

**CHINESE STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION  
PROCESS AND THEIR MAIN DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED  
WHILE STUDYING IN THE UPPER NORTHERN THAI  
UNIVERSITIES**

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**Abstract**

Increasingly, more students have chosen to study for their degree in upper northern Thailand since the government of China implemented new policies of opening up in the field of education in recent years. However, Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process has become an important factor affecting their academic achievements. The aim of this research is to investigate the Chinese students' performance in four fields (social-cultural, academic, environmental and psychological field) of cross-cultural adaptation. In addition, it identifies the main difficulties Chinese students encountered during their time at the upper northern Thai universities. The selected sample size was 314 students from the eight upper northern Thai universities. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and structured questionnaires were used for data collection. The data analysis method for determining the main difficulties was multiple regression. The results of the research showed: a) Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process was roughly in a shape of "U-Curve", furthermore, different Chinese students group performed differently in the four fields of cross-cultural adaptation; b) Eleven main difficulties were found to be contributing factors affecting the process of Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation, among which 'being not accustomed to campus life', 'having difficulty in understanding courses', 'not having good job prospects', and

'having difficulty in fitting-in with Thai society' were the most influential items. Finally, some useful suggestions for both Chinese students and Thai universities were put forward to help these students to become better adapted to the host Thai environment.

**Keywords:** Cross-culture adaptation; difficulties; Chinese students; Thai universities

## Introduction

With the growth of the economy of China and the implementation of new opening-up policies<sup>1</sup> by the government of China, more and more Chinese students have chosen Thai universities as their overseas study destination in recent years: a report from SINA website education section showed that more Chinese students had chosen to study in Thailand for practical reasons since 2014 (Yu, 2019). According to statistics of Thailand's Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC), totally, 18,814 international students were registered and studied in 155 colleges or institutions of Thailand in 2015, among these about three quarters were students from China. Another report from *Ifeng.com* (Li, 2016) also showed a similar situation: the number of Chinese students studying in Thai universities had increased nearly tenfold in the previous 15 years, and the number of Chinese students ranked highest among international students in Thailand.

In general, having international students benefits the host country and specifically, its education system in many ways. For example, Thai scholar Veenunkarn Rujiprak pointed out in his study that international students bring an aspect of diversity and international atmosphere for Thai universities (Rujipak, 2016), in addition, international students have greatly increased the revenue for the higher education sector in Thailand over the last ten years. Despite the potential benefits for host countries, for many of the international students themselves, going abroad to study is a challenging process. This process is full of difficulties and stresses, especially those caused by the process of cross-cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997). International students' psychological and physical aspects, even their future career have been affected by the challenge of their cross-cultural adaptation process (Berry and Sam, 1997).

Although some Chinese students at Thai universities received great success, other Chinese students encountered difficulties while studying at universities in Thailand. Ma (2016) indicated that Chinese students encountered many difficulties related to daily life, academic and communication while studying in Thailand. According to Liu et al. (2014)'s survey on 34 Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Education of China issued an educational cooperative document-*Educational Actions on Promoting One Belt and One Road (OBOR) Construction* in July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and the implementation of this official document has greatly promoted China to strengthen educational cooperation with OBOR countries including Thailand in the following years.

exchange students from Honghe University, the cross-cultural difficulties of these students during their studies in Thailand mainly focus on language, interpersonal communication, alien customs, practice works, and social values. Deng and Yang (2009) described several cultural differences between Thailand and China, which includes body-language, clothing, diet and table manners. They pointed out that in the cross-cultural setting, one shall try to understand the nonverbal manner and behaviors, so as to improve cross-cultural ability and promote cross-cultural communication. As Chinese students constitute a significant source of international students in Thailand, thus, it is necessary to learn about their situations at Thai universities. Moreover, it is also vital for the families of Chinese students to understand the cross-cultural adaptation process of these students, because they are key supporters and decision makers in this process.

On one hand, faced with fierce competition in the higher education sector by western countries and other south-east Asian countries, Thai universities are trying to attract more Chinese students, therefore, they need to know more about Chinese students and their situation in Thailand. On the other hand, China news report showed that about 10.31 million Chinese students took GaoKao (National Matriculation Exam) in the year 2019, this revealed the number students taking GaoKao returned to the magnitude of 10 million since 2009, and therefore it was becoming more competitive to enter the best universities in China. (Guo, 2019) Under these circumstances, studying in Thailand and other Asian countries had become an important choice for some Chinese students and their families.

How to successfully obtain a degree from Thai universities is a major concern of many Chinese students and their parents, they need to understand the main difficulties they may encounter and how to overcome them. Understanding Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process could benefit not only the host institutes but also the students themselves. Phang (2013) mentioned that higher education (HE) has become an increasingly competitive sector in a global context, so it is fundamental to understand international students in order to attract them to study in the host countries. However, some difficulties international students encountered in the cross-cultural adaptation process have a profound influence on their lives, if they can overcome the main difficulties, it could help them successfully adapt to the new environment (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004). The purpose of establishing the main difficulties Chinese

students encountered while studying in Thailand is to provide suggestions for them to better adapt to the Thai environment and to help them improve their academic achievements.

## Literature Review

### *Cross-cultural Adaptation Process Theories*

The original meaning of 'adaption' refers to the biological concept of organisms which change their physical characteristics or living habits to adapt to the surrounding environment. 'Cross-cultural Adaptation' is a concept in social science which refers to the sojourners' changing their attitude and behavior after continuous contact with people from different cultural background. It is also applied to explain a change in one's performance whilst operating in the new environment, steps in the change would be called a process of adaptation.

