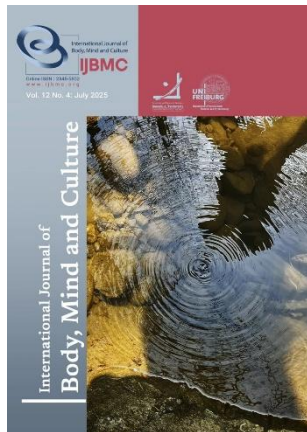1 Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok,10210, Thailand.
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Self-Career Management as a Mediator Between Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Career Development Among Chinese Students in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines the impact of cross-cultural adaptation on career development among Chinese international students in Thailand, with self-career management serving as a mediating factor.

Methods and Materials: A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from 511 Chinese international students in Thailand using validated scales. A structured questionnaire served as the data collection method. Statistical analyses, including regression analysis and bootstrapping for mediation testing, were conducted using SPSS and PROCESS software.

Findings: Cross-cultural adaptation positively influences career development (β=.692, p<.001), with self-career management serving as a partial mediator (indirect effect =.290, p<.001). Significant differences in cross-cultural adaptation were observed based on gender (p<.001), educational level (p<.001), and length of stay (p<.001).

Conclusion: Cross-cultural adaptation significantly enhances career development, with self-career management playing a mediating role. Findings emphasize the need for universities and policymakers to implement targeted interventions to support international students. However, given the study's cross-sectional nature, further longitudinal research is necessary.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Comparison, Thailand, Occupations, Students, China.

Introduction

With the increasing transnationalization of higher education, Southeast Asia has become a key destination for international students, including a growing number of Chinese students studying in Thailand (Mok & Sawn Khai, 2024; Pongsin et al., 2023). While existing research has extensively examined cross-cultural adaptation among international students, most studies have focused on Western contexts (Bourdage et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding how Chinese international students adapt in Thailand and how this adaptation influences their career development. Given the expanding educational cooperation between China and Thailand, it is essential to explore the specific challenges and opportunities Chinese students face in this setting. However, research remains limited on the direct link between cross-cultural adaptation and career development, particularly the role of self-career management in this process. Addressing this gap is crucial for providing targeted academic and career support to Chinese international students in Thailand.

Cross-cultural adaptation is commonly understood through the stress-adaptation-growth model, which involves both psychological and behavioral adjustments in a new cultural environment (Kim, 2017). While much of the existing literature highlights its impact on students' academic performance, life satisfaction, and mental health (Cao & Meng, 2022; Cruwys et al., 2021; He et al., 2023), fewer studies have explored its implications for career development—a crucial but often overlooked outcome of international education (Choy et al., 2021; Geeraert et al., 2019). Given the challenges international students face, including language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and social expectations (Dovchin, 2020; Gong et al., 2021), their ability to proactively manage their career development becomes a key determinant of long-term success.

Building on this perspective, self-career management—defined as an individual's proactive efforts in skill development, networking, and career planning—has emerged as a critical factor influencing career success, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Moon & Choi, 2017; Parsakia et al., 2023). While existing research has linked self-career management to positive career outcomes (Guo et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2023; Wang & Alex, 2024), its role in helping international students navigate cross-cultural adaptation remains underexplored. This study posits that self-career management serves as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and career development, providing a more nuanced understanding of how international students transition from adaptation to career success.

Moreover, demographic factors such as gender, educational level, and duration of stay abroad may further shape this process. Prior research suggests that gender can influence the way students seek and benefit from social support in cross-cultural adaptation (Wang et al., 2015) and that male and female students may experience different adaptation challenges (Eisikovits, 2000). Similarly, educational level and length of stay abroad have been linked to varying degrees of academic and psychological adjustment, with first-year students and graduates often facing greater difficulties with adaptation (Chen et al., 2018). To ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study incorporates these demographic factors as moderating variables to examine their potential influence on the adaptation–career

development pathway. By integrating these elements, this research aims to bridge theoretical gaps and provide practical insights into supporting the career development of Chinese international students in Thailand.

