

## Modeling the Societal Adaptation and Challenge: Living Experience of Chinese Students Studying in Thailand Higher Education Institutions

Songyu Jiang<sup>1</sup>, Tongfeng Xu<sup>2</sup>, Hao Li<sup>3\*</sup>, Ming Li<sup>4</sup>, and Han Wang<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1, 2</sup>Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship,  
Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Thailand

<sup>3</sup>\*Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, Thailand  
<sup>4</sup>Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajapark Institute, Thailand

<sup>5</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training, Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College, China

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: \*li.hao@ku.th

Received May 17, 2024; Revised July 16, 2024; Accepted July 30, 2024

### Abstract

In recent decades, an increasing number of academics have opted to pursue their studies in Thailand. Despite this trend, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the societal adaptation of Chinese international students in Thailand. Bridging the existing gap, this research aims to: 1. unravel the intricacies of cultural adaptation processes among Chinese transnational students in Thailand; 2. illuminate the nuanced dynamics and challenges encountered by this unique group. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the investigation engaged with a purposive sample of 37 Chinese bachelor students majoring in management. It utilized in-depth interviews to capture the richness of their adaptation experiences within the Thai cultural and educational landscape. The research results were as follows: 1. environmental, sociocultural, economic, infrastructural, and geographical factors contribute to the multifaceted adaptation process; 2. notably, environmental changes, socio-cultural integration, economic conditions, and disparities between urban and rural settings significantly influence students' adaptation strategies. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex web of factors that facilitate or impede the cultural adaptation of transnational students. The study's contributions extend beyond the empirical findings to enhance the theoretical discourse on cultural adaptation, offering a nuanced perspective that underscores the multifarious nature of adaptation processes. Furthermore, the research highlights critical areas for policymakers, urban planners, and educational institutions to consider in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for transnational students. Furthermore, the

research highlights critical areas for policymakers, urban planners, and educational institutions to consider in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for transnational students. Furthermore, the research highlights critical areas for policymakers, urban planners, and educational institutions to consider in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for transnational students. By exploring the living experiences of Chinese international students in Thailand, this study deepens our understanding of their cultural adaptation process, thereby extending the current academic landscape in the field of international higher education. Additionally, the findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and educators, enabling them to develop more effective strategies and support systems to facilitate the integration and well-being of international students.

**Keywords:** international education; cultural adaptation; Thailand education; Chinese students; higher education; studying experience

## Introduction

In recent years, Thailand has undergone a significant metamorphosis in its higher education landscape, emerging as an influential educational nexus within Southeast Asia (Waters & Day, 2022). Characterized by substantial infrastructural expansion and a strategic emphasis on curricular internationalization, Thai universities present a unique synthesis of rich cultural heritage with rigorous academic standards (Buasawan, 2018). This evolution is highlighted by the escalating influx of Chinese higher education students, underscoring Thailand's ascending prominence as an international educational destination. Factors such as geographical proximity, cultural resonance, and economic feasibility underpin this trend. Notably, Thai higher education institutions offer a cost-effective alternative to their Western counterparts, as evidenced by competitive tuition fees and lower living costs, while maintaining educational quality. Official data from the Thai Ministry of Education corroborates this trend, revealing a steady annual increase of approximately 10% in Chinese student enrollment since 2015 (Tamene et al., 2017).

The Thai government's strategic initiatives, including relaxed visa policies and targeted scholarships for Chinese students, have significantly expedited this academic influx. These measures are complemented by Thai universities' active engagement and partnership initiatives in China, further augmenting the enrollment of Chinese students. This burgeoning educational exchange not only signifies Thailand's elevated status in the global education arena but also marks a deepening of Sino-Thai cultural and educational ties. Consequently, Thailand's higher education sector

epitomizes an ideal amalgamation of local cultural richness with global academic standards, fostering a dynamic, multicultural academic environment increasingly attractive to international students, especially from China (Lin & Kingminghae, 2014).

In pursuing overseas higher education, international students, including those from China, encounter a spectrum of dilemmas and challenges that extend beyond academic concerns, delving into cultural adaptation complexities (Gümüş et al., 2020). Transitioning to an unfamiliar educational and social environment involves navigating new cultural norms, language barriers, and social integration nuances (Ladum & Burkholder, 2019). This journey of adaptation is integral to their educational experience, impacting their well-being, academic success, and social integration. Despite commonalities between Thai and Chinese cultures, disparities in socio-political, socio-economic aspects, and institutional regimes present significant adaptation challenges for Chinese students in Thailand (Lin & Kingminghae, 2014).

Acknowledging these dynamics, the study of Chinese students' cultural adaptation in Thailand becomes paramount. It is essential to investigate how these students integrate their cultural perspectives within Thailand's distinct cultural context. This exploration is vital for understanding their academic and social experiences and for developing supportive measures to facilitate smoother transitions.

Existing literature on Chinese higher education students in Thailand identifies initial challenges such as language barriers, educational system differences (Isa et al., 2020), and social integration difficulties (Chen et al., 2021; Lin & Kingminghae, 2014). These studies emphasize the importance of cultural adaptability in influencing students' academic paths and well-being in a foreign context.

