A mixed-methods empirical investigation of Chinese international students' willingness to communicate in Thai within Sino-Thai educational cooperation

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ABSTRACT

Sino-Thai collaboration in higher education has diversified in recent years, making Chinese students a pivotal group in Thailand's international student population. This study investigates both the current state of their willingness to communicate (WTC) in Thai and how educational cooperation between the two nations shapes it. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research integrates a quantitative survey of 487 Chinese international students in Thailand with semi-structured interviews involving a purposive subsample of 13 participants. Drawing upon cross-cultural adaptation theory and the L2 Willingness to Communicate framework, the study explored the impact of contextual and personal factors on communicative behaviour. Analysis through SPSS, employing means and standard deviations, indicated that Chinese international students generally displayed moderate-to-low WTC in Thai. Additionally, coding analysis revealed that Sino-Thai educational cooperation principally influences students' WTC through three domains: academic adaptation support, cultural participation, and career-development facilitation. Collectively, these supports alleviate pressures associated with linguistic, cultural, and environmental adjustment, while simultaneously furnishing extrinsic motivation for professional advancement, thereby modestly enhancing WTC. Nonetheless, substantive progress remains contingent upon further optimisation of immersive language milieus and the systematic design of communicative practice opportunities. The study offers empirical insights and evidence-based language policies and bilingual talent cultivation recommendations within Sino-Thai cooperation.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by extending research on L2 WTC to the Thai language, which is considered a non-mainstream language, within the context of Sino-Thai educational cooperation. It conceptualizes cooperation as an "external stimulus–environmental mechanism" within the WTC framework and offers a new analytical perspective on how cross-cultural collaboration fosters communicative willingness.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's era of rapid globalization, educational internationalization has become a critical arena for both competition and cooperation among nations. It not only reflects the integration of global higher education systems but also functions as a cornerstone of national soft power, bolstering international influence and reshaping talent development structures [1]. Beyond conventional metrics such as student mobility and faculty exchanges, it signifies a global shift in how higher education is governed [2]. Historically, Europe and North America have been the primary

destinations for Asian students, shaping a mobility pattern that has been West-centric since the mid-twentieth century [3]. Nevertheless, concomitant with the pronounced elevation of Asian higher-education standards and the sustained consolidation of regional collaborative frameworks, a growing contingent of students from Asia is opting to undertake tertiary studies within the region itself [4]. Correspondingly, principal source nations China foremost among them have manifested a parallel recalibration of overseas study aspirations toward geographically proximate destinations, most notably within Southeast Asia [5].

China, the largest exporter of international students globally [6], has actively promoted higher education cooperation through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the "Double First-Class" project, and the Study-in-China Program, fostering a collaborative educational community [7]. Thailand, a pivotal node in the Belt and Road network, has responded with policies aimed at enhancing educational quality and supporting internationalization, including the "Thailand 4.0" strategy and the Eastern Economic Corridor scheme [8]. The strategic alignment between China's Belt and Road Initiative and Thailand's development agenda is accelerating collaborative efforts in higher education, establishing a new partnership framework focused on cultivating joint talent and integrating educational systems [9].

Contemporary higher-education internationalization, Knight [2] argues, is marked by two paradigm shifts. Horizontally, partnerships have moved from aid-based collaborations to market-driven competition, turning international education into a contest for students, resources, and prestige. Within Sino-Thai cooperation, Thai universities now employ explicit market strategies localized curricula, Chinese-language promotion, social-media campaigns, and alliances with recruitment agencies to attract Chinese students [10]. Intermediary agents offering counselling, application, and visa assistance mitigate information gaps and are widely used by Chinese applicants [11-15]. Vertically, the focus has shifted from student self-mobility to the cross-border movement of programs and providers [2]. Sino-Thai partnerships now deliver joint degrees in flexible "3 + 1," "2 + 2," and "1 + 3" formats [16] together with bilingual, trilingual, and especially Chinese-medium curricula that align with the Belt and Road initiative, these offerings, chiefly designed by Thai institutions, reduce language barriers and ease academic transition, enabling Thai universities to recruit substantial cohorts of Chinese students [17].

