



## Intercultural Challenges Encountered in Teaching Chinese Students in Thai Higher Education

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### Abstract

Intercultural challenges have gained prominence in Thai higher education due to the influx of Chinese students into Thai universities. This study aimed to examine the intercultural challenges encountered by Thai lecturers when teaching Chinese students and to identify effective teaching strategies to promote active learning in intercultural classrooms within Thai higher education. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews as a guideline for the focus group discussion. The findings revealed that Thai lecturers face key intercultural challenges, including language proficiency, learning behaviors, and attitudes toward learning. Firstly, regarding English language proficiency, Chinese students often struggle in understanding the lessons, which makes them hesitant and less confident in participating in class activities and discussions. Secondly, Chinese students exhibit learning behaviors such as remaining quiet and passive, avoiding interaction, and relying heavily on mobile apps. Lastly, their attitudes toward learning are reflected in their learning behaviors, as they highly value attending classes, grades, and scores. In addition, key teaching strategies for promoting active learning in intercultural classrooms incorporate using simplified English, speaking slowly and repetitively, simplifying lessons, providing Chinese translation in the lessons, asking questions to Thai students before addressing Chinese students, and allowing the use of an online dictionary. The study provides useful teaching strategies for bridging cultural gaps in intercultural education environments of Thailand and helps build a classroom management strategy that supports learning for Chinese students.

## 1. Introduction

In the current globalized world, higher education institutions are becoming increasingly diverse, hosting students from various cultural backgrounds who study together in intercultural classrooms. In Thailand, the higher education system has experienced increasing internationalization, with a significantly growing number of students from various countries enrolling in Thai universities. Notably, the large number of Chinese students has contributed to intercultural dynamics and presented challenges for Thai educators.

Additionally, many Thai universities have admitted an even greater number of Chinese students since China's post-COVID-19 reopening. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of Chinese students joining higher education in Thailand. This trend has brought about some interesting intercultural interactions and posed challenges for Thai lecturers. Data from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI) shows that in 2020, 14,403 Chinese students chose to pursue their studies in Thailand. The subsequent year, 2021, witnessed a further increase to 15,786 Chinese students. By 2022, the number had escalated to 21,419 Chinese students. According to Ye (2020), many of them continue to see overseas education as an opportunity for both academic achievement and personal development.

Notably, in 2020, a large proportion of Chinese students chose to study in private universities, as reported by The Nation ("Thai universities welcome return of Chinese students," 2023); a significant number of Chinese students enrolled at private Thai universities, accounting for 70% of the total, and the rest attended state universities. The popular programs among Chinese students were management, business administration, international trade, and Thai language programs (Nukitrangsan, 2023). According to Chao and Soontornnaruerangsee (2024), international programs in popular fields are considered the best way for Chinese students in Thai universities to acquire specialized knowledge while enhancing their English capability with a focus on specific-field terminology and improving listening and speaking skills for daily life communication.

As a result, cultural differences in teaching and learning between the cultures of China and Thailand have been identified as an energetic intercultural challenge among Thai university lecturers. The way in which a culture defines education is an essential

concern to be aware of when teaching and learning in an intercultural classroom context to achieve more effective classroom interaction. Hofstede (1986) states that "As teacher-student interaction is such an archetypal human phenomenon and so deeply rooted in the culture of a society, cross-cultural learning situations are fundamentally problematic for both parties (p. 303)." The circumstance is that the lecturer and student come from two different cultures, leading to intercultural interactions within a classroom context that need to be comprehended and managed well.

Noticeably, the learning behaviors of Chinese students are highly focused on reading and writing; they do not enjoy oral practice and dislike classroom interactions and activities. Some typical learning characteristics of Chinese students are described as "rote," "silent," and "passive" (Sit, 2013). On the other hand, Thai universities strongly promote "active learning" in their teaching and learning methods. In a broad sense, active learning refers to all kinds of classroom learning that require students to engage in activities (writing, discussion, and presentation) and not just receive a one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher (Mizokami, 2018).

Therefore, students are encouraged and expected to express themselves and share ideas and opinions through classroom activities. Participation in these activities is one of the key parts of the learning process, both collectively and individually. Some Chinese students seem to lack confidence in sharing and voicing their opinions and thoughts via oral practice in class; they prefer to learn passively.

In addressing intercultural challenges in higher education, it is important to recognize intercultural communication as a key factor. This study examines the intercultural challenges encountered by Thai lecturers when teaching Chinese students and identifies effective teaching approaches to promote active learning in intercultural classrooms. By adopting Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, the research examines cultural differences and their influence on educational practices. The goal is to help create a way to run a classroom that helps Chinese students learn and make it easier for people from different cultures to get along in Thai university settings for intercultural education.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Culture and the Imperative of Intercultural Communication in the Educational Context

The concept of culture is complex and multifaceted, which has been described by scholars from many disciplines in various ways. According to Hofstede (2001, p. 9), culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.” This description emphasizes that culture is learned, shared, and influences behaviors, perceptions, and values of people from different cultural backgrounds. Likewise, Hall (1959) views culture as a form of communication governed by implicit rules that include both verbal and non-verbal expressions. While Martin and Nakayama (2021) define culture as behaviors learned within a group. In addition, Guest (2017) highlights that culture encompasses a range of elements, including knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, artifacts, and institutions. It is not only collectively embraced but also continuously debated within communities, shaping how individuals interact with one another and their surroundings.

