

# Exploring Acculturation Strategies and Intercultural Communication Competence of Chinese International Students at a Private University in Thailand

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore freshman Chinese international students' acculturation strategies (AS) and intercultural communication competence (ICC) using explanatory sequential mixed method. A total of 145 Chinese undergraduates studying in six international programs at a private university self-assessed their AS and ICC through an online questionnaire; six of them voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by SPSSPRO, frequency and percentage for the participants' personal information, and mean and standard deviation for their AS and ICC. Content analysis was used to analyze data from the interviews.

The quantitative results revealed their predominant choice of integration strategy ( $\bar{X}=3.53$ ) so as to maintain their own culture and seek involvement in Thai society and their highest level of ICC ( $\bar{X}=4.29$ ). Their highly self-perceived ICC driven by learning about English-speaking cultures previously during their study of English in middle and high schools (93.10%) and liking to learn about those English-speaking cultures (71.72%), acquiring intermediate and advanced English levels (84.82%), staying in the host country at least a year (77.94%), watching English movies (76.55%), reading cultural books (71.71%), and acquiring intermediate and advanced Thai levels (69.66%) were seen to influence their appropriate choice of AS. The qualitative outcomes supplemented reasons behind this choice in that they obviously recognized the integrative benefits which would make their life easier during their study in Thailand, help them communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds better and improve their academic performance. The findings implied that the Chinese students could undergo the process of acculturation better or adjust themselves to the Thai social environment more easily because they had positive attitudes towards other cultures, an understanding of their own culture and of others, skills in interacting with foreigners and dealing with cultural differences, and awareness of cultural values of Chinese culture and of others.

**Keywords:** acculturation, acculturation strategies, intercultural communication competence, Chinese international students

## Introduction

The higher education internationalization in Thailand has attracted students from other countries, especially China, to come to study in different programs that adopt English as a medium of instruction. The number of Chinese students in Thailand appeared to increase after the Covid 19 epidemic (China and Globalization Think Tank, 2022) as it had a negative impact on the income of many Chinese families, and Thailand with relatively low tuition fees became the top choice for Chinese students (Ding, 2021). The influx of Chinese students in Thailand bring the issues about cultural and language differences which caught more researchers' attention, for they are associated with acculturation, or the process one needs to go through to adapt oneself to a new social and cultural environment (Ching et al., 2017). For example, Buddhism has a strong influence on Thais' beliefs and values as the national religion; Chinese people's ways of thinking are influenced by Confucius philosophy (Zhang, 2019). Their official language is also different. Thailand uses Thai while China uses Chinese Mandarin. The only obvious similarity is use of English as a foreign language (EFL), and both Thai and Chinese students tend to have difficulty to improve their English because they have less chance to use it in daily life.

When Chinese students come to study in Thailand as international students, many of them do not know Thai and must use English for intercultural communication (IC) with the locals and people from different countries in these three concentric circles that Kachru (1985) conceptualized: the Inner Circle (countries that use English as a native language); the Outer Circle (countries that use English as a second language); and the Expanding Circle (countries that use English as a foreign language). Past studies showed their encounter of challenges or difficulties in adapting themselves, related to daily life, studies, communication (Ma, 2016), interpersonal communication, use of English, exotic customs, practical works, social values (Liu et al., 2014), unfamiliarity with campus life, difficulty in understanding English lectures, lack of job opportunities, and difficulty in integrating into Thai society (Sun et al., 2020), university learning culture, university administrative culture, interpersonal culture, social culture, daily habits, and eating habits and nonverbal communication (Huang, 2021). The experiences in difficulties could affect their physical and psychological well-being, as well as academic performance (Berry, 2005; Berry et al., 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). It can be said that Chinese international students in Thailand must go through the process of acculturation.