Literature Review

Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The cross-cultural adaptation theory proposed by Ward and Kennedy (1994, 1996) has been widely applied in the field of cross-cultural research. This theory divides cross-cultural adaptation into two core dimensions: psychological adaptation and socio-cultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1994, 1996). Psychological adaptation refers to the adjustments and development of an individual's stress, emotions, self-concept, and self-esteem during the process of overcoming cultural differences (Gong et al., 2021). Socio-cultural adaptation focuses on an individual's effective interaction with others, social structures, and cultural systems in a new cultural environment, including adapting to cultural norms, language communication, and social rules (Kaikkonen, 2014).

Building on this, Ward and Kennedy (1994) further divided cross-cultural adaptation into three levels: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. The emotional level encompasses acceptance of the new culture, satisfaction, and self-efficacy. The cognitive level focuses on cultural knowledge, values, and language proficiency—the behavioral level concerns social skills, adaptation strategies, and adherence to cultural norms. The cross-cultural adaptation process is divided into three stages: culture shock, cultural adaptation, and cultural adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Each stage is influenced by factors such as personal traits, cultural distance, and social support, thereby significantly impacting the adaptation outcomes (Ward & Kennedy, 1996).

Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides an analytical tool for cross-cultural adaptation research. Its five dimensions—power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, and short-term versus long-term orientation—reveal the deep-seated differences between various cultural backgrounds (Triandis, 2018). Kluckhohn and

Strodtbeck's (1961) value orientation theory further explains key issues in cultural systems from six aspects: human nature, the relationship between humans and the environment, the relationship between individuals and others, activity orientation, spatial concept, and time concept (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). These perspectives provide a framework for exploring individuals' value adjustment and behavioral adaptation in cross-cultural contexts (Watkins & Gnoth, 2011).

Hypotheses

Existing studies have demonstrated that gender plays a significant role in cross-cultural adaptation. Specifically, males and females may employ different adaptation strategies when confronted with cultural differences. Females are generally more inclined to seek social support to cope with culture shock, while males may demonstrate greater independence (Yu et al., 2019). Additionally, societal expectations of gender roles may also influence the psychological and behavioral responses of international students during the adaptation process. Furthermore, educational level is closely related to an individual's cognitive abilities, career competencies, and capacity for cross-cultural adaptation. International students with higher educational levels typically possess stronger cultural understanding and social skills, making it easier for them to adapt to and cope with cultural differences (Chen et al., 2018). For example, students with higher education levels are often better able to understand the complexities of a new culture and adopt effective adaptation strategies (Bengtsson, 2014). Therefore, educational level may significantly impact the cross-cultural adaptation ability of international students. Additionally, the duration of stay has a direct impact on the cross-cultural adaptation process of international students. Research has shown that short-term international students typically face greater culture shock and require more time to adapt to the new cultural environment (Pitts, 2009; Wang et al., 2018). Students staying long-term, after the initial adjustment period, are typically able to integrate better into the local culture and exhibit stronger adaptation abilities (Rujiprak, 2016). Therefore, international students with different durations of stay may exhibit significant differences in cross-cultural adaptation abilities. In conclusion, gender, educational level, and duration of stay in Thailand may

play different roles in the cross-cultural adaptation process. Based on this, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There are significant differences in cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese international students in Thailand based on gender.

H2: There are significant differences in cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese international students in Thailand based on educational level.

H3: There are significant differences in cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese international students in Thailand based on the length of stay.

Research has demonstrated that cross-cultural adaptation has a profound impact on career development by enhancing individuals' cultural adaptability, cross-cultural communication skills, and adaptability in multicultural contexts (Shafaei & Razak, 2016; Ward et al., 2020). Specifically, cross-cultural adaptation can alleviate culture shock, promote the regulation of psychological stress, and thereby improve individuals' career planning and development capabilities (Chew et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2024). It can also enhance individuals' communication efficiency and innovation ability in the workplace, further improving their career competitiveness (Caligiuri et al., 2019; Zhou, 2021).

Furthermore, according to the cross-cultural adaptation model (Ward et al., 2020), emotional adaptation helps individuals alleviate culture shock, cognitive adaptation promotes understanding and integration of the cultural environment, and behavioral adaptation improves individuals' practical abilities in cross-cultural settings. These different adaptation factors work together to support career satisfaction and career development (Li & Rao, 2021; Schnitzler et al., 2021).