In an educational context, culture significantly influences the learning process, influencing teaching methods, values, beliefs, and prejudices. Culture's unique history, traditions, and status of teachers reflect the esteem in education (Samovar & Porter, 2001). According to Deardorff (2006), cultural differences affect interactions between teachers and students, classroom dynamics, and expectations regarding authority, feedback, and collaboration. Accordingly, misunderstandings can occur when teachers and students adhere to different cultural assumptions and expectations, highlighting the need for multicultural competence in teaching.

Intercultural environments foster understanding and knowledge by enabling individuals to exchange experiences and perspectives during communication (Bancha & Bamrung, 2023). This exchange is facilitated through intercultural communication, which refers to the ways people from different cultural backgrounds interact, share ideas, and negotiate meanings. It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication, cultural awareness, and the ability to adapt to diverse social contexts (Gudykunst, 2005).

Effective intercultural communication requires an awareness and understanding of both verbal and non-verbal cues, as well as an understanding of the cultural contexts

that shape individual perceptions and responses. In the context of intercultural classrooms where teachers and students are from diverse cultural backgrounds, different classroom behaviors and practices, interactions, and communication in the classroom are vital encounters. As Tilovatova (2024) indicates, in today's educational environments, which are becoming increasingly diverse, effective intercultural communication is essential for successful teaching and learning.

Pointedly, the entry of Chinese students into Thai universities has gained significant attention, particularly in the aspect of cultural differences and intercultural classroom. It is imperative to identify and understand the unique intercultural challenges faced by both lecturers and students. This approach is crucial to ensuring a positive and enriching educational experience for all students.

## **2.2 Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions**

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions are valuable for understanding cultural differences, guiding etiquette, and facilitating communication in various contexts, ranging from business to diplomacy (Hofstede et al., 2010). This framework groups cultures based on similarities and differences. In general, Hofstede's model has been associated with cultural dimensions in educational contexts, learning styles, and behaviors. However, this study employs Hofstede's framework to relate two cultural dimensions: individualism-collectivism and power distance. These two dimensions help in clearly understanding the differences between Chinese and Thai cultures, particularly in the context of education, which describes student-teacher relationships and learning behaviors.

The individualism-collectivism dimension describes the relationship between personal autonomy and group affiliation. Ting-Toomey (1999) highlights that individualistic and collectivistic values manifest differently across familial, educational, and professional settings. The countries with individualism emphasize personal goals and self-directed behaviors, whereas the countries with collectivism prioritize group welfare and reciprocal loyalty.

Individualistic cultures, in education, encourage students to think freely and are more likely to feel comfortable speaking up in class. Teachers encourage students to solve their own difficulties. With an emphasis on their unique needs and creative ways to problem-solve, these tactics typically help students develop into independent

thinkers and doers where independence and self-reliance are emphasized and respected (Chayakonvikom et al., 2016).

In collectivistic societies, students are not encouraged to speak out about their opinions and are expected to memorize and reproduce the information presented to them. Students exhibit a reduced tendency to articulate and exchange their insights regarding classroom learning, indicating a need for increased support, which consequently undermines independence and self-reliance. Additionally, teachers underline the importance of respecting community hierarchy and following established standards over inquiry and debate. Consequently, students in such a society often assume a passive role, with instruction being predominantly teacher centered. The dissemination of opinions and knowledge is typically confined to individuals of elevated status (Chayakonvikom et al., 2016). This results in knowledge dissemination confined to those of elevated status, as seen in Thailand and China.

Although China and Thailand have the shared status of collectivistic countries, their approaches to education differ due to their different levels of collectivism. According to the Country Comparison Tool (2020), China meets a score of 43 in collectivism, which is considered a collectivist society, where group needs often take precedence over individual interests. This influence extends to hiring and promotions, favoring family and close connections. In the educational context of China, education is a teacher-centered form and emphasizes hierarchy and authority. Due to the expectation of respect for their teachers, students may be less likely to question or argue with teaching methods (Alqarni, 2022).

Thailand, with a score of 19, indicates that Thai people prioritize loyalty to their extended relationships and family, emphasizing strong relationships and responsibility. They are not confrontational, avoiding offenses that could lead to loss of face. Building personal relationships takes time and patience, and open discussions are not common in Thai society (Country Comparison Tool, 2020). In an educational context, Pruksakit (2016) reveals that although teachers are also respected, Thai classrooms may demonstrate a more relaxed hierarchy. A more interactive learning environment may result from students' increased confidence in expressing their opinions.

As Greenfield (1994) suggests, understanding the dimension of individualism and collectivism provides valuable insights into varying perspectives and behaviors

within educational settings. The comparison between China and Thailand falls under the cultural dimension of collectivism, which results in certain similarities. However, there are differences in the extent of classroom atmosphere and educational approaches, with Thailand exhibiting a more relaxed hierarchical structure. This cultural dimension presents how people are integrated into groups and is crucial for understanding group dynamics in classroom settings.