In order to go through the acculturation process more easily, Chinese international students need to use the right acculturation strategies (AS). Berry (1997) classifies them into assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. Integration is the most effective

strategy while marginalization is the most ineffective (Berry et al., 2006). The AS employed by the students can strengthen their intercultural communication competence or ICC (Mahmud & Foong, 2019), which are abilities to understand and respect the excellent cultural traditions of other countries, communicate and interact with people who have different cultural backgrounds, and adapt to the needs of China's social, economic, technological development, and international exchanges (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2013). This definition guided by the Chinese government requiring all Chinese English teachers from middle and high schools to teach their students not only the language but also its culture is in line with Byram's (1997) ICC model, which consists of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. If they possess those abilities or are competent in intercultural communication, they may undergo the process of acculturation better or adjust themselves in a new environment more easily.

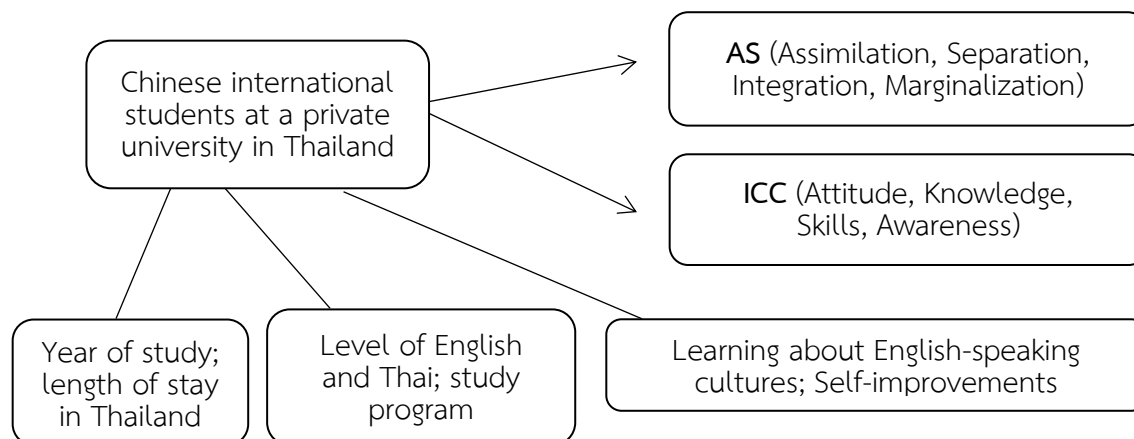
With the influx of Chinese students in Thailand and lack of research into AS and ICC in a Thai context, it was worth exploring AS that Chinese international students used and the extent to which they perceived their ICC. A self-assessment questionnaire based on Berry's (1997) AS model and Byram's (1997) ICC model were used to investigate freshman Chinese students studying in international undergraduate programs at a private university in Thailand. The former model was suitable to study international students' acculturation experiences, and it has been widely applied in different contexts (Xie, 2010; Yoon et al., 2011). The latter was one of the influential models in line with the ICC definition guided by the Chinese government, and it was relevant to the foreign language learning (Liu & Hu, 2013; Yan & Tananuraksakul, 2023). The freshman students were chosen as the target group was because new comers tended to face challenges or difficulties in the process of acculturation during their first 10-12 months (Ruan, 2017), so their experiences in adjusting themselves to the new cultural environment remained fresh in their minds.

## Research Objectives

To investigate the following:

- 1) Acculturation strategies Chinese international students used.
- 2) The extent to which Chinese international students perceived their intercultural communication competence.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



## Research Methodology

In this research, explanatory sequential mixed method was used to explore Chinese international students' AS and ICC, which meant that a questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews were adopted. This method was suitable for this study because the primary data collected from the questionnaire gave closed answers while the data collected from interviews were open answers.

