

# Investigation Report on the Learning Status and Cultural Integration of Chinese Thai Language Major Undergraduates' First Month Study Abroad in Thailand

**Ling Luo**

Thammasat University  
luoedu2022@gmail.com

Received: 24- June -2023

Revised: 27- July -2023

Accepted: 21- August -2023

**Abstract**— This thesis examines the learning status and cultural integration of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their initial month of study abroad in Thailand, focusing on students' development of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Situated within the framework of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the study addresses challenges encountered by Chinese Thai language major students while study abroad in Thailand and explores strategies to enhance ICC through innovative teaching or studying methods and intercultural exchange programs.

Using a mixed-methods approach encompassing quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the investigation provides valuable insights into students' challenges, extracurricular engagement, adaptations with local Thai environment, and their ICC. Language barriers, cultural differences, and practical issues necessitate targeted support mechanisms such as language training and cultural orientation programs. Integration of extracurricular activities and interactions with local students emerges as pivotal for facilitating language acquisition and cultural integration. Continuous support, including mentorship programs and self-reflection opportunities, is vital throughout students' study abroad experience. Additionally, integrating intercultural competence development into the curriculum is emphasized for enhancing communication skills and cultural understanding.

In general, this study adds to the existing literature on study abroad programs by emphasizing the significance of ICC in a globalized world. Practical implications are offered for educational institutions, policymakers, and program coordinators involved in study abroad initiatives, emphasizing language acquisition, cultural integration, and ICC. The study suggests exploration of diverse intercultural communication contexts and utilization of longitudinal designs and objective measures.

**Key Words**—Intercultural Communication Competence, Study abroad program, Intercultural experiences, Intercultural communication challenges

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) is crucial in today's era of economic globalization and the pursuit of a shared future. As people from diverse cultural backgrounds interact, conflicts and contradictions arising from cultural differences can hinder effective communication. Recognizing the significance of ICC, the International Commission on Education (1996) for the 21st Century emphasized its importance in fostering a comprehensive education and pointed out that 21st century education should foster four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be, for individuals to thrive and contribute to society.

As we all know, universities play a central role in nurturing talents and have become essential in cultivating intercultural qualities and communication skills among college students. In the context of China's "the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" and the growing importance of intercultural communication, the Chinese Ministry of Education has emphasized the need to develop intercultural communicators with strong international perspectives and the ability to engage in international affairs and competition. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, as the only province in China connected by sea and land to Southeast Asian (ASEAN) countries, plays a vital role in the organic connection of the Belt and Road. Nanning, the capital of Guangxi, has been designated as the permanent venue for the ASEAN Expo since 2004, facilitating exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN in

various fields.

However, in China, English has traditionally dominated second language acquisition (SLA) research, but scholars have questioned its universality and adaptability to non-English foreign language learning. Chinese scholars have highlighted the value of non-English foreign languages, considering them as language capital with economic and cultural significance. Thai, as an important foreign language, holds particular importance due to its political and economic value in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative. China and Thailand's diplomatic relations and support for the BRI have further emphasized the significance of the Thai language in facilitating successful cultural exchanges.

To meet the demand for Thai language proficiency, the Chinese Ministry of Education identified Thai as a "language other than English (LOTE)" or "less commonly taught foreign language (LCTFL)." As a result, universities and vocational colleges in Guangxi and across China have introduced Thai language majors. These programs often adopt a "3+1" education model, where students spend one year in the target country to learn about its culture, complete internships, and undertake professional courses offered by partner institutions.

Despite these efforts, there are challenges in cultivating ICC among Thai language major students in Chinese universities. Traditional language teaching methods often yield poor results, with limited focus on improving language proficiency and neglecting intercultural communication skills. Additionally, exam-oriented education and a lack of emphasis on intercultural communication in universities contribute to a lack of communication competence among students. Furthermore, the limited resources for intercultural communication courses and the shortage of faculty with strong ICC further hinder the development of students' intercultural communication skills. Moreover, the absence of an intercultural communication environment in Guangxi limits students' exposure to different cultures and inhibits intercultural exchanges. While the ASEAN Expo provides some opportunities for interaction, most Thai language major students have limited understanding of Thai culture, customs, and differences. This lack of intercultural awareness hinders their ability to effectively engage in intercultural communication.

#### Significance of the study

This study aims to investigate ICC development of Chinese Thai language major college students during their first month's study abroad program in Thailand. While previous research has primarily focused on English learners, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining ICC development among less commonly taught language learners. Therefore, this study holds theoretical, pedagogical, and practical significance as outlined below:

- (1) Identification of learning challenges: it can identify the learning challenges that Chinese Thai language major undergraduates face in their first month of study abroad in Thailand. It can help identify the areas where students need more support and resources to improve their learning experience and academic performance. By the way to assess their ICC.
- (2) Improve learning outcomes: understanding the learning status of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates can help educators and policymakers develop effective strategies to improve the learning outcomes of students.
- (3) Enhance international education: studying abroad is an integral part of international education, and such a report can help institutions and policymakers understand the challenges faced by Chinese Thai language major undergraduates in their first month of study abroad. It can help identify the areas that need improvement to provide a better international education experience for students.

#### Research objectives and research questions

This study aims to investigate various aspects of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates' study abroad experience, including language proficiency assessment, learning experiences and challenges, cultural integration evaluation, factors influencing learning progress and cultural integration, and the provision of recommendations and strategies. The study also seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on study abroad programs and intercultural communication in language learning. The findings will provide valuable insights and practical recommendations to enhance study abroad programs for Thai language majors and promote their language acquisition and ICC development.