However, there is a noticeable gap in comprehensive support and advisory frameworks to aid their cultural adaptation, potentially affecting their academic performance and mental health. Additionally, current research exhibits homogeneity in theoretical approaches, primarily focusing on superficial adaptation challenges and lacking depth in intercultural dynamics (Thomas, 2017). Moreover, while qualitative studies have explored cultural adaptability, they have not developed a comprehensive theoretical model to systematically explain cultural adaptability and acculturation aspects (Sarmiento et al., 2019).

Given the advancement of higher education in Thailand, an increasing number of Chinese academics are choosing to study there. However, studying abroad presents both opportunities and

---

challenges, particularly in terms of cross-cultural adaptation. While scholars have discussed the intercultural adaptation of Chinese international students using qualitative approaches, current studies have yet to develop a comprehensive theoretical model.

### Research objective

1. To develop a comprehensive theoretical model for Chinese students in Thailand, adopting an exploratory approach using multiple theoretical perspectives.
2. To fill existing research voids and offer a new, theory-based perspective on the cultural adaptation experiences of Chinese students in Thailand.

### Scope of Research

*Content of the study:* This research is systematically structured into several distinct sections, each contributing uniquely to the overall investigation of the cultural adaptation of Chinese transnational students in Thailand. The abstract succinctly outlines the research objectives and methodologies, providing an overview of key findings related to the multifaceted adaptation process influenced by various factors. The introduction sets the contextual backdrop, detailing Thailand's evolving educational landscape and its appeal to Chinese students, while also framing the study's significance in addressing cultural adaptation. The literature review elaborates on previous studies, highlighting the challenges of cross-cultural adaptation and identifying gaps in the current understanding. The research objective section delineates the aims of the study, emphasizing the development of a detailed acculturation model and enhancing the theoretical perspective on cultural adaptation. The scope of research specifies the content, population, sample, area, and time frame of the study. The research methodology describes the qualitative methods employed, focusing on in-depth interviews and grounded theory analysis. The research results present the findings from the data analysis, articulating the emergent themes and their implications. Each section of the study is crafted to build upon the previous, culminating in a comprehensive exploration of the cultural adaptation experiences of Chinese students in Thailand, thereby enriching the academic discourse on international education and cultural integration.

*Population and sample:* The population and sample of the study specifically target Chinese bachelor students majoring in management. A total of 37 students were purposively selected to

participate in the research. These participants, currently enrolled in higher education institutions in Thailand, were chosen to provide in-depth insights into their cultural adaptation processes within the Thai educational and cultural landscapes. The study engages with these students through detailed qualitative interviews, aiming to capture the richness of their experiences as they navigate their new academic and social environments.

**Area:** The research area in this study pertains to Thai universities, particularly those located in Bangkok and neighboring regions. This geographical focus is significant as it represents a central hub of educational activity and cultural interaction within Thailand, which is relevant to the study's investigation of the cultural adaptation processes among Chinese transnational students. This area was selected due to its prominence in the Thai higher education system and its attractiveness to international students, providing a rich context for examining the nuanced experiences of cultural integration and adaptation.

**Time:** The research time specified in the study is that the Chinese business management students have been residing in Thailand for approximately six months. This duration is critical as it represents a significant period for initial cultural adaptation and adjustment, allowing the researchers to capture the early stages of the student's integration into the Thai cultural and educational environment. This time frame provides a snapshot of the challenges and dynamics encountered by the students as they navigate their new academic and social settings.

## Literature Review

### Cross-cultural Communication and Social Adaptation in the Context of International Students

Cross-cultural communication and social adaptation refer to the processes by which individuals from one culture effectively communicate and adapt to the norms and practices of another culture (Setti et al., 2022). This is particularly pertinent in the context of international Chinese students who navigate a complex web of cultural, linguistic, and academic challenges in foreign environments. These processes involve not only language proficiency and communication skills but also broader aspects of cultural understanding, psychological well-being, and social integration. Recent research in this field has explored various dimensions of the experiences of Chinese students abroad (Li et al., 2021; Lin, 2020).

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of various research studies focusing on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in diverse educational contexts around the world. Each entry in the table corresponds to a specific study, summarizing key findings and noting the country where the study was conducted. Table 1 serves as a valuable resource for understanding the multifaceted nature of cross-cultural adaptation, revealing how factors such as social support, language proficiency, digital communication platforms, and educational strategies impact the experiences of Chinese students abroad.

The diversity of the countries included in the table, ranging from Ireland to New Zealand, the United States, Australia, and China – underscores the global scope of the research on this topic. Studies like Wang (2020) and Gümüş et al. (2020) highlight the importance of language skills and social networks in adaptation processes, while others, such as Ou et al. (2023), delve into more nuanced aspects like naming practices and identity formation.

Innovative approaches to understanding and supporting adaptation are also evident, with Dovchin (2020) examining gamification techniques and Gümüş et al. (2020) investigating the impact of metaverse cultural communication. Ma and Zhan (2022) focus on the role of social support-seeking in coping with acculturative stress, illustrating the complexities of cultural adjustment in different host nations. Collectively, Table 1 reflects the current academic discourse on the challenges and strategies pertinent to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students. It highlights the varying dimensions of adaptation, from psychological well-being to social and academic integration, offering a holistic view of the international student experience.

