

**CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF CHINESE EMPLOYEES  
IN THAILAND**



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**CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF CHINESE EMPLOYEES IN THAILAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the cultural adaptation issues that Chinese employees encounter while working in Thailand. Using in-depth interviews, the study investigates both Chinese and Thai employees to understand their experiences with cultural differences and challenges. The findings show that the main issues involve language communication, religious customs and cultural differences, and cross-cultural preparation. To address these issues, the authors propose some solutions to help Chinese employees better adapt to the Thai culture and work environment. After the completion of the China-Thailand high-speed railway, these research results can provide useful guidance for future Chinese workers in Thailand.

**KEY WORDS:** Chinese employees / Thailand / Cultural adaptation issues / Cultural differences

34 pages

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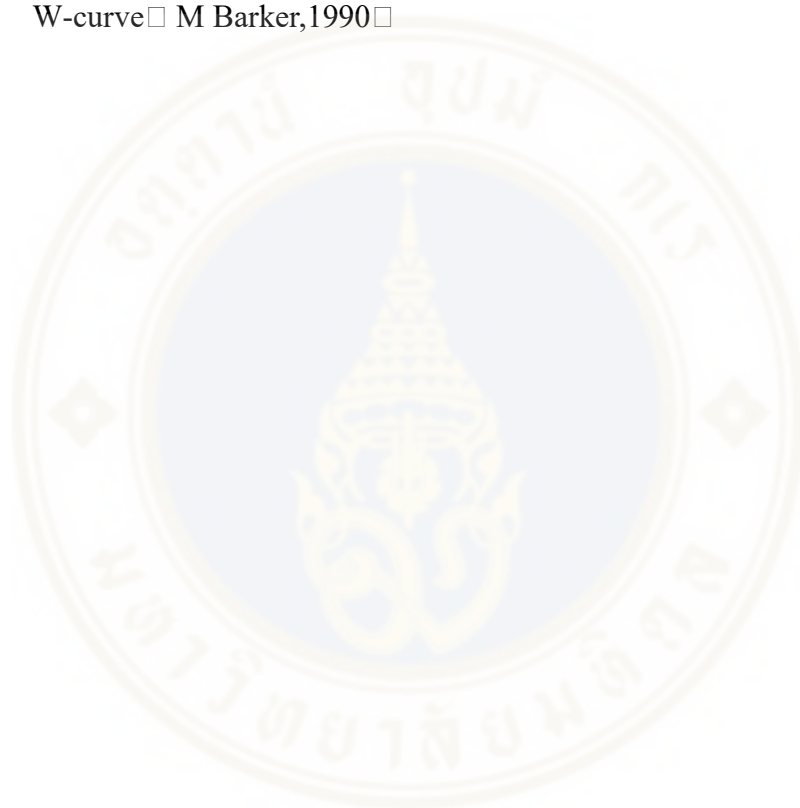
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

According to the "Guidelines on Business Environment in Countries (Regions) for Enterprises Investing Overseas, Thailand (2019)" compiled by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, China's outward foreign direct investment has increased more than 50 times, with total investment amounting to nearly US\$2 trillion, becoming an important engine driving the global outward direct investment growth. The report of the 19th Party Congress proposes to focus on the construction of "One Belt and One Road", adhere to the "introduction" and "going out", innovate foreign investment methods, promote international production capacity cooperation, and accelerate the cultivation of international economic cooperation and competition. Accelerate the cultivation of new advantages in international economic cooperation and competition, which points out the direction for trade and investment promotion in the new era.

China and Thailand have a long history of friendship and are important economic and trade partners. According to the data published on the official website of China's National Bureau of Statistics, China's outward direct investment amounted to US\$129.8 billion in 2018, ranking 2nd in the world, and the contract value of foreign contracted projects also reached US\$241.804 billion. Along with the expanding foreign economic and trade exchanges, a large number of Chinese citizens have the opportunity to go out of China and seek better development in other countries. Thailand is the subject of this article.

Thailand covers an area of 513,000 square kilometers and has a total population of 69.42 million as of January 2019.

People. (Guidelines on Business Environment in Countries (Regions) for Enterprises Investing Overseas, Thailand (2019)) There are about 80,000 Chinese working in Thailand. (Based on verbal estimates from daily contacts with staff at the

Chinese Embassy in Bangkok and the Bangkok Immigration Department; no official statistics are available).

Chinese employees abroad face an unfamiliar cultural environment, where the values, beliefs, ethics, customs, ways of thinking, and behavior are different from Chinese culture in one way or another.

The disturbing reality is that Chinese nationals abroad have not been very successful in adapting to the host country's culture, and they tend to be "self-contained" and have difficulties integrating into the host country's culture, as well as being deeply alienated from other Asian communities. "Chinese people don't seem to know and care about how to deal with people from different cultures." (Peng, K. P., & Wang, Y. L., 2009). Although this statement may be an overgeneralization, it does illustrate the deficiencies in the cross-cultural adaptation of most Chinese people.

The failure of Chinese employees to adapt cross-culturally can result in impaired self-confidence, frustration, and other direct or indirect negative consequences for the individual employee. For companies, the direct negative impact is in terms of financial performance and management efficiency. It may indirectly affect the company's image and even its relationship with the local community and society.

Having the ability to communicate professionally in the international workplace can be an effective way to achieve business goals. (Goodall, H. L., & Goodall, Sandra., 2006).

There are many different methods of communication in an organization, such as phone calls, messages, letters, emails, and video conferences. The message sent to the recipient can be verbal (talk) or non-verbal (sign language, body gestures). Each country has its language, vocabulary, slang, jargon, idioms, and ethical type of culture. Even when using advanced systems in international communications to help companies do business with foreign partners or set up branches abroad, employees of companies still face the consequences of culture clashes due to social differences that lead to differences in language use. One's language and behavior have meaning to others, and the behavior of language can represent or imply certain differences in different cultures. (Leeds-Hurwitz, W. 1989)

Due to cultural differences, the behavior of individuals from different cultures may be misunderstood by the locals because sometimes people unknowingly

say things that are difficult for others to understand. In business organizations, cross-cultural communication and the use of cross-cultural competencies are crucial for individuals to adapt to temporary status quo and practical situations. When messages are communicated, different perceptions and awareness may arise due to different approaches and cultural backgrounds, resulting in the message being understood in different ways. For example, Thai people often send "55555555" meaning "hahahahaha" in conversation to express happiness because the pronunciation of "5" in Thai is similar to "hahaha" is similar to "hahaha". However, the pronunciation of "5" in Chinese is similar to the sound of "woo woo woo" when people cry, so "55555" is used to express crying in Chinese chats.

In any case, observation (learning about the local culture) and recognition (imitating and developing local cultural principles) can be used to communicate successfully in the workplace. These strategies are important for employees from different cultural backgrounds to create work products and develop work through diversity. (Jackson, S. E., & Alvarez, E. B., 1992).