### 1. Population and Samples

The population was 145 (N=145) freshman Chinese undergraduate students studying in six international programs at a private university in Thailand in their second semester of 2022 academic year, and the number was fewer than 200. Census sampling technique was applied to include the entire population (Lodico et al., 2010), so the sample size was also those 145 students (n=145). For the qualitative research, convenience sampling technique was selected because it was popular, low-cost and simple (Stratton, 2021). Six (n=6) students from different programs volunteered to participate in the semi-structured interview. This sample size aligns with Guest et al. (2006), and there is suggestion that 6-12 participants are appropriate for the qualitative research.

### 2. Research Instruments, Validation and Reliability

An online questionnaire and questions for semi-structured interview were main research instruments. The questionnaire had three parts: personal information (i.e., gender, age, year of study, study program, length of time in Thailand, English level, Thai level, learning about English-speaking cultures, reading cultural books, watching English movies, and overseas experiences before coming to Thailand); AS; and ICC. The second and third parts used Five-Likert scales (5 = "Strongly Agree", 4 = "Agree", 3 = "Neutral", 2 = "Disagree", and 1 = "Strongly Disagree"). Part 2 had 28 items taken from Yu and Wang's (2011) questionnaire with alteration; Items 1-7, 8-14, 15-21, and 22-28 corresponded to Berry's (1997) four AS. Part 3 had 37 items adopted from Yan and Tananuraksakul's (2023)

questionnaire; Items 1-10, 11-22, 23-33 and 34-37 covered Byram's (1997) ICC components. The questionnaire was valid, for it had evaluation result higher than 0.7. Then it was pilot tested by 30 Chinese international students from a different university, and the result analyzed by Cronbach's coefficient showed reliability at 0.887.

Questions for semi-structured interviews were constructed based on the results of the analysis of questionnaire. Sample questions included: 'how you normally maintain your own culture and integrate into Thai culture', 'how you normally learn about other cultures', 'how you normally improve your communication skills with people from different cultural backgrounds'.

### 3. Data Collection

The online questionnaire was shared in the WeChat group of 145 freshman Chinese international students on May 28, 2023, and by June 1, 2023, all of them completed the questionnaire. Most of them were 18 and 19 years old (85.52%), were in Thailand for over one year (77.94%), had intermediate and advanced English levels (84.82%), intermediate and advanced Thai levels (69.66%), learned about English-speaking cultures during their study of English in middle school and high schools (93.10%). More than half of them read cultural books (71.72%) and watched English movie (76.55%); some of them had overseas experiences (8.28%).

The students were also invited to take part in semi-structured interviews and by June 5, 2023, six students (three females and three males) voluntarily participated in the interviews. Their age varied from 17 to 18 to 19 to 20 and to 21 and from six different international programs. Each participant was interviewed about 15 minutes in Chinese and the content of interview was recorded. It was then transcribed and sent to them to check the accuracy.

### 4. Data Analysis

Through using Scientific Platform Serving for Statistics Professional (SPSSP), frequency and percentage were used to analyze the participants' personal information while mean and standard deviation for their AS and ICC, which were interpreted based on the 5-rating scales (4.21-5.00 = very high/very positive, 3.41-4.20 = high/positive, 2.61-3.40 = neutral, 1.81-2.60 = low/negative, 1.00-1.80 = very low/very negative).

Content analysis method was used to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews. Firstly, the data in Chinese were organized and edited into text documents, and then translated into English. After that, the data were encoded and analyzed based on the predominant acculturation strategy and components of ICC (attitude, knowledge, skills and awareness) as five keywords. Finally, similar content about these keywords were put into the same categories, which were used to explain the quantitative results.

## Research Results

### 1. Acculturation Strategies Used by Chinese International Students

Table 1 revealed the overall mean scores of each acculturation strategy. Integration strategy had the highest mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =3.53) which meant it was the predominant strategy, followed by separation strategy ( $\bar{X}$ =2.46), assimilation ( $\bar{X}$ =2.02) and marginalization ( $\bar{X}$ =1.85).