**Power Distance:** This dimension reflects the distance between power and the members of a specific culture and the extent to which inequality and power are tolerated. Cultures with high power distance expect and accept clear hierarchies, where people respect authority and societal roles are well-defined. Conversely, cultures with low power distance value individuality over status and value equality and informal interactions (Hofstede et al., 2010; Country Comparison Tool, 2020).

According to the Country Comparison Tool (2020), China shows an 80 on the high-power distance index, which indicates that the society is strongly committed to existing hierarchies. This score reveals that this society values authority and traditional roles while emphasizing the necessity of social structure and order (Hofstede et al., 2010). As Qian and Liu (2021) point out, Chinese teachers often maintain a higher degree of formality and authority in the classroom, reflecting a cultural tradition of valuing hierarchy.

For Thailand, a score of 64 signifies a moderate acceptance of hierarchy in society. This number shows that Thai culture respects authority, but relationships are more balanced, there is less formality, and there is a higher level of informality than in some other societies (Hofstede et al., 2010; Country Comparison Tool, 2020). In an educational context, the traditional pattern of being teacher-centered represents a large, high-power distance in the classroom. The leadership of teachers is expected in the classroom, and students expect to be directed as to what to do (Bae et al., 2014). Based on the description mentioned, it clearly explains intercultural communication in education, highlighting how power distance in China and Thailand influences the relationships between teachers and students. Accordingly, understanding these differences is essential for effective communication in different intercultural contexts.

In brief, Hofstede's framework provides great contributions for people to understand cultural differences and similarities that influence various areas and aspects, including education. The dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance are notably

useful for a more profound understanding of cultural differences and expectations. Individualism-Collectivism illustrates how people balance personal goals with group needs, showing how China and Thailand approach these differently. Power distance exhibits how each culture and society views authority and hierarchy, with China accepting strict hierarchies and Thailand being more flexible. To be successful in intercultural communication in diverse educational contexts, one needs to understand these cultural dimensions well.

### **2.3 Active Learning in Higher Education**

In higher education, active learning incorporates teaching activities in which students participate in tasks such as reading, writing, discussing, or problem-solving, while also using advanced cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, and assessment (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This approach is significant for developing student capability, whereby students participate actively in their learning process within the classroom (Tientongdee, 2018).

Additionally, Brame (2016) highlights that active learning involves using teaching methods to capture students' attention in the learning process and providing students with meaningful learning activities, allowing them to reflect on their actions. Numerous research studies reveal that the incorporation of active learning into university curricula significantly enhances learning experiences for students (Theobald et al., 2020).

Saiphet (2018) utilizes a quasi-experimental design to investigate how an active learning approach enhanced motivations of students to learn English. The study examined how the students' motivation changed after engaging in an active learning session with activities designed to get everyone involved. The findings revealed that after the end of the semester, there was a significant increase in students' motivation to learn the English language.

In Thailand, active learning is strongly encouraged at all levels of education, including the university level. The pedagogical approach of active learning as a learning strategy is highly promoted by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) to enhance learners' learning capacity (Charoensuthipan, 2022). Accordingly, the active learning approach is widely supported and promoted at all educational levels, as it aims to promote student learning by creating a student-centered setting.

## 2.4 Related Studies

According to Huang (2021), Chinese students in Thai universities face various challenges, including adapting to independent learning, administrative practices, English proficiency, interpersonal customs, social norms (such as alcohol restrictions), eating habits, daily practices (like removing shoes), and nonverbal communication differences. In addition, the survey results emphasize the vital role of language proficiency in integrating into the Thai community and achieving success at international universities in Thailand. Such a result corresponds to the study of Chao and Soontornnaruerangsee (2024), and confirms that inadequate English writing strategies and communication in daily life contexts are the key challenges encountered by Chinese students in Thai universities.

Regarding adaptability, Chinese students in Thailand are quite good at integrating into the local Thai community. There may be some awkward moments and stumbles during the initial months, as they become more familiar with cultural norms, language, and other aspects of everyday interactions. Chinese students approach this challenge with diligence, as well as their study habits and business mindsets (Nukitrangsang, 2023).

In addition, Sun et al. (2020) state that the adaptation of Chinese students in upper northern Thai universities to a new culture has a significant influence on their academic success. In general, Chinese students showed a "U-Curve" pattern in their cross-cultural adaptation, with each group differing in four dimensions of adaptation. Eleven major challenges were identified as important factors affecting Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation, with the most influential issues being 'unfamiliarity with university life,' 'difficulty understanding the courses,' 'limited job opportunities,' and 'struggling to integrate into Thai society.'

Zhao (2007) examined the classroom behaviors of Chinese teachers and New Zealand students in a Chinese-language classroom and those of New Zealand teachers and Chinese students in an English-language classroom. One key difference in these intercultural classrooms is that Chinese students learn not to interrupt their teachers. If they have questions, they must raise their hands and wait for permission to speak. Most prefer to listen quietly during class and ask questions afterward. While Western students often perceive active participation in discussions as undisciplined, Chinese teachers may feel disrespected if students interrupt their lectures. In contrast,

New Zealand teachers view Chinese students as less engaged in answering questions and participating in class activities.