## **1.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

The subjects of this study are Chinese employees working in Thailand. The main research question of this study is: What are the cross-cultural adjustment experiences of Chinese employees working in Thailand? To better answer this research question, the study will explore the research question step-by-step by starting with the following two sub-questions.

1. What are the cross-cultural adjustment problems encountered by Chinese employees working in Thailand?
2. What measures should be taken to improve and enhance the level of cross-cultural adjustment of Chinese employees working in Thailand?

The focus of this study is to explore the problems of cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese employees in Thailand, the adaptation strategies, and the analysis of the influencing factors. Specifically, interviews are conducted with Chinese employees working in Thailand to understand the main cross-cultural adaptation problems they encounter in their cultural environment, and analyze how to adopt

different strategies to solve these problems through these problems. In addition, the analysis of the personal experiences of Chinese employees in Thailand and the interview data are combined to make recommendations to help Chinese employees working in Thailand and Chinese people who intend to work in Thailand in the future to adapt to the intercultural environment.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 The concept of adaptation and cross-cultural adaptation**

The term "adaptation" was first used in biology to indicate that organisms are adapted to the natural environmental conditions in which they live, with the survival of the fittest and the elimination of the inferior. (Zhang & Lin, 1975) extended this concept to the field of psychology and classified adaptation as active and passive, emphasizing the interaction between humans and their environment as a mutual influence and interaction.

Piaget brings the concept of adaptation into the field of psychology, suggesting that "assimilation" and "adjustment" are two necessary aspects of the human adaptation process, and that adaptation occurs when the two are in balance (Guo, 2005).

Thus, adaptation consists of two subjects, usually the individual and the environment. These two subjects influence and interact with each other in the adaptation process. The role of the individual is smaller than the role of the environment, and the final fit is assimilation. The process of adaptation in which the individual and the environment interact and fit each other is called "adjustment". At least one of the two subjects in the adaptation process will change. Usually, people who work abroad will go through the process of familiarization, adaptation, and adjustment to the new environment when they change from the existing environment to the new socio-cultural environment. Redfield et al. (1936) were the first to propose a clear definition of "cross-cultural adaptation", which is "a phenomenon in which one or both parties change their original cultural patterns as a result of sustained, direct cultural contact between different cultural groups/individuals "(as cited in Shan & Xue, 2008).

## 2.2 Cross-cultural adaptation process

The definition of cross-cultural adaptation is an evolution from the group to the individual level.

When individuals/groups from one culture are exposed to another culture, they experience profound anxiety due to leaving the familiar cultural environment and unfamiliarity with the new social interaction procedures, norms, symbols, and symbols (Oberg, 1960). Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) first defined cross-cultural adaptation as a phenomenon in which the original cultural profile of at least one group changes significantly when two groups of people with different cultures come into sustained and direct contact. The core of this concept is that group contact leads to a change in cultural patterns, and the change may be on one side or on both sides. The changes are both group-level and individual-level, where the individual-level changes involve emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects. Individuals achieve a state of equilibrium with their intended environment based on meeting their own needs.

Ward and Kennedy (1996) define cross-cultural adaptation as a conscious, dispositional choice of cultural beliefs and behavioral patterns that an individual makes as he moves from one culture to another, based on his emotions and perceptions of the two different cultures.

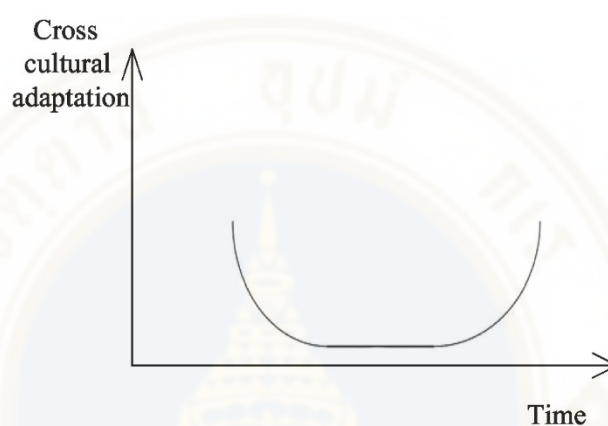
The study of cross-cultural adaptation originated from the cultural exchange between different groups and gradually developed into the study of individual cross-cultural adaptation. Modern cross-cultural adaptation mainly refers to the process of individuals leaving their original culture and continuously contacting, learning, influencing each other and integrating into the new culture. After entering a new cultural environment, individuals will find that the culture of the original group is no longer applicable, so they will feel uncomfortable and need to adjust their adaptation strategies to eventually integrate into the new environment. These two definitions are actually differences in perspective, with the macro perspective focusing on group and structural issues, and the micro perspective focusing on individual experiences and feelings.

Specifically, cross-cultural adaptation refers to an individual's efforts to establish and maintain a stable, interactive, and meaningful relationship with the new culture after leaving the original cultural environment and entering a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. (Kim, 2001)



There are two classical theories in cross-cultural adaptation research containing: the "U-curve hypothesis" and the "culture shock model".

(Lysgaard, 1955) The U-curve hypothesis is known to this day; Lysgaard summarizes the process of cross-cultural adaptation as an initial adjustment phase, a crisis phase, and a readjustment phase, with a U-shaped curve distribution of the three phases. It depicts the emotional trajectory of cross-cultural adapters from a high to a low emotional state, followed by a gradual return to a high emotional state (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1 U-curve hypothesis (as cited in Murshed et al., 2021)**

The concept of culture shock was first introduced by Oberg in his "culture shock" model, which defines them as "a form of mental anxiety caused by the sudden loss of familiar symbols of social interaction" (An, 2010.). He argues that when individuals are exposed to a new cultural environment, after a brief period of novelty, they may feel tension, loss, and anxiety due to the loss of the familiar cultural environment.

