

Issue paper on
Higher Education | No. 01 | 2022

Academic and Interpersonal Adaptation Experience of International Students in China

Introduction

In observing and exploring the international students in China; it is found that the Thai international students in China have experienced certain adaptation difficulties and presented with unique characteristics in terms of academic and interpersonal adaptation. The following section will summarise the empirical study of Thai international students from the cooperative program between BeiBu Gulf University (China) and Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (Thailand).

China-ASEAN Cooperation in Higher Education

Along with the accelerating process of regional economic integration between China and ASEAN, the educational cooperation and exchange between China and ASEAN has been expanding, deepening and presents a broad development prospect. This fact is proved in the Statistics by the Ministry of Education in China (2018) that the number of students who choose to study in China's higher education institutions; Southeast Asia (SEA) has taken up four among the top 15 countries (including Thailand (28,608), Indonesia (15,050), Vietnam (11,299), and Malaysia (9479)).

As one of the countries with the largest number of ASEAN students coming to China, it is both a practical need and a long-term development demand to explore the current challenges of Thai students' adaptation in China and assist them in better intercultural study and life.

Academic Adaptation Challenges of Thai International Students

Language learning: The learning difficulties of Thai students with intermediate and advanced Chinese language proficiency mainly focus on language skills, such as writing. Whereas for those students in the elementary level the challenges are in the mastery of language elements, such as phonetic intonation, vocabulary

and speaking. Since Thai language and script, compared with Chinese, belong to different language systems, the problems encountered by Thai students learning Chinese are also due to the differences between pictographic and phonetic script. In addition, at the primary level, Thai students' phonetics learning are seriously disturbed by their mother tongue, which makes them prone to language fossilization in such aspects as "fractional accent, apical accent and lingual accent".

Classroom interaction: Exposing to a new cultural environment in China, Thai students express that they are too stressed and overburdened with academic tasks due to the teacher's "indoctrination" teaching method. In addition, in terms of classroom interaction and communication patterns between teachers and students, Thai students feels the requirement to speak actively in class quite challenging for them.

Teaching and assessment: Thai international students stress that the class attendance system is too harsh as many students complain teachers will record one absence and deduct the usual grade if they are late three times. In addition, they will be directly barred from sitting for examination due to their class absence of more than three times which creates dissatisfaction among Thai international students.

Interpersonal Communication Adaptation Difficulties of Thai International Students

Single communication circle: The interpersonal communication circles of Thai students are different for each individual, but the overall communication circles are basically composed of relationships with their conational, other international students, Chinese students and teachers. Among them, the interactions with Chinese students and teachers

are the weakest, while the interactions with their conational students are the closest.

Low frequency of interaction: The interviewed Thai students said that the Chinese students they come into contact are mainly encountered through study together such as taking the same course, but they basically have no interaction after the course ends. Therefore, it is difficult for them to maintain close and lasting interpersonal relationships with Chinese students, which tends to be a kind of relationship with weak bond and low frequency of interaction.

Limited communication channels: The interaction between Thai and Chinese students is mainly through acquaintances or association organizations, which means that international students rely more on acquaintances for communication or trust formal organization activities, and there are few other channels and mechanisms to motivate international students to actively interact with Chinese students.

Cultural Difference and Stereotyped Perception

Thai students have certain differences in cultural background, language and values with Chinese people, which are reflected in the different customs and habits and communication behavior codes between them. Therefore, in the process of encoding and decoding information in interpersonal communication, the two sides are prone to some understanding barriers, thus creating a gap in understanding. For example, the different definition of “friend” between the two sides may cause difficulties and obstacles in communication.

When international students are in a unfamiliar cultural environment, they cannot cross the line of sight of their own culture and are used to perceive the phenomena in host country’s cultures with their own cultural ideas, concepts and opinions. Therefore, when individuals conduct intercultural interpersonal communication based on stereotypes, if they hold positive cognitive impressions and evaluations, it will facilitate the communication between the two sides, but on the contrary, it will become a hindrance.

New Social Media’s Isolation

The hyperspace and high interactivity of social media including Facebook, LINE, Twitter, and Instagram meet the needs of international

students to communicate with their families and friends. This situation is able to solve the necessary psychological and emotional communication for them, but also cause the problem of over-dependence with their past relationships in their interpersonal adaptation.

In a nutshell, the new social media is a double-edged sword that helps Thai students to alleviate their loneliness and anxiety in the initial stage of intercultural adaptation; but at the same time, it also isolates Thai students who rely on virtual social interaction from the real interpersonal communication. Lack of real communication and interaction; is the major obstacle to the intercultural interpersonal adaptation of Thai international students in China.

References

Note: the findings in this article are from the following two published papers.

- Li Ying. (2018). Research on Intercultural Interpersonal Adaptation and Communication Barrier Attribution of ASEAN International Students in China. *Survey of Education*, 21, 1-4.
- Li Ying. (2019). An Study on Intercultural Academic Adaptation of ASEAN International Students in China—Based on the Survey of ASEAN International Students in Guangxi Local Universities. *Survey of Education*, 8(27), 20-22.

Prepared by:
Li Ying
IPPTN Postgraduate Student