**Table 1 Acculturation strategies used by Chinese international students**

No.	Acculturation strategies	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	Assimilation strategy	2.02	0.73	Low
2.	Separation strategy	2.65	0.67	Neutral
3.	<b>Integration strategy</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>High</b>
4.	Marginalization strategy	1.85	0.77	Low

#### 1.1 Assimilation Strategy

Table 2 showed the overall mean of assimilation strategy at a low level ( $\bar{X}$ =2.02), which meant the participants disagreed that they had little interest in their own cultural maintenance with a preference to interact with Thai culture. However, they strongly disagreed that they typically spoke Thai when they were in their apartment / house ( $\bar{X}$ =1.77) and would prefer to write poetry in Thai if they were asked to do so ( $\bar{X}$ =1.80).

**Table 2 Assimilation Strategy**

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I behave like a Thai in many ways.	2.12	0.66	Low
2.	<b>When I am in my apartment/house, I typically speak Thai.</b>	<b>1.77</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>Very low</b>
3.	I get along better with Thais than Chinese.	2.14	0.71	Low
4.	<b>If I were asked to write poetry, I would prefer to write it in Thai.</b>	<b>1.80</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>Very low</b>
5.	I feel that Thais understand me better than Chinese do.	2.10	0.69	Low
6.	I feel more relaxed when I am with a Thai than when I am with a Chinese.	2.10	0.76	Low
7.	I feel more comfortable socializing with Thais than I do with Chinese.	2.15	0.67	Low
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>2.02</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>Low</b>

### 1.2 Separation Strategy

Table 3 revealed the overall mean of separation strategy at a neutral level ( $\bar{X}=2.65$ ), meaning the participants neutrally agreed that they maintained their own culture but avoided involvement with people from different cultures. However, they disagreed that Chinese should not date non-Chinese ( $\bar{X}=2.27$ ).

**Table 3 Separation Strategy**

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	Chinese should not date non-Chinese.	2.27	0.94	Low
2.	I would prefer to go out on a date with a Chinese than with a Thai	2.78	0.53	Neutral
3.	Most of my friends are Chinese.	2.70	0.64	Neutral
4.	I prefer going to social gatherings where most of the people are Chinese.	2.69	0.69	Neutral
5.	I feel that Thais don't treat me the same as they socialize with other Thais.	2.67	0.66	Neutral
6.	Most of the music I listen to is Chinese music.	2.66	0.63	Neutral
7.	My closest friends are Chinese.	2.76	0.63	Neutral
	Overall mean	2.65	0.67	Neutral

### 1.3 Integration Strategy

Based on Table 4, the overall mean of integration strategy was at a high level ( $\bar{X}=3.53$ ), meaning the participants agreed that they maintained their own culture and sought to involve with in Thai society. Most items showed high mean scores except Item 7 with a neutral mean score ( $\bar{X}=3.27$ ), which stated that they thought in Thai as they did in Chinese.

In line with all six interviewees, they have used integration strategy to maintain their own culture and seek to involve in Thai society as they believed that maintaining their own culture and integrating into Thai culture at the same time were “beneficial for their study abroad life”. Moreover, they valued integration strategy by means of speaking Chinese and English in different situations, and they were willing to communicate in Thai with local people and learn more about their own culture and Thai culture.

**Table 4 Integration Strategy**

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I like taking part in both Chinese and non-Chinese social activities.	3.60	0.70	High
2.	I feel that both Chinese and Thais value me.	3.61	0.69	High
3.	I feel very comfortable around both Thais and	3.55	0.75	High

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	Chinese.			
4.	I have both Thais and Chinese close friends.	3.54	0.69	High
5.	I prefer to have both Chinese and non- Chinese friends.	3.57	0.70	High
6.	I would be just as willing to marry a Thai as a Chinese.	3.55	0.70	High
7.	<b>I think as well in Thai as I do in Chinese.</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>High</b>

### 1.4 Marginalization Strategy

Table 5 showed the overall mean of marginalization strategy at a low level, meaning the participants disagreed that they avoided maintaining their own culture and interacting with people from different cultures. In particular, they disagreed that they found it hard to trust both Thais and Chinese sometimes ( $\bar{X}=1.81$ ) and to make friends ( $\bar{X}=1.83$ ) and felt that neither Thais nor Chinese liked them ( $\bar{X}=1.83$ ).