In Thailand, Chinese student enrollments have surged due to diverse cooperative agreements, particularly in private universities offering lenient admissions and expansive international programs [18]. These institutions foster tight-knit Chinese communities where Mandarin predominates, creating a distinct "co-ethnic community"[19]. Despite the potential for language acquisition through local interaction [20] students predominantly engage within Chinese-speaking networks, limiting Thai language practice. This insular environment, while aiding adjustment, undermines Thai language acquisition efforts, posing significant challenges. Chinese students in Thailand encounter multiple barriers to effective Thai-language proficiency. Primarily, the lack of authentic Thai practice opportunities inhibits oral fluency [21, 22]. Despite prolonged stays, social networks predominantly comprise Chinese peers, restricting exposure to Thai discourse [23]. Second, anxiety about language use and low self-efficacy deter learners from actively engaging in Thai [24]. Meanwhile, the educational environment in Thailand remains predominantly sinicized, with limited immersive experiences in Thai language and culture. These factors collectively hinder students' development of robust communicative competence in Thai.

Merely being physically present does not ensure automatic proficiency enhancement. Language acquisition relies on extensive interaction with native speakers [25] and intrinsic motivation, coupled with actual language usage [26]. Willingness to communicate (WTC), recognized as a crucial psychological construct since the 1980s [27], precedes verbal behavior, providing insights into language usage across proficiency levels and contexts [28]. Unlike competence assessments that measure abilities, WTC indicates the inclination to engage linguistically, thus offering valuable perspectives on learning outcomes. This study investigates the WTC of Chinese students in Thai higher education partnerships. Originally centered on native language communication, research on WTC now encompasses second and foreign languages, yet it predominantly focuses on English, particularly within Anglophone nations [29-

34]. There is a noticeable lack of research on regional languages such as Thai, with geographic emphasis mainly on East Asia, North America, and Western Europe, neglecting Southeast Asia. This research addresses these gaps by examining Chinese students' WTC in Thai educational settings. Previous studies indicate that WTC in a second language is influenced by motivation, confidence, social support, attitudes, cultural factors, and situational contexts [31, 35-39]. This study situates WTC within the framework of transnational educational partnerships, exploring its evolution and impact on linguistic and intercultural engagement. As Sino-Thai academic collaboration grows and Chinese enrollment in Thai institutions increases, Chinese students encounter unique linguistic and social contexts. Exploring their WTC in Thai offers insights into their communicative engagement, providing theoretical understanding and pedagogical implications.

In the specific scenario of expanding educational ties between China and Thailand, marked by a notable rise in Chinese student enrollment at Thai academic institutions, these learners confront distinctive linguistic and social contexts diverging from conventional study abroad norms. Exploring the dynamics and underlying pathways of their Thai-language WTC promises a deeper understanding of the psychological and sociological mechanisms driving their communicative involvement. Thus, this investigation centers on two primary questions:

1) What is the overall level of willingness to communicate in Thai among Chinese students in Thailand?
2) How does educational cooperation influence their willingness to communicate in Thai?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Linguistic Interaction

Cross-cultural adaptation involves individuals gradually aligning with the cultural norms, language, and social conventions of the host society [40, 41]. In studies of second-language acquisition and communicative competence, this concept explains how learners undergo emotional and behavioral changes in a new cultural context. Ward and Kennedy [42] proposed a framework that distinguishes psychological and sociocultural adaptation, emphasizing the role of coping strategies, social support, and individual traits [41]. Sociocultural adaptation typically improves sharply after arrival and stabilizes over time, while psychological adaptation fluctuates and remains sensitive to various factors Ward and Rana-Deuba [43]. Kim [44] the paradigm suggests that adaptation begins with an individual's readiness, including understanding of the host language and culture, emotional regulation, and communication skills. Those well-prepared engage more in language-mediated interactions, fostering effective communication in the host environment. Cultural affinity accelerates sociocultural adjustment, while significant differences hinder language use and social integration Kim [44]. Lee and Chen [45] argue that cross-cultural adaptation is a process of communicative engagement and interaction, demonstrating competence in the host society.