Self-career management, as a proactive approach to career development, plays a significant role in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation and career progression by setting career goals, formulating development strategies, and coping with career challenges (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Savickas, 2005). The social relationships established during the cross-cultural adaptation process are also crucial for career development, as they provide necessary social support and valuable information and resources for career advancement (McClure, 2007; Swann Jr, 2012).

Research has shown that when career goals align with an individual's self-concept, it significantly enhances their intrinsic career motivation, leading to more active engagement in career planning and skill development (Harris, 2023; Shu et al., 2020). Good cross-cultural adaptation skills help individuals cope with culture shock, turning adaptation experiences into career development advantages, while also shaping international students' confidence and competitiveness on the global career stage (Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

In summary, cross-cultural adaptation is not only a key factor in career development but also provides motivation and support for self-career management. Self-career management, by enhancing cultural adaptability and formulating adaptive strategies, strengthens international students' career planning abilities and workplace adaptability, becoming an important bridge between cross-cultural adaptation and career development. Based on this, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Cross-cultural adaptation has a significant positive impact on the career development of Chinese international students in Thailand.

H5: Cross-cultural adaptation has a significant positive impact on self-career management among Chinese international students in Thailand.

H6: Self-career management mediates the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and career development among Chinese international students in Thailand.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and career development among Chinese international students in Thailand. A structured questionnaire served as the primary method of data collection. A cross-sectional design was chosen due to its efficiency in collecting data at a single point in time, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of current adaptation and career-related factors (Creswell, 2014).

Participants and Sampling

The study utilized purposive and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants. Given the specific focus on Chinese international students in Thailand, purposive sampling ensured that the sample met the required demographic criteria. In contrast, snowball sampling facilitated access to hard-to-reach participants. Although these methods provided a representative sample, potential biases in participant selection were acknowledged.

The final sample comprised 511 Chinese international students studying in Thailand. The sample size was determined through a power analysis, aiming for sufficient statistical power ($\beta = 0.80$), a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), and an α level of 0.05 for regression analysis. This ensured that the study had adequate power to detect significant relationships between the variables of interest. Participants' demographic characteristics were analyzed, with gender-balanced representation (Males: 48.5%; Females: 51.5%).

Measurements

Sociocultural Adjustment Difficulty Scale (DSA): This study utilizes the Sociocultural Adjustment Difficulty Scale (DSA) developed by Chen et al. (2018) to assess the difficulties students encounter during the cross-cultural adaptation process, encompassing three dimensions: academic studies, social interaction, and daily life. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) ranges from .710 to .910, indicating good internal consistency of the scale. This study selected and modified the academic studies and daily life dimensions, with the academic studies dimension including 11 items and the daily life dimension containing 15 items. The scale uses a 5-point Likert scale, with a scoring range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Additionally, this study utilizes the Cross-Cultural Communication Anxiety Scale, which is based on the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Anxiety (PRICA), comprising 14 items with a Cronbach's α of .817, indicating good reliability. The PRICA scale replaces the "social interaction" dimension of the DSA to reflect psychological adaptation in cross-cultural communication better (Chen et al., 2018).

Career Development Scale: This study uses a self-developed Career Development Survey, which was

designed based on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Australian Career Development Inventory (CDI-A), and the Career Engagement Scale. The questionnaire was appropriately adjusted based on the characteristics of the research participants. The questionnaire consists of two dimensions: willingness to participate in development activities (8 items) and development behavior (8 items), with Cronbach's α values of 0.906 and 0.908, respectively, indicating good reliability and validity. The questionnaire employs a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and adheres to the framework for questionnaire development proposed by Dillman et al. (2014). It underwent literature review, expert review, pre-testing, and reliability and validity analysis to ensure good validity and reliability (Dillman et al., 2014).

Self-Career Management Scale: The Self-Career Management Scale was revised by Weng (2010) based on the research findings of Noe (1996) and Zikic and Klehe (2006). It aims to assess individuals' self-management ability in their careers. The scale includes three dimensions: career exploration, career goal setting, and career strategies. The scale employs a 5-point Likert scale for scoring, with Cronbach's Alpha values for the dimensions being 0.860, 0.830, and 0.780, indicating good reliability and internal consistency. Therefore, it is suitable for career-related research and practice.