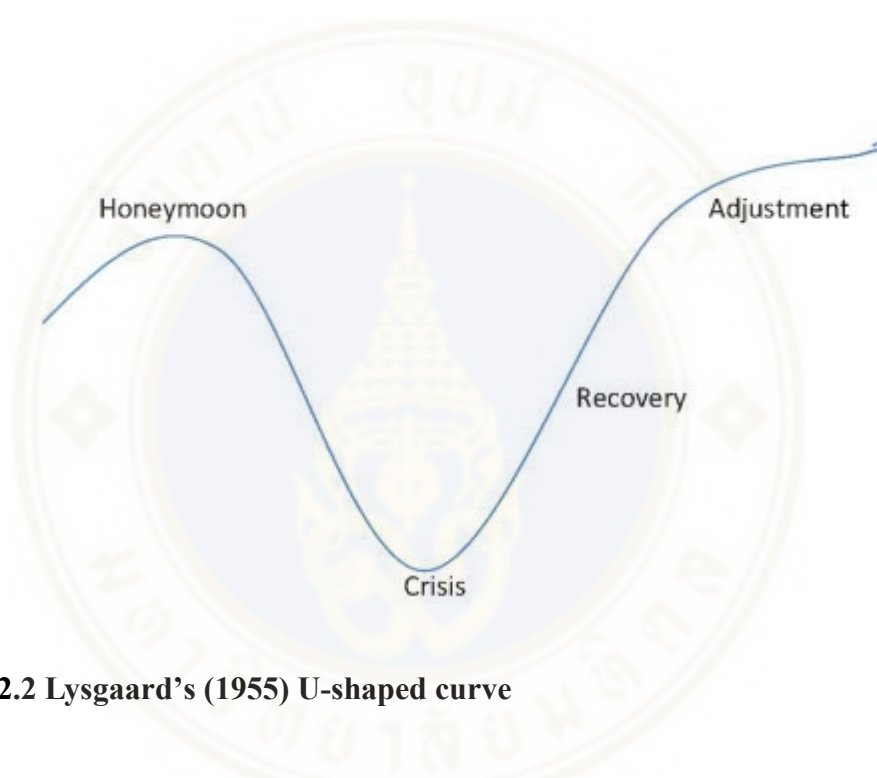
The honeymoon phase is the first stage, in which the intercultural adapters feel excited and novel about the new cultural environment, and do not feel significant cultural differences, and are optimistic and positive, but this state only lasts for a short period of time.

The second phase is the crisis, after the honeymoon period of excitement, the intercultural adapters gradually realize the cultural differences and feel the psychological gap, the anxiety replaces the novelty, the discomfort with the new environment becomes more and more obvious, and the negative attitude gradually

increases.

The third stage is the recovery period, when intercultural adapters reacquaint themselves with everything around them, gradually get used to things they cannot adapt to, and consciously accept and adapt to cultural differences.

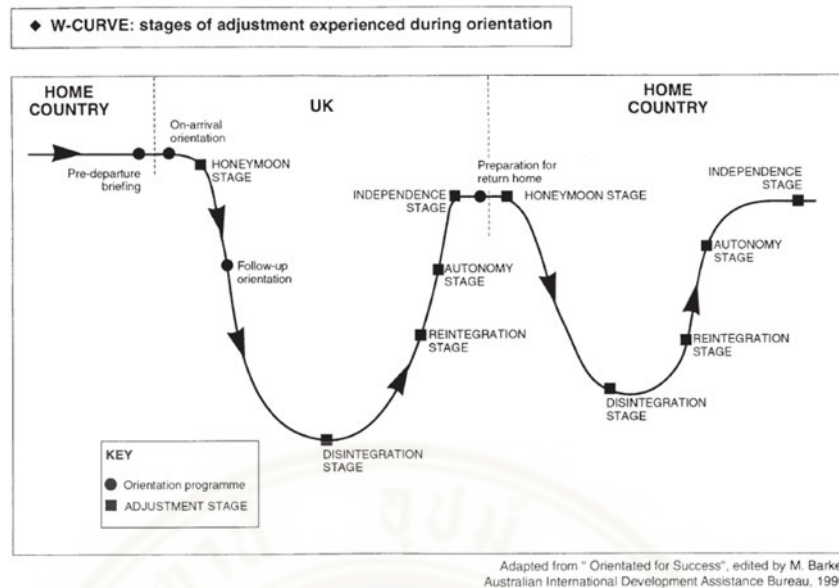
The last stage is the adjustment period, with complete adaptation to the new environment, the previous discomfort becomes very acceptable, the anxiety basically disappears, and the person begins to devote himself to understanding and enjoying the happiness of the new world.



**Figure 2.2 Lysgaard's (1955) U-shaped curve**

(Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) proposed the W-curve model based on the U-curve hypothesis, which shows the continuous reshaping of sojourners to adapt to the new cultural environment in terms of individual psycho-emotional aspects, and is also a widely accepted model theory, the process can be divided into five stages: 1. honeymoon 2. disintegrate 3. reintegration 4. autonomy 5. independence. (See Figures 2.3)





**Figures 2.3 W-curve** □ M Barker,1990 □

John W. Berry's (1992) Model of Intercultural Adaptation Strategies (see Table 2.1) classifies intercultural adaptation strategies according to the adapters' attitudes toward the original culture and the new culture, i.e., whether they are willing to retain their original cultural identity and whether they accept the new cultural identity and establish positive and good relationships with members of the host society. Strategies are divided into four models: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization. "The "Intercultural Adaptation Strategy Model" suggests that whether intercultural adapters maintain or abandon their original cultural identity and whether they reject or accept the dominant host culture will produce very different intercultural adaptation outcomes. Berry" reveals the complexity and multidimensionality of the acculturation process at the macro level and demonstrates the important influence of individual subjective intercultural adaptation behaviors on intercultural adaptation outcomes.

**Table 2.1 (Berry, 1992)**

		Value and Maintain Native Culture	
		YES	NO
Value and Maintain Host Culture	YES	Integration	Assimilation
	NO	Separation	Marginalization

### 2.3 Factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation

Two main theories of cross-cultural psychology influence the process and outcome of people's cross-cultural adaptation. The first one is the cultural learning theory, (Furnham & Bochner, 1982), which is a positive advocate of cultural learning theory, mainly looks at cultural adaptation from a behavioral perspective, and believes that the influencing factors include: knowledge and language of the target culture, the distance between the two cultures, and the degree of interaction with people of the target culture. The second one is the anxiety processing theory, (Berry, 1997). It is the representative scholars, who mainly view the cross-cultural adjustment problem from the perspective of emotion, and believe that the influencing factors include personality, social support, gender, ethnicity, etc.

A social network is a relatively stable social set of relationships between one or more actors and is an important social environmental factor that influences sojourners' adaptation to a foreign culture in a cross-cultural context. Individuals can rely on their social networks and get help through them to obtain support from various resources, such as friendship, emotional support, and money, to enable them to solve crises and problems in their lives and to ensure the normal functioning of their daily

lives. Research has shown that a good social network helps reduce life stress and is beneficial to physical and mental health and personal well-being; conversely, the lack of a social network can lead to physical and mental illness and make it difficult to maintain one's daily life (Wasserman, 1994).

### **Social support**

Social support refers to the help and supports an individual receives in times of need, which can come from family members, friends, and acquaintances, with marriage being considered the main source of social support (Chen, Che & Zhu, 2003). Chinese people in Thailand, they can receive support from their hometown, colleagues, friends, and local Thai people. From the perspective of emotional support, Adelman (1988) argues that the support of fellow countrymen can reduce the anxiety and helplessness of sojourners. However, if sojourners rely too much on this social support, it may negatively affect their integration into the local community. Thus, the social support provided by compatriots can be a double-edged sword for the intercultural adjustment of sojourners.