In the light of previous research and contextual information, and under the framework of ICC, the primary aim of this study is to investigate and provide responses to the specific questions listed below:

- (1) What are the primary challenges faced by Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their first month of study abroad in Thailand?

- (2) To what extent do Chinese Thai language major undergraduates engage in extracurricular activities and interactions with local Thai students, and how does this impact their language acquisition and cultural integration?
- (3) What is the intercultural communication competence level of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates in Thailand during their first month of study abroad?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Intercultural communication competence (ICC)

Since D. Hymes published his article *On Communicative Competence* in 1971, which extended the concept of Chomsky's language ability through thinking, the term "communicative competence" has been widely spread. After the publication of the famous American anthropologist Hall's *The Silent Language*, scholars from around the world have never stopped researching and discussing intercultural communication competence. Therefore, what exactly does intercultural communication competence refer to? Which ICC model is suitable for this study? In this section, a literature review will be conducted thoroughly.

### Definitions of ICC

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a complex and comprehensive concept. In previous literature, the definition of Cupach (2002) states that ICC is not an inherent behavioral trait of a person, and the criteria for determining the strength of it vary from person to person. Deardorff's study in 2004 discovered that Byram's definition of ICC (1997) is the most widely accepted. According to Byram, ICC refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This definition posits that intercultural communication comprises various components, including knowledge of foreign and native cultures, skills for both intercultural and linguistic communication, abilities to perceive and interact with others, recognition and respect of diverse values, beliefs, and behaviors, critical cultural awareness, and self-awareness. Spencer Oatey & Franklin (2019) defined ICC as "the ability of communicators from different cultural backgrounds to implement effective and appropriate verbal or nonverbal communication behaviors and deal with psychological problems and communication consequences arising from communication behaviors".

Chinese scholars have also contributed to the definition of ICC, keeping pace with foreign linguists. Sun Qiong and Zhao Chunchang (2005) believed that ICC refers to the ability to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, follow the principles of language adaptability to the environment and relationships, and achieve communication goals. Chen Xin (2009) believes that "in combination with teaching practice, ICC refers to the language ability, pragmatic ability, and communication practice ability based on intercultural awareness that are necessary for successful communication in the intercultural communication process." Zhang Weidong and Yang Li (2012) believe that "ICC is the ability to appropriately apply language and cultural knowledge to engage in effective and appropriate communication practices with members of different cultures and is a decisive factor in intercultural activities. Foreign language education is the main channel for cultivating ICC."

Although the researchers in and out of China probed into ICC from various aspects, there is currently no universally accepted definition. However, two key points that are commonly accepted as essential in defining ICC are appropriateness and effectiveness. Chen and Starosta (1998) define ICC as the ability to effectively and appropriately engage in communication behaviors in order to elicit a desired response from those who are culturally different. Similarly, Fantini (2000) describes ICC as the complex set of skills required to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals who are linguistically and culturally diverse. Deardorff (2004) also emphasizes the ability to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds as being key to ICC.

In short, ICC refers to the ability to successfully communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds in a multicultural environment. Skills, knowledge is the foundation, consciousness is the core of ICC, and ability is the key. The accumulation of positive intercultural communication knowledge can trigger sensitive intercultural communication awareness, which in turn can promote the improvement of comprehensive intercultural communication skills.

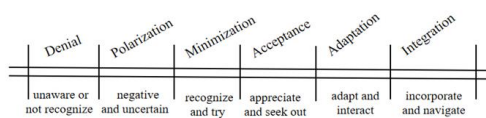
### Integrated Model of ICC

Various researchers have proposed different frameworks and models for Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). Some well-known models include Ruben (1976), Spitzberg (1984, 2000), Fantini (1995, 2006),

Chen and Starosta (1996, 1998, 2000), Byram (1997), Deardorff (2006), and Risager (2007). In China, scholars have also developed localized models, such as those by Wen Qiufang (1999), Jia Yuxin (2004), Zhang Hongling (2007), Zhong Hua and Fan Weiwei (2013), and Gao Yongchen (2014). For the purpose of this study on the learning status and cultural integration of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their first month in Thailand, Deardorff's model is deemed more suitable.

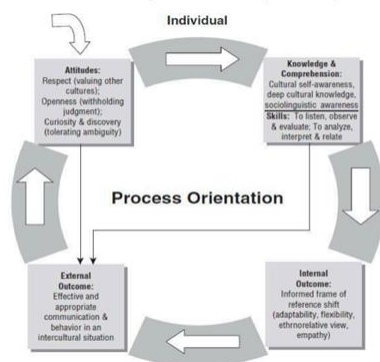
Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence, outlined in her book *The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence* (2006), is a widely cited and influential theoretical framework. It emphasizes that intercultural competence is not a static trait but a dynamic process that can be developed and enhanced over time. The model consists of six stages that individuals need to go through in order to develop intercultural competence. These stages are depicted in a figure and provide a framework for analyzing the process of cultivating intercultural competence.

Fig. 1  
 Stages--Deardorff's Process Model of IC (2006)



In intercultural communication, individuals progress through stages including denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence captures these stages and provides a framework for understanding the development of intercultural competence. It aids in comprehending the journey individuals undertake to cultivate intercultural competence and navigate complex intercultural situations.

Fig. 2  
 Process Orientation--Deardorff's Process Model of IC (2006)



Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence incorporates key orientations: Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills, Awareness, Language, and Action. Attitudes focus on embracing cultural differences with positivity. Knowledge involves understanding diverse cultures. Skills encompass active listening, empathy, and adaptability. Awareness pertains to reflecting on one's own cultural biases. Language emphasizes proficiency in foreign languages. Action entails actively engaging in intercultural interactions and applying intercultural competence. This comprehensive model emphasizes ongoing development and has wide applicability across contexts such as education, business, and international relations.