Data collection

This study focused on 511 Chinese international students in Thailand, who were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. Data were primarily collected through an online survey using the platform https://www.wjx.cn/. The questionnaire was pre-tested and optimized based on feedback before being officially distributed, ensuring the clarity of the items and the scientific rigor of the survey. Attention check questions were embedded during the data collection process, and submitted questionnaires were regularly monitored to ensure data quality. Ultimately, after excluding invalid responses, 511 valid questionnaires were retained. The research process strictly adhered to ethical guidelines, with all participants signing informed consent forms to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS and AMOS. First, Harman's single-factor test was applied to assess common method bias. Next, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and ANOVA were conducted to examine differences across demographic groups. Mediation analysis was performed using PROCESS Model 4 with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to test the indirect effect of self-career management in the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and career development. Standardized regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were reported to confirm mediation effects. Model fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA) were used to validate structural equation modeling (SEM) results. Surveys were conducted online via https://www.wjx.cn/. Attention checks ensured data validity. Statistical analyses, including correlation analysis, t-tests, ANOVA, and PROCESS Model 4 for mediation analysis, were conducted using SPSS and Amos.

Findings and Results

Common Method Variance

First, common method variance was tested. Based on Harman's single-factor method (Podsakoff et al., 2003), the factor analysis results revealed nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, with the first factor accounting for 31.251% of the variance. This result indicates that no dominant general factor emerged in the factor analysis, further suggesting that the common method bias issue in the dataset is not significant (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Correlation Analysis

This study employs Pearson correlation analysis to investigate the relationships between cross-cultural adaptation, career development, and self-career management. It verifies the robustness of the results using the bootstrapping method. Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation results, which show significant positive correlations between cross-cultural adaptation (CA), career development (CD), and self-career management (SCM). These findings confirm the positive relationships between CA, CD, and SCM, suggesting that stronger cross-cultural adaptation is associated with

better career development and more effective self-career management: The correlation coefficient between cross-cultural adaptation and career development is .557 (p<.001), with a 95% confidence interval of [.494, .614]. The correlation coefficient between cross-cultural adaptation and self-career management is 0.634 (p < .001), with a 95% confidence interval of [0.579, 0.683]. The correlation coefficient between career development

and self-career management is .600 (p <.001), with a 95% confidence interval of [.542, .653].

These results demonstrate significant positive correlations between cross-cultural adaptation, career development, and self-career management, providing theoretical and statistical support for subsequent mediation effect testing and path analysis.

Table 1

Correlation Analysis Table (N=511)

Variables	CA	CD	SCM
CA	1		
CD	.557***	1	.600***
SCM	.634***	.600***	1

Note. ***p<.001; CA=Cross-cultural Adaptation; SCM=Self-career management; CD=Career Development

Hypotheses Testing

This study tests the research hypotheses using SPSS and Process software. First, SPSS is used to conduct differential analysis of background variables such as gender, educational level, and length of stay in Thailand, in order to explore their impact on the main variables. The process is used to analyze the mediation model and test the mediating effect of self-career management on the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and career development.

Specifically, the first step is to analyze the direct effect of cross-cultural adaptation on career development; the second step is to test the indirect effect of self-career management in this relationship. The confidence interval for the indirect effect is estimated using the Bootstrapping method. The results indicate that the

direct effect of cross-cultural adaptation on career development is significant, and self-career management plays a crucial mediating role in this relationship.

Differences in Cross-Cultural Adaptation Among Chinese International Students in Thailand by Gender, Educational Background, and Length of Stay

This study used an independent samples t-test to examine the differences between male and female Chinese international students in Thailand across three dimensions: cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, daily life, and intercultural communication ability. As shown in the statistical results in Table 2, gender has a significant impact on cross-cultural adaptation (t = -8.368, p < .001), academic life (t = -6.498, p < .001), daily life (t = -6.706, p < .001), and intercultural communication ability (t = -2.961, p < .001).