### **Cultural Distance**

Babiker, Cox, and Miller (1990) first introduced the concept of "cultural distance". The cultural distance hypothesis suggests that the greater the difference between the host culture and the host culture, the greater the difficulty of cross-cultural adaptation. For example, if the cultures of Korea and North Korea are similar, the cultural distance is small; on the contrary, if the cultures of the United States and Korea are very different, the cultural distance is large. (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1990)

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview method, and the interview framework has been established by combing through the literature before conducting the pre-interviews and formal interviews. The framework consisted of three main aspects: understanding the background of the interviewees, asking them what difficulties they encountered in their life and work in Thailand, asking them how they dealt with these challenges, and finally drawing the results through this study in an attempt to find ways to help Chinese employees adapt cross-culturally in Thailand.

#### **3.1 Interviewees**

This chapter requires in-depth interviews with four Thai locals in addition to the 10 Chinese employees, to understand the cross-cultural adaptation situation of Chinese people in Thailand from the side, enriching the study, and expanding the horizon of understanding the cross-cultural adaptation problem of Chinese people.

The interviewees for this study were 14 people, including 10 Chinese employees and 4 Thai locals. 10 Chinese employees were randomly selected from my social circle in Thailand, while the 4 Thai locals were selected to represent other locals' perceptions of Chinese people to a certain extent. These four Thais are my friends from my life in Thailand, and all of them have worked or cooperated with Chinese people.

The first part served as a warm-up and mutual familiarization stage for the interview, by asking some basic information and relatively easy-to-answer questions to help the interviewees get used to the atmosphere and environment of the interview and to understand their background information and their experiences before coming to China. Example: How long have you been in Thailand? Why did you choose to come to Thailand to work? What were your impressions of Thailand before coming here? What are your expectations of life here?

In the second part, the interviewees were asked to recall their feelings and experiences when they first came to Thailand and based on their answers, they were further asked about the cultural adaptation difficulties they encountered and how they manifested themselves. Example: What difficulties did you encounter when you first came to Bangkok? Can you give a specific example or describe a specific incident that you encountered? How did you feel about it?

In the third part of the interview, the focus is on the working environment of the interviewee. Based on the previous part, the interviewee is guided to recall his or her feelings and experiences when he or she first came to work in Thailand and is asked about the difficulties he or she encountered in terms of the entry process, job content, freedom of work and colleague relations, and is also asked about his or her suggestions for the company or other Chinese. Example: What difficulties have you encountered in your work? How did you deal with this problem?

### 3.2 List of interviewees

**Table 3.1 List of interviewees**

Category	Code name	Gender	Age	employee/employer	Cumulative years in Thailand (years)
Chinese	1	male	25~30	employee	2
	2	male	35~42	employer	5
	3	female	22~26	employee	1.5
	4	male	35~40	employee	3.5
	5	male	30~35	employee	2
	6	female	23~28	employee	0.5
	7	female	25~30	employee	6
	8	male	35~40	employer	5
	9	male	42~55	employer	11
	10	male	30~35	employee	2
Thai people	Code name	Gender	Age	Relations with the Chinese in Thailand	Years of working with Chinese
	A	male	30~38	employee	5
	B	male	60~70	Employer (retired)	35
	C	male	35~45	employee	7
	D	male	43~52	Partner	8

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDING ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Issues with cultural adaptation**

##### **4.1.1 Language and Communication adaptation**

In the 10 Chinese people I interviewed, all of them mentioned that language and communication are issues that affect their adaptation. However, the difference is that the 7 Chinese employees who were interviewed are able to use English proficiently at work, and what affects them is often the inconvenience in daily life (such as bargaining when shopping/asking questions), or when their colleagues are all Thai and communicate in Thai, which affects their communication at work and makes it difficult for them to integrate into the team. The other three Chinese employers who came to Thailand to do business all mentioned that they did not speak Thai well when they first arrived in Thailand, and the local Thai employees did not understand Chinese, so they often needed a translator. However, due to cultural differences or other reasons, the translation often fails to accurately express the true intentions of both parties, which results in a lot of wasted effort to repeatedly understand each other's meanings and even causes suspicion and cracks between them. The following are the answers of four Chinese interviewees:

Interviewee 1: "I don't know any Thai language at all. Communication at work is fine because my colleagues in the company can all speak English, although some of them have accents. But after work, locals, especially middle-aged and elderly people, basically don't speak English. I can't communicate in language at all, and even when buying things, I have to use a calculator. Sometimes, I may be cheated because of the language barrier, but I can't argue because of the language barrier. I feel very inconvenient, so I moved to a place near the mall and supermarket to ensure that I can buy things smoothly in daily life."

Interviewee 3: "There are still some difficulties. Although my English is



very good, sometimes I don't understand some idioms, implicit meanings, and non-verbal language used by the other party. Or sometimes Thai people will discuss things in Thai for a long time, leaving me aside, and when they have a result, they will ask me if I understand or ask for my opinion, but I cannot express myself. Actually, I hope the other party can explain it to me, but considering that it may waste everyone's time, and everyone has already discussed it, I just let them tell me what I need to do. I often ask a colleague who I have a good relationship with for details of the discussion. Sometimes, I also don't understand their sense of humor, and just laugh along with them without really understanding the joke. Afterwards, I feel embarrassed to ask them what was so funny."

Interviewee 4: "My English is okay, but not very good. I have no problem listening to Thai people talking, but I'm not that good at speaking myself, maybe I still have some Chinese accent. There is not much problem with work because there are only a few work terms that I use every day, so I am quite familiar with them. However, sometimes when expressing some work opinions, the words may not be clear enough, and it may not be as logical and profound as expressing it in Chinese. There are more communication barriers in daily life. I am not familiar with some uncommon words, and I don't know what the other person is talking about when they suddenly mention them. Fortunately, communication in daily life is more casual and can be confirmed with gestures, objects, and so on."

Interviewee 9: "When I first came to Thailand many years ago, I didn't know Thai and my English was only okay. It was difficult to find a Chinese translator at the time, so I had to rely on Thai people who knew Chinese to translate for me. I had to repeat myself and my translator had trouble understanding what I was saying. There were often differences in the translation results. Later, I realized that many of the things I said were dialects or used old Chinese words in new ways. Thai people learn Chinese mostly from textbooks, so they may not be familiar with these dialects or old words. With more interaction and communication, and as my translator became more familiar with my company's business, we were able to work together more smoothly. Of course, now that I've been in Thailand for many years, I can communicate in Thai without a translator."

Language and communication play an important role in cross-cultural

adaptation. For Chinese people who want to work in Thailand, their own foreign language proficiency is crucial for cross-cultural adaptation. The other party's accent can also greatly affect their cross-cultural adaptability. Both Chinese and Thai people may find it difficult to communicate due to heavy accents. In addition, cultural differences behind the language, such as idioms, subtext, non-verbal language, and communication habits, can deeply affect the cross-cultural adaptability of Chinese people.

