An Investigation into Culture Shock and Social Support Among Thai Students in Chinese Universities

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Abstract
This study explores the culture shock and social support among Thai students studying in universities in Chongqing, China. Data collection and analysis were conducted through semi-structured interview and NVivo with 10 Thai students from three universities in Chongqing. The results indicate that Thai students experience culture shock in terms of environment, language, culture, and academics. Universities, student organizations, friends, and family serve as resources of social support for Thai students. Among these social support, family and friends are the preferred resources for assistance, while university support is crucial for international students' adaptation to the new environment. The study suggests that international students should adequately prepare before arriving to the host country. Additionally, host universities should deepen their understanding of the difficulties and needs of international students, and enhance social support services. Finally, the significance, limitations, and future directions of this study are discussed.
Keywords: Culture Shock, Social Support, International Student, Thai Student

Introduction
        Seeking international education is an opportunity for international student to explore different cultures, develop new ways of thinking and behaving, make new friends, improve cross-cultural knowledge and skills, increase self-esteem and confidence, and become more mature through the experience of living independently in another culture (Haisley et al., 2021; Trujillo et al., 2020). For a long time, China has been a major source of international students worldwide (Wu et al., 2021). However, due to its undeniable rise in the geopolitical and economic spheres on the global arena Yang (2022), China is becoming a very intriguing destination for international students recently. China is currently the third-biggest recipient of international students worldwide and the world's largest provider of postsecondary

international students (Gao & Liu, 2020). With the advancement of the "Belt and Road" initiative, an increasing number of students from countries among Southeast Asia are choosing China as their destination for higher education (Gong et al., 2020; Li, 2021). Thailand, being China's third-largest trading partner within the ASEAN region, has witnessed a steady rise in the number of students pursuing studies in China in recent years (Yonemoto, 2020).

It is not a smooth and straight forward process for international students to study abroad. Due to the differences in cultural backgrounds, viewpoints, languages, social environment, weather, food, clothes, and living habits Aryani et al (2021), the international students will encounter unique challenges in the new environment, such as adjusting to a new culture Mardhiyah & Kusuma (2023), dealing with language barriers Hasanah et al (2023), and adapting to the new educational environment (Liu et al., 2022) . One of these challenges that comes with living in a new place is culture shock, which nobody can avoid (Aryani et al., 2021). According to the study by Oberg Oberg (1960), culture shock results from anxiety brought on by the loss of all signs and symbols that have become ingrained in one's memory or are frequently utilized in daily interactions. Some scholars considered that social support is important to help individuals cope with and adapt to the challenges of adjusting to a new culture(Lashari et al., 2023; Pantelidou & Craig, 2006). Social support is essential to minimize any potential negative impacts of significant life events and everyday difficulties (Lafreniere et al., 2005). Despite the abundance of literature on culture shock experienced by international students and the corresponding social support, there is limited research specifically addressing the culture shock and social support among Thai students during their academic pursuits in China. Based on previous research and current research gaps, the following research objectives are proposed:

i. To explore the experiences of culture shock encountered by Thai students at Chinese universities.

ii. To investigate the social support resources that help Thai students to adapt in Chinese Universities.

iii. To provide recommendations and suggestions for enhancing the management and service quality for international students in Chinese universities.

Literature Review
Culture Shock

A series of studies on international students show that international students who are far away from their families and friends often encounter culture shock in a foreign country, including social culture, language, academics, food habits and accommodation (Hussain & Shen, 2019; Zhou et al., 2008). Culture shock as a notion dates back to 1929, when some experts first used the word to describe the experience of immigrants (Dutton, 2011). The renowned anthropologist Kalervo Oberg proposed the term "culture shock" in his speech in Rio de Janeiro in 1955. In his published article, Oberg (1960) explained that culture shock was triggered by the anxiety of losing all familiar social signs and symbols. The familiar signs or cues are mostly things a person learns how to do based on their culture of origin, and these cues encompass the myriad ways we navigate our daily life environments (Oberg, 1960). Culture shock is also a decrease in personal adaptability to society, often resulting in behavioral disorders or neurotic symptoms when a person experiences stressful situations (David, 1971; Furnham, 2020).

Here are some common symptoms of culture shock: homesickness; communication difficulties; social isolation; anxiety and stress; physical discomfort; cultural

misunderstandings; loss of confidence; disorientation; nostalgia; changes in eating and sleeping habits (Furnham, 2019). In 1960, Oberg explained the stages of culture shock in his article *Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments* and stated that people will experience the stages of honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment when they moved to a new country (Oberg, 1960). It's important to note that while these symptoms are common, not everyone experiences culture shock, and individuals may also go through different phases of adjustment. Over time, with adaptation and coping strategies, many people successfully overcome culture shock and develop a more positive and balanced experience in their new cultural environment.

