

A Comparative Study on Intercultural Adaptation of Thai and Vietnamese Majors during Overseas Study

Dimin Luo

School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Agricultural University, Kunming, 650000

Keywords: Intercultural adaptation, Thai and Vietnamese majors, Comparative study

Abstract: Through questionnaire investigation and interview on Thai and Vietnamese majors' intercultural adaptation in their target language country, this study compares their intercultural adaptability in different cultures. The study finds that students in different target cultures have different intercultural adaptations. In addition, the study suggests that students should be brave to step into the new circle and experience the deeper culture and college should strengthen females' mental health in the overseas study.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the country's implementation of the "Belt and Road " and "Bridgehead Construction" strategies, Yunnan, as an important province facing the Southeast Asian Radiation Center, needs to strengthen the cultivation of Southeast Asian minor language talents. According to the statistics, Thai major and Vietnamese major rank first and second respectively in terms of enrollment. In recent years, our institute has carried out the international cooperation "3 + 1" project for students to improve their language ability and understand the target language culture so as to cultivate application-oriented talents with international vision.

However, in a foreign country, Thai and Vietnamese majors are "intercultural people" in the third space where two cultural spaces (Chinese culture and target culture) meet. Whether they can adapt to the local culture would affect their learning. Therefore, intercultural adaptation in the third space has become an important problem faced by Thai and Vietnamese majors in their overseas study

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classification of Intercultural Adaptation

Intercultural adaptation is defined as the process of fitting into the demands of a new cultural environment. Most researchers agree on Ward (1993) and his colleagues' classification of intercultural adaptation that it can be divided into two dimensions: social-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation. Social-cultural adaptation refers to the ability to adapt to the local social and cultural environment. Psychological adaptation is based on emotional response including mental health and life satisfaction in intercultural contact. It is mainly divided into the adaptation in living, interpersonal communication, service mode, moral consciousness and social support.

2.2 Intercultural Adaptation Mode

Many scholars have carried out extensive research on intercultural adaptation mode. There are two main modes generally recognized by the academic community: (1) Oberg (1960) put forward this adaptation process generally has four basic stages: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. (2) In terms of intercultural adaptation strategies, Berry (1990) distinguishes four acculturation strategies from two dimensions: the tendency to maintain traditional culture and identity and the tendency to communicate with other cultural groups: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization.

2.3 Previous Empirical Study At Home

In China, scholars began to pay attention to the study of intercultural adaptation in the 1980s. At

present, the research on intercultural adaptation of Chinese scholars is mainly concentrated in three areas. The first area is to measure the acculturation of Chinese people abroad. For example, Lin Decheng (2010) studied the intercultural acculturation of Chinese volunteers to Thailand. The second area is mainly on the theme of intercultural adaptation of international students in China. Chiang (2015) qualitatively studied the cultural adaptation of international students in China and Yang Junhong (2009) investigated the international students' adaptation problems in China. The third area is the study of the adaptation of minority groups in Han-dominated areas. Zhang Jinmei (2008) paid special attention to the cultural adaptation of minorities in southwest China.

But few researchers have identified the overseas learning groups of Thai and Vietnamese majors as research subjects. Moreover, previous studies ignore comparative studies on intercultural adaptation in multiple countries. Therefore, through the dimensions of social-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation proposed by Ward and his colleagues (1993), this study attempts to conduct an empirical study on the intercultural adaptation of Thai and Vietnamese majors in grade 2017 in the "3+1" project.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Subjects

Based on the geographical distance, the degree of contact, this study selected 45 Thai majors and 45 Vietnamese majors who studied abroad for one year in the "3+1" program in our institute as the research subjects.

3.2 Research Questions

In terms of social and cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation, are there some differences and similarities between Thai and Vietnamese majors' cultural adaptation in their target country? If yes, what are they?

3.3 Research Methods

In order to make the investigation more comprehensive, both quantitative method and qualitative method were applied.

A questionnaire survey containing two dimensions of social-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation was conducted among Thai majors and Vietnamese majors. The sociocultural adaptation scale was revised on the basis of Ward and his colleagues' study (1999). The psychological adaptation scale was designed with the reference of the self-assessment depression scale of Zung W.W.K. (1965).

Based on the data from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted to interview stratified sampling of 10 Thai majors and 10 Vietnamese majors in depth about their overseas acculturation. That is, the interviewees answered openly according to the questions, and the interviewers also adjusted appropriately according to the respondents' answers. Such a stratified sample interview can avoid students who are concentrated on a certain type of cultural adaptation to ensure the study more scientific and objective.