First of all, language acquisition is an important aspect for foreign student's cross-cultural adaptation process. According to Schumann (1978) the process of cross-cultural adaptation for international students can be classified into two aspects: social adaptation and psychological adaptation. The former includes native language learning by contact with the native speakers, while the latter involves the process of psychological growth after opening up to the host environment. Bochner (1982) also believe that the cross-cultural adaptation process can be divided into social-cultural adaptation, and psychological adaptation, where social-cultural adaptation refers to the ability to better integrate with the society of the host country and psychological adaptation associates with feelings of well-being during the transition period. Oberg (1960) was famous for his cross-cultural concept of '*Culture Shock*', which he viewed as 'Occupational Disease'. Oberg pointed out that people usually feel 'sick with anxiety' by encountering unfamiliar cultural signs and symbols such as words, customs, gestures, facial expressions. He viewed culture shock as a normal process of cross-cultural adaptation. Later scholars also recognized and developed Oberg's concept of '*Culture Shock*' (Oberg,1960; Weaver, 2000), and it was recognized that it could happen to anyone who was introduced suddenly to a new culture. Oberg has described a 'four stages' of cross-cultural adaptation, those stages can be listed as the stage of: 'honeymoon', 'crisis', 'recovery' and 'adjustment'. The reasons why international students encounter '*Culture Shock*'

maybe various. However, Chinese scholar Zhu (2013) summarized those reasons as Four conflicts: 'language and cultural', 'class cultural', 'equality and independence status', 'psychological factors.'

Lysgaard's (1955) describes the sojourner's level of adaptation as a 'U' shaped function in a host culture. Lysgaard's 'U-Curve' showed that the cross-cultural adaptation process seemed to follow a U-Curve over time: newcomers usually entered into a 'happy' stage at the very beginning, then they encountered 'crisis' in which one feels lonely, unhappy and less adapted, and finally they moved to a 'better' stage and becoming integrated into the foreign community through self-adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955). U-Curve is the primary and most suitable theoretical model for cross-cultural understanding, the basic point of this understanding is: when a person lives in a host culture and environment, he must go through some difficult times before he can regain the comfort and ordinary feelings while in his own culture (Yuan and Zhao, 2013).

Thus, it can be seen that the process of cross-cultural adaptation is a course of changing one's behavior gradually in a new environment over time. Li (2011) described the cross-cultural adaptation process as 'during the period an immigrant lives in a new environment, he or she experiences various difficulties in the local social context, and it also refers to the process of positive changes of an immigrant to adapt to a new culture. The definitions of 'cultural adaptation' in previous studies make us pay more attention to the performance of Chinese students in the process of their cross-cultural adaptation, which is one of our research objectives.

#### *Aspects of Cross-cultural Adaptation*

There have been several studies relating to cross-cultural adaptation process of Chinese students. Previous studies focus on the aspects of students psychological, social and cultural adaptation. Some of these were found to have impacted Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation: for example, Yang (2009) divided these into *cultural*, *emotional*, and *environmental*. Similarly, recent studies on Chinese students overseas learning indicated there were several influencing aspects related to students cross-cultural adaptation, which include *academic progress*, *cultural adaptation*, *social support*, and *psychological adjustment* (Lilasetthakul and An, 2011; Ma, 2016) suggested Chinese students studying in Thailand need to adjust in five aspects so as to get better cross-cultural adaptation, these aspects include *academic*, *cultural*, *social*,

*environmental, and psychological.*

According to Searle and Ward (1990) and other scholars, the definition of cross-cultural adaptation includes social, cultural, and psychological aspects. This study aims to gain an overall understanding of Chinese student's cross-cultural adaptation, therefore academic and environmental aspects were added. The study tried to explore major cross-cultural changes for Chinese students studying in the upper northern Thai universities, so their cross-cultural adaptation was investigated using the following four fields: *social-cultural field, academic field, environmental field, and psychological field.*

The cross-cultural adaptation involves the above-mentioned four aspects; however, it has different emphasis on the adaptability of Chinese students while they were studying at the upper northern Thai universities. Since Thailand is a specific region, the Chinese students' cross-cultural encounter and performance also presents a new characteristic, that is, more regional and specific. The purpose of finding out the main difficulties encountered by Chinese students in the process of their cross-cultural adaptation is to help them cope with that, furthermore, to provide practical suggestions for both Chinese students and their host Thai universities. These are what we want to study as well.

### **Research Objectives**

- (1) To investigate Chinese students' performance in the four fields of cross-cultural adaptation while they are studying in the upper northern Thai universities.
- (2) To identify the main difficulties which have significant impacts on Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process.
- (3) To provide suggestions to Chinese students in helping them to become better adapted to the host environment and to Thai universities in terms of improving their educational programs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the literature review and three research objectives, and this conceptual framework can be illustrated as follows (see Figure 1):