2.2. Willingness to Communicate in Thai

The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was initially formulated to explain variations in native-language communicative behaviors, conceptualized as a personality-linked trait [27]. In second-language research, the differences between L2 and L1 communicative behaviors are widely understood through MacIntyre, et al. [28] framework, which conceptualizes L2 WTC as emerging from the interaction of stable dispositions and context-dependent influences shaped by affective, individual, and sociocultural factors. Scholars have further advanced the concept of Situated WTC, emphasizing that communicative readiness fluctuates with immediate contextual changes [32, 46]. Studies reveal that classroom ambiance, perceived social support, and linguistic immersion significantly impact WTC Cao and Philp [30]. Peng [37] expanded on this with an ecological model illustrating how classroom dynamics directly and indirectly affect WTC through communicative self-efficacy. Beyond educational settings, peer encouragement plays a pivotal role. MacIntyre, et al. [36] reported that peer support enhances learners' use of the target language in natural contexts, with support dynamics evolving as learners integrate into social networks and gain linguistic proficiency. Immersion depth also significantly influences WTC. Learners in immersive environments

exhibit higher WTC and reduced communication anxiety, underscoring the motivational impact of immersion [47]. Quality interaction with the target language enhances proficiency and reinforces communicative motivation [48].

In sociolinguistic settings where multiple codes coexist or where the use of a specific language is not mandatory, willingness to communicate assumes a complex and multifaceted profile. Learners also face the task of deciding whether to initiate interaction and, if they do, of selecting an appropriate linguistic code from their available repertoire - a process closely associated with language choice [49]. The multitude of viable language choices can diminish motivation to use the target language, impacting both the frequency and proactive nature of its deployment. Consequently, WTC becomes highly situational and dynamically fluid, transitioning from a fixed dispositional trait to an outcome influenced by language identity, social engagement, and psychological comfort [32]. Within this context, defining the classification of Thai is essential. Second language acquisition research typically conceptualizes a second language as one acquired within a community where it is extensively used in everyday discourse [50]. For Chinese students residing in Thailand, although Thai is not their native language, its pervasive use in daily communication justifies its classification as their second language. Thus, Chinese learners' WTC in Thai aligns with established theories of second language WTC and can be examined through the constructs of environmental dynamics, confidence development, and language contact within the WTC model. Analyzing Thai through this lens not only elucidates the communicative tendencies of Chinese learners in a foreign context but also broadens the theoretical applicability of the model to multilingual environments featuring less commonly taught languages.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach combining a structured questionnaire with individual interviews. Mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques within a single study, enhancing the understanding of complex research phenomena [51]. The quantitative phase employed a questionnaire to assess Chinese international students' willingness to engage in Thai-language communication within Sino-Thai educational cooperation. Survey methodology, valued for its efficiency and representativeness, remains crucial in quantitative research [52, 53]. Online questionnaires, due to their convenience and broad accessibility, have become primary tools for data collection, enabling access to diverse populations and reducing time and financial costs [54, 55]. This study used Wenjuan (https://www.wenjuan.com) for administering questionnaires, ensuring rapid data collection. The qualitative component comprised semi-structured interviews exploring how Sino-Thai academic collaboration influences participants' use of Thai. These interviews, conducted face-to-face, fostered rapport and allowed adjustments based on non-verbal cues, enriching data collection [56, 57]. Naturalistic interactions and non-verbal cues promoted deeper insights into respondents' experiences [58].

3.2. Participants

The quantitative phase of the study utilized convenience sampling across five leading private universities in Bangkok, renowned for their large Chinese international student cohorts. These institutions boast robust Sino-Thai collaborations and offer joint-program pathways featuring courses conducted in Chinese, thereby attracting a significant contingent of Chinese nationals. Undergraduate students were the primary focus group, reflecting the universities' flexible admissions policies and diverse curricular offerings. An online survey yielded 487 usable questionnaires from voluntary Chinese undergraduates, ensuring the inclusivity and practicality of the sampling procedure without imposing quotas. In accordance with research ethics and privacy safeguards, the five institutions were coded as A–E for subsequent data analysis and reporting.