#### **4.1.2 Religious customs and cultural differences affect work habits**

##### *Religious customs differences*

Thailand regards Buddhism as the national religion, which is believed by almost the entire population. Through interviews with ten Chinese and four Thai people, it was found that Thai religious and cultural customs have a significant impact on the work habits of both Chinese and Thai people. However, when communicating with Thai people, Chinese people may cause small or large disputes due to not giving enough attention to these customs, which is unfavorable for the long-term harmonious development of the company and its employees. In addition, Thailand also has some unique cultural customs, such as not handing over items that exceed shoulder height, which need to be understood. Interviewee 4 mentioned that the Thai supervisor of the engineering department in his company had applied for a 60-day leave. However, the Chinese management considered his reasons not very reasonable and rejected his proposal. The employee then submitted his resignation letter. He was excellent and had contributed a lot to the company during his tenure, and was highly appreciated by the senior management, soon becoming the backbone of the engineering department. The reason he applied for leave was that he had decided to become a monk and experience a two-month period of a constrained life. At that time, the employee turnover rate in the company was high, the employees were relatively nervous, and the 60-day leave was considered long and uncertain. After considering many factors, his application was not approved. It was unexpected that he would be determined to experience this lifestyle and really give up his salary, benefits, and promising job. Interviewee 4 still expressed his lack of understanding of this and regret the Thai supervisor. The Thai interviewees explained the reason for this. Indeed, many Chinese executives do not understand Thai



cultural customs. Among them, there is a custom that 99% of men choose to become monks and experience short or long periods of monastic life. Generally, the time chosen by adult Thai men is around 90 days, and there is no maximum limit, but the minimum cannot be less than three days. In the local area, if a man has not experienced monastic life, he is generally not considered an adult, and his relatives and friends around him will also ridicule him. In Thailand, people greatly respect the monks and regard them as having a high status. It is generally believed that experiencing monastic life and cultivating one's morality will accumulate blessings for those who love themselves and pray for everything to go smoothly after becoming an adult. Thailand attaches great importance to the monastic ritual, which requires an auspicious time to be calculated and relatives to be invited. Then, the senior members of the family will pierce the earlobes of the person who is becoming a monk, who must wear a white robe. After a series of tedious procedures, they will go to the temple.

In addition, interviewee 2 mentioned that their company received an order earlier which would result in a significant profit if successful. Therefore, he decided not to approve any leave requests from employees and instead offered a double salary subsidy to those who were willing to come back to work during their vacation. Based on the working situation in China, such a measure would be very encouraging and rewarding. However, he did not anticipate that there is a very important Buddhist holiday in Thailand, and on that day, all Buddhist followers must go to the local temple early in the morning to listen to the preaching of noble monks, purify their inner world, pray for everything to go smoothly, and also participate in charitable activities of the day. So, on that day, 90% of Thai employees either called in sick or arrived late, ignoring the company's relevant regulations. Later, after his investigation, he learned that the significance of that day in their hearts could not be compensated by several times the salary or money. Their faith could not be bought with money.

According to the interviewees, religion also has an impact on cultural practices.

*1. There should be no direct physical contact between women and monks:*

At the same time, Thai interviewee C also mentioned that last year during the Chinese New Year, their Chinese company knew about the custom of inviting monks to recite scriptures and pray for blessings in the local area. This could not only wish for

the health and emotions of relatives but also pray for smooth work. Therefore, many respected monks were invited to preach on that day. During the entire process, all employees of the company, whether Chinese or Thai, participated in the preaching of the monks with great care. However, when the activity was nearing its end and the monk was about to leave, a certain monk was walking unsteadily. The female company executive from the Chinese side immediately reacted to help support him, but before she could touch the monk, he took the initiative to support himself and did not allow her to touch him. Later, he also explained to the female company executive that there should be no direct physical contact between women and monks in Thailand, even just handing things over is not allowed.

*2. The handover of items should not be higher than the shoulders:*

Interviewee 10 mentioned that there was a time when a Chinese employee came to him for a signature. After greeting each other, he stood in front of the Thai employee's desk and wanted to hand over the documents to himself the Thai employee. Interviewee 10 just wanted to check the contents of the document, but he saw the Thai employee immediately stand up and leave with a bad expression on their face. After communicating with them later, he learned that when the Thai employee received the document from the Chinese employee, their hand and the document were almost passing over the top of his head. Thai people attach particular importance to their heads as they believe that their soul is located there. If their head is touched casually, they feel like their soul is being taken away and they are being disrespected. In family gatherings, elders and juniors must sit separately, with the elders sitting higher, as a sign of respect and care for the elders. Those who sit higher also try their best not to move above others' heads. If they must pass over someone's head, they will generally apologize and seek permission before taking action.

#### **4.1.3 Cultural differences in Time Perception**

From the interviews, it was learned that all 10 Chinese participants believed that Thai people do not have a good sense of time and consider being late as normal. The first interviewee stated that in several important meetings, all middle and senior-level staff were required to attend, but it was common for some to arrive late, with many of them being Thai employees. Through extensive investigation, it was found that this

phenomenon is quite widespread, and the reasons for being late are varied, with the most common being traffic congestion or physical discomfort. Despite repeated emphasis on the matter, an appropriate solution has not been found. In contrast, the interviewees said that Chinese people typically take preventive measures, place great emphasis on time, follow objective rules and scientifically formulate plans to evaluate the entire process to ensure that projects are completed within the specified scope and with high quality. However, the Thai side is perceived as having no concept of time, low work efficiency, and does not pay attention to planned goals. They believe that as long as the work is completed within the plan, it is worthy of praise, and being late or not completing work on time does not have serious consequences.

Interviewee 8: "The locals' sense of time is too poor. When they say they'll be there in five minutes, they won't show up within an hour. When they say they'll be there in an hour, it's basically not going to happen today."

Interviewee 2: "Lateness, early departure, and absenteeism are rampant. They are not very diligent, do not like to work overtime, and sometimes even if you offer overtime pay, they won't do the work. It's enough to make you angry."

Interviewee 5: had a strong emotional response and said, "People here have no sense of time and are always late for everything. They lack a strong sense of work responsibility, are not dedicated, and look like they're not even working during work hours. I really don't want to work with them."

#### **4.1.4 Homesickness**

Six of the interviewees said that they are relatively lonely outside of work, and their circle of friends is relatively small. Although the local people are very friendly, they still feel like a foreigner. Everyone misses their family members, but the degree of missing and the impact of missing are different. Most of the Chinese working in Thailand said they missed their families, but this kind of missing did not affect their work. From the perspective of whether they are willing to settle down, most of the interviewees are unwilling, and only 2 said they can consider it because it can create one more possibility for their children. For returning to China, the Chinese in Thailand need to rely on their efforts to find a job after returning to the country, which is quite insecure for those who go abroad. If the time spent abroad is relatively short, it is relatively easy

to maintain a personal network in China. It is relatively complicated if you have been working abroad for a long time and your interpersonal network has been lost.

In the collected interview data, everyone mentioned "homesickness" at least twice, especially married Chinese.