Social Support

Wills (1991) claimed the sense that one is loved and cared for by others is known as social support, and it might originate from a partner, family, friends, or social and communal relationships (Allen et al., 2002). Since the 1970s, social support has been a subject of interest for scholars across various fields, and many researchers have been exploring this concept. Due to the broad scope of social support and the widespread distribution of researchers in different fields, there is no unified definition of the concept. Cohen and McKay (2020) regarded social support as beneficial interpersonal interaction that helps individuals withstand the adverse effects of stress. Research has examined that the social support can alleviate culture shock when people live in a new environment (Hashimoto et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2006), and relieve stress form social, academic and health (Kim et al., 2008), and a loss of social support has a significant influence on international students(Putra et al., 2022a). In the study, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found that international students face numerous obstacles during the initial transition period upon arriving in the United States, including academic life, health insurance, on-campus or off-campus living, social interactions, transportation, and more. International students make efforts to establish social support systems to overcome the challenges, but they are in greater need of appropriate resources and support from educational institutions to facilitate their adaptation (Bhochhibhoya et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2022b).

Regular communication with family and friends can help alleviate feelings of homesickness and provide emotional support (Zhai, 2002). Building connections with fellow international students and local peers to share experiences can create a sense of belonging and understanding of the host country (Chavajay, 2013). Student organizations and universities can play an important role in helping students cope with culture shock by providing social support (Lin, 2006). Assistance from academic advisors, professors, and administrative staff is vital since they can provide guidance on academic matters, offer supervisorship, and help students navigate the institutional systems (Almutairi, 2020). The development of a social support network among family, friends, instructors, administrators, and academic institutions can enhance the general welfare and effective adjustment of international students to their new homeland.

Through the collation and review of the literature of culture shock and social support, combined with the research focus of this article and probes that were presented to participants, the following research questions are proposed in this study:

i. What are the experiences of culture shock encountered by Thai students at Chinese universities?

ii. What are the social support resources that help Thai students to adapt in Chinese Universities?

Method

The primary purpose of qualitative research is to understand phenomena and reveal participants' perspectives, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. It is commonly employed in exploratory studies to assist researchers in gaining a better understanding of complex social phenomena (Creswell, 2012). According to the purpose of this study, a qualitative research design will be utilized to explore the culture shock experienced by Thai students in China, delving deeper into the difficulties and challenges they encounter in culture shock.

This study recruited 10 Thai students, 7 females and 3 males, currently enrolled in three universities in Chongqing, China. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in both English and Chinese. The participants consisted of 8 undergraduates and 2 postgraduates, with an average age of 23.8 years (ranging from 21 to 32 years). All participants were recipients of scholarship and had been studying in China for a duration exceeding 10 months, ranging from 10 to 27 months.

The interview protocol for this study was developed by the researchers through a review of relevant literature. The interview protocol is primarily focused on two research questions, with more in-depth and extensive discussions guided by participants' responses. The interview questions sought participants' perspectives on culture shock they experienced during their study in China. Additionally, participants were asked about their strategies for mitigating culture shock and the social support resources.

Table 1
Demographic information of participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Degree	Year of Stay in China	Scholarship	Major
IS-1	F	25	Undergraduate	3nd Year	CGS	Chemistry
IS-2	F	22	Undergraduate	2nd Year	CQMS	Chinese
IS-3	M	32	Master	3nd Year	UIS	Education
IS-4	F	22	Undergraduate	1st Year	CGS	Chinese
IS-5	F	23	Undergraduate	2nd Year	CQMS	Engineering
IS-6	F	21	Undergraduate	1st Year	CGS	Chinese
IS-7	F	22	Undergraduate	2nd Year	UIS	Education
IS-8	M	27	Master	2nd Year	CQMS	Chinese
IS-9	F	21	Undergraduate	1st Year	CGS	Medical
IS-10	M	23	Undergraduate	2nd Year	UIS	Education

Note: IS= International Student; M=male; F=female; CGS= Chinese Government Scholarshi; CQMS= Chongqing Mayor Scholarship; UIS=University-level Scholarship

In qualitative research, interview allows participants to express themselves freely and share more reliable and authentic experiences with the researcher, providing rich and in-depth detail (Creswell, 2012). Semi-structured interview serves as a data collection instrument to undergo a 30-35 minute interview with each participant, offering academic flexibility to participants by posing prompting questions when necessary (Creswell, 2012). Given the research of gaining a profound understanding and description of the culture shock experienced by Thai students in China, a convenient sampling was employed (Hill & Williams,

2012). All research procedures strictly adhered to issues such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and privacy rights. To ensure anonymity, participant information was encoded.