Table 2

Gender differences in cross-cultural adaptation (N=511)

Variables	Genders Male (n=248) M (SD)	Female (n=263) M (SD)	t	p
Cross-cultural adaptation	2.62 (0.45)	2.97 (0.50)	-8.368	.000
Academic life	2.45 (0.82)	2.94 (0.89)	-6.498	.000
Daily life	2.42 (0.85)	2.94 (0.92)	-6.706	.000
Cross-cultural communication	2.98 (0.21)	3.03 (0.19)	-2.961	.000

Female students scored significantly higher than male students on all dimensions (mean values: cross-cultural adaptation 2.97 vs 2.62; academic life 2.94 vs 2.45; daily

life 2.94 vs 2.42; intercultural communication ability 3.03 vs 2.98), indicating that females demonstrate stronger adaptation ability in these areas. The findings

suggest that gender is an important factor influencing cross-cultural adaptation, with female students performing significantly better than male students in

cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, and daily life, and slightly outperforming males in intercultural communication ability. Hence, H1 was supported.

Table 3

Differences in cross-cultural adaptation by educational level (N=511)

Variable	1(n=187) M (SD)	2(n=229) M (SD)	3(n=95) M (SD)	F	P	Post hoc comparison
Cross-cultural adaptation	2.63 (0.40)	2.81 (0.51)	3.13 (0.53)	33.909	.000	1<2; 1<3; 2<3
Academic life	2.44 (0.77)	2.72 (0.91)	3.17 (0.90)	22.423	.000	1<2; 1<3; 2<3
Daily life	2.44 (0.80)	2.69 (0.92)	3.17 (0.97)	21.219	.000	1<2; 1<3; 2<3
Cross-cultural communication skills	2.99 (0.21)	3.01 (0.20)	3.05 (0.21)	2.895	.056	---

Note. 1=Undergraduate students, 2=master's students, 3=PhD students

This study employed one-way ANOVA to investigate the differences in cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, daily life, and intercultural communication ability across various levels of academic background among Chinese international students. As shown in Table 3, academic background significantly influences cross-cultural adaptation (F = 33.909, p < .001), academic life (F = 22.423, p < .001), and daily life (F = 21.219, p < .001), with doctoral students scoring significantly higher than

undergraduates and master's students on these dimensions.

However, no significant difference was found in intercultural communication ability (F = 2.895, p = .056). These results suggest that higher-educated international students demonstrate stronger adaptation abilities in cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, and daily life. However, the differences in academic background do not have a significant effect on intercultural communication ability. Accordingly, H2 was supported.

Table 4

Differences in cross-cultural adaptation by length of stay (N=511)

Variable	1(n=101) M (SD)	2 (n=230) M (SD)	3 (n=180) M (SD)	F	p	Post hoc comparison
Cross-cultural adaptation	2.62(0.52)	2.77(0.46)	2.95(0.51)	15.006	.000	1<2; 1<3; 2<3
Academic life	2.35(0.90)	2.68(0.86)	2.93(0.86)	14.099	.000	1<2; 1<3; 2<3
Daily life	2.47(0.97)	2.62(0.85)	2.90(0.95)	8.489	.000	1<2; 1<3; 2<3
Cross-cultural communication skills	2.98(0.19)	3.02(0.21)	3.01(0.20)	0.860	.424	---

Note. 1=more than one month, 2=a half year to one year, 3=more than one year.

This study employed ANOVA to investigate the differences in cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, daily life, and intercultural communication ability among Chinese international students with varying lengths of stay in Thailand. As shown in Table 4, the length of stay in Thailand significantly influences cross-cultural adaptation (F = 15.006, p < .001), academic life (F = 14.099, p < .001), and daily life (F = 8.489, p < .001), with students staying longer demonstrating higher levels of adaptation in these dimensions. However, no significant difference was found in intercultural communication

ability (F = 0.860, p = .424). These results suggest that as the length of stay in Thailand increases, international students exhibit stronger adaptation abilities in cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, and daily life. However, there is no significant difference in intercultural communication ability based on length of stay. H3 was supported.

In summary, gender, academic level, and length of stay in Thailand have a significant influence on cross-cultural adaptation, academic life, and daily life. However, these factors did not show significant differences in

intercultural communication ability, suggesting that intercultural communication ability may be influenced by other factors and warrants further research.