More representative is the words of interviewee No. 4. He said: "Because my biggest anxiety is family. The wife and children are all in China, and the child is also facing the high school entrance examination. Being away from home for a long time is not good for the child's growth". Moreover, husband and wife get together less and leave more, and they are always worried about relationship problems. Many Chinese in Thailand have problems in their families because of the separation between the two places. What are we fighting for? It's not for the sake of a good life for the whole family. If something goes wrong in the family, what's the point of working hard here?

For the Chinese interviewees in Thailand, many ask themselves the question: Stay or Return to China? The subject of interview No. 7 was a Chinese teacher who graduated from a university in Thailand and married and had children in Thailand. She and her husband are both Chinese. They do not want their children to return to China to study in the future and hope to stay and settle in Thailand. "I also miss home very much, but my home is not far from Bangkok and it takes about an hour and a half by plane. Sometimes I will take my parents over to play for a while. But I don't want to go back to China in the short term. I want to stay in Thailand Settling down. Because I have to think about my children. Children in China are under too much pressure. We all come from that stage. I see that some elementary school students even have to do their homework until the early morning, and the children have no time to go to school. Play and think. If it was in the past, I would think it was okay, but now I have studied in Thailand for so many years, and I also teach in Thai schools. I find that the most important thing for children is quality education rather than exam-oriented education. I Consider that my children will go to international schools in Thailand in the future. First, the international schools here are cheaper than domestic ones. Second, it will be easier to use Thailand as a springboard to go to other countries in the future. I hope my children can live happier than I did when I was a child. "

Interviewee No. 9 has been in Thailand for 11 years, and his wife and children are in Thailand. He said, "I think it's better to be happy in Thailand. On the

contrary, when I return to my country, my former friends are unfamiliar, and I still have various unaccustomed habits."

Interviewee No. 10: "I used to work in Singapore. Frankly speaking, I wanted to stay in Singapore at the time, but due to Covid-19, the company laid off employees. I was one of them. At that time, due to environmental and visa issues, It is very difficult to find a new job quickly. I have to go back to China. I have to find a job by myself when I return to China. I still feel very insecure. Fortunately, my domestic network is still there. Very good, they helped me find a suitable job together. So when it comes to returning to work in China, I just feel that the uncertainty is very high, and I am very worried that I will not find a suitable job."

#### **4.1.5 Difficulty in Making Money**

Apart from "homesickness," another major source of anxiety for Chinese people in Thailand is "making money." By analyzing the interview data, I found that the frequency of the word "making money" is second only to "homesickness." However, unlike "homesickness," the anxiety about "making money" is more prevalent among Chinese employers who run their own businesses, and for employees who receive fixed wages, this issue is not as serious.

"I'm most afraid of not making money. As I get older, the anxiety caused by my career gets deeper and deeper. Chinese people who come to Thailand are here to 'strike gold,' but how many people really get the 'gold'! When everyone came to investigate, they saw that the prices of goods here were much higher than in China, but when they actually came to do business, they found that the situation was not what they thought. Prices are indeed much higher than in China, but the market is much smaller. If the volume doesn't increase, what's the use of high prices? Moreover, besides labor costs, various costs here are much higher than in China, and there are many competitors in the industry. Chinese people like to engage in price wars with each other, and the profit margin becomes smaller. However, since we have come, it is difficult to go back. First, the money invested in the early stage has already been put in. If we go back now, the money invested earlier will be wasted. Second, when we came out, relatives and friends had high hopes for us and were all waiting for us to return in glory. We cannot face them if we go back like this." (Interviewee No. 2)



"My friends in China thought I made a lot of money since I started a company abroad, but the money in Thailand is not so easy to make. If I can choose again, I would rather develop my career in China." (Interviewee No. 8)

"I simply love Thai culture, and teaching Chinese in Thailand gives me a decent salary and good vacation time. For me, I am already satisfied. I like this relaxed atmosphere." (Interviewee No. 7)

Interviewee No. 3 said: "Whether you are happy or not is not important, as long as you can make money, it is almost the same in China or abroad. If you have no money in China, you cannot be happy either; here, as long as you make money, you can still dream with a smile."

#### **4.1.6 Lack of Cross-Cultural Preparation**

Through interviews, it was found that for the 10 interviewees, cross-cultural adaptation in Thailand was basically a passive process. Apart from being aware of the importance of language, the 10 Chinese interviewees did not consciously seek to understand and reflect on other aspects of Thai culture. Even before the study, these ten people had never heard of the academic concept of "cross-cultural adaptation." From the interview results, three interviewees experienced cultural barriers in different aspects. Among them, Interviewee No. 5 was mainly uncomfortable with motorbike transportation in Thailand and had many complaints about Thai taxi drivers taking detours. He also expressed shame for his previous disrespect of Thailand's transgender community, but after living in Thailand for a while, he gradually adapted to the traffic and made friends with some transgender individuals. Interviewee No. 6, for personal reasons, is a vegetarian and thought that as a Buddhist country, Thailand should have vegetarian restaurants everywhere. She had never had any concerns about food, but after coming to Thailand, she realized that she had neglected to understand that there were few vegetarian restaurants in Thailand, which made her feel troubled. Interviewee No. 8 may have a more introverted personality and dislikes socializing. He thought that Thai people or other foreigners have different hobbies from him, and he prefers to stay at home or hang out with Chinese friends. However, after spending time in Thailand, he realized that not all foreigners were incompatible with him, and he gradually made foreign friends.

Interviewee No. 5 said, "I have never received cross-cultural adaptation training. I didn't know much about Thailand before going there. My impression of Thailand before going was that it had crowded traffic, ladyboys, relatively backward urban infrastructure, and so on. After going, I was surprised to find that Bangkok's city development and rail transit were much better than I had imagined. I adapted well to that. However, in terms of traffic rules, cars are left-hand drive, and I'm very scared to cross the road, especially with vehicles turning. Motorbikes are also a type of taxi in Thailand, but they don't provide helmets for passengers, and many motorbikes are fast and often weave between traffic. Every time I ride, I'm terrified, especially since I've seen many news stories about motorbike accidents. Later on, I tried to avoid riding motorbikes as much as possible. If I had to ride, it would only be in a "tuk-tuk"."

"I used to have biases towards transgenders and homosexuals, but after coming to Thailand and befriending people from these communities, I realized that they are kind-hearted individuals. I feel ashamed of my previous prejudices." (Interviewee #5)

"I have met many kind-hearted Thai elders in my life, but the only disappointment I've had is encountering Thai taxi drivers who like to take longer routes. As someone who has been in Thailand for a while, I would have expected to avoid such situations." (Interviewee #5)

"I have never received any cross-cultural training. Before coming to Thailand, I knew that Thai cuisine includes a wide variety of food, including offal, insects, and even snakes, but as a vegetarian, it didn't affect me. However, I didn't know if there were many vegetarians in Thailand. Meat is cheaper than vegetables in Thailand, and I found it challenging to eat outside because I am worried about the ingredients. So, I end up cooking all my meals. I feel very uncomfortable. In my imagination, Thailand is a Buddhist country, and there should be many vegetarian restaurants. If I had known this earlier, I might have reconsidered coming to work in Thailand." (Interviewee #6)

"I don't have many local friends because our interests and hobbies are very different. For example, foreigners like to exercise, hike, and drink, but I don't enjoy those things. I prefer to stay at home on weekends. Foreigners also tend to separate their work and personal life, so they may not want to spend time with me on weekends. If I want to socialize, I prefer to hang out with fellow Thai people. Thai-Chinese people also

have their own community." (Interviewee #8)

Adequate cross-cultural awareness can help Chinese people who are preparing to work in Thailand to gain a better understanding of Thai society, economy, politics, customs, and cultural differences. A good understanding can also help them prepare to cope with cross-cultural differences and adapt better to their new environment in Thailand.