After organizing and familiarizing with the data, the research enters the phase of coding. In this phase, researcher systematically reviews the data, identifying key terms relevant to the research questions from interview records and forming a preliminary list to provide initial codes for the data. During the coding process, researchers pinpoint crucial segments of the text and attach labels to index them, as they relate to themes or issues in the data (King, 2004). These codes may correspond to the most fundamental parts of interview data or raw information, aiding researchers in gaining a clear understanding of the acquired information (Javadi & Zarea, 2016).

To ensure the credibility of the transcription coding, researchers read the data multiple times. After repeated reading and organizing, the data were manually coded by the researchers and analysed by NVivo software. Theme analysis was conducted to identify central ideas in the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes were categorized and consolidated into overarching themes for further report writing.

Results

This study aims to explore the culture shock experienced by Thai students in China, and the social support they received. Based on the coding results of interview data, researchers carefully analyzed relevant themes that emerged from the data and extracted quotes. Examples from interviews to clarify and describe these themes. Data related to culture shock experiences were categorized and analyzed under the following four themes: (a) language barriers, (b) environmental differences, (c) sociocultural barriers, (d) academic difficulties. Social support resources from relevant interview data were also categorized and analyzed under the following four themes: (a) university support, (b) organizational support, (c) family support, (d) friends support.

Experiences of Culture Shock

International students, as a group of sojourners, inevitably experience culture shock during their studies abroad (Furnham, 2019), and Thai students studying in China are no exception. In this study, 10 Thai students expressed that they have all experienced varying degrees of culture shock, citing relevant themes such as environmental differences, sociocultural barriers, language barriers, and academic difficulties.

Table 2
Qualitative Finding 1 (culture shock)

Higher-level theme	Theme	Theme description
	Language barriers	Different language system
		Communicating difficult in Chinese
		Difficulty understanding the local dialect
		Writing difficult in Chinese
		Difficulty searching Chinese webs

Culture shock	Environmental differences	Foggy and grey weather, mountain city
		Public bathroom and toilet, no kitchen in dormitory
		People smoking in the public and speak loudly
		No cash payment in the shops
		Crowed and complex transportation
		Food is too spicy with small portion
	Sociocultural barriers	Diverse social customs and campus culture
		Difficulty participating in club activities
		Difficulty joining student organizations
		Divergent values and social norms
		Negative stereotypes and prejudice
	Academic difficulties	New education system and teaching method
		Difficulty reading research material and course book Graduation Difficulties
		Challenges in commutating with supervisors
		Difficulty publishing papers

Language Barriers

Language barriers are the most challenging culture shock encountered by the majority of international students during their academic journey in host countries. All 10 participants discussed facing a series of unresolved issues due to language barriers. Chongqing, located in the southwestern region of China, is an area where many local residents use dialects in their daily communication. This undoubtedly adds invisible pressure and anxiety for international students. Participant IS-8 mentioned in the interview that she can understand some Mandarin, but she is completely unable to comprehend the Chongqing dialect. She expressed:

I can understand some Mandarin, but the Chongqing dialect is entirely incomprehensible to me. It adds an extra layer of challenge, and sometimes I feel quite anxious because of it. Once, I went to a small shop near the school to buy something, and I wanted to purchase toilet paper. The shopkeeper used the local dialect to tell me where the toilet paper was, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. He repeated it several times, but I still couldn't comprehend. Similar incidents also happen in restaurants; we often end up ordering food we don't like due to language issues because people here really like to speak in dialects. ----IS-8

Mandarin Chinese and Thai belong to different language systems, and several participants expressed that Chinese is truly one of the most challenging languages to learn in the world, both in terms of pronunciation and writing. Participant IS-2 stated:

It takes me a long time to write a sentence, and Chinese character writing is extremely challenging. I often forget the structure of certain characters and make frequent mistakes. Pronouncing Chinese characters is also difficult due to the

different tones. I hesitate to answer questions in class because I'm afraid others won't understand what I'm saying, as I often mispronounce the tones. ----IS-2

Similarly, Participant IS-5 also provided feedback that *"writing Chinese characters and speaking Mandarin well is indeed a very challenging task."* Participant IS-3, currently in the third year of graduate, mentioned that he is working on his master thesis in Chinese. He said *"Despite having studied Chinese for six years, writing an academic paper in Chinese is extremely complex and challenging"*

Language barriers require prolonged efforts to overcome, since a few participants mentioned that they rarely interact or communicate with Chinese classmates. These participants also hesitated to participate in various school activities, fearing that others might not understand their spoken Mandarin.