In summary, the intercultural challenges across education, including differences in learning behaviors, cultural misunderstandings, and language barriers, highlight the importance of understanding the influence of culture on educational practices. Active learning, a key strategy for fostering student-centered environments, has been shown to have varying success across cultures, as evidenced by the focus on Thailand versus the challenges faced by Chinese students. The complexity of cultural understanding and adaptation among Chinese students in Thailand highlights the importance of addressing language ability, social norms, and everyday practices in their university life.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Population and Samples**

The study focuses on all of the 17 Thai lecturers from various courses who have taught Chinese students for at least one semester in a Thai university faculty. Chinese students, constituting the majority in classes, are recruited annually through an MOU with an international student recruitment agent since 2018. The MOU mandates a specific study plan with a language ratio of Chinese to English (7:3) in the first year, gradually increasing English content in subsequent years. This unique intercultural context presents challenges for Thai lecturers due to the characteristics of Chinese students.

#### **3.2 Research Tools**

This study utilized a qualitative approach employing semi-structured interviews as guidelines for a focus group discussion. Following Bernard's (1988) approach, the interviews provided flexibility by combining predetermined open-ended questions with the improvisation of additional queries to extract in-depth information. The guideline questions, informed by the investigators' teaching experiences with Chinese students for over two semesters and a literature review, were employed for both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion. The questions included:-

1. Are there any differences in learning behaviors between Thai and Chinese students? If yes, what are they?

2. What do you think are the causes of those differences in learning behaviors between Thai and Chinese students?
3. Do those different learning behaviors of Chinese students have any impacts on your teaching styles? Why? Why not? How?
4. Provided that active learning is mandatory in our classrooms, do you think those different learning behaviors of Chinese students promote active learning in your class? How?
5. Further to no. 4, if those different learning behaviors of Chinese students promote active learning in your class, have you ever tried to further enhance their active learning? Which approach did you try? How did it work?
6. Further to no. 4, if those different learning behaviors of Chinese students hinder active learning in your class, what did you do to solve that? What approaches have you tried to enhance the participation of Chinese students in your classes? Which ones worked? Which one did not? Which one is the best?
7. In general, how do you think teaching Chinese students is challenging?

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Focus group discussions were employed, comprising 17 Thai lecturers whose qualifications aligned with the study's scope. Advantages of focus groups include obtaining a wider range of detailed information, perspectives, and opinions efficiently, being cost-effective, and allowing for the clarification of ideas (Liamputpong, 2011). To mitigate bias, the 17 informants were divided into two groups of 11 and 6 members based on convenience, allowing informants to choose a preferred time and group. This approach aimed to foster comfort in sharing experiences and ideas, leveraging diverse educational backgrounds for valuable comparative insights into their perceptions of Chinese students' behaviors.

The small group size was deliberately chosen to encourage genuine discussions, ensuring each participant had ample opportunities to express themselves adequately, as suggested by Mishra (2016). Additionally, both investigators and informants were lecturers of similar ages and academic ranks and from the same faculty. This similarity aimed to eliminate potential power differences that might interfere with opinion-sharing during the discussion. For these reasons, they were assumed to be familiar with one another and comfortable expressing their thoughts.

The discussion for each group was organized online via Zoom in separate sessions for 3 and 2 hours, respectively, in compliance with the measures against the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were re-informed of the research ethics policy before the discussions, which were recorded with their prior consent. The recordings and their transcriptions are stored in a password-protected folder and will be retained for 2 years after the study is completed.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

Transcribed discussions underwent content analysis to address study questions, utilizing both inductive and deductive approaches. The inductive method revealed intercultural challenges faced by lecturers teaching Chinese students in Thailand and how they adapted their teaching approaches. The deductive approach identified the best practices applied by each informant. Researchers interpreted transcripts, categorized content into themes, and analyzed it using intercultural and teaching theories.

## **4. Research Findings**

### **4.1 Intercultural Challenges of Teaching Chinese Students in Intercultural Classrooms in Thailand**

The findings reveal unanimous agreement among all the 17 lecturers who had experienced teaching the Chinese students for at least one semester that language proficiency, learning behaviors, and attitudes toward learning are the most significant challenges they encountered in their intercultural classrooms.

#### **4.1.1 Language Proficiency**

Language proficiency in this study refers to the ability of the students to use English, as the medium of instruction, for classroom purposes, namely teaching, asking and answering questions, discussing, writing a report, and presenting a project. To achieve these tasks, productive and receptive skills are equally necessary for them.

