information, they agree to be contacted and give information.

The two Indonesian students have received the OTS scholarship (Orange Tulip Scholarship) to take one-year study for master degree in Maastricht University Netherland started from December 2023 until August 2024. The first subject is Lisa (The faculty of Globalization and Development Studies in the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) and the second is Tia (the Faculty of Law, majoring in Globalization and Law). Both of them become the informants of this research.

Due to the different location between the writer and subject, the face-to-face communication is done via online. Challenges of using text-based online communication and the strategies to navigate

them. There are three challenges having online communication. They are including different time zones, managing productivity and distractions, and in ability to interpret body language. One of the challenges in this study is the different time zones. Due to six hours different in time, the writer needs to wait for the reply sometimes. The use of interview is done regularly via text-based WhatsApp. Over the past ten years, communication platforms facilitated by the internet like Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom have been recognized as valuable tools for collecting qualitative data (Archibald et al., 2019; Gibson, 2022; Kaufmann & Peil, 2020; Krouwel et al., 2019; Reñosa et al., 2021). The limitations on in-person interactions have heightened technology utilization and compelled researchers worldwide to think about transitioning to online data gathering techniques (Chen et al., 2020; Dodds & Hess, 2020). The digital realm significantly influences an adolescent's social growth (Gibbs et al., 2020) as they increasingly turn to digital platforms for education, entertainment, communication, and connectivity, constituting one in three internet users worldwide (Stoilova et al., 2021). Therefore, this study uses an online data collection. The writer uses WhatsApp text to gain the information from both of the subjects. Ten questions are given dealing with culture shock. The questions ask about the experiences living in Netherlands especially what they like and what they do not like about the country, how do they deal with culture shock, how do they finally accept the differences and their future plan whether they want to stay or leave the country. The process of online communication is done based on the subjects' schedule in which they have to write their thesis paper. Therefore, the process is done step by step. The elaboration of the data is given based theory the stages of culture shock. Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lygaard's (1955). U-curve is a widely used model for cultural adapting and adjustment. Kalervo Oberg's theory (1954) is also used to elaborate each stage based on the subjects' experiences.

Data analysis procedures

After gathering the information, the writer examines the data from the interviews through several steps. The interview data was examined by using these steps: transcribing the information, categorizing the data, validating the data, and summarizing subjects' perspectives on culture shock. The writer uses data triangulation to understand the stages of culture shocks. The interview is used to know the personal experiences and perspectives about culture shocks. Ten questions are given dealing with culture shock. The questions ask about the experiences living in Netherlands especially what they like and what they do not like about the country, how do they deal with culture shock, how do they finally accept the differences and their future plan whether they want to stay or leave the country.

As applicable in most qualitative designs, there is no single or strict rule for determining the appropriate sample size for a narrative inquiry (Francis et al, 2010). The two participants in this study are selected because both of them join the same scholarships that is the Orange Tulip Scholarships.

FINDINGS

Both of the participants or subjects are Indonesian. Lisa is from Jakarta and Tia is from Sumatra. They have the certain reasons to choose Netherlands to study. According to Lisa, besides the affordable school tuition or fee, she has families living there. This makes easier for her to survive. Meanwhile, Tia always wants to study abroad to gain unique experiences. As a law student with a bachelor's degree from Indonesia, the Netherlands is her primary choice because Indonesian law has closely related with Dutch law since the colonial period. Although the legal systems are not identical, there are relevant legal frameworks that make studying in the Netherlands particularly beneficial. Additionally, she never been to Europe before, and the high living

standards in the Netherlands also is also influenced her decision. The WhatsApp text is sent to the subjects every one week. The writer has to wait for the respond based on the activities and time differences. The responds are concluded at the following;



First Subject:

Lisa (Master student of the faculty of Globalization and Development Studies; faculty of Arts and Social Sciences)

Quote:

“We cannot change the culture, the only to do is to adjust with the situation by trying to figure out the things s tep by step”.