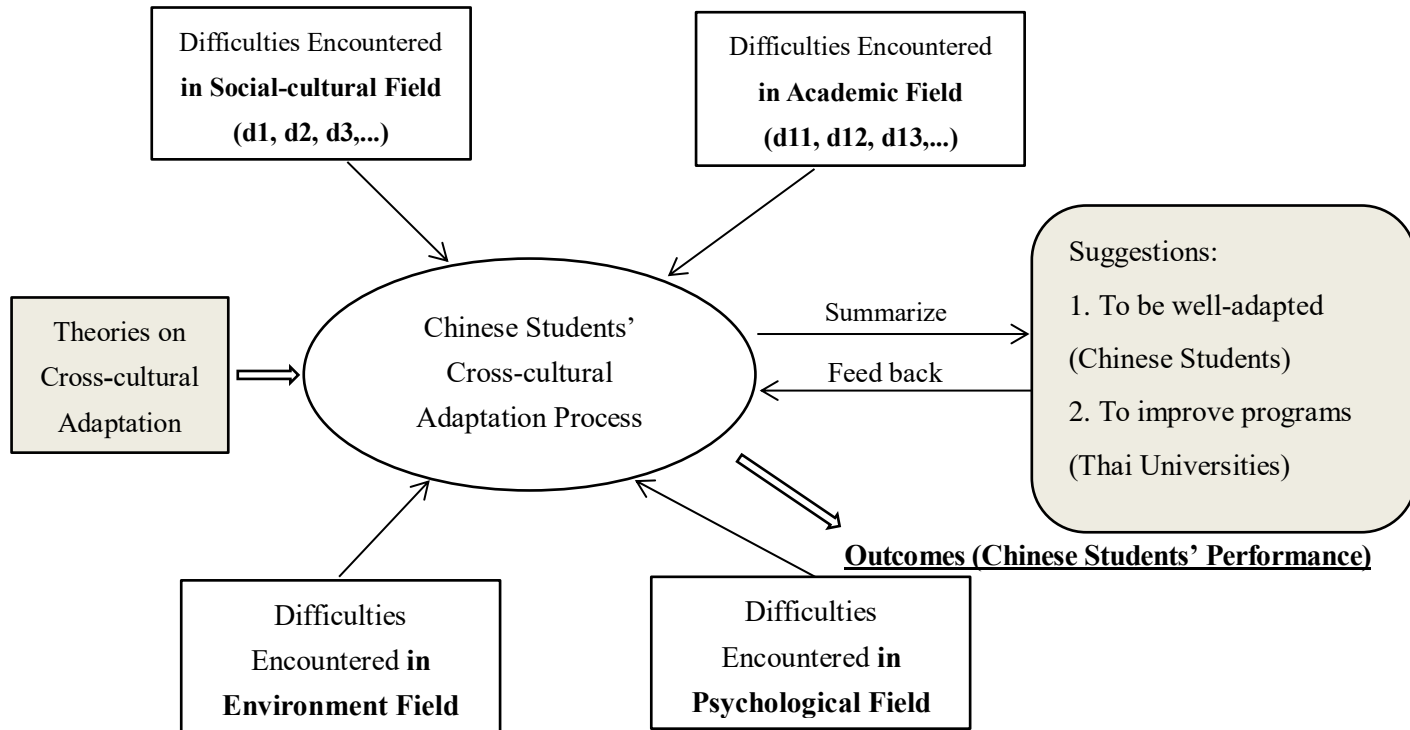


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of the Study



## Research Approach

### *Qualitative Method and Quantitative Method*

According to Myers (1997), qualitative research methods were originally developed in natural science to enable the researcher to study natural and social phenomena, the author further explained that qualitative methods are designed to help researchers understand people and social contexts within which they live. Some examples of qualitative methods include surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, case study, action research, participants' observation etc. Based on the objectives of the study, the researchers of this study purposely chose two of them: i) in-depth interviews, and ii) focus group discussion.

The first qualitative method was designed to establish the Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process while they were studying in the upper northern Thai universities. The primary data for this qualitative method was collected through in-depth interviews. In order to obtain the data, the research went to several research sites to meet the Chinese student respondents face-to-face during the three months period of field survey. The second qualitative method was designed to put forward practical suggestions to help Chinese students and Thai universities. In order to obtain the data, the researchers organized three sessions of focus group discussion at three universities in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lampang respectively.

Quantitative research method focuses on gathering, description and analysis of quantitative information in social sciences or to explain a particular phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> There are many methods of quantitative analysis, most of which involves statistical analysis. Based on the objectives of the study, the researcher of this study purposely chose two of them: i) T-test, and ii) multiple regression analysis.

The above two quantitative methods were applied to answer the following two questions: a) Are there any different performances between different Chinese student groups in their cross-cultural adaptation process? b) What are the main difficulties that Chinese students encountered during their study at the upper northern Thai universities? The primary data were collected through

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<sup>2</sup> <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide>

structured questionnaires, which were filled by different Chinese student groups during the field survey.

### *Data Collection Tools*

#### (1) A Structured Questionnaire Design

The structured questionnaires consist of three parts: the first part is questions on Chinese students social-demographic information, which includes name, sex, age, origin place, programs attended, majors, tuition fees etc; the second part includes 24 questions for evaluating the different performance of the Chinese students in the four fields of cross-cultural adaptation (with 6 questions for each field); the third part includes 44 questions for testing the main cross-cultural adaptation difficulties which Chinese students were facing while studying in Thailand. The answers were calculated in the following ways:

- (a) The answers to the first part of questionnaire was summarized by narrative language, which gives the basic information of Chinese student respondents;
- (b) The answers to the second part of the questionnaire were scored with numerical values. As the Chinese students' evaluation of their cross-cultural performance is positive results in the four fields, the way of arranging the data is by a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 5 (=strongly agree) to 1 (=strongly disagree). In addition, T-test was used as a statistical method to determine the different cross-cultural adaptation between different Chinese student groups;
- (c) The answers to the third part of the questionnaire were scored with numerical values as well. As the Chinese students' evaluation of their cross-cultural difficulties is negative results, therefore the way of arranging the data is by a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (=strongly agree) to 5 (=strongly disagree), the lowest score means less difficulty and the highest score means the most difficulty. In addition, multiple regression was used as a statistical method to determine the main difficulties the Chinese students encountered while they study in the upper northern Thai universities.