According to the feedback from the lecturers, insufficient English proficiency in Chinese students hinders their academic achievement because it obstructs their understanding of the lessons. Given that all of them passed the required TOEIC scores for admission and a compulsory English preparatory course operated by the faculty, their listening and reading skills are supposed to be adequate for the study. However,

the responses from the lecturers indicate their predicament in learning academic subjects with English as the medium of instruction. Signs of the predicament can be inferred from their learning behaviors, including their quietness and reluctance to participate in the class activities. While these behaviors correspond with the Chinese learning style preferences that have been generally accepted as inherent factors, several linguists view those behaviors as one of the results of their inadequate English proficiency (Parniewicz, 2019). Such a view is in accord with the lecturers' observation about the Chinese students' reaction to their lecture, "Most of them seemed not to understand what I was saying," and "When some of their classmates translated what I had said into Chinese, they nodded but then shook their head to refuse to say anything or answer my question." (Informant 5-1). The lecturers' responses correspond with several studies on the intercultural challenges the Chinese students encountered in Thai higher education (Huang, 2021).

#### **4.1.2 Learning Behaviors**

The intercultural challenges in the learning behaviors of the Chinese students observed by the lecturers include being quiet and passive learners, avoiding communication, obsessive dependency on mobile phone applications, a lack of awareness toward plagiarism, and disregarding classroom norms or regulations.

To begin with, the Chinese students are always quiet and passively listen to the lecture without any verbal responses. Many of them avoid making eye contact with their lecturers. These behaviors have been recognized and explained as characteristics of people from high power-distance societies (Country Comparison Tool, 2020; Hofstede et al., 2010). However, they are considered a challenge for the Thai lecturers because they find it difficult to measure their students' comprehension of the lessons. Furthermore, given that active learning exercises had been supplied to improve their learning accomplishment, the Chinese students' quiet and passive learning styles appear antithetical to the active learning strategy. According to the lecturers' responses (Informant 5-2), "Chinese students would only communicate or participate when pushed to do so." Some of them expressed their refusal to answer the question by replying "I don't know" repeatedly.

Secondly, the Chinese students tended to avoid communicating not only with lecturers but also with non-Chinese-speaking classmates. All the lecturers whose classes

included both Chinese and Thai students noted a noticeable divide between these two student groups, which made it challenging to organize them for assignments or activities. Whereas “Thai students would rather not have Chinese students in their group. They said that Chinese students were difficult to get in touch with and hardly contributed to the tasks. Chinese students said that they didn’t know how to contact Thai students and how to contribute to the group assignment.” This kind of situation occurred repeatedly in different classes with group assignments, and it signified a lack of communication between the Thai and Chinese students. However, the fact that the Thai students had their Chinese classmates’ contact but could not reach them, whereas the Chinese counterparts did not know how to contact their Thai classmates, implies the Chinese students’ avoidance of using English or communicating with non-Chinese speakers.

As for their avoidance of communicating with the lecturers, it can be inferred from, in addition to their quietness and reluctance to participate in the class activities mentioned above, the lecturers’ responses that “they did not have any concepts of and did not know how to do a presentation and a written report” and “they did not know how to respond to a Thai-format multiple-choice examination.” Under such ordinary circumstances as receiving an assignment or sitting an examination, students are most likely to ask for clarification or suggestions from the lecturers or invigilators. However, most of the Chinese students, as members of a collectivist society, chose to stay quiet and made a blind guess at a supposed-to-be workable method to finish the assignment or examination, and it was often to no avail. This corresponds to the lecturers of subject matter courses’ feedback on their submitted assignments or presentations as “not properly done” or “poorly done.” Considering that the lecturers had provided them with detailed instructions on how to do a presentation, write a report, or answer the exam questions thoroughly and clearly in both spoken and written forms, with Q&A sessions, the Chinese students’ failure to conform to the instructions implies their difficulty in understanding spoken and written English as well.

In terms of their obsessive dependency on mobile phone applications, all the lecturers observed a similar pattern among Chinese students: “They constantly utilize a mobile phone application to assist them learn in one way or another.” A translation application is the most commonly used. “The Chinese students used a translation application when they were listening to the lecture, doing an activity or assignment in

the class, making a question, preparing an answer, writing a report, doing their homework, and even when talking to their classmates." The lecturers in language classrooms indicated that "the Chinese students used a reading application to help them do reading assignments," as well as "They used a search engine to help them do writing assignments." The subject matter lecturers mentioned that "the Chinese students asked the questions to Siri, then copied and pasted the answers in their assignment." With their obsessive dependency on mobile phone applications, the lectures became disruptive because the lecturers had to pause from time to time to allow them to translate the content to learn, prepare their questions and answers, conduct discussions, and engage in other related activities.

Their ignorance of plagiarism is also evident in their assignment, in which they duplicated the result of a search engine and reproduced it directly. "This kind of behavior was found in all types of the Chinese students, be they hard-working or not-so-attentive ones." While all the lecturers stated that they had already taught in detail how to avoid plagiarism and that any assignment including plagiarism would be rejected and marked zero, the majority of the Chinese students plagiarized, seemingly without realizing it. "When their assignment was rejected and marked zero, some of them frowned with confusion; some of them told me (lecturer) that I was too strict." Given that plagiarism is universally banned in academic settings, their ignorance prevents them from receiving grades for their assignments, and, as a result, they fail the course.

In terms of disregarding classroom norms or regulations, all the lecturers reported that most Chinese male students neglected to wear their uniforms properly. "Their shirts were deliberately unbuttoned, not tucked in pants, no belt, no necktie," coupled with "The Chinese male students usually wear sweatpants to the class," and "Some of them usually had their pant legs rolled up."