3.4 Data Collection:

45 Thai majors and 45 Vietnamese majors were invited to finish the questionnaires which took them 10 minutes for the completion. The students' valid questionnaires were 90 and the valid percentage was 100%. Thus, the investigation was valid enough. On the other hand, the interview was completed after the questionnaire investigation.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This part analyzes and compares Thai majors' and Vietnamese majors' intercultural adaptation in different countries from the perspective of adaptation time, social-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation based on the data from questionnaires and interviews.

4.1 Comparison of General Adaptation Time

Adaptation time is a key sign for judging the degree of adaptation. Figure 1 clearly shows that Vietnamese majors adapted to the new culture faster than Thai majors. 69.89% Vietnamese majors could fit into the new life in 1-2 months, while only 25.45% Thai majors adjusted themselves to the new environment in 1-2 months. Most of the Thai majors spent longer time adapting to the new life in the foreign country.

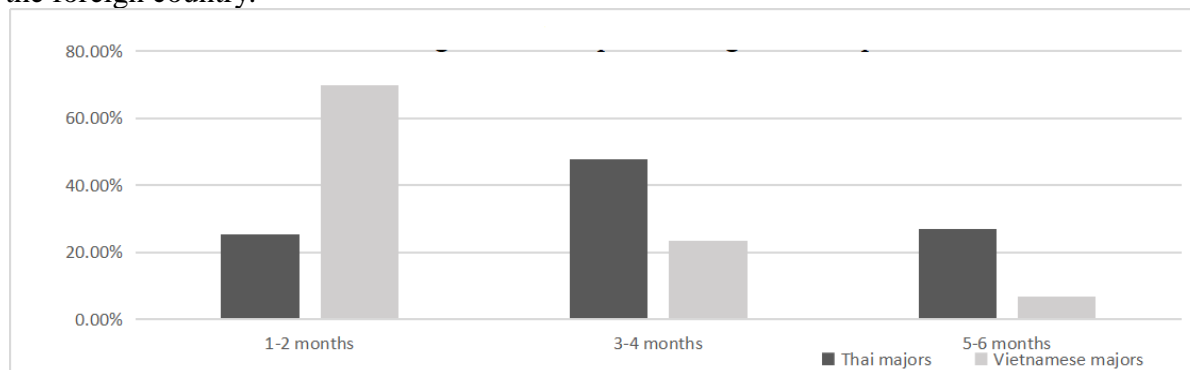


Figure 1 Comparison of general adaptation time

By comparing the interview data of Thai majors and Vietnamese majors, it is also found that Thai majors took longer to adapt to Thailand. Among the 10 Thai major interviewees, 3 of them spent 3-4 months adapting; 6 of them spent 5-6 months and 1 of them had been adapting all the time. Among the Vietnamese interviewees, 8 of them could adapt to the new environment in 1-2 months, and the other 2 could adapt within 3 months. They thought the Vietnam cultural similarity was relatively higher, which made them feel easier to adapt.

4.2 Comparison of Social-Cultural Adaptation

There are 5 components in the social-cultural adaptation scale. They are adaptation in living environment, interpersonal communication, service mode, moral consciousness and social support.

In the aspect of adaptation in living environment, as can be seen from the figure 2 above Thai majors felt more difficult than Vietnamese majors. Table 1 shows its p-value was less than 0.05, which indicates there exists a difference between the two groups. The main adaptation problem focuses on the living environment, especially the climate and diet of Thailand. Thailand has a tropical monsoon climate. The average annual temperature is 24 ~ 30°C. The perennial temperature is no less than 18°C. From November to February, it is relatively dry under the influence of the cool northeast monsoon. From March to May, the temperature is the highest, reaching 40 ~ 42 °C. From July to September, it is affected by the southwest monsoon, which is the rainy season. Most Thai majors were used to the mild climate in Kunming, so the difference in climate made it more difficult for them to fit into the new environment. Due to the special weather conditions, Thai people have become dependent on sour and spicy taste. Some students needed time to be used to the strong flavor. In the interview, 8 Thai major interviewees pointed out that they were uncomfortable with the local transportation inconvenience, the extremely hot weather, and mosquitoes there. In contrary, the Vietnamese majors had less worries in these regards.

In terms of interpersonal communication, figure 2 shows both Thai majors' and Vietnamese majors' adaptation degree was low, 36.36% and 35.19% respectively. Table 1 demonstrates the average of adaptive difficulty in interpersonal communication are the highest among all the five components in both groups. This means both Thai majors and Vietnamese majors had lots of difficulty in adapting in this aspect. The so-called interpersonal communication, simply speaking, refers to people in social exchanges to establish a variety of different relationships. According to the survey, the social circle of the Thai majors and Vietnamese majors was relatively narrow in their overseas study. The interviewees also expressed that their social circle mainly concentrated in the circle of domestic students. In addition, they had the idea that it was easy to get to know foreign

friends but difficult to be true friends.