#### (2) An In-depth Interview Design

The in-depth interview consists two parts, the first part was designed to show the Chinese students' cross-cultural evaluation in the different time period (Phase I = 0-6 months, Phase II = 6-12 months; Phase III = over 12 months), they were asked to mark these phase as easy period (=3), average period (=2),

and hard period (=3); the second part was designed to show in which fields is cross-cultural adaptation becomes more difficult, the Chinese students were asked to list the most difficulty fields based on their own feelings. The purpose of this design to test Chinese students' performance in different cross-cultural adaptation aspect, which is more related to the first research objective.

### (3) A Focus Group Discussion Design

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) consist of two parts, the first part is the introduction of objectives and information to participants, the second part is FGD itself and keeping record/notes of the discussion. The purpose of FGD is to collect ideas and key information for developing practical suggestions to help Chinese students become better adapted to the host environment and to Thai universities to improve their educational programs. Three FGD were held at Chiang Mai University, Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, and Lampang Rajabhat University during the field survey period, and group of related persons were invited, which includes Chinese student representatives, Thai teachers, Chinese student advisors, school administrators, international student coordinators.

### *Selection of Samples*

The target geographical area of this study is the upper northern region of Thailand, and a total of thirteen universities are established in this area. However only eight universities with medium-term and long-term students (over 3 months, whose life changes can be observed) were selected.<sup>3</sup> The name of target universities was listed as: Maejo University (MJU), Chiang Mai University (CMU), Chiang Mai Rajabhat University (CMRU), Far Eastern University (FEU), Payap University (PYU), Chiang Rai Rajabhat University (CRRU), Mae Fah Luang University (MFU), Lampang Rajabhat University (LPRU).

Based on a primary survey, there were 1034 long-term Chinese students studying in the above-selected eight Thai universities (survey period: Nov 1<sup>st</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> There are no universities established in the provinces Lamphun, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son, and Phayao University, which is only higher education institute in Phayao province, does NOT have long-term Chinese students.

2017 to Jan 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018). By using Taro Yamane (1967)'s formula, the sample size was computed as 289. Considering these students were scattered at eight different universities, *Proportional Stratified Random Sampling* method was applied in selecting samples, thus the sample proportion for each university was approximately 28% (289/1034), and the researcher adjusted it to 30% (n=314) for better handling, the sample size per university was as Table 1 (see below).

The researcher went to the above-mentioned eight upper northern Thai universities and met the Chinese students randomly with the help of Thai administrators/teachers from international student affairs office. Questionnaires were distributed according to 35% of the total number of students in each university, then 30% of valid questionnaires were selected as sample. Since only the long-term students were designed as the target interviewees for in-depth interview process, the researcher re-selected 10% of Chinese students (study period great than 12 months) from the questionnaire samples in each university randomly, therefore a total number of 32 (314x10% ≈32) students interviewees were selected for the In-depth Interview survey procedures, these students not only needed to fill the structured questionnaires, but also be interviewed individually by the researcher.

**Table 1:** Sample Size Per University

Universities/Provinces	Chiang Mai	Chiang Rai	Lampang	Total (P/s)
Rajabhat University (P/s)	CMRU 102/31	CRRU 209/63	LPRU 51/16	362/110
Public University (P/s)	MJU 81/25 CMU 272/82	MFU 212/64		565/171
Private University (P/s)	FEU 19/6 PYU 88/27			107/33
<b>Total (P/s)</b>	562/171	421/127	51/16	1034/314

\* P = population number; s = sample number; Selected Sample Size for all the upper northern Thai universities is 314.

## Examination of Research Tool Quality

### Test of Validity

The developed research tools (questionnaire) were sent to five experts to check for validity and the objectivity of the questions, these five experts independently rated each question of the research on the questionnaire by using 4-point Likert scale (1=irrelevant; 2=weak relevant; 3=relevant; 4=very relevant), then they were analyzed to identify the index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC). The purpose of identifying the index of IOC is testing content validity and internal consistency of 68 questions (part two and part three) forming the questionnaires. In order to obtain IOC value, two types of index to measure IOC shall be computed: the first type involves the content validity of individual items (questions), it is entitled ICVI (Individual Content Validity Index), and the second type involves the context validity of the overall scale (questionnaire). It is entitled SCVI (Scale Content Validity Index).

The Calculation of ICVI, SCVI and Kappa Statistic- $K^\alpha$ <sup>4</sup> and the formula of these terms are listed below:

- (1)  $ICVI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^t (n)}{N \cdot t}$ , and  $SCVI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^t (n)}{N \cdot t}$ ;
- (2)  $K^\alpha = \frac{ICVI - P}{1 - P}$ , and  $P = \left( \frac{N!}{n!(N-n)!} \right) \times 0.5^N$ ;

Where n=number of experts giving a rating of 3 or 4; N=total number of experts;

P = probability of chance agreement; t=number of questions.

Thus, the IOC value of the questionnaire is computed as  $SCVI = 328/340 = 0.965$ , it reveals that the overall scale of the validity of the research tools is good and acceptable. At the same time, please note that final version of questionnaire was designed according to the suggestions of five experts, the researcher used individual question which had Kappa statistic  $K^\alpha$  Value greater than 0.8 (means good to accept).

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<sup>4</sup> SCVI value range from 0 to 1, the higher value, the better content validity; the SCVI value greater than 0.8 was usually accepted in social science research.