Not only did they disregard the classroom attire code, but also the rules and regulations. As a matter of fact, "They got out of the classroom whenever they wanted without asking for permission from the lecturer." "They talked loudly to each other." "The couple expressed their romantic affection openly." "They banged on the desk when they got angry with their friends." They engaged in physical altercations within the classroom. In contrast to males, Chinese female students typically wear their uniforms appropriately and conform to the rules and regulations.

#### **4.1.3 Attitudes Toward Learning**

All the lecturers observed certain distinctive learning behaviors of the Chinese students and viewed them as a reflection of their attitudes toward learning. Such attitudes include prioritizing class attendance and being obsessed with marks and scores.

All the lecturers responded in the same way that the Chinese students typically arrived early for their classes. However, they also agreed that just a few students studied intently, while the majority were constantly playing a game on their mobile phones in class. It appeared that they prioritized class attendance and assumed that simply attending class would secure their academic success. Such an assumption was based on their learning behaviors, such as coming to class without stationery, failing to listen to lectures, and being unaware of instructions, deadlines, and plagiarism when completing assignments. In addition, their reactions to lecturers' feedback on their performances, grades, and scores often included surprises and arguments about their regular class attendance.

Three of the lecturers revealed that they were directly approached by some of the Chinese students who failed to meet an assignment deadline, received a bad grade, and failed an exam to ask for assistance. When pleading with the lecturers to underline the need to assist them, the students referred to their parents as high-ranking authorities. Aside from that, another two lecturers stated that some of the Chinese students sought to ask them to examine their results, even though their work had not been done properly in accordance with the standards. "They appear to be obsessed with marks and scores rather than knowledge," the lecturers remarked. These cases exemplify the Chinese traits of a collectivist society where people favor close connections and value authority (Country Comparison Tool, 2020).

#### **4.2 Teaching approaches in enhancing Chinese students' active learning in a new environmental context of Thai universities**

Each lecturer used various ways in their classes to help Chinese students learn and achieve the objectives of the lessons. However, the following approaches are considered supportive of their instruction.

##### **4.2.1 Using Simplified English**

The lecturers of content subjects agreed that they needed to simplify their English, both spoken and written, in class. While technical terms were important to memorize,

they were defined using basic vocabulary and sentences that were not too long or confusing. Parts of the instructional materials, such as the PowerPoint presentation and worksheets, were modified to lessen the likelihood of language confusion.

This approach was also employed by Thai language class lecturers when providing activity or task directions. However, most English language class lecturers maintained an appropriate level of the language based on the course objectives.

#### **4.2.2 Speaking Slowly and Repeatedly**

Most lecturers reported that they had to speak slowly and pause to see whether the students understood the lessons. If they observed any signs of confusion or perplexity from them, they would repeat their speech with modifications to make it more understandable.

#### **4.2.3 Simplifying the Lessons**

Some subject class lecturers revealed that they had to simplify the lesson by concentrating only on the core knowledge of the course and omitting the peripheral information even though it might help complement the learning achievement. This approach was employed either in alignment with or as a result of their approach of speaking slowly and repeatedly.

#### **4.2.4 Providing Chinese Translation**

Some of the content lecturers provided Chinese technical terms and keywords in their PowerPoint presentations. Those who spoke Chinese also wrapped up the lessons in Chinese at the end of each part to ensure that the Chinese students understood them. Similarly, Thai language lecturers included Chinese translations of the targeted vocabulary in their PowerPoint presentations. According to the lecturers, the translations of technical terms and keywords into Chinese helped them understand the concepts and aided their self-study after class.

#### **4.2.5 Asking Questions to Thai Students Before Chinese Students**

In subject classes where most of the lecturers met Chinese students' avoidance of English communication during the discussion activity, some of the lecturers discovered that calling on a few able Thai students to speak first would encourage the Chinese students to participate more later. Those lecturers assumed that Thai students' performances were examples for Chinese students to follow. Furthermore, the Thai lecturer's easygoing

and supportive contact with the students might have reassured the Chinese students that speaking up was acceptable. Another assumption was that able Chinese students who had previously been afraid to speak up might be motivated to join in the conversation due to a sense of competition. Their assumptions reflect Hofstede's Power Distance Index differences between China and Thailand, with the former higher than the latter and how the Chinese students learned and adapted themselves accordingly. (Country Comparison Tool, 2020; Hofstede et al., 2010).

#### **4.2.6 Using Technology**

Thai language class lecturers frequently use technology to help them teach in various ways. Teachers allowed the Chinese students to use an online dictionary or translation software in class to aid them in learning new words and sentences. They also urged the Chinese students to practice speaking on their own by listening to Siri or Google and repeating what they heard. In addition, they instructed the Chinese students to record their speaking practice so that they could evaluate their performance. Subject class lecturers also permitted Chinese students to utilize a translation tool to aid their learning. However, they would only let them on occasion when an activity was assigned. Aside from that, cell phones were prohibited during classroom hours.