During the qualitative phase, interview candidates were selected from survey respondents who agreed to share contact details, based on academic year and scores on the Communicative Willingness Scale. Deliberate variation in university affiliation, program format, instructional language, and field of study maximized the representativeness

and breadth of data. Thirteen undergraduate students were interviewed, comprising 5 males (38.5%) and 8 females (61.5%) across different academic years and programs. The majority of participants (69.2%) were enrolled in International Business, while others pursued degrees in Thai Language and Tourism Management. Instructional language varied, with 53.8% receiving instruction in Chinese, 30.8% in Thai, and 15.4% in bilingual programs. Sample adequacy was assessed through thematic analysis, ensuring theoretical saturation of emergent themes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewees (N=13 undergraduate students).

Interviewee	Gender	Academic year	Professions	Instructional language	Thai Lang. Proficiency	Apply Channel
S1	Male	3rd year	IB	All Chinese	Beginner	IA
S2	Female	3rd year	Thai Lang.	All Thai	Intermediate	JC
S3	Female	3rd year	Thai Lang.	All Thai	Beginner	JC
S4	Male	3rd year	IB	All Chinese	Beginner	EA
S5	Male	4th year	IB	CH+ENG	Beginner	JC
S6	Male	4th year	IB	All Chinese	Beginner	EA
S7	Female	4th year	Thai Lang.	All Thai	Intermediate	JC
S8	Female	4th year	Thai Lang.	All Thai	Intermediate	JC
S9	Female	2nd year	IB	All Chinese	Beginner	EA
S10	Female	1st year	IB	All Chinese	Beginner	EA
S11	Female	2nd year	IB	CH+Thai	Beginner	IA
S12	Male	2nd year	IB	All Chinese	Intermediate	IA
S13	Female	2nd year	TM	CH +ENG	Beginner	EA

Note: S=Student; IB=International Business; TM=Tourism Management; IA=Individual Application; JC=Joint Cultivation; EA=Educational Agency; CH+ENG=Chinese+English (Bilingual); CH+Thai= Chinese+Thai (Bilingual).

3.3. Instruments and Procedures

Quantitative data were obtained via a two-part survey: demographics and Thai WTC [34] Chinese adaptation of Kim [59] revision of McCroskey [60] 12-item scale, grounded in the WTC framework of McCroskey and Baer [27]. The measure enjoys established validity and reliability in L2 research [61-66]. For this Thai context, "English" was simply replaced with "Thai," and responses were recorded on a five-point Likert continuum (1 = very unwilling to 5 = very willing). Expert review affirmed content adequacy, and the scale's internal consistency was exemplary (α = 0.969). Qualitative data were captured through a semi-structured interview schedule shaped by Pattapong [67] and Zeng [34] and core L2 WTC constructs, while accounting for the prospective effects of Sino-Thai academic partnerships. After expert vetting, the guide comprised six questions on WTC evolution, learning history, acculturation, and career support for example, "Since arriving in Thailand, how has your Thai WTC changed, and why?" Full questionnaire items appear in Appendix 1.

3.4. Data Analysis

SPSS supported the quantitative inquiry: descriptive statistics delineated the sample, while mean and standard deviation indexed Chinese international students' Thai L2 willingness to communicate. Semi-structured interviews supplied qualitative data. With consent, sessions were recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and edited for precision, preserving the interview framework. Member checking ensured transcript credibility. Final texts underwent thematic analysis [68, 69].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Quantitative Results

The survey's opening section profiled 487 Chinese students studying in Thailand. Females accounted for 53% of the sample, with the majority enrolled at University A (53%) and University B (23.2%), and the remainder distributed across three additional institutions. Third-year students represented the largest cohort (35.1%). International Trade,

Thai, and Finance & Accounting dominated the major distribution. Nearly half (45.6%) pursued programs taught wholly in Chinese, signaling limited day-to-day Thai exposure. Consistent with this context, 72.7% self-classified as beginners in Thai, highlighting the cohort's generally low proficiency.