*Test of Reliability*

There were two times of reliability testing in the study. The first time is to calculate the Cronbach coefficient for the 68 items in 'pilot study' for 30 samples: before the main study, the structured questionnaires were 'tried out' with 30 Chinese student respondents at Uttaradit Rajabhat University (URU) and then checked for internal consistency. This is regarded as one important component in the sampling procedure, for 'a small-scale' trial will be important before the main study by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) for the pilot study was obtained as 0.950, which support the real field survey in the next step.

The second time reliability testing for the real survey on 314 samples was done afterwards, by using SPSS to calculate Cronbach's Alpha, the researchers obtained a result of alpha coefficient= 0.901, suggesting that all items have high internal consistency.

**Results and Discussions***Chinese Students' Social-demographic Information*

About three quarters of Chinese students studying in the upper northern Thai universities were female, most of the students (91.7%) were between 18 and 22 years of age. The majority of Chinese students came from Yun Nan (77.7%) and Guang Xi (7.6%) province. More than half (62.1%) of these students were studying on bachelor programs, and another one-third (33.8%) of student were in a joint programme between Thai universities and Chinese universities. Regarding the selection of majors of Chinese students, Thai language was the most selected (accounts for 57.6%), followed by Business Administration (8.9%), English Language (8.0%), Software Engineering (5.4%) etc. Although the tuition fee varies among different universities in the upper northern Region of Thailand, most of the Chinese students paid between 50,000 baht and 200,000 baht per year.

*Chinese Students Cross-cultural Adaptation Process**Results of In-depth Interview*

According to the record of in-depth interview, there were obvious

changes in most Chinese student life during their time in the upper northern Thai universities. Most students reported that they became more adapted to their living and learning compared with the very beginning. By counting the most frequent occurrence, we can see this kind of change in the different time period: (a) the number of student ranked 'Average Period' on their life was 24 (accounts for 75%) for the Phase I; (b) the number of student ranked 'Hard Period' on their life was 21 (accounts for 65.6%) for the Phase II; (c) the number of student ranked 'Easy Period' on their life was 20 (accounts for 62.5%) for the Phase III.

Therefore, it indicated that the Chinese student's cross-cultural adaptation process is roughly in a shape of 'U-Curve'. This is a survey from the perspective of some students studying in the upper northern Thai universities; however, a similar situation was reported by other researchers with a group of Chinese students studying in Bangkok: 'About 48% of Chinese students adapted to Thai life in the first few weeks, another 34% of Chinese students gradually adapted to Thai life after two or three months, and 18% of Chinese students needed longer time to adapt to their study and life in Thailand' (Liu et al., 2014). In addition, the results of Chinese student's evaluation of the most difficult fields were ranked as: environmental (12 marked, 37.5%), social-cultural (9 marked, 28.1%), academic (8 marked, 25.0%), and psychological (3 marked, 9.3%).

#### *Results of Structured Questionnaire (part two)*

In this part, the Chinese student cross-cultural performance was measured by a rating scale with 24 items/questions, the rating scale is set by Likert 5 levels, then the researcher calculated the sum of the mean score for each cross-cultural adaptation field (social-cultural, environmental, academic, and psychological). By comparing the sum of mean score of each field, the Chinese student cross-cultural adaptation performance can be reported. The sum of mean scores was classified into 5 interval scales, which were calculated as follows: The interval level  $l = (\text{maximum value} - \text{minimum value})/n = (30-6)/5=4.8$ , thus, the criteria and sum of mean scores are set as five levels:

Level 1: very low level = Score range 6.00-10.80; Level 2: low level = Score range 10.81-15.60; Level 3: moderate level = Score range 15.61-20.40;

Level 4: high level = Score range 20.41-25.20; Level 5: very high level = Score range 25.21-30.00.

The statistical analysis results on the Chinese student cross-cultural adaptation performance was showed on Table 2.

**Table 2:** Sum of Mean Score of Chinese Students Cross-cultural Adaptation Performance

Cross-cultural Fields	The Sum of Mean Scores				Criteria
	Mean	S.D.	Lower Range	Upper Range	
Social-Cultural Adaptation	23.00	3.580	22.61	23.40	high level
Academic Adaptation	22.32	4.148	21.86	22.78	high level
Environmental Adaptation	19.91	3.560	19.52	20.31	moderate level
Psychological Adaptation	22.14	3.832	21.70	22.57	high level

Judging from the sum of mean scores of the Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation performance in Table 2, we can see that they performed relatively well in the four fields of cross-cultural adaptation. However, it showed that the Chinese students scored a moderate level in adapting to the environment but scored a high level in adapting to social and cultural, academic and psychological fields. This result is roughly in line with the evaluation from the 32 Chinese students' interviewees.

In order to understand the different performance in cross-cultural adaptation process between different Chinese student groups, a statistical analysis of the second part of questionnaire was conducted, and independent samples T-test method was used to determine whether these differences were significant or not. The statistical analysis results are showed in Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6.