The Honeymoon	The first subject is Lisa. She said that the first time awas fun because the weather is nice. It is at the summer time. Therefore, there was no problem at all regarding to it. It is almost the same with the weather in Indonesia. She added that the first month was full of excitement, traveling and exploring everywhere. She felt very excited. Easy to find Indonesian people. The places are clean, peaceful, no chaos in traffic or daily life in the surrounding area. Lots of green open areas for relaxing, jogging, hanging out with friends.
The Frustration	The first thing that caused the biggest shock was the weather especially in the rainy season, the rain is difficult to predict and is always accompanied by strong winds. This disrupts the daily activities especially during fall, winter and spring. All seasons are cold and rainy. So, from fall to winter she felt very difficult to endure. Moreover, the gloomy sky has made she felt quite depressed, coupled with having to take an exam. The second thing that quite culture shocking was the food. Local Dutch food is very bland and not varied, making it a little difficult to get practical everyday 'to go' food. Especially in the first month or two because she still did not know that many Asian & Indonesian foodstuffs are sold in supermarkets. In addition, seasonal differences that have never been felt before, especially when the temperature is below 10 degrees, was very uncomfortable. Such as getting tired easily, moody, sleepy, and not enthusiastic. The difficulty in getting sunlight has a big emotional impact. This also affects the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, she also rarely to hang out with friends. Then it slightly affects relationships with people around. The last was the high cost of living. The prices of food and drinks in restaurants and also Public transportation costs are expensive.
The Adjustment	She tries to adapt because the season is not something can be changed. Regarding to the weather, she downloaded several weather applications to know which one is more accurate and also buying and wearing warm clothes. For food, she often consumes Indonesian and Asian food but along the process, after eleven months, she tried to enjoy the local and western foods such as pasta, sandwiches, etc. and sometimes she combined the taste to be spicier like typical Indonesian or Asian food. Dealing with the cost of living, she spent less on it by buying something priority also rarely using public transportation instead she rides a bike to go everywhere.
The Acceptance	As stated previously that she is finally aware that she can not change everything there especially the difficulties in adapting with weather and the taste of the food. By having the weather applications, she is able to predict the weather or season for instance during the winter she wears warm clothes or during the rainy season she stops the outdoor activities. By joining Indonesian community in Netherlands, she finally has a better insight of living there. The sharing activities help her to understand the culture. Day by day become easier for her and she will develop the career there to be more independence. She decides to choose to work there because she feels more secure, calm, peaceful. It suitable for both working and self-development. It also fits with her personality which means by living there she has a

new insight that life does not always about pursuing things like how to become success, how to find a perfect match etc. It is more focus on enjoying every moment in life.



Second Subject:

Tia (Master student of the Faculty of Law, majoring in Globalization and Law)

Quote:

“Life is challenging everywhere, and it's about how you live with it. Every place has its own set of challenges and advantages.”

The Honeymoon

The second is Tia, she said that she enjoyed the way how of thinking of the people there. She said the people there are really open-minded. The general acceptance of differences and willingness to engage in discussions. Both are applied in daily life and at the university, where lecturers are receptive to our ideas and treat students equally. Next, the cleanliness and walkability of the cities, which is good for walking. Moreover, the beautiful architecture, especially the centuries-old buildings and also the art scene, with numerous museums showcasing pieces that she had only seen online before.

The Frustration

Tia said that when she first arrived, the weather was still warm, which made the initial adjustment easier. The most challenging part was adapting to living independently—managing daily tasks like cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping, alongside with her academic responsibilities. Apart from that, she also had a hard time in adjusting to the language. Despite considering herself fluent in English, using it constantly as a daily language was a new experience and took some adjustment. Furthermore, she experienced significant culture shock during the winter. Although she had encountered winter before during vacations, living through it was different, especially without her family. The short days and lack of sunlight made the city gloomy and led to a lack of vitamin D. Another challenge was adapting to the academic system. In Indonesia, passing classes required minimal reading, but here, they expect nothing less than expensive reading and very deep understanding of concepts - just memorizing would be very insufficient. Additionally, Dutch universities have "tutorials," where small groups of around 15 students discuss questions or cases weekly and share their opinions. This was difficult initially, as there was nothing similar in Indonesian universities. The same with the first subject, she also experienced the high cost of living. She would say that the feeling of ‘shock’ subsides after around three months

The Adjustment

For the weather, the most important thing is to stay inform about what to expect each week or day. Downloading a weather app and dressing according to the weather, and she never leave the house without an umbrella and a jacket in the Netherlands. Adjust activities and transportation methods based on the weather. During winter, when she experienced winter blues, her support system, especially her friends, helped to get through it. Relating with studies, it took some time to adjust, but she managed by paying close attention to the provided syllabus, trying her best to attend the class regularly, not being afraid to ask lecturers or friends for help, and giving her best effort. She also improved her time management and handled multiple responsibilities by staying focus and minimizing wasting time. By using it often, the language became easier. Overall, three months in things were definitely easier

The Acceptance

She finally realizes that life is challenging everywhere, and it's about how you live with it. She reminds herself that hardships in the Netherlands comes with many great experiences and advantages. The key is not to let the difficulties overwhelm but to learn to overcome them. Living independently also taught a lot about herself and

help her to grow personally. In short, whatever difficulties that she faced such as the weather (which often impact her emotions), the academic pressure, the language barrier, and also the high cost of living (this made her to cook often instead of buying), has led her to move forward or to change based on the culture. Fortunately, she had some Indonesian friends who faced the same situation so they shared how to overcome each difficulty.