Environmental Differences
Most participants expressed that they experienced a series of culture shock due to environmental differences upon arriving in Chongqing. For instance, the mountainous characteristics of Chongqing, where stairs and slopes are everywhere, and surprisingly, roads are on the rooftops of buildings. The light rail also passes through the buildings, making it easy for newcomers to get lost. Additionally, becaucse of the mountainous terrain, Chongqing often experiences heavy fog, creating a perception of haze and poor air quality. Participant IS-7 shared his first impression of Chongqing as follows:

Before coming to Chongqing, I learned about it being a mountainous city through the internet and videos, and I was attracted by its beautiful scenery. However, when I actually arrived, I was shocked by what I saw. You see buildings constructed along the mountainside, numerous bridges spanning the river, and intricate overpasses. Beneath the bridge pillars, there are residential buildings with up to 10 floors, and the light rail passes through the middle of these structures. In the central business district, you will find roundabouts and one-way streets everywhere. When faced with this complex traffic system, you feel overwhelmed, unable to determine directions, and unsure of where the road exits are. I once got lost in the bustling commercial center, and navigation doesn't seem to be very helpful here. ----IS-7

One discomfort for Thai students is the issue of smoking. In interviews, six students mentioned encountering people smoking in public areas, and the smell made them very uncomfortable. Despite the presence of no-smoking signs in designated areas, some individuals still smoked during meals, which was quite different from what they were accustomed to in their home country. Participant IS-9 mentioned, *"I really don't like the smell of smoke. However, here, you often come across people smoking, and there's no way to stop it outside. That's why I don't go to restaurants very often."*

Participants mentioned that one advantage of studying in China is that international students don't need to go outside to rent a house since the school provides accommodation. However, some students provided feedback that they are not accustomed to the shared public bathrooms and showers in the school. Participant IS-3 described:

Upon arriving at the dormitory, I discovered there was no kitchen and no private bathroom. I found a shared bathroom and toilet at the other end of the corridor, which I couldn't accept as I am not comfortable sharing a bathroom with others. ----IS-3

In addition, one of the most discussed topics by participants is the food shock. Living on campus prohibits cooking in their own rooms, so they have to use the communal kitchen. However, the communal kitchen is frequently crowded, and the cooking facilities are not very good. The exhaust fan is not powerful enough, causing dirt to accumulate in the kitchen. As a result, they have to choose to dine in restaurants. Participants unanimously agree that the food in Chongqing is too spicy, with excessive use of seasonings such as Sichuan peppercorns, ginger, garlic, star anise, etc. Some restaurants also serve small portions, leaving them feeling unsatisfied. Participant IS-7 shared an unpleasant dining experience:

I had this one unpleasant dining experience. The food was extremely spicy, and they used so many seasonings – like peppercorns, ginger, garlic, star anise, you name it. Plus, the portion was so small; I felt like I didn't eat enough.
----IS-7

Sociocultural Barriers

Distinct social norms, customs, and etiquette come from different social culture. International students may encounter misunderstandings and awkwardness in social situations due to unfamiliarity with the new culture. The results of this study indicate that Thai students in China face a series of sociocultural shock, leading to anxiety and stress. As expressed by Participant IS-3, she felt anxious about the etiquette to use when meeting a teacher for the first time:

In Thailand, we have great respect for teachers and place a strong emphasis on etiquette. Generally, before entering a teacher's office, it is common for us to take off our shoes. The first time I went to the counselor's office, I took off my shoes at the door and walked in. The teachers in the office all looked at me, and my counselor had a surprised expression, making me feel very embarrassed. ----IS-3

Some participants also mentioned that they felt somewhat uncomfortable with the management rules in the school dormitories. For example, the curfew for returning to the dormitory is set at 23:00, and anyone arriving later than that cannot enter the dormitory. Besides, participant IS-6 pointed out that Chinese students often assume that Thai students are not punctual and work slowly. She expressed, *"I really don't like their stereotypes about us. In reality, only a small number of Thai students may be like that, but these biases can give teachers a negative impression of us."*