**Table 3:** Independent Samples T-test for Four Fields of Cross-Cultural Adaptation between Male and Female Chinese Students

T-Test for Equality of Mean						
Parameter	F	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	M.D	S.E.D
Social & Cultural Adaptation	4.59	-2.45	312	0.01*	-0.27	0.11
Academic Adaptation	2.67	-3.24	312	0.00*	-0.37	0.12
Environmental Adaptation	0.01	-2.23	312	0.03*	-0.25	0.10
Psychological Adaptation	2.53	-2.64	312	0.01*	-0.28	0.10

\*Significant at 0.05 level; M.D = Mean Difference, S.E.D = Standard Error Difference

**Table 4:** Independent Samples T-test for Four Fields of Cross-Cultural Adaptation between Yunnan and Non-Yunnan Students

T-Test for Equality of Mean						
Parameter	F	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	M.D	S.E.D
Social & Cultural Adaptation	4.26	1.48	312	0.14	1.69	0.11
Academic Adaptation	0.24	1.50	312	0.13	0.18	0.12
Environmental Adaptation	0.69	0.05	312	0.96	0.05	0.11
Psychological Adaptation	0.07	1.83	312	0.05*	0.20	0.10

\*Significant at 0.05 level; M.D = Mean Difference, S.E.D = Standard Error Difference

**Table 5:** Independent Samples T-test for Four Fields of Cross-Cultural Adaptation Between Thai Major Students and Non-Thai Major Students

T-Test for Equality of Mean						
Parameter	F	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	M.D	S.E.D
Social & Cultural Adaptation	1.02	2.60	312	0.01*	0.25	0.10
Academic Adaptation	0.44	1.26	312	0.21	0.13	0.10
Environmental Adaptation	1.11	2.10	312	0.04*	0.20	0.09
Psychological Adaptation	0.20	0.99	312	0.32	0.09	0.09

\*Significant at 0.05 level; M.D=Mean Difference, S.E.D=Standard Error Difference

**Table 6:** Independent Samples T-test for Four Fields of Cross-Cultural Adaptation between Medium-term Students (months  $\leq$  6) and Long-term Students ( $\geq$  6 months)

T-Test for Equality of Mean						
Parameter	F	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	M.D	S.E.D
Social & Cultural Adaptation	4.35	-1.80	312	0.05*	-1.71	0.10
Academic Adaptation	5.02	-2.51	312	0.01*	-0.26	0.10
Environmental Adaptation	0.32	-2.04	312	0.04*	-0.21	0.09
Psychological Adaptation	1.13	-2.15	312	0.03*	-0.20	0.09

\*Significant at 0.05 level; M.D=Mean Difference, S.E.D=Standard Error Difference

The statistical analysis results showed that there was different cross-cultural adaptation performance between different Chinese student groups. It can be concluded as:

(a) Male students performed better than female students in all four fields of cross-cultural adaptation.

(b) Yunnan students performed better in psychological adaptation field than Non-Yunnan students.

(c) Thai major students performed better in social-cultural adaptation, and environmental adaptation than Non-Thai major students.

(d) Long-term students performed better in all four fields of cross-cultural adaptation than medium-term students. (It is also in line with Chinese students' 'U-curve' evaluation).

### Discussions

The Chinese students had positive changes in the four fields of cross-cultural adaptation while studying at the upper northern Thai universities, the process of their cross-cultural adaptation roughly follow a U shape, this was supported by Lysgarrd's 'U-Curve' theory. In addition, most of Chinese students performed well in social-cultural, academic, and psychological fields,

but they only had moderate adaptation in environment field. The reason is that environmental factors cannot be changed easily and students had to accept it passively. Furthermore, different Chinese students group performed differently in the four fields of cross-cultural adaptation, the possible reasons were discussed as follows:

- Male students performed better than female students in all cross-cultural adaptation fields.

Reason 1: Male students tends to do better than female students in coping with unfamiliar environment such as new accommodation, different form of transportation.

Reason 2: Male students were better in seeking information (offline and online) and making friends in a foreign country than female students, these traits helped them become better adapted in a host environment.

Reason 3: Due to the small proportion of male Chinese students in Thai universities, they felt less competition than female Chinese students, and they were more satisfied about the school life.

Reason 4: Compared to male Chinese students, female Chinese students were more sensitive and showed more psychological problems during their first stay in the host environment.

- Yunnan students performed better than Non-Yunnan students in psychological adaptation field

Reason 1: The south and west part of Yunnan shares similar weather and food or even culture (Dai Minorities) with Thailand, it reduced the strangeness and 'Culture Distance' for Yunnan students, and helped them to be settle down quickly and adapt better than students from other provinces of China.

Reason 2: Yunnan students make up the biggest proportion of Chinese student groups studying in the upper northern Thai universities, as a result, they can help one another while living in a foreign country, the so-called 'Integration Effect' will help them better adapt to the host environment.

- Thai major students performed better in social-cultural, and environmental adaptation than Non-Thai major students.

Reason 1: The advantage of understanding Thai language helped Thai major students have better performance in social-cultural adaptation field.

Reason 2: The language advantage also helped Thai major students adapt well in the host environment, for instance, it is easier for Thai language major students to find a better accommodation or transportation due to their fluency in Thai.

Reason 3: Thai major students were the largest group in the upper northern Thai universities, they can help one another during their time in Thailand, 'Integration Effect' helps in this case as well.

Reason 4: Most Thai major students participated in "3+1" or "2+2" joint educational program between Thai universities and Chinese universities, they had a Chinese teacher in charge of the group and had a clear study plan for one or two years, therefore, they usually knew how to make good use of the limited one or two year period to study at Thai universities, then obtained the required credits upon their return to China.

- Long-term Chinese students performed better in all four fields of cross-cultural adaptation than medium-term Chinese students.

Reason 1: Long-term students had a longer time to reduce 'Culture Shock' and it finally contributed to the improvement of their cross-cultural adaptation.

Reason 2: Long-term students usually have longer time to get accustomed to the host environment and had positive changes during the period of their study, so they will gradually improve their cross-cultural adaptability.

Reason 3: Long-term students were better prepared before going to study in Thailand, this helped them in coping with financial and psychological adaptation problems or other difficulties.