## **4.2 Collation of information from interviews with Thai people**

In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the cross-cultural adjustment problems of the Chinese in Thailand, this study also conducted in-depth interviews with four Thai locals who had more contact with Chinese, numbered A, B, C, and D respectively.

The interviews began by asking them about their impressions of Chinese people. The words they used the most were hardworking and smart, followed by the importance of money.

Interviewee A said: Chinese people are too hard-working. Chinese people in our company walk like this (imitating Chinese people walking in small steps), while we Thai people walk like this (imitating local Thai people walking slowly). The Chinese never seem to have enough work to do. They also often ask us to work overtime on weekends and holidays, and they get angry when we don't show up.

Interviewee B said, "The Chinese are very smart. I went to China to study in the 60s, when China's economy was still very slow, but it seemed like they knew everything. Now China is developing so fast that many places have caught up with or even surpassed the U.S. Why we can't do it in Thailand is because we are not as smart as the Chinese."

"Chinese people really don't talk directly enough, they are more vague, they want me to understand what they want by myself. For example, once during a one-on-one conversation, a Chinese employee told me that his workload was too heavy and he felt too much pressure. His family was also under a lot of pressure, and he felt that there was no way to balance his life and work. Later I found a way to transfer some of the workload away, and then the next time we talked he didn't act very happy, instead he



felt I didn't rehire him anymore. After a deeper conversation, I found out that when he complained about the workload, he was actually just trying to get a promotion and a raise because he was doing more than his job duties. The raise would also allow him to better support his family. I didn't understand his intentions at all, so I came full circle. In fact, it would have been better if he had made it clear to me directly. "

Interviewee D says: Chinese people love to bargain too much. When they come to buy something from me, they always talk for half a day. They love money too much. They are so rich, but they are so stingy and very uncomfortable with handouts.

The second topic of the interview with the Thai locals was: Do you think the Chinese people have integrated into the local culture? Their answer was very firm: No!

I don't think the Chinese understand or want to understand the Thai people. My Chinese colleagues in my company always talk about how great China is, and I rarely hear them say how great we are in Thailand. (Interviewee C)

Although many Chinese people live in Thailand, they do not have deep contact with the locals. Chinese people only make friends with Chinese people. I have been dealing with Chinese people for so many years, and I can speak Chinese fluently, but it is hard to make Chinese friends. (Interviewee B)

The third topic of the interview with the Thai locals was "How do you think Chinese people can integrate into the local culture". Many Chinese who come to Thailand do not speak either English or Thai, so how can they integrate into the local culture? In Thailand, Europeans, Americans, and Indians are well integrated into the local culture, while the Chinese are the exception. Interviewee C, on the other hand, said: to communicate more. But it's not easy. Most of the locals, including myself, don't speak Chinese or English, only Thai, and there are too few Chinese who can speak Thai well. Interviewee D said: Only when we treat each other as friends can we really integrate into each other's culture.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Conclusions**

This article focuses on the challenges faced by Chinese individuals working in Thailand due to cultural differences. The first challenge is language and communication adaptation. Even though some Chinese employees are proficient in English, they may face difficulties communicating with Thai colleagues who speak only Thai, leading to suspicion and misunderstanding. The importance of language proficiency and cultural understanding is emphasized.

Another challenge is religious customs and cultural differences affecting work habits. Failure to understand and respect these customs can lead to disputes and negatively impact the company and its employees. For example, certain customs, such as not handing over items above shoulder height and not having direct physical contact between women and monks, can affect work. Understanding these customs can help prevent misunderstandings and disputes.

The third challenge is the lack of cross-cultural preparation. Many Chinese individuals working in Thailand do not actively seek to understand Thai culture beyond language, leading to cultural barriers and discomfort. Adequate cross-cultural awareness can help individuals gain a better understanding of Thai society and adapt better to their new environment.

The fourth challenge is cultural differences in time perception and work ethic. The Chinese interviewees perceive Thai people as having poor time management skills and low work efficiency, whereas they place great emphasis on time and scientifically formulate plans to ensure high-quality projects are completed within the specified scope. Understanding these cultural differences can help individuals adjust and work together more effectively.

Homesickness is also a significant issue for many Chinese immigrants, particularly those who are married and have children. While many miss their families,

most are not willing to settle down in Thailand permanently due to the difficulty of finding work upon their return to China. Some interviewees discuss the pressures faced by their families, with some hoping to stay in Thailand to provide their children with a more quality-oriented education.

Finally, the difficulty in making money is a major concern for many Chinese individuals in Thailand. Chinese employers who run their own businesses face high prices, a smaller market, and intense competition. However, for employees who receive fixed wages, this issue is not as serious. Despite the challenges, many Chinese people stay in Thailand because of the money they have invested, the expectations of their relatives and friends, or their love for Thai culture.

Overall, Chinese individuals working in Thailand face a variety of challenges due to cultural differences. To overcome these challenges, individuals must actively seek to understand and respect Thai customs, develop cross-cultural awareness, and adjust their work habits and time perception.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

### **5.2.1 Recommendations for individual Chinese who come to Thailand by themselves**

Thailand is a country with diverse cultures and rich history and cultural heritage. If Chinese people are interested in working or starting a business in Thailand, it is recommended that fully understand the local culture, social, and business environment before making any decisions. Understanding Thailand's religious beliefs and culture is important for work, considering the attitudes towards work and culture of the local people, and adapting to the local living environment are all keys to success.

Working in Thailand requires attention to cultural and social rules. Thai people emphasize relationships and trust, and building networking relationships is crucial for business activities. Thai people also highly value etiquette and respect, so be mindful of speech and behavior when dealing with them. Especially in Thailand, people have great respect for monks and consider them to hold a high status. It is widely believed that experiencing monastic life and cultivating oneself can accumulate merit

for oneself and pray for smooth sailing in the future. Thai people attach great importance to the ordination ceremony and various Buddhist festivals, and their faith is priceless. It should be noted that in Thailand, women are not allowed to touch monks. In addition, there are some cultural norms, such as the Thai people attaching great importance to their heads, as they believe their souls reside there. Therefore, it is not appropriate to touch someone's head or pass things over someone's head.