PROCESS Test

This study uses Hayes' (2017) statistical analysis method and PROCESS Model 4 to test the validity of the hypotheses. As shown in Figure 1, the study examines the impact of cross-cultural adaptation on career development among Chinese international students in Thailand, with self-career management as a mediator. It analyzes the effects of gender, academic level, and length of stay on cross-cultural adaptation.

Figure 1

Research framework
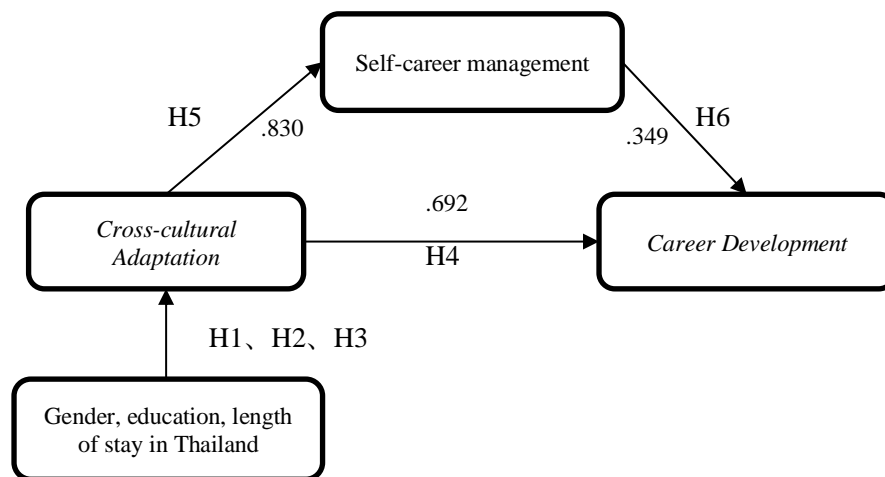
According to the analysis in Table 5, after controlling for background variables such as gender, academic level, and length of stay, cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese international students in Thailand had a significant positive effect on career development ($B = .692$, $SE = .057$, $t = 12.060$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. Furthermore, cross-cultural adaptation had a significant positive impact on self-care management ($B = 0.830$, $SE = 0.055$, $t = 14.992$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 5. Self-career management had a significant positive impact on career development ($B = .349$, $SE = .043$, $t = 8.041$, $p < .001$), validating the mediating role of self-career management between cross-cultural adaptation and career development among Chinese international students in Thailand, supporting H6.

Table 5

Results of mediation analysis

	CD			SCM			CD		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Constant	.135	.158	0.854	-.288	.153	-1.885	.236	.150	1.574
Gender	.276***	.072	3.835	.222***	.069	3.207	.198***	.068	2.894
education	.057	.050	1.143	.105**	.048	2.173	.020	.047	0.434
Stay in	.027	.039	0.688	.062	.038	1.654	.005	.037	0.138
CA	.692***	.057	12.060	.830***	.055	14.992	.402***	.065	6.188
SCM							.349***	.043	8.041
R²	.357			.451			.430		
Adjust R²	.352			.447			.424		
F	F(4,506)=70.211***			F(4,506)=103.955***			F (5,505)=76.166***		

Note. CA=Cross-cultural Adaptation; SCM=Self-career management; CD=Career Development ; Stay in=length of stay in Thailand; ***$p<.001$.

The analysis revealed that the indirect effect of cross-cultural adaptation on career development was significant (Effect = 0.290, SE = 0.029, 95% CI [0.142, 0.256]), indicating that self-career management plays a significant partial mediating role between cross-cultural adaptation and career development.

Additionally, the model's R^2 value is .451, indicating that cross-cultural adaptation and self-career management together explain 45.1% of the variance in career development. The adjusted R^2 value is .424, suggesting that the model has a high fit and strong explanatory power. In conclusion, cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese international students in Thailand has a significant positive impact on career development through self-career management, and the mediation effect has been validated, as detailed in Table 5.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings indicate a significant association between cross-cultural adaptation and career development, with self-career management acting as a partial mediator. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, causal relationships cannot be established, and longitudinal research is needed to validate these findings.