### *The Main Difficulties Chinese Students Encountered*

#### *Results of Structured Questionnaire (part three)*

The Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was employed to find out the main difficulties Chinese students encountered while they were studying in Thailand, and the outputs of MRA model were listed (see Table 7).

**Table 7:** Multiply Regression Analysis Model Summary

MRA Model					
Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Significant Level	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.(p)
Constant	1.367	0.895		1.527	0.128
X <sub>1</sub> : be accustomed to Thai campus life	0.733	0.130	0.242	5.653	0.000***
X <sub>2</sub> : be able to understand courses	0.575	0.119	0.197	4.829	0.000***
X <sub>3</sub> : having good job prospect	0.529	0.114	0.191	4.639	0.000***
X <sub>4</sub> : be adapted to Thai customs and habits	0.430	0.141	0.122	3.050	0.002**
X <sub>5</sub> : getting enough support from Thai universities.	0.474	0.151	0.118	3.152	0.002**
X <sub>6</sub> : be able to use Thai transportation	0.381	0.119	0.121	3.206	0.001**
X <sub>7</sub> : be fitting-in Thai society	0.329	0.092	0.130	3.579	0.000***
X <sub>8</sub> : optimistic on the prospects of studying abroad	0.338	0.154	0.092	2.201	0.028*
X <sub>9</sub> : can find ways to deal with depression	0.273	0.109	0.101	2.519	0.012*
X <sub>10</sub> : be adapted to Thai style of teaching	0.233	0.111	0.082	2.105	0.036*
X <sub>11</sub> : having internship opportunities	0.300	0.149	0.089	2.013	0.045*

$R^2$  Square = 0.620; Adjust  $R^2$ =0.606;  $N=314$

\* Significant level <0.05; \*\* Significant level <0.01, \*\*\*Significant level <0.001.

The results of MRA analysis showed that eleven aspects of problems were significant predictors of Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process. These eleven problems were considered as main difficulties that Chinese students encountered during their period of study in the upper northern Thai universities. Furthermore, the MRA Model with eleven difficulties could interpret 60.6% (Adjusted  $R^2$ ) of the VARIANCE in the overall students' cross-cultural adaptation process.

The MRA model can be written as:

$$Y=1.367+0.242X_1+0.197X_2+0.191X_3+0.122X_4+0.118X_5+0.121X_6+0.130X_7+0.092X_8+0.101X_9+0.082X_{10}+0.089X_{11}$$

Where, Y=Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process,  $X_1$  to  $X_{11}$  are main difficulties Chinese students encountered.

The MRA model indicated the strong relationship between the Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation process and the main difficulties they encountered. Since we marked each question item using the five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), the higher the score students gave, the lower the performance they experienced, i.e. the more difficulty they were facing. In conclusion, the eleven independent variables (difficulties) Chinese students scored had significant negative influences on their cross-cultural adaptation process. The main difficulties Chinese students encountered can be listed as follows:

- (1) Not accustomed to Thai campus life ( $\beta=0.242$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ).
- (2) Having difficulty in understanding courses ( $\beta=0.197$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).
- (3) Not having good job prospects ( $\beta=0.191$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).
- (4) Having difficulty fitting-in with Thai society ( $\beta=0.130$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).
- (5) Not adapted to Thai customs and habits ( $\beta=0.122$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).
- (6) Having difficulty in using Thai transportation ( $\beta=0.121$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).
- (7) Not getting enough support from Thai universities ( $\beta=0.118$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).
- (8) Cannot find ways to deal with depression ( $\beta=0.101$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).
- (9) Not optimistic about studying abroad and the future ( $\beta=0.092$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). (iv: psychological adaptation problem)
- (10) Hard to find internship opportunities ( $\beta=0.089$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).
- (11) Not adapted to Thai style of teaching ( $\beta=0.082$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

#### Discussions

The statistical analysis shows that 11 aspects of difficulties are significantly influential to the Chinese student's cross-cultural adaptation process. According to the coefficient Beta and significant level ( $<0.001$ ), 'Being not accustomed to Thai campus life' ranks first that would affect students' cross-cultural adaptation most, 'having difficulty in understanding courses' ranks the second influential, 'not having good job prospects' ranks the third influential, and 'having difficulty fitting-in with Thai society' follows. These are the top four influences. The possible reasons were discussed as below:

- Not being accustomed to Thai campus of life

Reason 1: The Chinese students did not understand Thai higher education system, did not get accustomed to Thai way of teaching, not familiar with the rules and regulations in campus. Some of them felt a great ‘*culture shock*’ at the beginning of their study life;

Reason 2: Language barrier, alien environment such as hot weather, Thai food, transportation problems brought more difficulties to Chinese students’ adaptation in Thai campus life as well.

Reason 3: Being far away from their hometown, Chinese students usually encountered psychological problems such as loneliness, homesick, depression, anxiety, worries. These prevented them becoming accustomed to campus life.

- Having difficulty in understanding courses

Reason 1: Most of the Chinese students reported to have difficulty in understanding a course due to their poor foreign language level (both English and Thai), the communication problems were the first and foremost difficulty Chinese students encountered while studying abroad.

Reason 2: Some Chinese students had low motivation to study abroad due to different reasons such as too much entertainment or travelling. This also led to poor academic performance during their time at Thai universities.

- Not having good job prospects

Reason 1: The Chinese students graduated with a Thai university’s bachelor degree did not have much competitiveness in the job markets both home and abroad, some companies prefer to recruit students with university degree from western countries such as USA and UK.

Reason 2: The upper northern Thai universities had inadequate international programs for Chinese students to choose, most Chinese undergraduate students were majoring in Thai languages. In addition, the education quality of the upper northern Thai universities is not as good as the famous universities in Bangkok or other regions of Thailand, so they cannot compete with them.