**Table 1** Comparative Analysis of Cross-Cultural Adaptation Among Chinese International Students Across Different Global Contexts

Source	Research Findings	Country
Wang (2020)	Chinese students in Ireland have an upper-middle level of cross-cultural adaptation, influenced by social support, language ability, and motivation for studying abroad.	Ireland
Sleeman et al. (2016)	Social networking sites are significant for the acculturation process of international students.	General/ Not specified
Bethel et al. (2020)	Relationships with host nationals are crucial for international students in New Zealand, affecting life satisfaction and psychological symptoms.	New Zealand
Ou et al. (2023)	Naming choices among Chinese students in the US involve both transnational processes and situated practices.	United States
Gümüş et al. (2020)	In a postcolonial context, language proficiency and national identity are key to cultural adaptation.	General/Postcolonial context
Dovchin (2020)	Gamification techniques could aid Chinese international students in Australia in improving their adaptation outcomes.	Australia
Ma and Zhan (2022)	Social support-seeking is effective for coping with acculturative stress among Chinese students in Japan and the US.	United States

Despite the richness of these studies, several gaps remain in the literature. First, there is a need for more comprehensive research on the long-term impacts of cross-cultural adaptation on Chinese students' personal and professional development. Second, the role of digital technologies and social media in facilitating or impeding adaptation needs further exploration, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, while existing studies have highlighted various factors influencing adaptation, there is a paucity of research on the development of practical strategies and support systems that can be implemented by educational institutions to facilitate smoother transitions for these students.

In conclusion, while significant strides have been made in understanding the cross-cultural communication and social adaptation challenges faced by international Chinese students, more research is needed to translate these insights into effective support mechanisms. This is crucial in an increasingly globalized educational landscape, where the ability to navigate cultural differences and adapt effectively has far-reaching implications for the success and well-being of international students.

### Chinese students studying in Thailand: A cross-cultural perspective

Cross-cultural perspective, in the context of Chinese students studying in Thailand, refers to the study and understanding of how these students adapt to and interact within the cultural, social, and educational environments of Thailand, which differ significantly from their native Chinese background (Ou & Gu, 2021). This perspective involves examining the challenges, strategies, and outcomes of their adaptation process in a foreign cultural setting. It encompasses aspects such as language acquisition, psychological adjustment, social integration, academic adaptation, and the development of intercultural competencies.

The current research on Chinese students studying in Thailand predominantly focuses on their decision-making processes, cross-cultural adaptation, and the various factors influencing their experiences in a foreign educational setting (Lin & Kingminghae, 2014). This area of study has garnered significant attention in recent years, reflecting the broader trends of globalization in higher education and the increasing mobility of international students.

Ou and Gu (2021) explore identity formation, imagined communities, and communities of practice among Thai university students in China, offering insights into the sociolinguistic aspects of cross-cultural adaptation. Ladum and Burkholder (2019) examine the psychological adaptation of international students, emphasizing the mediating role of host national connectedness. These studies highlight the complex interplay of social, psychological, and cultural factors in the international student experience.

Several studies have focused on the reasons why Chinese students choose to study in Thailand. Yin et al. (2015), Ye (2020), and Tan and Amponstira (2021) all investigate the factors influencing Chinese students' satisfaction and decision-making toward Thai universities. Dovchin (2020) extends this inquiry to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing contemporary insights into the changing dynamics of international education. Research by Ayivor et al. (2023) delves into post-graduation intentions, examining factors that influence Chinese students' decisions to stay in or leave their host country after completing their degrees. Lertpusit (2022) discusses Thailand's potential as a regional education hub, analyzing the attraction factors for Chinese students in Thailand and Malaysia.

Sun et al. (2020) provide an in-depth look at the cross-cultural adaptation process and the main difficulties faced by Chinese students in Northern Thai universities. These studies contribute valuable knowledge about the challenges and strategies involved in adapting to a new cultural and

educational environment. Additionally, Rattanaphumma and Visuttakul (2022) investigate the impact of study abroad experiences on the multilingual development of Chinese students in Thailand, offering a linguistic perspective on cross-cultural adaptation.

Current research on Chinese students studying in Thailand has made significant breakthroughs in understanding the multifaceted nature of their experiences (Rattanaphumma & Visuttakul, 2022). The studies collectively address various aspects, including decision-making processes, satisfaction levels, post-graduation intentions, and cross-cultural adaptation challenges (Lin, 2020). A notable trend is the exploration of psychological and sociolinguistic factors, such as identity formation and language development, which play crucial roles in students' adaptation and integration.

The body of research on Chinese students in foreign educational contexts, particularly in Thailand, demonstrates a growing interest in understanding their cross-cultural adaptation processes. Studies have shown that this adaptation is influenced by a myriad of factors, including language proficiency, educational models, social support systems, psychological well-being, and the quality of student-teacher relationships (Rattanaphumma & Visuttakul, 2022). A notable shift in research focus is observed, from a deficit perspective to one that emphasizes students' strengths and identities.

Consequently, it becomes imperative for this study to delve deeper into the contemporary challenges and positive perceptions experienced by Chinese students residing and studying in Thailand. Such an exploration is not only critical for elucidating the nuanced realities faced by these students but also for contributing constructively to their decision-making process regarding study destinations. Furthermore, an in-depth understanding of these aspects holds the potential to inform and inspire the strategic development of the Thai higher education sector. By addressing both the hurdles and the favorable elements perceived by Chinese students, this research aims to provide valuable insights that could guide the evolution of educational policies and practices in Thailand, thereby enhancing its appeal as a preferred destination for international education.