The mean willingness-to-communicate in Thai was 2.876 (SD = 1.065), placing the group in the lower-mid range and indicating that most students exhibit only modest readiness to engage in Thai-medium interaction.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics profile Chinese nationals undertaking studies in Thailand and their self-reported willingness to communicate (WTC) in Thai. Collectively, the cohort demonstrates a comparatively subdued disposition toward Thai-language interaction, a pattern that stands in stark contrast to the corpus of scholarship documenting Chinese learners immersed in Anglophone milieus, where linguistic proficiency and WTC typically ascend to an upper-intermediate echelon [34, 62, 63]. Evidently, the participants in the present inquiry did not replicate those tendencies.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of Chinese students' WTC in Thai (n = 487).

Variable	Category	N	*M*	*SD*
Gender	Male	229	2.794	1.120
	Female	258	2.950	1.010
Academic year	1st Year	137	2.658	1.076
	2nd Year	101	2.870	1.095
	3rd Year	171	3.040	1.014
	4th Year	78	2.909	1.067
Total		487	2.876	1.065

Prevailing theory in second-language acquisition maintains that immersion within the target linguistic ecology enhances communicative behavior [70, 71] and catalyses' measurable gains in language competence, particularly in spontaneous oral production [72, 73]. Yet, notwithstanding their residence in a dominantly Thai-speaking environment, respondents displayed a persistently attenuated WTC. This outcome intimates that environmental exposure, while indispensable, is not a sufficient catalyst for communicative volition. Aligned with Isabelli-García [20] thesis, the genesis of WTC is contingent upon a nexus of mediators namely, the caliber and volume of linguistic input, intrinsic motivational architecture, degree of acculturative orientation, and concrete communicative exigencies such that a target-language environment alone does not inexorably engender robust language-use intentions.

4.2. Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data was undertaken to explore the extent to which Sino–Thai educational collaboration informs Chinese international students' willingness to communicate in Thai. A systematic coding of thirteen semi-structured interviews yielded three overarching thematic categories and seven subsidiary dimensions, elucidating the ways in which collaborative educational ventures between China and Thailand shape Chinese students' proclivity to engage in Thai-language communication (see Table 3).

Table 3. Thematic matrix depicting the effects of Sino–Thai educational collaboration on the Thai-language WTC of Chinese students in Thailand.

Theme	Sub-theme
Learning & adaptation support	Pre-departure training & preparation
	Native-language environmental facilitation
	Language-program design & support
Cultural experience	Organization of cultural activities
	Community integration & interaction
Career-development support	Cultivation of vocational awareness and competencies
	Provision of employment opportunities

4.2.1. Frameworks of Learning and Adaptation Support

Support for Chinese students unfolds along three axes: (1) structured pre-departure orientation, (2) Chinese-mediated linguistic affordances on Thai campuses, and (3) comprehensive Thai-language curricula and tailored interventions.

(1) Structured pre-departure orientation

The thirteen participants accessed preparatory resources through joint degree pathways, commercial agencies, or self-initiative. Orientation typically encompassed beginner Thai, sociocultural norms, and practical life skills, together catalyzing students' WTC. Students (S3 & S7) in institutional partnerships had already navigated rigorous Thai coursework in China, replete with multimodal pedagogies. Such groundwork bolstered self-efficacy and tempered the anxiety of initial immersion.

> *"The Thai classes I took at home were quite straightforward for me." (S3)*

> *"We had Thai audio-visual-oral classes during our undergraduate program in China." (S7)*

Those using agency services received functional, task-driven briefings introductory Thai lessons, etiquette primers, and immigration walkthroughs providing essential intercultural readiness.

> *"They covered only everyday basics." (S6)*

> *"The agency provided thirty complimentary Thai lessons." (S9)*

> *"Their systematic outline of cultural taboos was exceptionally helpful." (S10)*

Independent applicants lacked coherent preparation, acquiring fragmented knowledge via online self-study:

> *"I followed online videos to learn Thai independently." (S1)*

> *"Prior to arrival, my Thai proficiency was literally zero." (S11)*

(2) Chinese-mediated linguistic affordances on Thai campuses

Participants praised the ubiquity of Chinese-Thai signage and Chinese-speaking staff for smoothing adjustment, yet acknowledged that such comfort undermined their incentive to practice Thai.