For international students who have just arrived in China, campus life poses a challenge. To adapt quickly to campus life, it is essential to actively participate in school-organized events, club activities, or activities organized by various institutions. However, the research results indicate that participating in school clubs or international student organizations faces certain difficulties. Participant IS-4 mentioned that activities for international students are not widely promoted:

> *Perhaps they use WeChat to organize groups, but I have never received any recruitment information. I really want to participate in activities organized for international students, but I can't find the organizers. I feel the school could provide us with information about these activities and inform us promptly.*
> *----IS-4*

Participant IS-7 also sated that:
> *I really want to participate in some campus activities, whether they are for Chinese students or international students. However, I've noticed that there is a lot of information about school activities, and we are not always the first to know. The lack of channels to join these activities is sometimes frustrating for me because I genuinely want to make more friends. ----IS-7*

The research results indicate that international students in China face social and cultural issues not only related to local cultural characteristics but also reflected in the campus culture of the universities. This suggests some recommendations for the universities that they should ensure open communication channels and safeguard the rights of international students to participate in extracurricular activities.

Academic Difficulties
Previous research indicates that international students in the host country may face academic difficulties,such as course registration and selection, classroom assignments, academic assessments, lectures, research presentations, paper publications and so on (Cena et al., 2021; Martirosyan et al., 2019). They are often unfamiliar with education and academic systems of the host country (Lin & Yi, 1997). The different methods of teaching and academic evaluation can pose various challenges for international students. The interview results of this study demonstrate that Thai students studying in China face various difficulties and challenges similar to those mentioned above. In the process of adapting to the new education system, Thai students experience significant pressure and make considerable efforts to the new academic demands. Participant IS-9 recalled his anxious first year:

> *Teachers speak English or Mandarin in the classroom. When the teacher speaks Mandarin, I feel very anxious. I'm afraid of the new grading system and professional exams. This year, I've spent a lot of spare time studying Mandarin. I hope to fully understand academic lectures in Mandarin, but it's very challenging.*
> *----IS-9*

Participant IS-3 is a senior going to graduate, and he is currently working nervously on completing his thesis. He acknowledged that the academic journey over these years has been quite challenging. He mentioned:

> *The academic system here is different from Thailand, and I had to make some adjustments in my research method, which has been quite distressing. To meet graduation requirements, I need to publish a paper, but I am not proficiency in Chinese. I spent a lot of time revising my paper to meet the publisher's requirements. ----IS-3*

All 10 students are recipients of scholarships supported by the Chinese government or universities. In order to continue receiving the scholarship, they have to prioritize their studies, as a decline in academic performance would jeopardize their scholarship eligibility. Moreover, recipients of Chinese government scholarships need to obtain their degrees within the specified timeframe, which adding significant pressure to their academic responsibilities. Participant IS-2, a recipient of the Chongqing Municipal Mayor Scholarship, mentioned in the interview:

> *I won't be able to continue receiving the scholarship if I fail in exams. This would create difficulties for both me and my family, and perhaps I wouldn't be able to continue my studies here. ----IS-2*

The interview results above indicate that Thai students in China are inevitably confronted with various culture shock because of the differences in social culture, social systems, and educational systems. To assist Thai students in quickly adapting to the new environment in the host country, various forms of social support become crucial.

Social Support Resources
The research results indicate that Thai students studying in China receive various forms of social support, which helps them alleviate the pressures brought by culture shock. Through thematic categorization analysis of interview results, the social support received by Thai students in China primarily comes from their attending university, school clubs and organizations, their own families, as well as friends from both their home country and the host country. These four forms of social support assist Thai students in adapting quickly to the social environment, the educational system, and the academic environment in China.

Table 3
Qualitative Finding 1 (social support)

Higher-level theme	Theme	Theme description
Social support	University support	Chinese language training programs
		Professional development workshops
		Course registration, academic services
		Financial support, scholarship
		Supervisor support, research guideline
		Accommodation support, new student orientation and advising and counseling
		Article publishing assistance
		Healthcare coverage, etc.
	Organization support	Various clubs, sports competition
		Global festivals and social groups
		Social gathering, entertainment
		City Sightseeing events
		Heritage and cultural celebrations
	Friends support	International Students Education Week
		Daily life support and assistance
		Emotional support, inspiration
		Urgent support and assistance
	Family support	Sharing experiences and mutual learning
		Financial support, tuition fee, monthly living expenses
		Healthcare support, emergency assistance
		Emotional communication, alleviation of homesickness
		Life skill learning and problem solving