Previous research on undergraduates' ICC during study abroad

According to OECD's report in 2021, the number of students who crossed borders to pursue higher education in 2019 was over 6.1 million, which is twice the number in 2007. When individuals participate in study abroad programs, they undergo physical and psychological changes that involve cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Cushner, 2007; Root & Ngampornchai, 2013; Ryan, 2010). As the campus becomes more diverse, ICC

has become increasingly important for students to communicate effectively with their peers and professors. Therefore, to maintain competitiveness and relevance in today's world, higher education institutions must provide intercultural learning opportunities to support students and evaluate institutional and student efforts towards developing ICC.

#### Related research on undergraduates Abroad

Due to the early development of ICC research abroad, scholars have also discovered a close relationship between college students studying abroad and their ICC. Thus, there are a lot of research in this field, and scholars have used different research methods, targeting different participants and countries, to show us different concerns between studying abroad and ICC. "The importance of other living and studying in the target-language country is a shared assumption of the faculty and students in most colleges and universities" (Schrier, 2011, p.3). By tracing early literature, Carroll (1967) conducted a seminal study on the language proficiency of college seniors majoring in French, German, Italian, and Russian. The study found that short-term study abroad experiences had a powerful impact on students' language learning ability, with foreign language aptitude being a significant factor associated with the level of skill attained. The study also revealed that males and females had equal language learning ability. This study has been cited frequently to support the claim that students who undertake SA experiences of at least one year are more proficient in their target language than those who do not (Freed, 1995). However, over the past two decades, some contradictory studies have emerged that challenge this assumption. For instance, Isabelli-García (2010) conducted a study that examined the acquisition rate of Spanish gender among 12 intermediate English learners of Spanish in SA and at-home contexts. The results showed no significant difference in the acquisition rate between the two contexts, and social behavior and language contact during the SA experience had minimal impact on the acquisition rate.

According to Pérez-Vidal (2017), recent research on study abroad (SA) has shifted its focus towards non-linguistic individual differences that impact second or foreign language learning in such a context. These differences include intercultural sensitivity and identity changes, affects such as foreign language anxiety (FLA), willingness to communicate (WTC) and enjoyment, and social networks. With the use of new technologies and social platforms, social networks can have an impact on linguistic practice.

Moreover, after thoroughly reviewing numerous systematic reviews and meta-analyses in the field of study abroad and intercultural competence (ICC), I have gained valuable insights from these empirical studies. Goldstein (2019) conducts a systematic review of previous research on short-term study abroad programs and their impact on intercultural competence outcomes. The article emphasizes the positive influence of programs that include cultural immersion, reflection, and dialogue. However, it also highlights limitations in the methodologies used, particularly the reliance on self-reported measures. The author recommends future research to incorporate more objective measures and rigorous methodologies to assess intercultural competence outcomes. Xiaotian Zhang and Mingming Zhou (2021) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis on interventions aimed at enhancing learners' intercultural competence. They evaluated the effectiveness of interventions such as study abroad programs, intercultural training, and cultural immersion programs. The article specifically explores the relationship between study abroad experiences and intercultural competence. The findings suggest that studying abroad has a positive impact on personal intercultural competence, although factors such as program duration, cultural background, and prior intercultural communication experiences can influence its effectiveness.

In summary, research on study abroad and ICC reveals a positive relationship between study abroad experiences and the development of intercultural competence. Factors such as program duration, cultural context, and individual motivations influence the effectiveness of study abroad programs. Additionally, individual differences, socialization processes, and identity development play significant roles in ICC development. These findings emphasize the importance of realistic goal-setting, effective interventions, and rigorous research methodologies in promoting intercultural competence.

#### Related research on undergraduates in China context

In recent years, Chinese scholars have gradually conducted more research on the ICC of college students studying abroad. And it involves different countries and priorities. Cui (2013) examined the oral fluency, grammatical accuracy, and syntactic complexity of 45 Chinese students studying in Canada for a short time to identify the impact of studying abroad on language proficiency and the factors influencing its development. The results showed that studying abroad led to quick improvement in fluency yet had no positive correlation with the accuracy of

grammar and syntactic complexity. In another study conducted by Wu (2017), the possible influence of short-term study abroad and language proficiency on the fear of intercultural communication and sensitivity of 33 graduate students from a Chinese university in the United States or Australia was explored. The results showed that short-term study abroad significantly reduced the level of fear of intercultural communication of English learners but did not have a significant impact on their intercultural sensitivity. The development of ICC of English learners was related to the length of studying abroad.

If the context of study is set in Thailand and the topic or keyword of IC or ICC is inputted, the most commonly seen research on CNKI network is about ICC among Chinese volunteers going to Thailand. Through reading and sorting, it has been found that there are many surveys and studies on the intercultural adaptation, training, and classroom teaching adaptation of volunteers going to Thailand. For example, Li Xiangfei (2013) conducted an eight items quantitative questionnaire survey on 52 volunteers and a qualitative interview survey on 21 volunteers. After correlation testing and comprehensive discussion analysis, it was found that the social support, social personality, and adoption of integration strategies received by volunteers are factors that affect the intercultural adaptation of volunteers. Xie Qiuping (2016) conducted a ten-month follow-up survey on six Chinese language teachers using intercultural adaptation curves and adaptation theory in the form of a questionnaire survey and two times' semi-structured interview. The data were then compared, analyzed, and classified. She Yun (2018) conducted interviews with some newly appointed Chinese language teacher volunteers in Thailand to understand the intercultural communication conflicts that new volunteers face in terms of lifestyle habits, interpersonal communication, teaching, and other aspects. The collected cases are universal, and the proposed solutions have a certain reference value for new volunteers in Thailand.