## Research Methodology

This investigation adopts a qualitative research paradigm, utilizing grounded theory to meticulously examine the social adaptation experiences of Chinese business students in Thailand. The essence of the study lies in its focus on comprehending the lived experiences, perceptions, and

challenges these students encounter as they navigate the complexities of adapting to a novel cultural and academic milieu.

The research encompasses a group of 37 Chinese business management students enrolled in higher education institutions in Thailand. These individuals, designated as participants P1 through P37 for anonymity, have each completed two years of university education in China. Currently residing in Thailand for approximately six months, the majority of these students are experiencing what is typically known as the frustration stage in the cross-cultural communication adaptation process. Their academic engagements are predominantly within universities situated in Bangkok and its neighboring regions.

Data was meticulously gathered via open-ended interviews, meticulously structured to extract profound insights into the students' experiences of life and academia in Thailand. Each interview, lasting approximately 20 minutes, was crafted to provide participants with ample opportunity to articulate their perspectives in depth. The interviews were conducted with a stringent emphasis on confidentiality and anonymity, fostering an environment conducive to sincerity and openness in responses. The anonymity of the participants was rigorously upheld in all interview transcripts and records.

The interviews were strategically designed to explore a comprehensive array of the participants' life experiences. This exploration included but was not limited to, their daily living routines, academic challenges, social interactions, and emotional adjustments in Thailand. The objective was to capture a broad spectrum of experiences, ranging from academic pursuits to social and cultural involvements, thereby facilitating a holistic understanding of their adaptation journey.

Employing the grounded theory methodology using Excel, the study involved a meticulous process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding of the data. This approach enabled the inductive extraction of themes and patterns embedded within the raw data. In the initial phase of open coding, data were dissected into discrete incidents and concepts. Subsequent axial coding entailed a thorough examination and reassembly of these codes into cohesive categories, pinpointing the interrelationships among them. The final phase, selective coding, synthesized these categories into a unified model, eloquently encapsulating the core themes of social adaptation among Chinese students in Thailand. Theoretical saturation was deemed achieved when no additional relevant data surfaced, indicating the comprehensive development of the model.

This research methodologically contributes to the field by not only unveiling the nuanced layers of Chinese students' adaptation in Thailand but also by modeling a robust framework for similar cross-cultural studies. The outcome of this research is a comprehensive model of social adaptation for Chinese business students in Thailand. This model encapsulates the key factors influencing their adaptation process and provides a nuanced understanding of their experiences in a cross-cultural academic setting. The model serves not only as a theoretical framework for understanding the adaptation of international students but also as a guide for educational institutions and policymakers to develop support mechanisms for facilitating smoother cultural transitions.

## Research Results

Strauss and Glaser (2020) explain that grounded theory is a systematic methodology in the social sciences that involves the construction of theories through methodical gathering and analysis of data. The study compiled 1,279 codes from the interview records of 37 participants. Based on grounded theory, the following process uses open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to construct a social adaptation model for Chinese students studying in Thailand.

### Open coding

In the context of this study, which employs grounded theory to investigate the cultural adaptation of Chinese transnational students in Thailand, open coding represents the initial stage of data analysis. This process involves the meticulous examination, comparison, and categorization of data to identify emerging themes, concepts, and categories (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Open coding serves as the foundation for developing a nuanced understanding of the students' experiences by fragmenting the data into discrete parts that can be systematically analyzed to reveal patterns and relationships (Charmaz, 2021).

In the open coding stage, data is dissected into discrete parts to identify significant concepts and categories. Each 'code' in the table represents a conceptual label derived from a careful examination of the data. These codes serve as foundational building blocks for the development of a theory (Charmaz, 2021).

Table 2 organizes the data into 15 distinct codes, each reflecting a unique aspect of the lived experience or observations in a specific context (presumably relating to life in Thailand, based on the content). For instance, "Water Quality Issues" encapsulates concerns about the frequency of

filter replacements due to poor water quality. In contrast, “cultural preferences” capture the societal inclination toward certain lifestyle choices, like frequenting coffee shops and wearing slippers.