### **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Discussion**

##### **5.1.1 Intercultural Challenges Found**

The findings reveal that insufficient English proficiency, learning behaviors, and attitudes towards learning are intercultural challenges in teaching the Chinese students in intercultural classrooms at a Thai university. Since English is the language of instruction in international programs, it is a requirement for university admission. However, despite the fact that all the Chinese students passed the required TOEIC scores for admission and a compulsory English preparatory course operated by the faculty, their listening and reading skills remained inadequate for the study, and raises questions about criteria and outcomes. The faculty might have to reconsider the required TOEIC scores for admission to ensure that students have sufficient English proficiency to achieve success in their studies. Furthermore, its compulsory English preparatory course should be examined to

identify areas for improvement so that it effectively helps students enhance their English skills.

The success of the faculty in uplifting the Chinese students' English skills will also improve their experience as international students. Insufficient English proficiency in Chinese students impedes their relationship-building with non-Chinese classmates, lecturers, faculty staff, and those who might have been helpful in some aspects of their campus life, academic or non-academic. Several studies have suggested similarly (Chao & Soontornmaruerangsee, 2024; Huang, 2021; Zhao, 2007). Their lack of confidence in communicating in English causes them to avoid interaction with foreigners. This resulted in their isolation or attachment to their Chinese friends only. Because of this, they lose opportunities to broaden their views and receive emotional or mental support from the relationship with those around them. After all, these experiences are crucial to their academic achievement as well.

Regarding learning behaviors, while all the lecturers agreed that the Chinese students were quiet and passive learners, they also decided that these behaviors decreased as they progressed through the years. It is hypothesized that students' familiarity with and trust in their lecturers and classmates reduces their nervousness when interacting with them in class. This might also be explained as their adaptation from a high-power-distance society, China, to a lower-power-distance society, Thailand. According to Sit (2013) and Ginsberg (1992), in China, students asking questions might be perceived as challenging the teachers; therefore, their silence was simply a way to express their respect towards the teachers. However, having learned that mutually interrogative interactions between students and teachers in Thailand were not perceived negatively, they became more relaxed and interactive. Because of this, the faculty may consider organizing some activities to help the Chinese students get to know Thai students and lecturers and familiarize them with teacher-student interaction in Thai higher education before the semester begins. If they have become acquainted with one another and the culture sooner, they might feel more at ease with interactions and become more vocal and engaged learners.

Another issue the Thai lecturers faced while teaching the Chinese students was their excessive reliance on mobile phone applications. While this is considered beneficial behavior because they use technology to assist them in learning, being overly reliant on

technological aid impedes instruction, as previously explained. Furthermore, it deprives them of the opportunity to improve their productive abilities, undermines their confidence in developing their own language for communication, and may result in plagiarism. The measures some of the lecturers employed to limit their use of mobile phones, i.e., describing the activities in which mobile phone applications are encouraged, designating time to be free from mobile phones, and confiscating their mobile phones in case of rule violation, have been proven to work. As a result, this might be officially implemented as a classroom policy to support the lecturers.

Ignorance of plagiarism was frequently found in the Chinese students. As a matter of fact, it was also commonly found in Thai students. This could be because the concept of plagiarism was not fully understood by them. According to theplagiarism.com (3 March 2016), students unknowingly plagiarize by failing to provide appropriate citations, paraphrasing a sentence made of information from multiple sources, and rewording another author's work to make it appear to be their own. However, in the case of Chinese students, inadvertent plagiarism might also emerge from their use of mobile phone applications. Due to their limited English skills, they relied on programs to assist them in explaining their ideas. If a search engine suggested an idea in accordance with their own, they might utilize it to communicate their thoughts. Given that imitation is a method of language learning (Lengkoan & Hampp, 2022), the fact that their replication of the text to communicate their views falls into the grey area of plagiarism should be examined and revised. Another explanation might involve their traits of a collectivist society and high power-distance dimensions, whereby people place high importance on cultural values such as respect for seniority and hierarchical relationships (Hu, 2001; Lin, 2024). With their desire to keep respect in hierarchical and harmonious norms, the practice of replication is a result. Nevertheless, it is necessary that the faculty provide them with a systematic workshop and a timing brush-up on plagiarism to constantly remind them of how to avoid it as well as to reinforce its importance.

The Chinese students disregarding the classroom norms and regulations might result from their unfamiliarity with university student uniforms, since they were not mandatory in China (Nukittrangsan, 2023). Even though the faculty explicitly informed in the orientation that a proper student uniform was a must for attending their classes, several of them, especially male students, insisted on ignoring the rule. Several lecturers'

observations of out-of-classroom behaviors of the Chinese students revealed that the Chinese culture of “Big Brother” was applied among them. A male student who looked older or had the traits of a leader was relatively respected by the others in groups. The Big Brothers had been key persons in the classrooms to assist the lecturers in relaying their messages, reminding their classmates of deadlines, and warning them of behaviors. Therefore, the faculty might consider initiating a Big Brother program in which Big Brothers are officially appointed and assigned to coordinate with the lecturers and the faculty to deal with other students, including persuading them to conform to the classroom norms and regulations. By persistently increasing the number of students who conform to classroom norms and regulations, the rest are anticipated to eventually follow suit, since they are from a collectivist society.