**Table 5 Marginalization Strategy**

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I find that both Chinese and Thais often have difficulty understanding me.	1.91	0.71	Low
2.	Sometimes I feel that Chinese and Thais do not accept me.	1.86	0.81	Low
3.	<b>Sometimes I find it hard to trust both Thais and Chinese.</b>	<b>1.81</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>Low</b>
4.	<b>I sometimes find it hard to make friends.</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>Low</b>
5.	I sometimes find it hard to communicate with people.	1.88	0.75	Low
6.	<b>I sometimes feel that neither Thais nor Chinese like me.</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>Low</b>
7.	Generally, I find it difficult to socialize with anybody, Chinese or Thai.	1.85	0.81	Low
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>Low</b>

### 2. Chinese International Students' Intercultural Communication Competence

As seen in Table 6, the participants perceived themselves to be competent in IC at a very high level ( $\bar{X}=4.29$ ). Their perceptions of attitudes ( $\bar{X}=4.38$ ), awareness ( $\bar{X}=4.42$ ) and skills ( $\bar{X}=4.26$ ) were at a very high level; the knowledge was at a high level.



Table 6 Chinese International Students' Intercultural Communication Competence

No.	ICC Elements	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	Attitudes	4.38	0.70	Very positive
2.	Knowledge	4.10	0.77	High
3.	Skills	4.26	0.77	Very high
4.	Awareness	4.42	0.75	Very high
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>Very high</b>

### 2.1 Attitude

The overall mean of attitudes in Table 7 was very positive ( $\bar{X}=4.38$ ), which meant they strongly agreed that they were curious and open to the cultures of English-speaking countries from the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle and were willing to look positively at their own and others' cultures. Most of the items were very positive except Items 4 and 7, meaning they agreed that they were open-minded to anyone speaking English ( $\bar{X}=4.13$ ) and always tried to understand the practices, behaviors, and values of people from other cultures ( $\bar{X}=4.11$ ). In line with all the six interviewees, they had positive attitudes toward learning different cultures as active learners, similarly mentioning that they “take the initiative to learn about other countries’ cultures”.

Table 7 Attitude

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I value cultural diversity.	4.48	0.71	Very Positive
2.	I understand the value of cultural diversity.	4.46	0.67	Very positive
3.	I respect people whose culture differs from mine.	4.41	0.65	Very positive
4.	<b>I am open-minded to anyone who speaks English.</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>Positive</b>
5.	I am curious about the English-speaking peoples' cultures.	4.46	0.73	Very positive
6.	I am willing to learn from people whose cultural orientations differ from me.	4.45	0.68	Very positive
7.	<b>I always try to understand the practices, behaviors, and values of people from other cultures.</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>Positive</b>
8.	I am willing to empathize with people whose cultural backgrounds differ from me.	4.50	0.72	Very positive
9.	I try to understand and accept the world view of people who speak English.	4.46	0.74	Very Positive
10.	I am flexible towards other cultures.	4.39	0.70	Very positive

	Overall mean	4.38	0.70	Very positive
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## 2.2 Knowledge

The overall mean of knowledge in Table 8 was high ( $\bar{X}$ =4.10), which meant the participants agreed that they understood their own culture and the English-speaking peoples' cultures including history, geography, customs, traditional habits, lifestyles, behavioral norms, cultural values, literature and arts. Most of the items were high except Items 1 and 5 which were very high, meaning they strongly agreed they were well equipped with cultural patterns of their own Chinese culture ( $\bar{X}$ =4.35) and knew about the similarities and differences between the English-speaking peoples' cultures and Chinese culture ( $\bar{X}$ =4.24). In line with all six interviewees, they had various ways to learn about different cultural knowledge, namely watching movies, documentaries or cultural related videos, reading cultural books and communicating with local friends or non-Chinese classmates, and listening to cultural stories through mobile applications.