Although my research focuses on Thai language majors and attempts to evaluate the impact of their first month's study abroad in Thailand on ICC, the above ICC research among volunteers in Thailand has also provided a lot of help in determining research methods and how to conduct research and investigations in this field.

### III. METHODS

#### Research design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The questionnaire surveys aim to evaluate the participants' ICC of their language proficiency, and cultural adaptation, etc. Statistical analyses will be utilized to establish patterns and correlations among variables. The qualitative component of the study involves conducting reflective written-reflection questions interview with a smaller cohort of participants to gain a more profound understanding of their experiences and perspectives regarding intercultural communication. A thematic analysis approach will be utilized to identify common themes and patterns in the data during the initial month.

#### Participants

The participants in this study consist of Chinese undergraduate students majoring in Thai at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. These students are part of an international cooperative education model called "3+1", where they spend the first three years studying at domestic universities and the fourth year participating in overseas practical studies in Thailand. The study abroad program aims to enhance intercultural awareness, develop intercultural competency, promote language learning, and foster friendships with individuals from different cultures. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic from late 2019 to 2022, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages did not raised the study abroad program and send undergraduates to Thailand to study. But at the beginning of 2023, based on the principle of voluntary choice, 27 students from 2019-academic year attend the program. Therefore, the participants are these 27 senior students (23 females and 4 males), currently studying at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University in Thailand since April 2023. Most of the participants have taken the CET-4 and CET-6 (College English Test Band 4/6), which are significant indicators of their language learning achievements. The eligibility criteria for the research subjects include Chinese nationality, international student status studying in Thailand, and Chinese as their native language, with English and Thai as their second and major foreign languages, respectively.

The quantitative component of the study involves administering an electronic questionnaire to the Chinese students in Thailand using the "Wenjuanxing" platform, a reputable questionnaire survey website and software in China.

The questionnaire evaluates the participants' ICC, language proficiency, and intercultural awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Table 1.  
Basis information of questionnaire participants (N=27)

Features	Number	Percent
Gender	23 female; 4 male	F: 85.19%; M: 14.81%
Age	21 (2); 22(18); 23(7)	21 (7.41%) ; 22 (66.67%) ; 23 (25.93%)
CET-4	Passed:12; Failed: 15	Passed (44.44%); Failed (55.56%)
CET-6	Passed:4; Failed: 23	Passed (44.44%); Failed (55.56%)
Thai Language Test	No one attend	0

For the qualitative component, written-reflection questions are used to conduct interviews with 5 female students who volunteered after completing the questionnaires. The interviews aim to explore the participants' perspectives on their cultural learning experiences, barriers, challenges, and expectations in their first month of study abroad in Thailand.

Table 2.  
Basis information of interview participants (N=5)

Name	Age	English level	Average grades in Thai courses	Personality
Liu Hongying	22	CET-4	B+	quiet
Yang Xiuhua	22	Not pass	B	outgoing
Yao xiaomin	22	CET-4	A-	confident
Zhou Jun	21	CET-6	A	easygoing
Yang Aihong	23	CET-6	A+	passionate

#### Data Collection

The data collection process for this study was conducted from April 2023 to May 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. To ensure better comprehension, the questionnaire had both in Chinese and English versions. It contained 25 statements rated on a five-point Likert Scale. Valid questionnaires were considered for analysis. The questionnaire was distributed in two steps. First, Chinese Thai language major students at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University were contacted. They were briefed on the survey's purpose before receiving the questionnaire link, which they would complete online via the Wenjuanxing platform. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Prior to the interviews, an interview outline was developed, covering participants' background information, study abroad preparations, academic experiences in China, past intercultural adaptation experiences, and future plans.

Participants will be contacted through social media platforms, and interviews will be scheduled either face-to-face or online. The interviews focused on participants' adaptation status, factors influencing intercultural adaptation, and adaptation strategies and suggestions. The data collection process, which encompassed the administration of the questionnaire and conducting in-depth interviews, enable researchers to gather valuable insights and explore the effects of the study abroad experience on students' ICC.

#### Data Analysis

Quantitative data and qualitative data will be analyzed respectively in the present study. And the findings from both datas can be integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the learning status and cultural integration of Thai language majors during their first month study abroad program in Thailand. The quantitative data will be conducted in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 27.

After entering the numerical data collected from the questionnaires into the SPSS system, the procedure of data analysis contained the following phases. First of all, the descriptive statistical analyses will be conducted to show the situations of Thai major undergraduates' ICC before and after first-month study abroad experiences in Thailand. Secondly, in order to explore the underlying factors of the questionnaires, exploratory and thematic factor analysis will be performed. The qualitative phase of the study with a content analysis approach will reveal information about students' study abroad experiences and expectations of cultural learning. After transcription, reading and rereading, interview responses were divided into common themes, to gain insights about the study abroad undergraduates in an all-round way.

Table 3.

#### Research Instruments & Data Analysis

Research Instruments	Data Analysis
1.questionnaire on ICC	A descriptive statistical analysis
2.Semi-structure interview	A content analysis of interview transcriptions
3.Reflective Writing	A content analysis of students' writing notes

#### Results

For the first month study in Thailand's Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, the 27 senior Chinese students majoring in Thai language had 4 classes per week, and each lasted 3 hours. The first course is Language and Culture in Movies, which tends to focus on studying films, but mainly introduces the basic features; Second is Thai Food and Snacks, which is to learn Thai food culture and Thai snacks with cooking practices; Third is Tourism Language, which involves learning Thai tourism culture, scenic spot transportation, mainly the basic and everyday Thai language. The fourth is performing in Thai language, learning performance culture, somewhat similar to performance/interaction course. Besides these courses, they enjoyed their spare time all by themselves. Under this condition, I collected students' questionnaires and interviews after first month's study and gradually analysis related data and responses.