**Table 2** Open Coding Analysis of Grounded Theory Data

Code Number	Open Code	Description
1	Water Quality Issues	Poor water quality (P2, P13), frequent filter replacements (P7)
2	Dining Experience	Eating is troublesome (P2), slow meal service (P12)
3	Cost of Living	High prices for vegetables and fruits (P6), except in wet markets (P8)
4	Cultural Preferences	Preference for coffee shops (P22, P25, P32), wearing slippers (P26, P27, P12)
5	Social Behavior	Thai people's high quality and enthusiasm (P11, P14, P16, P18), politeness even when drunk (P23, P19, P17, P3, P5)
6	Business Practices	General integrity in business (P13, P2, P4, P17), issues with taxi services (P11, P18, P9)
7	Transportation	Inconvenient (P34, P4, P19, P21), irregular traffic (P14, P13, P15, P5), motorcyclists' behavior (P11, P8, P28, P21, P33)
8	Urban Planning	Gap between urban and rural areas (P10, P5, P1, P4, P2), lack of urban management (P11, P31, P22, P19), unrestricted street vending (P5, P13, P15, P5)
9	Lifestyle and Beliefs	Nightlife culture (P10, P8, P12, P23, P13), prevalence of Buddhism (P11, P5, P26, P21, P13), presence of Buddha statues (P15, P3, P5, P12)
10	Service Quality	Poor hairdressing services (P5, P23, P11, P6), slow phone charging (P2, P4, P10, P37), poor telecommunications (P33, P12, P31, P35), good apartment services (P32, P31, P8)
11	Health and Environment	Hair loss concerns (P13, P14, P29), severe mosquito bites (P11, P25, P29, P31)
12	Infrastructure	High temperatures (P8, P6, P11, P16), poor network infrastructure (P1-P7, P20-P23, P29), poor drainage system (P4, P8, P13, P16)
13	Diversity and Tourism	Presence of many Europeans and Americans (P7, P19, P33, P21), cheap golf services (P3, P28, P23, P36)
14	Work and Commerce	Flexibility in work and store operations (P14, P15, P33, P26), arbitrary charges in online shopping (P7, P1-P6, P18, P21), underdeveloped shopping experience (P24, P28, P11, P19)
15	Law Enforcement and Safety	Lax traffic law enforcement (P15, P28, P31, P29), dangerous motorcycling practices (P13, P17, P24-P30, P35)

### Axial coding

Axial coding constitutes the second phase in the grounded theory methodology, building upon the preliminary insights gained from open coding (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). This analytical process involves the reassembly of fragmented data during open coding, enabling researchers to identify relationships between categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2021). It facilitates the establishment of a conceptual framework by linking categories to their properties and dimensions, thereby delineating the causal conditions, context, strategies, and consequences surrounding the phenomenon under study. Axial coding is instrumental in refining and integrating data, paving the way for the development of a cohesive theoretical model (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

This coding process is vital for the next stage of grounded theory, namely axial coding. Axial coding constitutes the second phase in the grounded theory methodology, building upon the preliminary insights gained from open coding (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). This analytical process involves the reassembly of fragmented data during open coding, enabling researchers to identify relationships between categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2021). It facilitates the establishment of a conceptual framework by linking categories to their properties and dimensions, thereby delineating the causal conditions, context, strategies, and consequences surrounding the phenomenon under study. Axial coding is instrumental in refining and integrating data, paving the way for the development of a cohesive theoretical model (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). (where connections between these open codes are established to form broader categories) and selective coding (where a core category is identified, around which the emerging theory is developed). The goal of grounded theory is not just to describe a phenomenon but to understand the underlying social processes, relationships, and structures that characterize it (Charmaz, 2021). This method is particularly effective in generating theories that are closely aligned with empirical data.

To proceed with axial coding, we need to identify relationships and patterns among the open codes we previously established. In axial coding, these codes are grouped into broader categories, which helps in understanding how various concepts are related to each other. These categories often represent the themes, processes, or phenomena that are evident in the data. Table 3 presents each category of axial code with associated open codes.

**Table 3** Axial Coding of Grounded Theory Data

Axial Code Category	Associated Open Codes
Environmental Challenges	Water Quality Issues, Health and Environment
Socio-cultural Dynamics	Cultural Preferences, Social Behavior, Lifestyle and Beliefs, Diversity and Tourism
Economic Considerations	Cost of Living, Business Practices, Work and Commerce
Service and Infrastructure	Transportation, Service Quality, Infrastructure
Urban-Rural Dichotomy	Urban Planning, Law Enforcement and Safety

Axial coding is a step in grounded theory methodology where codes from the open coding stage are examined in greater detail to understand the connections and relationships among them. This process involves organizing the open codes into categories, which can represent themes, processes, or phenomena observed in the data.

Environmental Challenges combine concerns about water quality and health-related issues, such as mosquito bites. It highlights the environmental challenges faced in the given context. Socio-cultural dynamics encompass various aspects of cultural preferences, social behaviors, and lifestyles, including the influence of religion and the presence of diverse groups (e.g., Europeans, and Americans). It illustrates the complex social and cultural fabric of the society being studied.

Economic Considerations related to the economic aspects of life, like the cost of living, business practices, and the nature of commerce and work. It reflects the economic realities and challenges in the environment.

Service and Infrastructure include aspects related to transportation, quality of services (like telecommunications and hairdressing), and overall infrastructure. It points to the level of development and efficiency of services and infrastructure.

Urban-rural dichotomy brings together issues related to urban planning and law enforcement, highlighting the differences and disparities between urban and rural areas.

Axial coding is crucial in grounded theory as it starts to build a framework that connects the micro-level observations (open codes) to macro-level themes (axial codes). It sets the stage for selective coding, where the core category or central phenomenon that the emerging theory will explain is identified.

### Selective coding

Selective coding is the final stage in the grounded theory methodology, where the core category that integrates all other categories is identified (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). This core

category represents the central phenomenon around which the emerging theory is structured. It explains the main theme or issue evident in the data. Selective coding synthesizes the entire data set by identifying a core category that encapsulates the primary theme of the research. It's the culmination of the grounded theory process, where all categories are unified under a single, coherent conceptual framework.