> *"Bilingual campus signs, even cafeteria menus, are extremely welcoming." (S10)*

Universities' provision of Chinese-language services particularly for visa and academic inquiries substantially lessens linguistic strain. Chinese-speaking personnel reduce early communication obstacles, thereby mitigating international students' psychological load during acculturation, as one student noted:

> *"With visa officers and TAs who speak Chinese, there's nothing to worry about." (S10)*

(3) Comprehensive Thai-language curricula and tailored interventions

Thai universities provide Chinese students with heterogeneous Thai-language provisions: fully Thai-medium joint degrees, Chinese-medium tracks with compulsory Thai, and programs where Thai is merely elective. Collectively, these structures foster linguistic proficiency and communicative willingness.

> *"In Thai-medium joint degrees, extensive core modules covering phonology, grammar, reading, and culture are delivered entirely in Thai, aiming for comprehensive competence" (S2)*

> *"Chinese-medium tracks also require Thai, yet limit teaching hours to basic everyday usage" (S4)*

> *"When Thai is elective and English is compulsory, students often prioritize English, curbing motivation for Thai learning and subsequent use" (S5)*

Beyond the standard curriculum, certain universities offer intensive Thai classes for students with prior knowledge, reinforcing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills while addressing practical needs such as workplace discourse and career preparation.

> *"There is an intensive Thai class for students who already have some basics; their proficiency is high, and the instructor provides employment support, such as teaching us how to write résumés." (S10)*

Institutions also organize co-curricular initiatives e.g., Thai speech contests that immerse students in authentic communicative contexts.

"We had a speech competition, and the foreign teacher enthusiastically coached us on pronunciation and rhetorical skills." (S8)

Finally, language-partner schemes pair Chinese and Thai students, providing extensive real-world opportunities to use Thai and reinforcing both competence and communicative willingness:

"A Thai university once hosted a week-long program at our university, and I was paired with a Thai student. We spoke constantly during meals, in class, and while strolling or shopping." (S7)

In sum, pre-departure training equips Chinese students headed to Thailand with rudimentary Thai and cultural schemas that prime later adjustment; this anticipatory proficiency central to adaptive potential [44] dampens culture shock and seeds early willingness to communicate. Yet a robust L1 enclave abroad, though stress-reducing, erects a "Chinese micro-space" that limits exposure to Thai, throttling demand and motivation for use. Because immersion supplies continuous input [73] elicits output [74] and sustains contact with host communities [20], its curtailment blunts willingness to communicate. Institutional Thai courses provide competence, but conversion to action hinges on perceived proficiency and low anxiety drivers of communicative confidence [28] and accurate self-assessment [75]. Most respondents rate themselves as "beginners," suppressing confidence and willingness. Thus, Sino-Thai programs scaffold initial willingness to communicate, yet the same bilingual safety net erodes immersion, leaving long-term communicative motivation underdeveloped.

4.2.2. Cultural Experience

Cultural experience is fostered through two interconnected avenues: (1) the organization of cultural activities and (2) community integration and interaction. Both dimensions enable Chinese international students to deepen their understanding of Thai culture, strengthen their identification with the host society, and, through authentic participation, engage with the Thai language organically.

(1) The organization of cultural activities

Universities curate intercultural exchanges, festivals, heritage workshops, and credit-bearing cultural courses. These initiatives enhance Chinese students' cultural cognition and provide tangible opportunities for dialogue with Thai peers and local communities, thereby nurturing their willingness to communicate (WTC) in Thai on both cognitive and behavioral levels. Several students remarked.