#### Data analysis of the questionnaire

Under the guidance of Deardorff's IC Model, through the classification and organization of 25 questions in the survey questionnaire and the obtained questionnaire data, the following is a detailed data analysis and feedback on students' first month learning status and cultural integration in Thailand. The Cronbach.  $\alpha$ coefficient of this questionnaire is 0.950, and the  $\alpha$ coefficients of each subscale are greater than 0.8. It can be seen that the design of this questionnaire is reasonable, and the questionnaire data has high reliability.

(1) Cognitive dimension (Questions 1, 5, 12, 13, 19): these questions assess the individual's knowledge and understanding of Thai culture, language, and the study abroad program's alignment with their prior learning. Based on the questionnaire data provided, we can analyze the responses within Deardorff's IC Model.

Question Number	Option Scale	Analysis
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1.This study abroad program provides us with the opportunity to learn about Thailand and multiculturalism.	Neutral 29.63% Agree 55.56% Strongly agree 14.81%	This suggests that while some participants perceive the program as an opportunity for cultural learning, there is still a substantial number of respondents who remain unsure about the program’s potential in this aspect.
5. I am able to acknowledge and respect the cultural differences in Thailand.	Neutral 3.7% Agree 62.96% Strongly agree 33.33%	This indicates a positive trend, with many participants expressing a level of cultural sensitivity and openness to diverse perspectives.
12.The course content of this study abroad program in Thailand is consistent with the Thai language major or cultural knowledge I studied in China.	Disagree 22.22% Neutral 33.33% Agree 37.04% Strongly agree 7.41%	These results suggest that there is no clear consensus among participants regarding the alignment of the study abroad program’s course content with their prior learning in Thai language or cultural knowledge. It implies that there may be areas where the program could be improved to better meet the participants’ expectations and needs.
13.I believe that the teaching methods and activities used in classroom learning in Thai universities are helpful for me to learn Thai.	Disagree 7.41% Neutral 29.63% Agree 55.56% Strongly agree 7.41%	These findings suggest that while most participants perceive the teaching methods and activities as beneficial, there is room for improvement to cater to the needs and preferences of all participants.
19.I have gained a deeper understanding of Thai culture and social customs.	Disagree 7.41% Neutral 11.11% Agree 66.67% Strongly agree 14.81%	Most respondents (66.67%) agreed, indicating that they have gained a deeper understanding of Thai culture and social customs through the study abroad program. However, a significant proportion (11.11%) remained neutral, suggesting that some participants may not have had substantial experiences or opportunities to enhance their understanding of Thai culture during the program.

(2) Affective dimension (Questions 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25): these questions explore the individual’s emotions, attitudes, and comfort level in intercultural situations, as well as their satisfaction, confidence, and personal growth during the study abroad experience.

In analyzing the questionnaire data, several patterns emerge. While a majority of participants expressed comfort in communicating with people from different cultures in Thailand, a notable 37.04% remained neutral, indicating a mixed level of comfort among the respondents. Similarly, while there is a positive attitude towards stepping out of one’s comfort zone and experiencing new cultural customs, a significant proportion of participants expressed neutrality, suggesting a level of hesitancy or indecision. These findings highlight the importance of creating an environment that encourages participants to engage in intercultural communication and provides support to help them navigate unfamiliar cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the data revealed varying levels of satisfaction and support among participants. While a majority acknowledged the clarity of teachers in explaining Thai language and culture, a small 3.7% disagreed, indicating room for improvement in ensuring effective communication and understanding. Similarly, while many participants appreciated language exchange and cooperative learning with their peers, 25.93% remained neutral, suggesting the need for further engagement and enthusiasm-building activities. Additionally, while a majority of participants actively participated in extracurricular activities related to Thai language learning, some respondents expressed a lack of engagement, highlighting the importance of promoting and facilitating meaningful cultural experiences beyond the classroom.

The following are chart/histogram presentations and analysis of representative questions.

Chart of Q22 I am satisfied with my learning achievements in Thailand within the first month.

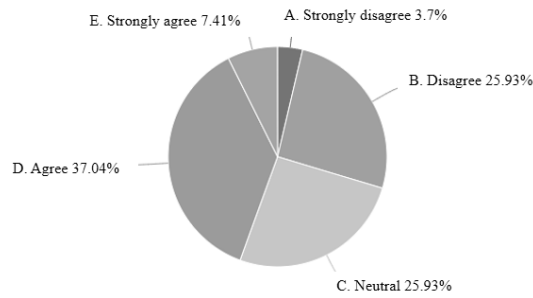
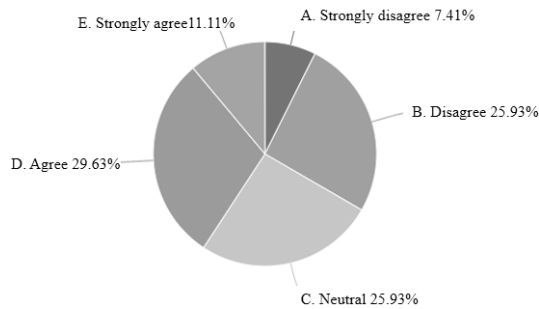
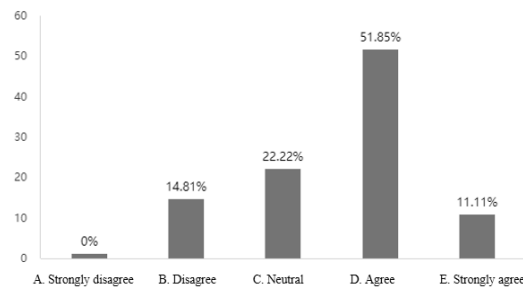


Chart of Q23 My Thai language major courses at the University of Thailand have met my expectations.