Societal Adaptation and Challenges have been derived to represent the primary theme in the data. It captures the essence of how individuals and society adapt to and manage various challenges and dynamics. This category integrates:

Environmental Challenges: Addressing how environmental factors impact daily life and health.

Socio-cultural Dynamics: Reflecting the complex interplay of cultural practices, social behaviors, and the diverse influences of religion and international presence.

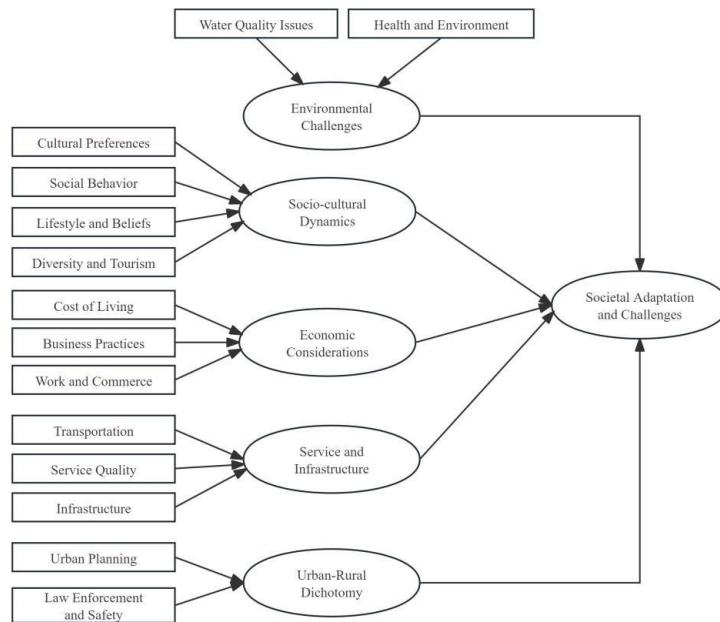
Economic Considerations: Highlighting the economic realities, opportunities, and challenges faced by individuals and businesses.

Service and Infrastructure: Concerning the quality and development of essential services and infrastructure, and their impact on daily living.

Urban-Rural Dichotomy: Focusing on the disparities and differences in experiences and challenges between urban and rural settings.

This core category, Societal Adaptation and Challenges, suggests that the central phenomenon in this research revolves around how individuals, businesses, and the broader society adapt to environmental, socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural challenges in their context. It implies a dynamic interplay of adaptation, coping mechanisms, and responses to a variety of challenges and changes within society.

The conceptual framework of this study, as delineated in Error! Reference source not found., encapsulates a complex synthesis of elements pivotal to societal adaptation processes.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of societal adoption and challenges

This framework postulates a dynamic and multifarious interrelation among five principal categories, each distinctly contributing to the overarching theme of societal adaptation amid an array of challenges. The intricate interconnectivity of these categories manifests a sophisticated interplay of adaptation strategies, coping mechanisms, and varied responses to diverse challenges faced by society. This framework fundamentally contends that societal adaptation is an intricate, non-linear process, marked not by isolation but by its multifaceted nature, shaped by a confluence of environmental, socio-cultural, economic, infrastructural, and geographical determinants. The interactive nature of these categories underpins a holistic understanding, elucidating how societies adeptly navigate and respond to a plethora of challenges in an evolving global context. In essence, this model provides a nuanced perspective on the adaptive mechanisms of societies, recognizing the complexities and interdependencies inherent in the contemporary socio-environmental landscape.

## Discussion

The findings of this study offer substantial insights into the intricate dynamics of societal adaptation, underscoring the multifaceted nature of the process as influenced by environmental,

socio-cultural, economic, infrastructural, and geographical factors. These results resonate with the theoretical underpinnings posited by Luna-Nemecio et al. (2020), which emphasizes the complexity of societal responses to diverse challenges.

Central to our findings is the interplay among the five identified categories. Notably, the environmental challenges align with the notions of Ou and Gu (2021), highlighting how ecological shifts directly impact societal structures. This concurs with the arguments presented by Shu et al. (2020), underscoring the necessity for environmental resilience in societal adaptation strategies. Similarly, the socio-cultural dynamics observed reflect the intricacies of cultural and social influences in shaping societal behaviors, as suggested by Phillips (2023). This aligns with the broader discourse on the impact of cultural norms and practices on societal evolution, as discussed in La Salle et al. (2020).

The economic considerations and the role of service and infrastructure revealed in the study point towards a direct correlation between economic health and societal well-being, resonating with the arguments presented by Lertpusit (2022). This relationship emphasizes the critical role of economic stability and robust infrastructure in facilitating effective societal adaptation, as suggested by Cox (2021).

The urban-rural dichotomy highlights significant disparities in adaptive strategies, echoing the findings of Cao et al. (2021). This suggests a nuanced understanding of geographical impacts on societal adaptation, advocating for tailored approaches in policy formulation and implementation.

The outcomes of this research emphasize the imperative for a sophisticated approach in the realms of policy formulation, urban development, and societal leadership to navigate the labyrinth of contemporary societal challenges. The implications for diverse stakeholders are delineated as follows:

Policymakers are confronted with the essential task of crafting and executing policies that transcend mere reactions to present difficulties, aspiring instead to preemptively address future developments. Such policies ought to cultivate resilience to environmental perturbations, endorse socio-cultural integration, amplify economic stability, and fortify essential infrastructure. For instance, the integration of climate resilience strategies within urban planning initiatives stands as a vital measure for safeguarding communities against environmental adversities. Additionally, policies aimed at enhancing social cohesion and cultural interchange can significantly enrich the socio-cultural fabric of multifaceted societies.