Reason 3: The number of Chinese students studying in Thai universities has

increased rapidly in recent years, and more Chinese graduates are staying in Thailand to find jobs, especially in business and tourism sectors, this has led to an increase in competition for work in job markets.

- Having difficulty fitting-in with Thai society

Reason 1: Cultural problems usually hinder Chinese students to fit-in in Thai society, these problems include unfamiliarity with Thai cultures, customs, social norms, religions. Cultural misunderstanding and poor interpersonal relations had the most adverse influence.

Reason 2: The so-called Ethnic Social Communication (ESC) had negative influences on the Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation. ESC on students means to interact and communicate with Chinese groups only in the foreign country, this helps Chinese students to become settled quickly at the beginning of their overseas life, however it prevents Chinese students' positive changes in the host environment and it hinders the process of their cross-cultural adaptation in the long run. The more Chinese students rely on ESC, the less they became assimilated with Thai society.

## **Suggestions**

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and statistical analysis of the structured questionnaire, the practical suggestions were put forward to Chinese students in helping them to become better adapted to the host environment and to Thai universities in terms of improving their educational programs. Besides, some of the suggestions are useful not only to Chinese students and Thai universities, but also to other researchers and experts.

### *Suggestions to Chinese students*

- In social-cultural adaptation field
  - (a) Try to get accustomed to Thai campus life with help of Chinese classmates who came to Thai university earlier or Thai teachers and friends at the university.
  - (b) To develop interpersonal communication skills, to expand circle of friends while studying in Thailand, take a positive attitude toward



difficulties in the cross-cultural adaptation process, and gradually assimilate Thai society.

- (c) Try to learn more knowledge of Thailand, society and its people, put oneself into the host cultural setting, and finally adapt to Thai customs and habits.
- (d) To seek social supports to improve one's fitting-in with Thai society, this social support usually comes from family members, Thai administrators, Thai teachers and classmates, it also includes social media and online resources.
- In academic adaptation field
  - (a) To choose a major which you are really interested, work hard on foreign languages (Thai and English) to understand courses.
  - (b) Try to participate mid-term/final term internship arranged by the host universities if available; To find in-campus and off-campus internship opportunities with the help of teachers, students or educational agent.
  - (c) Try to adjust one's study habits to Thai style of teaching, make good use of Thai university facilities.
  - (d) To build confidence in academic area and learn to be optimistic about studying abroad and future career.
- In environment adaptation field
  - (a) To prepare for the unfamiliar transportation and traffic conditions of Thailand, and learn to ride a motorcycle on condition of staying safe.
  - (b) To familiarize oneself with Thai university system, regulations, majors and programs, and try one's best to be accustomed to Thai campus life.
- In psychological adaptation field
  - (a) To seek help from professional psychology consultant or doctor while in the situation of depression, upset, anxiety.
  - (b) Try to maintain psychological health and to solve psychological problem with the help of family members, relatives, teachers, and peer students.
  - (c) To make good use of modern communication technology and social media such as WECHAT and LINE to keep contact with family and friends.

*Suggestions to Thai universities*

- In social-cultural adaptation field
  - (a) To provide more supports to Chinese students while they are studying at upper northern Thai universities, these supports includes both academic aspects and social-cultural aspects.
  - (b) To organize orientation sessions for Chinese students at the beginning of each semester, and to familiarize them with campus life, facilities, teaching staffs.
  - (c) To help Chinese students to establish good relationships with Thai teachers and students.
  - (d) To arrange on campus activities to help Chinese to associate with Thai people.
- In academic adaptation field
  - (a) To help Chinese students in their foreign language learning, to provide short training courses in English and Thai language for newly registered students at the beginning of each semester.
  - (b) To adjust its teaching style to meet Chinese student's needs, but try to maintain its international teaching mode and atmosphere.
  - (c) To provide vacation and graduation internship opportunities for Chinese students and offering intern scholarship to them if possible; to give advice on Chinese students' internship practice and career planning in Thailand.
  - (d) To provide help and information on Chinese students job seeking or help them in continuing study at master or Ph.D. level.
- In environment adaptation field
  - (a) To provide on-campus transportation shuttle to all international students.
  - (b) To maintain its nice and safe environment in campus, try to increase investment in its teaching facilities, dormitory facilities etc., and provide scholarships to attract more Chinese students.
- In psychological adaptation field
  - (a) To provide psychological counseling and necessary help to Chinese students when they encounter psychological problems.
  - (b) To designate full-time instructor for each Chinese students' group while they are studying in the upper northern Thai universities.

(c) To encourage Chinese students to study at the upper northern Thai universities by improving teaching quality and overall competitiveness of the university. This not only attracts more Chinese students to come, but also makes them more optimistic about their future.

- Extra Suggestions to Thai universities

Under the framework of the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’(BRI), China are intensifying all-round cultural and educational cooperation with countries along the routes and nodes of BRI, Thai government could take this opportunity to strengthen high education cooperation between Thailand and China. Therefore, extra suggestions to the upper northern Thai universities are listed as follows:

- (a) To offer more international programs with competitive tuition fees, which are suited for Chinese students.
- (b) To improve its international environment and academic related aspects such as international campus, concepts in education, teaching method and style, curriculum design.
- (c) To make full use of its regional advantage and try to attract Chinese students through educational exhibitions, admission promotion fairs or other educational exchange activities.
- (d) To build up partnership with more China universities and establish more joint educational programs with Chinese universities with regional advantage such as Yun Nan and Guang Xi province.

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