"We invited Thai classmates to celebrate the Songkran Festival together; students from the Southeast Asian Languages Department joined us as well." (S3)

"On specific Thai holidays the university hosts many events and welcomes Chinese students for example, the Loy Krathong Festival and various cultural performances." (S6)

"Both Chinese and foreign instructors showed us…to cook Thai dishes…screened Thai films." (S8)

(2) Community integration and interaction

Engagement with local communities offers students avenues to build relationships with Thai residents, experience everyday cultural milieus beyond campus, and sharpen their applied Thai proficiency in situ. One participant noted.

"Teacher would take us to a practical activity at the market to converse with local people." (S8)

Within predominantly Chinese-speaking academic enclaves, these curated experiences serve as compensatory scaffolds. They do not directly teach grammar or vocabulary; rather, they dampen acculturative anxiety by cultivating cultural familiarity, thereby normalizing Thai-language interaction. This interplay aligns with Kim [40] who posits a reciprocal dynamic between linguistic competence and cultural adaptation, and with Yashima [76] who links cultural affinity to heightened communicative motivation. Consequently, cultural experience, though ancillary to formal instruction proves pivotal in creating the affective and cognitive conditions that underpin students' readiness to engage in Thai-language discourse.

4.2.3. Career Development Support

Sino-Thai educational collaboration influences Chinese international students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in Thai by providing career development support, which includes (1) the cultivation of career awareness and skills and (2) the provision of employment opportunities.

(1) Cultivation of career awareness and skills

Certain universities organize specialized career lectures that inform students of recruitment demands and sectoral trends among Chinese enterprises in Thailand, thereby enhancing their understanding of the Thai labor market. These events not only promote awareness of Thai-based employment but also emphasize the competitive advantage of Thai-language proficiency. As one student remarked:

> *"Our teacher once asked whether I would consider working in Thailand and mentioned that the university would host career seminars for international students, focusing on the talent needs of Chinese companies in Thailand. The teacher also said that, should suitable vacancies arise, we would be encouraged to apply." (S8)*

Respondents further noted that universities offer employability-oriented training, such as curriculum vitae workshops, which strengthen their job application skills:

> *"There is an intensive Thai-language class for students who already have a foundation. Their proficiency is excellent, and the instructor also offers employment support, such as teaching résumé writing." (S10)*

(2) Provision of employment opportunities

Interviews reveal that universities, faculty, and alumni networks constitute principal channels for securing employment. Universities host campus job fairs or post vacancies and internships on their official websites, thereby connecting students with potential employers:

> *"Our university once held a job fair that included both Chinese and foreign companies; the university website also advertises vacancies." (S4)*

> *"The university held a two-way selection fair that we attended. Many companies recruited on-site, and several seniors stayed to work here. A friend of mine is already employed in Thailand." (S6)*

Alumni, though informal, also facilitate access to organizational needs and internships:

> *"Many alumni in Thailand have founded companies or work in established firms and share desirable positions with juniors." (S7)*

Collectively, career-development support exerts a decisive motivational influence on Chinese students' willingness to communicate in Thai. Moving beyond conceptions of career goals as a mere subset of instrumental motivation [36, 77], this study shows that policy-level incentives within Sino-Thai educational partnerships explicitly connect language study to real employment needs, thereby intensifying actual language use. When students perceive Thai proficiency as integral to future employability, their motivation and WTC rise markedly. Prior evidence confirms that host-language mastery bolsters job competitiveness, life satisfaction, and social integration [78-80]. Yet vocational motives remain under-explored, particularly in Anglophone nations where Chinese graduates' employment rate is a modest 27.9% [81] and further constrained by immigration and labor-market barriers. Thailand's comparatively liberal work policies and expanding economic ties with China convert Thai from a mere survival tool into a strategic professional asset. Given that Thai not English is the default medium in local workplaces, proficiency gains carry immediate, tangible value, powerfully energizing Chinese students' communicative engagement and sustained language practice.