Concerning attitudes toward learning, prioritizing class attendance and being obsessed with marks and scores are remarkable traits among the Chinese students. An inquiry into the cause of such attitudes conducted with random students revealed that student recruitment agencies had important roles in the development of class attendance behaviors among those students. Their persuasion to make potential clients decide to become new students included propaganda that studying at a Thai university was not as difficult as at one in China and that merely regular attendance guaranteed their graduation. Regarding their obsession with marks and scores, several previous research studies acknowledge that it is a result of a Chinese social value that has been continued into the present.

It might be assumed that their attitudes towards learning were the cause of their classroom behaviors, which were not beneficial to their study. As reported by the lecturers, they attended their class early but without any stationery or learning materials; they were not attentive to the lecture but to mobile phone games; and they approached the lecturers to help them pass the course without achieving the requirements. To prevent or reduce these behaviors, the faculty must correct their perception of studying in Thai universities at the earliest stage of their study. An orientation in which misperception is corrected, followed by a consistent reinforcement of the university policy and explicit commitment of the faculty to exercise its authority to ensure good governance in the administration of education, is a suggestion for this matter. In addition, a session to motivate the students to learn for the sake of learning rather than grades is also a vital part of the orientation.

### **5.1.2 Teaching Approaches Used by the Lecturers**

The teaching approaches the lecturers used to help the students learn and engage them in their classrooms were using simplified English, speaking slowly and repeatedly, simplifying the lessons, providing Chinese translation, asking Thai students questions before Chinese students, and using technology.

These teaching approaches conjured up a classroom scenario and teaching experience in which the lecturers first met with their students and soon realized that their proficiency in English was lower than adequate. Hence, they had to improvise to make the students understand the lesson by using simplified English and speaking slowly and repeatedly. Subsequently, they revised their teaching materials to simplify the lessons and add Chinese technical terms, keywords, definitions and concepts so that the students could self-study in their native language after class hours. In addition, they searched for learning-aid technology to use in their class. Lastly, as a result of trials, tests, and observations, some lecturers found a tactic to stimulate their students to participate more actively, that is, by asking Thai students questions before Chinese students. This tactic was derived from discoveries that a competitive atmosphere helped encourage able students to participate. Moreover, an exemplar of answering helped clarify what the lecturer expected the student to do for those who were not confident in how to react.

While these approaches were reported to work in teaching the Chinese students of this faculty, not all of them are supposed to work in different contexts. Since these approaches were outcomes of improvisation, they are contextual and conditional on the students' nature. Furthermore, each of them should be applied cautiously to prevent undesirable consequences.

To begin with, using simplified English and speaking slowly and repeatedly might be appreciated by those whose proficiency in English is low. However, given that those classes were composed of several other students whose levels of English proficiency were different, some students, especially those with high proficiency levels, might not approve of such kind of English as the medium in their classrooms. Regarding simplifying the lessons, some students might doubt whether they had been provided with comprehensive knowledge related to the subject. Considering that they paid higher tuition fees to enroll in an international program, their expectations of the quality of all aspects of education were supposed to be high. This kind of compromise might not be acceptable for them.

Providing Chinese translation is another approach that might offend other students. Due to the nature of international programs, a class might contain students from various countries. Some students might become frustrated and worried about privilege or unfair treatment when they were solely given Chinese translations.

### **5.2 Limitation**

The findings of this study are based on a specific group of Chinese students attending a Thai university. As a result, they should not be generalized or used to stereotype all Chinese students. The goals of this study are to compile the intercultural obstacles to teaching the Chinese students and to identify teaching approaches for lecturers to enhance the Chinese students' active learning and improve their achievement of educational goals. A study on several groups of Chinese students may yield diverse results.

In addition, further investigation to evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching strategies and their long-term impact on student learning would be valuable, since this study only examines the success of various teaching tactics based on the lecturers' subjective assessments.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The findings of this research study show that students' inadequate levels of proficiency in English are the most significant factor that makes teaching challenging. In the context of a Thai university with Chinese students as the majority of the class, this condition is not inapplicable. Therefore, to facilitate the teaching and ensure the learning achievement of the students, a program to effectively enhance their English skills is the utmost necessity.

Regarding the remaining issues, including learning behaviors and attitudes toward learning, the university and Chinese students' shared understanding of intercultural differences helps to improve the circumstances. This shared understanding refers to mutual respect and adaptation between the university and Chinese students. Both sides learn mutually to create more effective educational environments. The programs to help enhance intercultural awareness and sensitivity that the faculty might consider providing them include an intercultural orientation session for Chinese students and an intercultural camp

for all students from different cultural backgrounds to participate in, with a collaborative learning session assigned.

Chinese students' perceptions of Thai culture, particularly as it pertains to the educational system and university life, their favorite teaching and learning strategies, and the interactions and relationships between teachers and students, might help them make decisions about how to act and behave both within and outside of the classroom. Understanding Chinese culture can help the university avoid misinterpreting and harshly evaluating their behavior. Furthermore, some elements of Chinese culture can be necessary to support their system in order to care for or handle them.

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