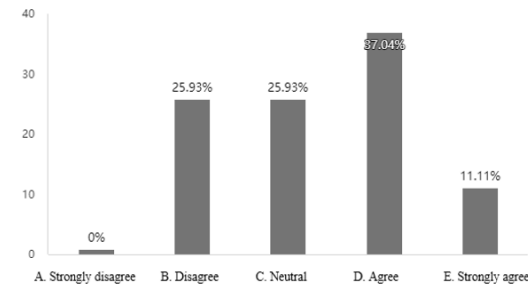


Based on the questionnaire data from Q22 and 23, it can be concluded that 10 participants (37.04%) expressed satisfaction with their learning achievements in Thailand within the first month. However, when specifically considering the Thai language major courses at the University of Thailand, a notable number of 25.93% participants expressed disagreement or a 25.93% neutral stance regarding whether their expectations were met. These findings suggest that while participants may be generally satisfied with their overall learning experiences in Thailand, there may be room for improvement in meeting expectations related to the Thai language major courses. Further investigation is warranted to identify the specific factors influencing these perceptions and to identify areas for enhancement in the educational experience.

Histogram of Q24 Since I started this project, my intercultural communication competence has improved.



Histogram of Q25 I have confidence in my plans and goals for studying or working in the near future.

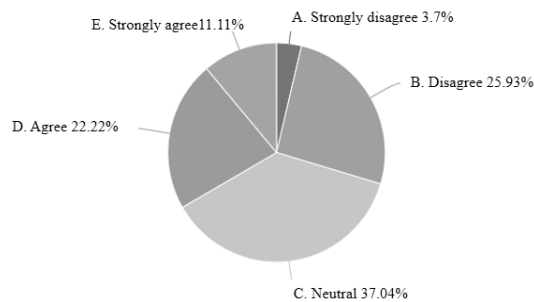


The data analysis of Q24 and 25 indicate that a majority of 51.85% participants perceive an improvement in their

ICC since starting the project, reflecting the positive influence of the project on their ability to engage in intercultural interactions. However, participants' confidence in their near-future plans and goals for studying or working varied, with a significant portion expressing 25.93% disagreement or a 25.93% neutral stance. This underscores the importance of further investigating the factors that shape participants' confidence and the implementation of suitable support measures to bolster their assurance in pursuing their future aspirations.

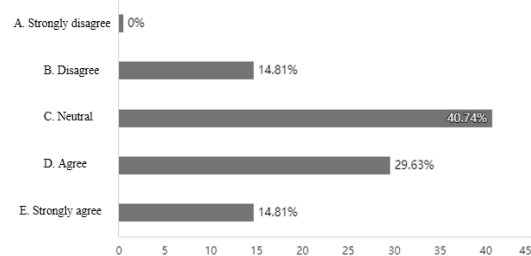
(3) Behavioral dimension (Questions 2, 6, 7, 14, 16, 17, 20): These questions focus on the individual's actions, behaviors, and skills related to language proficiency, classroom engagement, time management, and adaptability in the host country. Following are the representative chart or bar chart from Q 2,7,16.

Chart of Q2 I am confident in my competence to speak Thai or English.

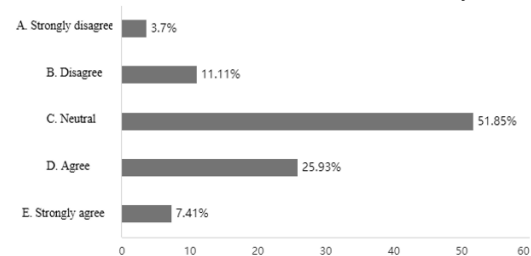


From Q2, it is evident that participants' confidence in their competence to speak Thai or English varied. A significant 37.04% proportion expressed a neutral stance, suggesting uncertainty regarding their language abilities. Additionally, 7 students (25.93%) have a lack of confidence in their language proficiency. Conversely, a smaller 22.22% portion agreed or 11.11% strongly agreed, demonstrating confidence in their language skills. This analysis highlights the need for further exploration of the factors influencing participants' confidence and emphasizes the importance of language learning and intercultural communication support to enhance their language competence, thus enabling effective intercultural interactions.

Bar chart of Q7 I am able to actively interact and communicate with teachers and classmates in the classroom.



Bar chart of Q16 In the first month of study, I was able to make reasonable use of my study time and resources.



From Q7 and Q16, it can be concluded that participants' experiences regarding their ability to actively interact and communicate with teachers and classmates in the classroom were diverse, with a significant portion expressing a 40.74% neutral stance and 4 students chose disagree on this point. Similarly, participants' perceptions of their proficiency in making reasonable use of study time and resources in the first month of study varied, with a notable percentage expressing a 51.85% neutral stance, while 25.93%, as 15 students thought they do well in this period.

These findings indicate the need for further investigation into the factors influencing participants' communication skills and study habits. Implementing appropriate support mechanisms is crucial to enhance their classroom interaction and facilitate effective utilization of study time and resources.

#### Analysis of the interview

Interview Q1: How did you feel during your first month of studying in Thailand (which could involve various aspects such as study, life, mood, etc.)?