University Support

The interview results indicate that Chinese universities offer various forms of social support for international students. For instance, they arrange new student orientation and set up information desks where newcomers can inquire about the registration procedures and other information. Participants mentioned that since they are with limited proficiency in Chinese, their universities provide Chinese language training programs. Some universities organize workshops for students facing challenges in their major courses, aiming to help them gain a fully understanding of their majors. The universities also assign supervisors and counselors to assist international students in overcoming academic and personal difficulties. Participant IS-3 shared the academic support measures provided by his school:

My foundational knowledge of the major wasn't very strong. Our university frequently organizes conferences related to the related subjects, and supervisors often encourage us to attend these events. Additionally, the university holds

professional seminars periodically throughout the semester, and graduate students can apply to participate. These learning opportunities not only enhance my understanding of the subject matter but also cultivate my research skills in the field. I find these activities at the university to be very meaningful. ----IS-3

However, some participants argue that, despite the provision of supervisors and counselors for international students, the guidance and assistance they receive in their studies are not truly effective. They hope that the universities can address academic challenges encountered by international students at a fundamental level. For example, implementing weekly and monthly meetings to help students overcome academic difficulties, and assigning course advisors for relevant major courses to assist them in completing assignments.

Participant IS-7 believes that the university's orientation program for new students is particularly helpful for those who have just arrived. He states, *"The orientation program helped me become familiar with the university environment very quickly. At the same time, I met many friends and teachers who provided significant support for my studies and daily life."*

Almost all Chinese universities provide accommodation for international students, relieving them of the anxiety of finding housing. Ten participants unanimously agree that this assistance has been immensely helpful. Participant IS-9 mentioned, *"Being able to apply for on-campus accommodation has significantly reduced my anxiety, allowing me to focus on resolving other issues."* The Chinese government and universities offer generous scholarships to international students. All ten participants in this study are scholarship recipients, and they express that the financial support from the Chinese government and universities enables them to concentrate on their studies. Participant IS-5 stated:

I have been awarded the Chongqing Municipal Mayor Scholarship, which covers my tuition and provides partial living expenses. Despite the academic pressures, I am very satisfied because it allows me to focus on studying and achieving good grades. My parents are also delighted because the scholarship helps alleviate their financial burden. ----IS-5

Ten participants stated that the universities, in addition to providing academic and financial support, also utilize the university website for information support. The university distributes freshmen orientation guide and admission letter to students through email, along with the URLs of relevant university departments. Some elements on the university website are specifically designed to assist new students. Participant IS-4 said, *"Our website has a dedicated menu for international students with frequently FAQ about new student. Through the FAQ, we can easily resolve many issues related to registration. Additionally, the school's international student office has a dedicated email to assist students solve problems."*

Apart from that, the university also provides assistance to students in their daily lives and studies through supervisors and counselors. Participant IS-9 shared her story with her supervisor:

My supervisor is very concerned about my academic progress. She requests monthly reports on my studies and we frequently communicate through emails about any difficulties I encounter in my learning. She is always patient in helping me clarify

any doubts. Sometimes, she even invites me to taste Chinese cuisine together. I feel cared for in her presence, and I believe I am being well taken care of. ----IS-9

Organization Support

The research results indicate that student organizations can provide a social platform for students, helping them build new friendships and interpersonal relationships, facilitating their integration into campus life. Student organizations, like collectives and individuals, can offer corresponding social support to their members. Chinese universities host a wide variety of student organizations, and based on the information shared by participants, they primarily engage with the International Student Union, the International Student Association, and other related clubs. These student organizations not only provide information support but also organize meaningful activities, such as various sports competitions, city sightseeing events, International Student Education Week, celebrations of major international festivals, and so on. By participating in these organizational activities, international students can not only alleviate the stress and frustration but also adapt more quickly to life in the host country.

Participant IS-4, a freshman in her first year, believes that participating in various student organization activities is significant for her adaptation to campus life. She mentioned,

I joined the school's International Student Association and Calligraphy Association. I met many students from different countries, and we often collaborate to organize activities. Our favorite activity is organizing city tours for new students. We visited the most famous attractions in Chongqing, learned about its history, culture, and cuisine. Through participating in such activities, I feel that Chongqing is no longer unfamiliar, and I have started to like this city. ----IS-4

Participant IS-8 mentioned that he really enjoys the International Student Education Week organized by the student union. During Education Week, he can taste cuisines from different countries, learn about various cultures, and make many new friends. He stated, *"The International Student Education Week is truly a fantastic event. I have participated for two years now. In preparing for this event, our Thai students always showcase their best performances. It's a great initiative for students from other countries to understand Thai culture."*