With regard to the adaptation in service mode, moral consciousness and social support, compared with Thai majors, figure 2 shows Vietnamese majors' adaptation degree was lower. It tended to be tougher for Vietnamese majors in these aspects. Vietnamese majors stated that the life in their target city was quite simple and there were some inconvenience for them in the aspect of service mode and social support.

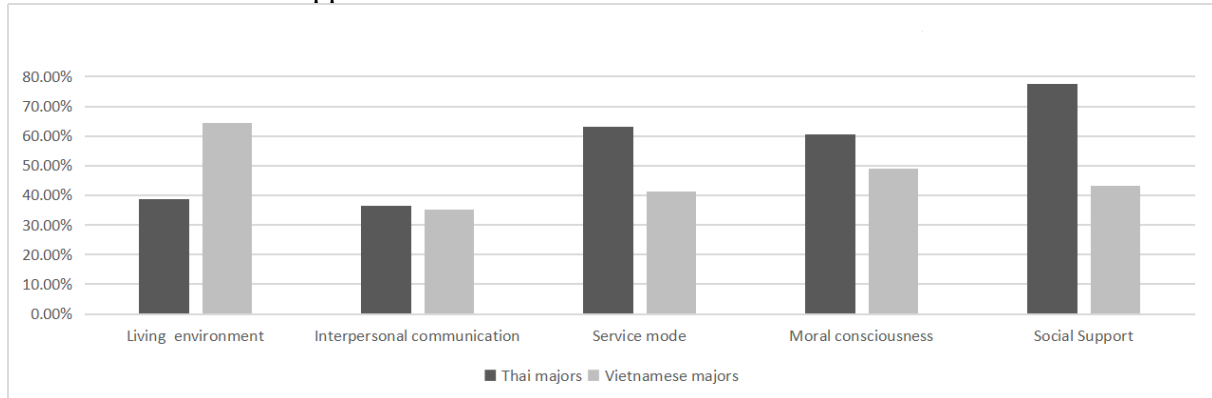


Figure 2 Comparison of social-cultural adaptation degree

Table 1 Comparison of social-cultural adaptation

Components	Majors	N	Average of adaptive difficulty	Adaptation degree	Significance (P-value)
Living environment	Thai	45	4.61	38.79%	0.00000384
	Vietnamese	45	2.89	64.44%	
Interpersonal communication	Thai	45	4.76	36.36%	0.64492653
	Vietnamese	45	4.83	35.19%	
Service mode	Thai	45	3.86	63.18%	0.27603387
	Vietnamese	45	4.03	41.31%	
Moral consciousness	Thai	45	3.89	60.48%	0.38222611
	Vietnamese	45	3.42	48.89%	
Social support	Thai	45	4.24	77.72%	0.03795629
	Vietnamese	45	3.38	43.33%	

4.3 Comparison of Psychological Adaptation

In terms of mental health, the adaptability of Thai majors was weaker than that of Vietnamese majors as shown in figure 3. Statistically, gender was found to be the probable cause. The proportion of females in Thai majors were 76%, whereas the proportion of females in Vietnamese majors was 50%. Females were more sensitive psychologically. Table 2 clearly displays there was an obvious discrepancy on psychological health between Thai majors and Vietnamese majors, for its p-value was less than 0.001.