Table 8 Knowledge

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I am well equipped with cultural patterns of my own culture, which is Chinese.	4.35	0.65	Very high
2.	I am well equipped with cultural patterns in countries where English is a native language (e.g. American, British, Australia, New Zealand and Canada).	4.08	0.78	High
3.	I am well equipped with cultural patterns in countries where English is a second language (e.g. Singaporean, Filipino, Nigerian and Malaysian).	3.91	0.90	High
4.	I am well equipped with cultural patterns in countries where English is a foreign language (e.g. Thai, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese).	4.03	0.76	High
5.	I know about the similarities and differences between the English-speaking peoples' cultures and Chinese culture.	4.24	0.70	Very high
6.	I know how people from different countries behave in various circumstances to have a better communication with them.	4.14	0.82	High
7.	I know the cultures of peoples who speak English as a native language (e.g. American, British, Australia, New Zealand and Canada).	4.10	0.79	High
8.	I know the cultures of peoples who speak English as a	3.90	0.85	High

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	second language (e.g. Singaporean, Filipino, Nigerian and Malaysian)			
9.	I know the cultures of peoples who speak English as a foreign language (e.g. Thai, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese).	4.03	0.75	High
10.	I can interpret the cultural information.	4.14	0.74	High
11.	I can analyze the cultural information.	4.12	0.76	High
12.	I can relate the cultural information.	4.13	0.77	High
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>4.10</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>High</b>

### 2.3 Skills

The overall mean of skills in Table 9 was very high ( $\bar{X}=4.26$ ), which meant they strongly agreed that they had ability to use their cultural knowledge to interpret different cultural phenomena and to discover new cultural knowledge when socially interacting with the English-speaking peoples. The mean scores for most items were similar, however, Items 10, 8 and 4 each were the highest, which meant they strongly agreed that they sought out opportunities to cooperate with the English-speaking peoples ( $\bar{X}=4.43$ ), and explored the English-speaking peoples' cultures outside their communities ( $\bar{X}=4.41$ ), and they could get information about the cultures of English-speaking peoples from their own learning, such as attending ICC training, reading cultural books, and studying abroad ( $\bar{X}=4.34$ ). Consistent with all the six interviewees, they were aware of cultural differences when being or socializing with foreigners as they similarly said that they "often encountered cultural differences" and "dealt with those cultural differences".

Table 9 Skills

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I can communicate effectively with the English-speaking peoples.	4.18	0.75	High
2.	I can communicate in socially appropriate ways with the English-speaking peoples.	4.17	0.77	High
3.	I can communicate in culturally appropriate ways with the English-speaking peoples.	4.18	0.81	High
4.	<b>I can get information about the cultures of English-speaking peoples from my own learning (such as attending ICC training, reading cultural books, and studying abroad).</b>	<b>4.34</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>Very high</b>
5.	I can communicate well verbally with the English-speaking peoples	4.17	0.79	High

6.	I can detect some misunderstandings happening during the on-going interactions between Chinese and the English-speaking peoples.	4.28	0.76	Very high
7.	I can contrast communicative behaviors of Chinese and the English-speaking peoples in social settings (e.g. family, school, office).	4.26	0.77	Very high
8.	<b>I seek opportunities to explore the English-speaking peoples' cultures outside my communities.</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>Very high</b>
9.	I can learn new cultural knowledge of English-speaking peoples when I interact with them in English.	4.29	0.71	Very high
10.	<b>I seek out opportunities to cooperate with the English-speaking peoples.</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>Very high</b>
11.	I have a cultural-specific knowledge of the English-speaking peoples to socially interact with them.	4.15	0.86	high
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>4.26</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>Very high</b>