5. CONCLUSION

With the progressive deepening of Sino-Thai educational collaboration, the number of Chinese international students studying in Thailand has grown steadily, making them a significant segment of the country's international student population. These students are primarily enrolled in private universities that offer instruction mainly in Chinese and routinely provide Chinese-language services and bilingual support. While such an environment reduces

adaptation challenges, it inadvertently decreases students' motivation and opportunities to use Thai in authentic contexts. Consequently, the present study identifies a generally moderate to low willingness to communicate (WTC) in Thai among Chinese international students. The cooperation framework through learning and adaptation support, cultural-experience initiatives, and career-development guidance offers systematic assistance that promotes Thai language acquisition, broadens opportunities for language use, and enhances learning motivation, thereby positively influencing WTC. However, WTC remains limited by external factors: since universities predominantly provide Chinese services, students' daily need to speak Thai is diminished, and their WTC rarely reaches high levels. Improving WTC requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders. Existing support measures should be further optimized, and an immersive, interactive linguistic environment should be intentionally cultivated. Additionally, individual factors such as motivation and attitude are critical; therefore, diversified strategies should be implemented to guide students toward clearer and more sustained motivations for using Thai, ultimately strengthening their practical communicative competence.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that Chinese students' WTC in Thai remains low, primarily owing to a homogeneous linguistic environment devoid of authentic communicative pressure. Accordingly, parties to Sino-Thai cooperation should embed stronger language-practice orientations in curricula and co-curricular activities, jointly crafting interactive, realistic settings for Thai use. At the classroom level, a "Thai-first" principle could be instituted, encouraging the use of the language during group discussions, project presentations, and Q&A sessions, with such usage incorporated into participation grading to convert linguistic knowledge into expressive skill. Beyond the classroom, partner institutions might establish "Thai Corners" or language studios that routinely host simulated life-scenario drills, intercultural exchanges, and bilingual competitions, thereby diversifying language-use domains. Cultural-exchange programs should likewise heighten interactivity and participant engagement, enabling Thai and Chinese students to achieve bidirectional integration of language and culture in genuine encounters, thereby amplifying both communicative motivation and actual proficiency.

7. LIMITATIONS

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the geographical and institutional distribution of the sample is relatively narrow, encompassing only private universities in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Although Sino-Thai educational-collaboration programs operate elsewhere in Thailand, Bangkok was chosen because it permits large-scale data collection and affords considerable representativeness. Nonetheless, this sampling strategy circumscribes the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Thailand and to institutions of different types. Second, the investigation relies chiefly on cross-sectional questionnaire and interview data; it therefore lacks a dynamic, longitudinal account of how Chinese students' willingness to communicate in Thai develops. Potential stage-specific fluctuations during the study-abroad trajectory remain uncharted. Future longitudinal research could fruitfully deepen our understanding of the mechanisms by which willingness to communicate evolves.

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Appendix 1.

Part 1: Background Information

1. Your gender:

   A. Male   B. Female

2. Your university：   _____

3. Your year of study:

   A. Freshman (1st year)   B. Sophomore (2nd year)

   C. Junior (3rd year)   D. Senior (4th year)

4. Your major:

   A. Thai Language   B. International Business

   C. Finance and Accounting   D. Tourism Management

   E. Other (please specify):_____

5. What is the language of instruction for your studies in Thailand?

   A. Fully Thai-taught   B. Fully English-taught

   C. Fully Chinese-taught   D. Chinese – Thai bilingual instruction

   E. Chinese – English bilingual instruction

   F. Trilingual instruction (Chinese – English – Thai)

   G. Other (please specify): _____

6. How would you rate your Thai language proficiency?

   A. Beginner   B. Intermediate

   C. Advanced   D. Fluent

   E. Native-like

Part 2: Thai Language Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scale for Chinese International Students

No.	Question
1	Present a talk in Thai to a group of strangers.
2	Talk in Thai with an acquaintance while standing in line.
3	Talk in Thai during a large meeting with friends.
4	Talk in Thai in a small group of strangers.
5	Talk in Thai with a friend while standing in line.
6	Talk in Thai in a large meeting of acquaintances.
7	Talk in Thai with a stranger while standing in line.
8	Present a talk in Thai to a group of friends.
9	Talk in Thai in a small group of acquaintances.
10	Talk in Thai in a large meeting of strangers.
11	Talk in Thai in a small group of friends.
12	Present a talk in Thai to a group of acquaintances.