The interviewees' experiences during their first month in Thailand reflect a range of emotions and observations. Liu Hongying appreciates the Thai lifestyle and the helpfulness of the people. Yang Xiuhua faces challenges but receives support from classmates. Yao Xiaomin finds wonder in Thailand's culture and scenery. Zhou Jun embraces the new environment with curiosity and adaptation. Yang Aihong initially feels uneasy but emphasizes the importance of embracing new experiences and receiving support. These experiences align with Deardorff's IC model, highlighting the acquisition of cultural knowledge, intercultural skills, and positive attitudes. The interviewees demonstrate an understanding of Thai lifestyles and communication styles, exhibit communication and adaptability skills, and foster a sense of belonging and integration into the Thai community.

Interview Q2: Do you think your language proficiency (Thai, English) has improved during this month? Why?

The interviewees' reflections on their language proficiency in Thai and English during their first month in Thailand provide insights into their language development and its connection to intercultural experiences. Liu Hongying reflects on the fluency of Thai people in English, motivating her to improve her own English skills. Yang Xiuhua and Zhou Jun express limited progress in language proficiency, attributing it to limited opportunities for immersion. Yang Aihong recognizes the importance of gradually transitioning to Thai language and notes the impact of exposure to Thai texts and interactions. These experiences align with Deardorff's IC model, highlighting the development of language proficiency as an intercultural skill. Through immersion, the interviewees demonstrate an increasing ability to communicate and understand Thai language, driven by positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. As their language proficiency continues to grow, it is expected to enhance their intercultural growth and engagement with Thai culture.

Interview Q3: What difficulties or challenges did you encounter during your first month of studying in Thailand? How did you overcome them?

The difficulties and challenges encountered by the interviewees during their first month of studying in Thailand offer valuable insights into their intercultural experiences and their ability to navigate unfamiliar situations. Language barriers emerge as a prominent challenge mentioned by the interviewees. Liu Hongying emphasizes the need to overcome the language barrier, despite having studied Thai in China for over 3 years. Yang Xiuhua acknowledges the initial difficulty in adapting to the differences in language, weather, and diet. Yao Xiaomin recounts a specific challenge with taxi drivers and how he overcame it by seeking assistance from Thai friends and using authentic Thai language. Zhou Jun shares experiences of cultural misunderstandings and language barriers, which affected his mood but prompted an adjustment in mindset. Yang Aihong mentions language communication challenges and the inconvenience of transportation and online payments in Thailand.

The challenges faced by the interviewees highlight the development of intercultural skills and attitudes in Deardorff's IC model. They demonstrate resilience and adaptability in overcoming language barriers through various strategies. Additionally, these challenges emphasize the importance of cultural knowledge in understanding Thai norms and systems. These experiences contribute to the interviewees' ongoing intercultural growth and success in their studies and cultural immersion in Thailand.

Interview Q4: What was the most challenging language or cultural exchange scenario you encountered during your first month of learning in Thailand (please provide a detailed example)? How did you respond?

Liu Hongying : Performing roles in a realistic and serious manner for a music video (MV) during "the language and culture in movies" course was the most challenging cultural exchange scenario. Despite our lack of acting experience, we dedicated a day to rehearse and created handmade props. Our teacher appreciated our efforts, deepening our understanding of Thai and Chinese different performance styles.

Yang Xiuhua: During an outing with three classmates, the taxi driver took us to the wrong destination. Initially, I communicated with the driver and confirmed the correct address with my companions before the journey. As I tend

to get car sick, I fell asleep in the car. Eventually, my classmates informed me that we were headed in the wrong direction. I immediately communicated with the driver using both Thai and a telephone translator. Luckily, we reached our intended location, preventing any unnecessary expenses.

Yao xiaomin: When the delivery rider didn't know the way and she called me, I bravely told her the address where I was, and it was quite difficult to complete the communication in Thai with poor telephone signal.

Zhou Jun: Due to a malfunctioning restroom water heater, we sought assistance at the office but were unsure about the repair process. With the help of our teacher and Thai classmates, we located the office. However, to proceed with the repair, we needed to log in to our Google accounts, which we were unprepared for. Fortunately, our teacher assisted us by recording the necessary information with pen and paper. Throughout the communication, we used English and Thai keywords in turns.

Yang Aihong: During the phone card package application, I forgot to prepare in advance, causing initial embarrassment. However, I managed to overcome the situation by using translation software, communicating gradually with simple sentences. Despite my limited speaking ability, I understood the staff's instructions and successfully completed the desired package.

The above scenarios demonstrate the development of intercultural skills within Deardorff's IC model. Effective communication, problem-solving, and adaptability are crucial skills for navigating challenging language and cultural exchange scenarios. The interviewees' ability to overcome these challenges through persistence, creativity, and the utilization of available resources reflects their growth in intercultural competence. These experiences will contribute to their overall intercultural growth and competence, enabling them to navigate future encounters with increased confidence and effectiveness.

Interview Q5: Are you satisfied with your progress during your first month of studying in Thailand? Why?

The interview responses show mixed levels of satisfaction with the initial month of studying in Thailand. Liu Hongying is generally content despite low expectations, while Yang Xiuhua is dissatisfied with the courses. Yao Xiaomin feels there is more focus on leisure activities than learning, and Zhou Jun is dissatisfied with personal progress. Yang Aihong acknowledges the need for improvement in language skills. These differing levels of satisfaction reflect the dynamic nature of intercultural development within Deardorff's IC model. It emphasizes the importance of ongoing reflection, adaptation, and active engagement in intercultural learning. By fostering a growth mindset and taking an active role in their learning journey, individuals can strive for continuous progress and development in their intercultural competence.

Interview Q6: What are your expectations or goals for your future study or graduation work plan? How do you plan to continue improving your Thai, English, and intercultural communication competence?