#### 2.4 Awareness

The overall mean of awareness in Table 10 was very high ( $\bar{X}=4.42$ ), which meant the participants strongly agreed that they had ability to value cultures of their own and of the English-speaking peoples'. All items were very high, but the highest level was Item 4, which meant that they strongly agreed they were well aware of the culture of the English speaking people ( $\bar{X}=4.46$ ). The six interviewees also similarly shared that they "valued Chinese culture and valued the culture of other countries". Three of them valued the traditional festival culture of Chinese as it represented a part of traditional Chinese cultural customs and it was very important for Chinese culture.

Table 10 Awareness

No.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1.	I am well aware of my own culture.	4.43	0.73	Very high
2.	I am aware of my own cultural values.	4.38	0.78	Very high
3.	I am aware of the existence of cultural differences	4.42	0.68	Very high
4.	<b>I am aware of the English-speaking peoples' cultures.</b>	<b>4.46</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>Very high</b>
	<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>4.42</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>Very high</b>

In conclusion, the participants predominantly used integration strategy to maintain their own culture and seek involvement with Thai society. Moreover, they perceived that they had a very high level of ICC with positive attitudes towards other cultures, cultural knowledge of their own and of others, skills in interacting with foreigners and dealing with cultural differences, and awareness of cultural values of Chinese culture and of others.

## Discussion

The Chinese international students' self-assessed AS and ICC were discussed based on the research results as follows:

### 1. Acculturation strategies the Chinese students used

The quantitative findings indicated that the 145 freshman Chinese international students used integration ( $\bar{X}=3.53$ ) as a predominant strategy during their first year of study journey to maintain their own culture and seek involvement in Thai society (Berry, 1997) as they felt that both Chinese and Thais valued them, liked taking part in both Chinese and non-Chinese social activities, had both Thai and Chinese close friends, preferred to have both Chinese and non-Chinese friends, felt very comfortable around both Thais and Chinese and were willing to marry a Thai as a Chinese. These findings suggested that the Chinese international students could go through the process of acculturation easier (Ching et al., 2017) and more likely to adapt to the new cultural environment (Lian & Tsang, 2014), as integration strategy could have a positive impact on the acculturation process (Berry, 1997). These quantitative results were parallel with studies in Belgium (Cao et al., 2017) and in America (Xing et al., 2020) in that Chinese international students preferred to use integration strategy for better adaptation. However, the findings differed from another research conducted in America (Lai et al., 2022) which indicated Chinese international students' preference to use separation strategy in order to achieve the sense of happiness and satisfaction (psychological adaptation).

The qualitative findings from all the six interviewees further supported those quantitative outcomes because they were aware of the integrative benefits saying that maintaining their Chinese culture and at the same time integrating into Thai culture could "make life easier in Thailand, help communicate with foreigners better and improve academic performance and study". These findings were similar to the research of Cao et al. (2017) in that Chinese international students in Belgium used integration strategy to improve their English proficiency, local language proficiency and relationship with their classmates, teachers, and other people they socialized.

In order to integrate into the Thai culture, the interviewees said they were "willing to communicate in Thai with their Thai classmates, teachers and other local people and to learn about cultures of their own and of Thai more through watching movies, reading cultural books, interacting with Chinese and Thai friends and visiting cultural attractions".

These findings were in line with not only the study of Xing et al. (2020) that Chinese international students in America used integration strategy to acquaint themselves with the host culture but also the personal information the 145 participants responded to the personal information about their length of stay in Thailand for over one year (77.94%), their intermediate and advanced English levels (84.82%) and their intermediate and advanced Thai levels (69.66%).