---

Urban planners are impelled to embrace adaptable urban frameworks that accommodate the evolving exigencies of society. This encompasses the creation of spaces conducive to environmental sustainability, socio-cultural inclusivity, and economic prosperity. Green spaces, for example, not only ameliorate environmental and social well-being but also catalyze communal engagement. Furthermore, the advancement of infrastructure that bridges the gap between urban and rural locales is paramount in dissolving disparities, thereby guaranteeing equitable access to services and prospects.

Societal leaders across various sectors are encouraged to lead initiatives that augment the societal capacity for adaptation and flourishing in the face of diverse challenges. This may involve the initiation of community engagement endeavors that foster cultural empathy and unity, the advocacy for economic strategies that privilege sustainability, and the support for infrastructural developments attuned to society's forthcoming necessities.

## Conclusion

This study has offered a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted processes of societal adaptation, with a particular focus on the complex interplay between environmental, socio-cultural, economic, infrastructural, and geographical factors. The intricate dynamics uncovered herein underscore the non-linear and interconnected nature of societal adaptation, emphasizing the pivotal role of diverse external influences and internal coping mechanisms. This research has illuminated the profound impact of these factors on societal resilience and evolution, thus contributing significantly to the discourse on societal adaptation within the context of a rapidly changing global landscape.

## Suggestion

While offering valuable insights, this study is subject to certain limitations that necessitate a cautious interpretation of its findings. Predominantly, the confined sample size of 37 participants restricts the generalizability of the results to the wider population of Chinese students abroad. Additionally, the exclusive focus on bachelor students majoring in management may not encapsulate the diversity of experiences across different academic disciplines and educational levels, potentially overlooking varied adaptation strategies and challenges. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of this

research, although instrumental in uncovering in-depth personal experiences, limits the ability to quantify the prevalence or distribution of these experiences among a larger student population. These constraints highlight areas for future research, including the expansion of sample size, inclusion of a broader range of academic fields and educational stages, and the integration of quantitative methods to enrich the understanding of cultural adaptation processes among transnational students.

Looking forward, the limitations identified in this study underscore the necessity for expanded inquiry into the cultural adaptation of Chinese transnational students. Future research should aim to include a larger, more diverse sample size and extend beyond the domain of management bachelor students to encompass varied academic disciplines and educational levels. This approach will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the adaptation strategies and challenges faced by a broader spectrum of transnational students. Moreover, integrating quantitative methods could provide a more nuanced analysis of the prevalence and characteristics of cultural adaptation phenomena. Additionally, expanding the geographical scope to incorporate a wider array of societal contexts would significantly enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Collectively, these recommendations propose a multifaceted strategy for future investigations, promising richer insights into the complex dynamics of cultural adaptation among transnational student populations.

## New Knowledge

Through meticulous data analysis involving open, axial, and selective coding, the research identifies key themes such as environmental challenges, socio-cultural dynamics, economic considerations, service and infrastructure, and the urban-rural dichotomy. These themes highlight the multifaceted nature of students' adaptation processes, encompassing practical issues like water quality and cost of living, cultural engagement, and the impact of misinformation. The core category, "Societal Adaptation and Challenges," integrates these themes, illustrating how individuals and society adapt to and manage various challenges. This study offers a comprehensive framework that underscores the complex interplay of factors influencing the educational and social experiences of Chinese students in Thailand.

## References

Ayivor, S., Mensah, W. Y., & Yang, H. (2023). An assessment of post-graduation residency plans of international doctoral graduates in the United States and economic status of their country of origin: The case of sub-Saharan Africa. *International Social Science Journal*, 73(247), 195–214. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12382>

Bethel, A., Ward, C., & Fetvadjiev, V. H. (2020). Cross-cultural transition and psychological adaptation of international students: The mediating role of host national connectedness. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 539950. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.539950>

Buasawan, P. (2018). Rethinking Thai higher education for Thailand 4.0. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 7(2), 157–173. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-07-2017-0072>

Cao, C., Zhu, C., & Meng, Q. (2021). Chinese international students' coping strategies, social support resources in response to academic stressors: Does heritage culture or host context matter? *Current Psychology*, 40, 242–252. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9929-0>

Charmaz, K. (2021). The genesis, grounds, and growth of constructivist grounded theory. In Janice M. Mores, Barbar J. Bowers, & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *Developing grounded theory: The second generation revisited* (pp. 153–187).