The participants express their future goals and strategies for improving language skills and intercultural communication. Liu Hongying plans to pursue graduate studies in Thailand, Yang Xiuhua aims to work in Thailand and improve spoken English, Yao Xiaomin seeks a job in Bangkok and better understanding of Thai language nuances, Zhou Jun prioritizes overcoming social barriers and finding a job facilitating China-Thailand communication, and Yang Aihong desires work aligned with her interests and language improvement. These aspirations reflect their commitment to ongoing development in intercultural competence, emphasizing linguistic proficiency, cultural understanding, and effective communication across cultures. Strategies include further language study, social interactions, seeking employment opportunities that foster intercultural communication, and immersing themselves in Thai culture. Through these strategies and a growth mindset, they expect continuous learning and improvement in their intercultural competence.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Through in-depth analysis of quantitative survey questionnaire data and qualitative interview texts, the following insights have gradually emerged regarding the related issues of the learning status and cultural integration of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates' first month study in Thailand.

Research question 1

RQ 1: What are the primary challenges faced by Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their first month of study abroad in Thailand?

The primary challenges faced by Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their first month of study abroad in Thailand encompass language barriers, cultural differences, and practical issues. participants highlighted

difficulties with language communication, including the need to adapt to the Thai language despite prior language study. Challenges in understanding and being understood by taxi drivers and delivery riders also emerged. Moreover, cultural exchange scenarios, such as participating in a music video and encountering different performance styles, posed challenges for the students. Practical issues, including online payments, and seeking assistance for repairs, were additional challenges faced. However, the interviewees demonstrated resilience and adaptability by actively seeking solutions, utilizing available resources, and engaging in effective communication. These experiences highlight the interplay of intercultural skills and attitudes within Deardorff's IC Model, emphasizing the importance of language proficiency, cultural knowledge, communication strategies, problem-solving, and adaptability in successfully navigating the challenges encountered during their initial month of study in Thailand.

#### Research question 2

RQ 2: To what extent do Chinese Thai language major undergraduates engage in extracurricular activities and interactions with local Thai students, and how does this impact their language acquisition and cultural integration? Chinese Thai language major undergraduates exhibit a range of engagement in extracurricular activities and interactions with local Thai students. While some express a neutral stance regarding classroom interaction, a majority show agreement and strong agreement in their liking for language exchange and cooperative learning. Additionally, many actively participate in extracurricular activities related to Thai language learning and feel supported by their peers. Interviews reveal that language proficiency development varies, but immersion experiences contribute to improved skills and positive attitudes towards cultural integration. Overall, engaging in extracurricular activities and interactions positively impacts language acquisition and cultural integration, emphasizing the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for such engagement.

#### Research question 3

RQ 3: What is the intercultural communication competence level of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates in Thailand during their first month of study abroad?

Participants exhibited mixed levels of satisfaction with their learning achievements and progress during the first month's study abroad in Thailand. While some expressed contentment with the study and living experience, others expressed dissatisfaction and felt that they had not achieved their desired learning outcomes. However, there was a general agreement that their ICC had improved since the start of the project. The interviews revealed a range of perspectives on language proficiency development, understanding of Thai culture, and satisfaction with progress. These findings align with Deardorff's IC model, emphasizing the dynamic and individualized nature of intercultural competence development. It underscores the importance of continuous reflection, adaptation, and active engagement in the intercultural learning process to enhance communication competence and overall satisfaction with the study abroad experience.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to investigate the learning status and cultural integration of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their first month of study abroad in Thailand. Through a mixed-methods approach incorporating quantitative survey questionnaires and qualitative interviews, the research questions were addressed, leading to valuable insights into the challenges faced by the students, their engagement in extracurricular activities and interactions with local Thai students, and their intercultural communication competence.

The findings of this study have several implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and program coordinators involved in facilitating study abroad programs. Firstly, the identified challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and practical issues, call for targeted support mechanisms. Providing language training and cultural orientation programs prior to students' departure can enhance their preparedness for the study abroad experience. Additionally, creating platforms for language exchange and cooperative learning within the curriculum can promote language acquisition and cultural integration. Secondly, the positive impact of extracurricular activities and interactions with local Thai students on language acquisition and cultural integration suggests the importance of incorporating such opportunities into study abroad programs. Encouraging students to participate in activities related to Thai language learning and facilitating interaction with local students can foster meaningful intercultural exchanges and contribute to their overall learning experience. Furthermore, the varied levels of satisfaction with learning achievements and progress highlight the need for ongoing support and guidance

throughout students' study abroad journey. Offering mentorship programs, regular check-ins, and opportunities for self-reflection can help students navigate challenges, set realistic goals, and monitor their progress. Additionally, incorporating intercultural competence development into the curriculum can enhance students' communication skills and cultural understanding.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study. Firstly, the research focused solely on Chinese Thai language major undergraduates studying abroad in Thailand during their first month. Generalizing the findings to other contexts or study abroad durations should be done with caution. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or recall errors. Future research could employ a longitudinal design and incorporate objective measures to enhance the robustness of the findings.

In conclusion, this thesis provides valuable insights into the learning status and cultural integration of Chinese Thai language major undergraduates during their initial month of study abroad in Thailand. The findings highlight the challenges faced by the students, the impact of extracurricular activities and interactions, and the development of intercultural communication competence. The implications suggest ways to support students in overcoming challenges, fostering engagement, and enhancing their study abroad experience. While the study has limitations, it contributes to the existing literature on study abroad programs and lays the groundwork for further research in this area.

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#### AUTHORS PROFILE



**Ling Luo**, a Ph. D student in English Language Studies program, Thammasat University, Thailand. She is also an lecturer in Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, China. Her research interests are in intercultural communication and college English pedagogy.