Family Support

The research results indicate that, like most international students, these ten participants also acknowledge that family support is their primary resource of social support while studying in China. They believe that family members not only provide them with financial assistance but also offer emotional support. Participant IS-2 explained:

When I decided to study in China, my parents supported my decision although they worried about me being far from home. My mom prepared a lot of Thai food for me, and my dad specifically arranged a Visa card for me. During the initial days in Chongqing, I missed my parents a lot. I talked to them every day, and with their companionship, my anxiety and worries decreased significantly.
----IS-2

Participant IS-7 also mentioned, *"For many difficulties in life, I seek help from my parents. When my emotions are unstable, or when I feel academic pressure, or when I'm not feeling well physically, I always talk to my parents. They provide the biggest support for me.*

Friends Support

Eight participants indicated that social support from fellow Thais can be labeled as "very important." It is evident that friends from the same nationality are the most common social support resource for Thai students. Participant IS-5 expressed, *"For me, it's not easy to make Chinese friends here, so I mostly go out with Thai classmates. We share the same cultural background, and we communicate without barriers. It feels very natural, so I prefer to be with Thai friends, and they can also help me overcome problems related to adjusting to the local environment."* Other participants also hold similar views, feeling that staying connected with Thai friends helps them relax.

Many participants also emphasized the importance of interacting with Chinese friends, stating that *"Chinese classmates can share a lot of useful information with us. They can take us to a deeper understanding of Chongqing, the university, and can also provide advice on our studies. This is very important for us international students."* Additionally, some participants mentioned that their friends in Thailand also provide them with assistance. Participant IS-10 mentioned, *"Whenever I feel down, I will chat with my good friend in Thailand. She comforts me and helps me get out of the low moments."*

In addition, participant IS-6 believes that international students from other countries have also provided her with a lot of help in her studies and daily life. She said, *"I have friends from South Korea and Italy, and we often chat and go shopping together. I feel that they have alleviated my anxiety and homesickness to some extent."* It can be seen that Thai students in China have diverse resources of friend support, including fellow Thais, Chinese friends, friends in Thailand, and friends from other nationalities.

Discussion and Implication

In summarizing the research results, we found that Thai students in China experienced the following culture shock: language barriers, such as communication in Mandarin and local dialects; sociocultural barriers, including social etiquette and campus culture; environmental differences, such as climate, transportation, and accommodation; and academic difficulties, such as different assessment systems and teaching methods. These research findings directly address the first research question and, to some extent, support certain culture shock theories. The anxieties, frustrations, and pressures experienced by Thai students in the new environment upon their arrival in China align well with the experiences described by Oberg (1960) and others. Many experience of the culture shock they encountered on campus also corroborate Furnham's perspectives (Furnham, 2019).

Additionally, the communication difficulties and writing challenges faced by Thai students due to language barriers also confirm the research findings of Hussain and Shen (2019), regarding academic difficulties and language challenges faced by international students in China. Moreover, the challenges Thai students encounter in terms of classroom teaching methods and academic systems in China are similar to many aspects summarized in Zhou's research (Zhou et al., 2008). This study also reveals that the proficiency in the Chinese language, understanding of Chinese culture, and individual personality traits significantly impact the extent of culture shock experienced by Thai students, a result consistent with the findings of Lin (2006). With the increase income of family and the support of scholarship

policies by the Chinese government and schools, economic difficulties are no longer an inevitable experience for Thai students during their studies in China, validating the viewpoints presented by (Hussain and Shen, 2019). This research also identifies institutional differences between the two cultures, such as disparities in education systems and academic structures, as significant sources of stress and anxiety for Thai students in China. To overcome the anxiety stemming from these differences, seeking social support and fostering students' cross-cultural adaptation abilities are imperative.

The second research question of this study focuses on the resources of social support that Thai students obtain in China. Through the analysis of interview, the resources of social support for Thai students in China were identified as the educational institution they attend, student organizations, family, and friends. Participants considered family and friends to be the primary resources for seeking help, as they can provide timely emotional and instrumental support. This research finding aligns with the findings of Zhai (2002), revealing the crucial role of family support in helping Thai students cope with culture shock and cross-cultural distress. Particularly, friends from other nationalities can assist Thai students in handling urgent issues in the host country, which is similar to the findings of (Chavajay, 2013). It is reported that international students perceive greater social-emotional and instrumental support from fellow international individuals than from friends in the host country (Chavajay, 2013).