To better understand Thailand's culture and social characteristics, it is suggested that collect information through various channels, such as referring to official websites, consulting with local business associations, or talking to colleagues working in Thailand, to obtain more comprehensive and accurate information. Additionally, those interested in visiting Thailand can try traveling there for a period of time to gain a deeper understanding of local culture and social customs. This can not only help better adapt to the local environment but also improve cultural literacy and cross-cultural communication skills, which will be helpful for work and life. Of course, if circumstances do not allow, can also improve cross-cultural adaptation ability by reading relevant literature or participating in training.<sup>98</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that the media plays an important role in shaping the public's perception and attitude toward cross-cultural issues. The media often emphasizes exoticism and differences, while sacrificing similarities and commonalities. This may lead to prejudice and misunderstanding of other cultures among the public, thus affecting cross-cultural adaptation. Therefore, we need to adopt a cautious attitude towards media reports and cannot solely rely on them to understand the cultural and social environment of Thailand or other countries.

### **5.2.2 Recommendations for Thai companies hiring Chinese Employees**

In order to achieve integration between different cultures, it is necessary to first understand and familiarize oneself with the inherent differences between cultures, to know oneself and the other, in order to proceed with subsequent development. The simplest and most direct means is to conduct cross-cultural training, targeting all employees and management personnel of the company. Currently, the company where interviewee C works does not pay much attention to cultural training for employees, which is one of the reasons for cultural conflicts. The focus of cross-cultural training

should be on learning and understanding each other's cultures, in order to facilitate mutual understanding of the differences between the other culture and one's own culture. Cross-cultural training for Thai companies should be conducted as part of new employee training. The training can be conducted through a combination of face-to-face and online courses, to attract interested employees to participate. Through training, employees' cultural sensitivity and adaptability can be enhanced, and the essential differences in cultural connotations can be coordinated and integrated. Cross-cultural training for Thai companies should focus on the following four aspects:

(1) Strengthen language training, mainly targeting Chinese employees for English and Thai language training, as well as improving the Chinese proficiency of Thai employees. In order to ensure employee interest, diverse training forms and rich content can be adopted. Improving language proficiency is a long process that requires long-term persistence. Online courses can make training more convenient and easier to manage. Improving language proficiency can increase awareness of each other's culture, promote mutual understanding of special expressions and cultural taboos, and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

(2) Cultural sensitivity training is also essential, and all employees of the company should be included in the training, which should focus on the diverse backgrounds of all employees. The goal is to eliminate any mental or emotional barriers that people with different cultural backgrounds may have and to enhance their understanding and adaptation to Thai culture. Through training, Chinese and Thai employees can learn about each other and avoid any work-related unpleasantness caused by cultural differences. For example, Thai people believe that it is impolite to pass things over someone's head.

(3) Cross-cultural management and leadership training is a cultural training program for senior management personnel within the company. The company's cross-cultural management skills are often reflected in the abilities of senior management personnel, so this is an important aspect of cross-cultural management training. Especially for Chinese executives, due to the different national conditions between Thailand and China, Thai people prefer a better balance between work and life and direct communication. Developing cross-cultural management skills is a systematic process, and I suggest that deeper and more systematic learning and training should be conducted



to make it a required course for all Thai company managers.

(4) Training on Chinese and Thai customs and habits can be done through regular or irregular work-related activities that promote understanding of each other's culture and social customs, including food, communication, and thinking styles, and provide opportunities for employees from different cultural backgrounds to communicate. Especially in Thai Buddhist customs and traditions, which affect many aspects of Thai people's work, such as the importance of temple practice and the taboo of touching monks by girls. These are things that the company needs to accumulate and gradually train their employees on, as many Chinese people cannot understand these detailed cultural differences by themselves.

Cross-cultural training can help employees understand the customs, behaviors, food culture, and taboos of different countries, and avoid misunderstandings in daily work. In the long run, it can make communication between employees more smooth, and relationships more harmonious, greatly reducing the negative effects of cross-cultural conflicts.

## **5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

### **5.3.1 Limitations**

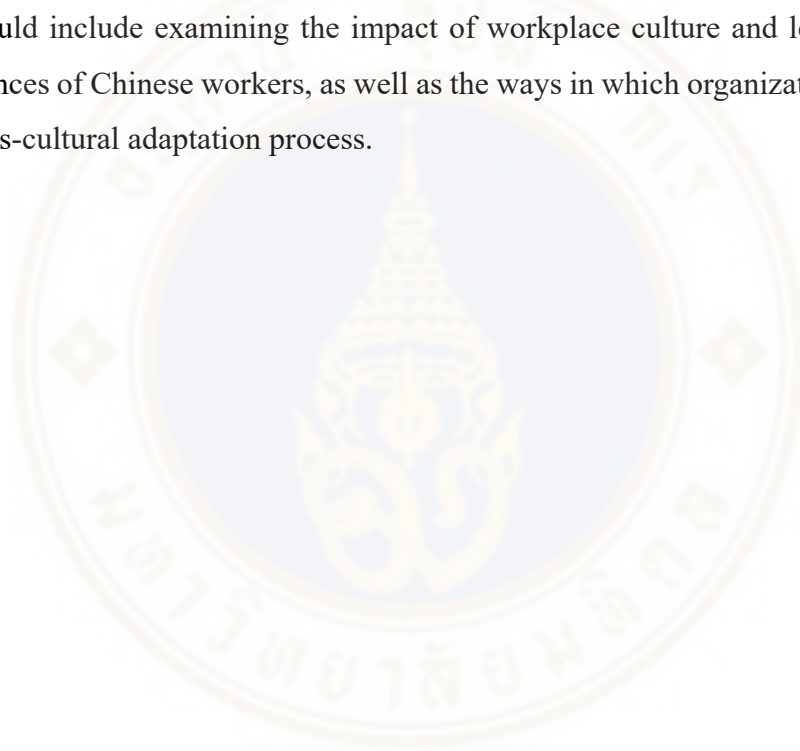
A limitation of the study was the small sample size, as only 10 Chinese workers and 4 Thais were interviewed. While this sample size is suitable for exploratory research, it may not be sufficient to draw statistically significant conclusions. Furthermore, the sample was chosen based on convenience and may not be representative of the large number of Chinese workers in Thailand.

Another limitation of the study is the possible presence of social desirability bias in the responses. Because the interviews were conducted face-to-face, respondents may have provided answers that they consider socially acceptable, or they may have been portrayed in a positive light. This may affect the validity of the data collected.

### **5.3.2 Suggestions for future research**

Future research could seek to address these limitations by using larger, more representative samples and random sampling methods. In addition, researchers could incorporate quantitative measures, such as surveys or psychometric assessments, to complement the qualitative data obtained through interviews. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cross-cultural adaptation experiences of Chinese workers in Thailand.

Another direction for future research could be to investigate the role of social support, particularly within the workplace, in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation. This could include examining the impact of workplace culture and leadership on the experiences of Chinese workers, as well as the ways in which organizations can support the cross-cultural adaptation process.



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