The results align with prior research on cross-cultural adaptation and career development. For instance, Ward et al. (2001) emphasized the role of psychological and sociocultural adaptation in shaping professional success (Ward et al., 2020). Similarly, De Vos and Soens (2008) found that proactive career behaviors contribute to long-term employability (De Vos & Soens, 2008). This study extends these findings by highlighting the mediating role of self-career management among Chinese international students in Thailand.

Theoretically, previous studies on cross-cultural adaptation have primarily focused on its implications for academic, social, and psychological outcomes (Cao & Meng, 2022; Lai et al., 2023; Sheng et al., 2022). In this research, these models are broadened by demonstrating that adaptation is not only a social and psychological process but also a critical variable in career development. By linking adaptation with career satisfaction, this study highlights the long-term implications of cross-cultural experiences beyond short-term academic and social adaptations.

While self-career management has drawn significant focus in career studies, its extension to addressing cross-cultural issues has not been extensively studied (Cao et al., 2013; Hennings et al., 2022; Secundo et al., 2019). This study posits self-career management as a major mediator, describing how successful adaptation enhances students' ability to engage in anticipatory career management. This is consistent with career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), which posits that individuals are responsible for creating their careers, doing so by adjusting to their environments.

Through the examination of gender, educational level, and duration of stay as moderators, the research strengthens individual differences in adaptation and career development. The results contribute to cultural adaptation and career transition theories, suggesting that demographic factors moderate students' adaptation, coping, and career planning. This perspective aligns with person-environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), which emphasizes that individuals' backgrounds moderate their ability to adapt to new environments. Practical implications arise from these findings. Higher education institutions should provide structured cross-cultural training programs to facilitate smoother adaptation, thereby indirectly enhancing students' career prospects (Koo Moon et al., 2012; Wang & Tran, 2012). Career counselors can integrate cross-cultural competency development into career planning sessions, while policymakers should consider expanding international student support networks, including mentorship programs and career development workshops tailored to culturally diverse learners (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Leong & Hartung, 1997).

Additionally, alternative mediators or moderators should be explored in future studies. Social support, language proficiency, and personality traits (such as openness to experience) could influence the extent to which cross-cultural adaptation translates into career success (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Chu & Zhu, 2023). Investigating these factors could provide a more nuanced understanding of the adaptation process.

This study establishes a theoretical connection between cross-cultural adaptation and career development research, two fields that have been studied separately. The findings suggest that career outcomes

must be integrated into models of international student adaptation, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies that consider both academic and professional trajectories. This study provides empirical evidence that cross-cultural adaptation enhances career development, mediated by self-career management. By highlighting the mediating role of self-career management and the moderating effect of demographic variables, this study contributes to the theoretical models of cross-cultural adaptation and career development. The implications of these findings require a deeper understanding of how international students balance their academic, social, and professional activities within a host cultural environment. Universities should integrate career development support within cultural adaptation programs. However, due to the study's cross-sectional design, longitudinal studies are needed for causal validation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce social desirability bias. Second, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal research would be necessary to track adaptation and career outcomes over time (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Third, the sample consists exclusively of Chinese students in Thailand, which limits its generalizability to other international student populations. Future studies should consider cross-country comparisons to explore broader adaptation trends (Dobbins et al., 2011). Consistent with Ward's (2001) model, cultural learning and psychological resilience play crucial roles in career success. Contrary to expectations, the length of stay did not significantly influence intercultural communication ability, suggesting that external factors, such as personality or prior exposure, may be more influential (Kim, 2001; Alitabar, S. H. S., & Parsakia, 2025).

This study is based on cross-sectional data and cannot reveal causal relationships. Future research is recommended to adopt a longitudinal design to track the changes in cross-cultural adaptation and career development dynamically. In terms of research methodology, this study primarily uses a questionnaire survey method. Future studies could incorporate qualitative research methods to obtain richer data.

Additionally, in response to the impact of cross-cultural adaptation on career development, educational institutions and relevant organizations should provide systematic cross-cultural adaptation training for Chinese international students, such as cultural diversity lectures, intercultural communication skills training, and psychological support services. These measures can help students integrate into the local cultural environment more quickly, thereby enabling them to better cope with academic and daily life challenges.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

By the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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