Student organizations are one of the resources of social support for Thai students, providing members with informational and emotional support. This finding aligns with the conclusion of Lin (2006), highlighting the role of student organizations in offering social support to help new members cope with culture shock and adapt to a new cultural environment. The university, as a crucial resource of social support for international students, provides policy support, financial aid, and emotional assistance to its students. The implementation of international student enrollment policies and scholarship programs by the university is essential for international students to complete their studies in the host country. In this study, Thai students received scholarship support from the government or the university, alleviating their financial pressures in the host country and facilitating better adaptation to the new environment and academic completion. Despite the various forms of support provided by the university to international students, some participants expressed concerns that they did not receive sufficient support from faculty and staff in terms of their academic and general needs. This perspective resonates with the findings of Almutairi's research Almutairi (2020), indicating the need for further strengthening support from the university in both academic and daily life aspects. It suggests that the university's support for students' learning and living needs should be enhanced.

It was found that although Thai students are aware of the culture shock they experience and understand various resources of social support, they do not effectively utilize these resources to cope with the stress resulting from culture shock. The perspectives gathered in this study will contribute to helping Thai students adapt to life in China by inspiring them to learn how to leverage different forms of social support to address challenges in the new environment. For instance, preparing for the academic journey by utilizing new media and online videos, enhancing cross-cultural adaptation skills through teaching and information resources from the universuty, building a social support network by participating in international student activities organized by student organizations, and seeking guidance from supervisors and counselors for advice. These findings aim to empower Thai students to

proactively utilize social support to navigate and overcome issues that may arise in the new cultural setting.

Simultaneously, the results of this study hold significant implications for the admission and management of international students. The research revealed that international students are aware of potential culture shock challenges before arriving on campus. Therefore, universities can proactively prepare information materials about the host country during the admission process, distribute them to students, emphasize common obstacles, and provide contact information for relevant support services. Recognizing the diverse characteristics of different international student groups, university administrators, supervisors, counselors, and student community managers should understand the specific adaptation experiences of various groups. Subsequently, they can apply varied but effective strategies to assist these different groups in addressing their challenges. For instance, universities can tailor orientation programs based on the characteristics of student groups, facilitating a quicker integration of international students into campus life. This study offers in-depth insights from a substantial sample of Thai students, prompting university staff to consider similar interviews with Thai students to understand their genuine difficulties and needs. Furthermore, interview results suggest that university administrators should establish stable relationships with international students, maintain regular communication, and, more importantly, disseminate practical information relevant to international students' interests in a timely manner. For example, supervisors or counselors can regularly organize forums for international students to address their practical needs. The university can establish social media networks specifically for international students to collect feedback on their needs.

Limitation and Conclusion

This study is limited to ten Thai students from three universities in Chongqing, China, the findings may not be generalizable to other student populations and institutions. While the universality of the results of this study has its limitations, the findings contribute to the literature on culture shock and social support, confirming some previous research outcomes. Additionally, the study provides constructive suggestions for universities and international student administrators involved in recruiting international students, facilitating more effective in management of international student and promoting the internationalization of higher education.

The significance and impact of this study cannot be extrapolated to address the needs of all international students, but ongoing research can cater to the evolving needs of this diverse demographic. The study solely conducted qualitative analysis on the data, and it is recommended that future research employ mixed methods or quantitative approaches to study international student populations with different backgrounds and cultures. Using larger samples can help validate and extend these findings. Ultimately, this study serves as a valuable contribution to the understanding of the experiences of Thai students in China, but its findings should be considered within the specific context and scope of the study.

The research results indicate that the culture shock experienced by Thai students in China are inevitable and complex. Compared to previous studies, these culture shock phenomena appear to be dynamic, evolving with the development of society. Thai students are not passive with the culture shock, they seek social support from universities, student organizations, friends, and family to ensure a quick adaptation to the new life in the host country.

The study suggests that for better alleviating the pressure caused by culture shock, international students can undertake pre-departure preparations, such as understanding laws and regulations, education system and assessment methods, local social culture, dietary habits and climate, transportation, school environment and geographical location, campus life, and son on. Universities should also be prepared for orientation and follow-up services, and conduct orientation consultations and admission education activities to assist international students in facing the challenges of culture shock positively. The university can encourage the international students to engage in social activities with fellow countrymen local students, which can help the students reduce the stress and homesickness.

Furthermore, universities and relevant faculty can organize students to participate in language training and special courses on Chinese culture to enhance their cross-cultural adaptation abilities. It is hoped that this study can assist future international students in preparing for the challenges of culture shock. Additionally, the research findings and recommendations can inspire university and its staffs to further strengthen their support for international students.

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