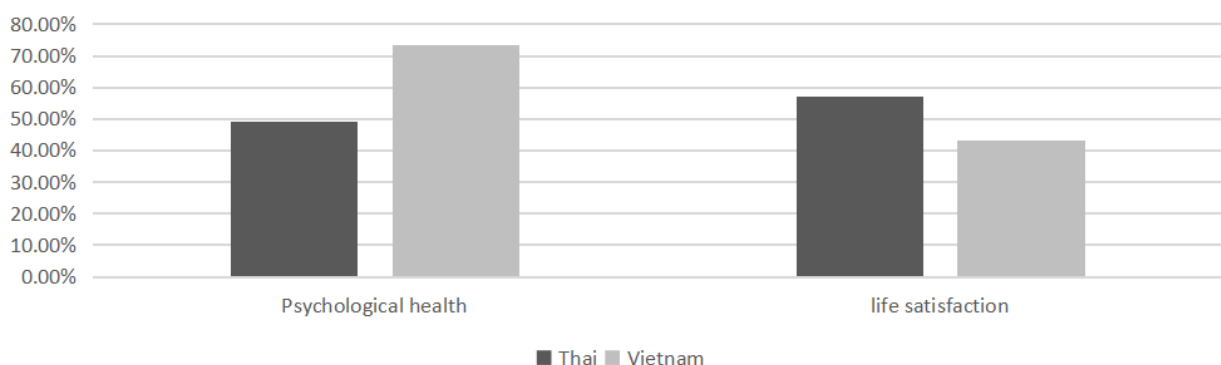


Figure 3 Comparison of psychological adaptation degree

Table 2 Comparison of psychological adaptation

Components	Majors	N	Average of adaptive difficulty	Adaptation degree	Significance (P-value)
Psychological health	Thai	45	2.85	49.13%	0.000036211
	Vietnamese	45	4.13	73.51%	
Life satisfaction	Thai	45	3.56	57.20%	0.005693774
	Vietnamese	45	4.38	43.10%	

In the interview, most students found it difficult to adapt psychologically to loneliness and homesickness. The humble living environment will gradually become a natural habit, but the most difficult thing to overcome is loneliness. When asked when there was an intention to return to China, 12 interviewees said they would like to go back after 3 months of freshness. Students who were homesick one month before returning home were aroused by the enthusiasm of other people who wanted to go home, because everyone counted down in the group to count the time of returning home. In the aspect of life satisfaction, Thai majors' degree was higher than that of Vietnamese majors.

5. Findings

5.1 Different Culture Distance, Different Intercultural Adaptation.

Cultural distance refers to the degree of cultural difference between the native culture and the target culture. It mainly includes differences in language, living habits and so on. Students go to different target language countries and experience different cultural distances, so social-cultural adaptation is also different. Scholars generally believe that the greater the cultural distance, the greater the difficulty for expatriates in intercultural adaptation. The living environment in Thailand was much more different from the environment the students lived in before they went abroad, so it was more difficult for them to adapt than the Vietnamese majors who went to Vietnam. The aspects of service mode, moral consciousness and social support in Vietnam were more different than those of Thailand, so it was tougher for Vietnamese majors to adjust to the new life. Therefore, for different majors, corresponding intercultural training should be carried out based on their target culture.

5.2 Lack of Interpersonal Communication in Target Culture

Human beings and social animals cannot survive in isolation from the outside world. But due to cultural differences and cultural barriers, students still chose to be in the native culture circle. Actually, dealing with interpersonal issues is undoubtedly very helpful to intercultural adaptation. Therefore, students should be brave to step out of the native cultural circle and touch the new culture to comprehend the target culture more deeply, which is the huge significance of the overseas learning.

5.3 Strengthening female's Mental Health Education.

Females are more sentimental than males in the new environment. Colleges may pay closer attention to female students abroad and carry out activities such as psychological consultation and mental health survey for them. It is suggested that they'd better communicate more with their family, friends and classmates, share their joys and sorrows to find emotional support. They are encouraged to be positive to solve the adaptive problems and overcome the adaptation barriers.

6. Conclusion

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the comparison of intercultural adaptation between Thai majors and Vietnamese majors studying abroad for 1 year. The study finds that students in different target cultures have different intercultural adaptations. Students should have the courage to step into the new circle and experience the deeper culture. College should strengthen females' mental health in the overseas study. When faced with the problem of cultural conflicts, do not evade, face positively, maintain an optimistic attitude, and adjust in time. In the process of intercultural adaptation, it is necessary not only to maintain the native culture but also to maintain an inclusive attitude towards the culture of the host country to achieve cultural integration.

Acknowledgment

Yunnan Agricultural University Social Science Young and Middle-aged Project: A Comparative Study on Intercultural Adaptation of Southeast Asian Language Majors During overseas study. Project number: 2017SK09

References

- [1] Berry, J. W. Psychology of Acculturation. In: R.W. Brislin (Ed.). Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.
- [2] Chiang, S. Y. Cultural adaptation as a sense-making experience: International students in China. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 397-412, 2015.
- [3] Lin, D.C. Research on Intercultural Adaptation of Chinese Volunteers in Thailand. Master Degree Thesis of South China University of Technology, 2010.
- [4] Oberg, K. Culture shock adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, Vol.7, 1960.
- [5] Ward, C. & Kennedy, A. Psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. *International Journal of Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 11, 1993.
- [6] Ward, C. and Kennedy, A. The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, no. 23, 1999.
- [7] Yang, J.H. Research on Cross-cultural Adaptation of International Students in China. Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2009.
- [8] Zhang, J.M. A Study of the Cultural Adaptation of Yunnan Minority College Students. *Journal of Kunming University of Science and Technology: Social Sciences Edition*, no. 4, pp. 102-107, 2012.
- [9] Zung WWK. A self-rating depression scale. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, no. 12, pp.63-70, 1965.