Charmaz, K., & Thornberg, R. (2021). The pursuit of quality in grounded theory. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 18(3), 305–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1780357>

Chen, P., Wang, H., You, X., Chen, D., & Chew, R. S. Y. (2021). Mental Health Issues of International Mainland Chinese College Students in Thailand. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 25(5), 565–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315320964288>

Cox, J. (2021). The higher education environment driving academic library strategy: A political, economic, social and technological (PEST) analysis. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 47(1), 102219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102219>

Dovchin, S. (2020). The psychological damages of linguistic racism and international students in Australia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(7), 804–818. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1759504>

Gümüş, S., Gök, E., & Esen, M. (2020). A review of research on international student mobility: Science mapping the existing knowledge base. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(5), 495–517. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319893651>

Isa, F. M., Noor, S., Ahmdon, M. A. S., Setiawati, C. I., & Tantasuntisakul, W. (2020). Comparison of students' perception about curriculum design versus employability in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. *International Journal of Management in Education*, 14(4), 331–351. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMIE.2020.107997>

La Salle, T. P., Wang, C., Wu, C., & Rocha Neves, J. (2020). Racial mismatch among minoritized students and white teachers: Implications and recommendations for moving forward. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 30(3), 314–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2019.1673759>

Ladum, A., & Burkholder, G. J. (2019). Psychological Adaptation of International Students in the Northern Part of Cyprus. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 9(1), 19–33.

Lertpusit, S. (2022). Driving Thailand to Become a Regional Education Hub: An Analysis of the Factors of Attraction among Chinese Students in Thailand and Malaysia. *GMSARN International Journal*, 16, 66–74.

Li, L., Shen, W., & Xie, A. (2021). Why students leave Chinese elite universities for doctoral studies abroad: Institutional habitus, career script and college graduates' decision to study abroad. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 84, 102408. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102408>

Lin, L. (2020). The visible hand behind study-abroad waves: Cram schools, organizational framing and the international mobility of Chinese students. *Higher Education*, 79, 259–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00408-1>

Lin, Y., & Kingminghae, W. (2014). Social support and loneliness of Chinese international students in Thailand. *Journal of Population and Social Studies*, 22(2), 141–157.

Luna-Nemecio, J., Tobón, S., & Juárez-Hernández, L. G. (2020). Sustainability-based on socioformation and complex thought or sustainable social development. *Resources, Environment and Sustainability*, 2, 100007. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resenv.2020.100007>

Ma, Y., & Zhan, N. (2022). To mask or not to mask amid the COVID-19 pandemic: How Chinese students in America experience and cope with stigma. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 54(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2020.1833712>

Ou, W. A., & Gu, M. M. (2021). Language socialization and identity in intercultural communication: Experience of Chinese students in a transnational university in China. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(3), 419–434.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1472207>

Ou, W. A., Gu, M. M., & Hult, F. M. (2023). Translanguaging for intercultural communication in international higher education: Transcending English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 20(2), 576–594.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2020.1856113>

Phillips, M. J. (2023). Towards a social constructionist, criticalist, Foucauldian-informed qualitative research approach: Opportunities and challenges. *SN Social Sciences*, 3(10), 175.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-023-00774-9>

Rattanaphumma, R., & Visuttakul, C. (2022). Impact of Study Abroad Experiences on the Multilingual Development of Chinese Students: A Case Study in Thailand. *Journal of Research and Curriculum Development*, 12(1), 43–57.

Sarmiento, A. V., Pérez, M. V., Bustos, C., Hidalgo, J. P., & del Solar, J. I. V. (2019). Inclusion profile of theoretical frameworks on the study of sociocultural adaptation of international university students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 70, 19–41.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.02.004>

Setti, I., Sommovigo, V., & Argentero, P. (2022). Enhancing expatriates' assignments success: the relationships between cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptation and performance. *Current Psychology*, 41(7), 4291–4311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-00931-w>

Shu, F., Ahmed, S. F., Pickett, M. L., Ayman, R., & McAbee, S. T. (2020). Social support perceptions, network characteristics, and international student adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 74, 136–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.11.002>

Sleeman, J., Lang, C., & Lemon, N. (2016). Social media challenges and affordances for international students: Bridges, boundaries, and hybrid spaces. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(5), 391–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315316662975>

Strauss, A. L., & Glaser, B. G. (2020). Patterns of dying. In *The dying patient* (pp. 129–155). Routledge.

Sun, K., Yossuck, P., Panyadee, C., & Ek-lem, B. (2020). The Process of Chinese Students Cross-cultural Adaptation and Their Main Difficulties Encountered while Studying in the Upper Northern Thai Universities. *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies*, 343–372.

Tamene, E., Shizhou, L., & Xiulan, W. (2017). International Student Mobility (ISM) in China in the New Phase of Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE): Trends and Patterns. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(30), 71–81.

Tan, Y., & Amponstira, F. (2021). Win-win or not? Factors impacting Chinese programs in Thai higher education under zero-game. *Interdisciplinary Research Review*, 16(1), 36–42.

Thomas, D. (2017). Factors that explain academic dishonesty among university students in Thailand. *Ethics & Behavior*, 27(2), 140–154.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2015.1131160>

Wang, Z. (2020). Bonding and bridging social capital: The determinants of English language fluency and its effects on the labour market outcome of international students in Ireland. *The Economic and Social Review*, 51(1), 35–61.

Waters, T., & Day, M. J. (2022). Thai Menschenbild: A Study of Chinese, Thai, and International Students in a Private Thai University as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1), 86.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01101-y>

Ye, Y. (2020). Factors affecting the decision-making of Chinese students to study in higher education institutions in Thailand. *Romphruek Journal*, 38(1), 101–117.

Yin, H., Ruangkanjanases, A., & Chen, C. (2015). Factors affecting Chinese students' decision making toward Thai universities. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 5(3), 189.