The same with Lisa, she wants to develop her career there. She loves the work culture and dynamic situation, where superiors treat as an equal and value insights. There are also still many aspects of the Netherlands that she would like to explore.

DISCUSSION

Based on the above findings, the process of culture shock has totally experienced by both of the subjects. It started from the feeling of excitement up to the feeling of acceptance. The feeling of excitement to come to the new country is shown at the stage of the honeymoon. The differences between Asian life and Western life are seen clearly. The differences between the old and new culture are seen in a romantic light (Pujiyanti, 2014). Lisa said that the cleanliness of a peacefulness of the places in Holland makes her feel excited. The activity of relaxing, jogging or sightseeing are easy to do and find everywhere along with its beautiful scenery. Tia has experienced the people's mindset especially regarding with appreciation of diversity. This period is full of observations and new discoveries. They enjoyed the moment next the stressful phases have experienced by them. One of the biggest types of culture shock is inclement weather. Many newcomers, especially those from the warmer climate, will encounter it. This is the long and harsh winters (McLean, 2019, p. 4). Lisa and Tia had to struggle with it as well. the unpredictable weather from fall to winter are also impact their emotional feelings. The rest of the problems are dealing with the food taste, the language, the cost of living and academic system. As stated by Christine (2023) that newcomer might start to feel frustrated or angry about the difficulties of adapting to the new language. Everyday activities start to feel stressful. For example, he/she can't understand the differences in how public transportation works. The food tastes strange or don't know which stores to go to for things you need. The western foods are less of variation rather than Indonesian food. This makes Lisa has a lack of appetite to eat. To solve the problem, she makes her own by combining the Western and Asian food. One of the main struggles that international students face after arriving to Canada is getting used to a new diet. Because food is cooked differently back home, spices are not the same, fresh products are often not available, and many vegetables and fruits that were of daily consume are simply nowhere to be found. This causes the beautiful art of food to turn into one of the most irritating parts of your day-to-day (Baquin, 2020). Tia has the challenges in using the language and the academic system. She tries to adjust by using it often and doing an immersion with the local. Language learning takes time and effort, but the rewards are immense (Quigley, 2023). They also have joined the Indonesian community in Netherlands. Moreover, the education system is also experienced by one of the subjects. Reading is significant activities to do. The same thing is also experienced by Indonesian students in Singapore. In frustration stage, the difference in the education system in Indonesia and Singapore is a challenge in itself, such as in Singapore, they prefer to prepare for the exam by actively going to the library, while Indonesia mostly studies the day before the exam takes place (Bahri et al, 2022). To overcome the problem, she attends the class regularly and be active to ask questions in class. The cost of living is also becoming the problem for both. Therefore, they spend less money by finding the cheaper shop and cooking by themselves. It is also in line with Ibrihimaj (2024) which said that she had made such an amazing group of friends, my professors were great, and she'd even discovered cheaper stores to shop in", After some months, both finally accept the situation. One begins to develop problem-solving skills for dealing with the culture and adopts the country's ways with a positive attitude (Pujiyanti, 2014). They realized that the culture cannot be changed. They must live with it or learn through the process to survive. They see the differences in a positive way instead of complaining because they believe that life is challenging everywhere. They gain something from the host culture. The new sense of understanding and comfort has led them to continue their staying there to find the job. In short, culture shock (for the first time) can lead to

negative feelings but during the process of adaptation and the support from the surroundings. Individual will pass the problems by accepting the situation.

CONCLUSION

The first time living in the new country becomes the challenges for new comers. The differences in everything will be seen clearly through the process. Moving from Asia to Western country is not an easy way. The two Indonesians (Lisa and Tia) are the sample of Asians who try to survive in Netherlands. Their first-time living is full of challenging. They need time to finally accept the situation. They experienced something positive and negative during the process. The stages of culture shock are used to describe their experiences. First is the euphoria in which they enjoyed the environment, the people, the buildings, and the local mindset. They spent their time explore the foods, the places and everything there. After months, problems occur especially dealing with the weather (from tropical country to four season country); the winter is the hardest part for them. besides, the matter in culinary (from spicy food -Asian to junk food=Western) or less variation food) has reduced the appetite to eat. Some others challenge occurs like the language, the high cost of living, the education system. The best part is they try to adapt with the situation for example like the use the application to know the weather, they shared experiences to Indonesians who live there, they created the food by themselves by combining the tastes or ingredients, or searching Indonesian food at the local market. Fortunately, they can solve the problems and accept the situation by changing their mindset. In the other words, seeing something difference in a positive way. They can not change the situation. It does not mean that they totally accept but still they try to understand. This process is still continuing because they will find out more differences. They only surface not the bottom yet. The decision to stay longer there is a prove that Netherlands becomes the safest place for them.

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