## 2. Intercultural Communication Competence the Chinese students perceived

The overall quantitative findings indicated that to a very high extent ( $\bar{X}=4.29$ ), the 145 freshmen Chinese international students perceived that they had the ability to understand and respect the excellent cultural traditions of other countries, communicating and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, and adapting to the needs of China's social, economic, technological development, and international exchanges defined by Chinese Ministry of Education (2013) and parallel with the assumption that Chinese students possessed ICC required by the Chinese government. In particular, they thought that they obtained very positive attitudes towards other cultures ( $\bar{X}=4.38$ ), that they were very well aware of the value of Chinese culture and other cultures ( $\bar{X}=4.42$ ), and that their skills in interacting with foreigners and dealing with cultural differences were very high ( $\bar{X}=4.26$ ). These findings were supported by most of 145 freshman Chinese international students' personal information in the survey that they learned about English-speaking cultures during their study of English in middle school and high school (93.10%), and most of them (71.72%) enjoyed learning about those cultures. More than half of the students read cultural books (71.71%) and watched English movie (76.55%). However, the students did not see their cultural knowledge of their own culture and of others ( $\bar{X}=4.10$ ) as high as their attitudes toward other cultures, awareness of the value of different cultures and skills in interacting with foreigners and dealing with cultural differences, perhaps because most of them (91.72%) did not have overseas experiences before coming to Thailand and the ones with overseas experiences (8.28%) spent their time in other countries before coming to Thailand for a short period of time ranging from 3 days to 30 days.

The qualitative findings from all the six interviewees also showed their positive attitude toward learning different cultures (including Thai, Japanese, Russian, Korean, French, British, Canadian and American) as active learners; they had various ways to learn about cultural knowledge (i.e. reading cultural books, watching movies, using mobile applications to listen to cultural stories) and were aware of some customs and traditional festivals of other cultures; they valued both Chinese culture and the other cultures. In addition, they were aware of cultural differences and how to deal with the differences when interacting with foreigners and usually improved their communication skills with foreigners. These results were parallel with Cheng (2018) indicating that understanding cultural differences and the cultural background of Thailand, mastering the language of Thailand, changing oneself

actively and adjusting to a new culture helped Chinese students in Thailand improve their ICC.

The above discussion about AS and ICC of the Chinese students can imply the relationship between these two concepts since their overall level of ICC was very high with very positive attitudes toward other cultures, and they chose integration strategy which was the right choice to help them adjust themselves to the Thai culture more easily. This implication is parallel with Brislin (1992) that students' high level of ICC can guide or direct them to choose the right choice of acculturation strategy and undergo the process of acculturation better or adjust themselves in a new environment more easily.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the AS used by the freshman Chinese students studying in six international undergraduate programs at a private university and their self-assessed ICC using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The quantitative results collected from 145 Chinese students showed that they predominantly used integration strategy. The qualitative outcomes supplemented reasons behind their predominant choice of integration as they obviously recognized this strategy which would make their life easier during their study in Thailand, help them communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds better and improve their academic performance. They perceived themselves to be competent in intercultural communication at a very high level, implying that they had positive attitudes towards other cultures, cultural knowledge or an understanding of their own culture and of others, skills in interacting with foreigners and dealing with cultural differences, and awareness of cultural values of Chinese culture and of others. Their highly self-perceived ICC driven by learning about English-speaking cultures previously during their study of English in middle and high school, liking to learn about those cultures, watching English movies, reading cultural books, being in the host country at least a year, and acquiring intermediate and advanced English and Thai levels were seen to influence their appropriate choice of acculturation strategy. It could also imply that the Chinese students could undergo the process of acculturation better or adjust themselves to the Thai social environment more easily.

### Recommendations

The same study about AS and ICC conducted with a larger number of Chinese international students studying in different universities and regions of Thailand is recommended. Universities in Thailand should provide their international students not only from China but also from other countries with a short basic course of Thai language and culture, intensive intercultural training, visiting cultural attractions, weekly international films



with English subtitles and monthly international gatherings in order to promote their cultural knowledge and appreciation of cultural differences.

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