



Perceptions of Thai University Students on Chinese Popular Culture in Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study investigates Thai university students' perceptions of using Chinese popular culture in learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), focusing on their preferred engagement methods, perceived opportunities, and intercultural challenges. A mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires (N=202) and semi-structured interviews (n=15) was employed, with stratified and purposive sampling ensuring representative insights. Findings revealed that digital platforms, particularly TikTok (72.28%) and YouTube (68.81%), served as primary channels for accessing Chinese popular culture, with short-form videos favored for their contextualized language input. Students reported significant opportunities in vocabulary acquisition ($\bar{X}=4.46$), listening comprehension ($\bar{X}=4.41$), and intercultural understanding, such as grasping social norms ($\bar{X}=4.30$). However, challenges included cultural dissonance ($\bar{X}=3.90$), non-standard language structures ($\bar{X}=3.92$), and difficulties in interpreting idioms or dialects. Qualitative insights emphasized the need for guided cultural contextualization to mitigate misunderstandings. The study concludes that integrating Chinese popular culture into CFL curricula enhances learner motivation and linguistic skills but requires pedagogical scaffolding to address cultural and linguistic complexities. Recommendations include leveraging digital platforms for immersive learning, fostering cross-cultural exchanges, and incorporating critical media literacy to navigate stereotypes. These findings contribute to optimizing CFL instruction through culturally responsive pedagogies.

Keywords: Chinese Popular Culture, Chinese as a Foreign Language, Thai University Students

Introduction

The interplay between Chinese culture and language education has significantly transformed Thailand's Chinese language education. Cultural exchanges between China and Thailand have a history of over two millennia (Baker et al., 2022), and digital globalization has revolutionized this through Chinese movies, TV dramas, and mobile games. Chinese films, dramas, and social media content provide immersive, low-pressure exposure to the language, reducing anxiety and increasing motivation (Placer et al., 2024). However, despite students' preference for relatable digital content (e.g., short videos, online games), traditional classroom methods (e.g., calligraphy) remain dominant (Jia, 2024). This highlights a generational disconnect, as Thailand's Gen Z learners gravitate toward interactive and modern media while institutions lag in integrating these tools effectively.

The rise of Chinese as Thailand's most popular second foreign language (Weerasawainon, 2019) is closely tied to deepening Sino-Thai economic relations. By 2023, China's investments in Thailand reached 848 billion baht (Bangkok Post, 2024), creating strong demand for Chinese-speaking professionals in trade, tourism, and technology sectors. This economic interdependence reinforces the practical value of Chinese proficiency, making it a strategic skill for Thai students. Additionally, China's soft power expansion through digital platforms (e.g., TikTok, WeTV) further embeds Chinese language and culture into Thailand's media landscape, shaping learners' exposure and attitudes.

While popular culture-based learning shows promise in boosting engagement, its application in Thai classrooms remains underexplored and unstructured. Some educators incorporate TikTok clips or drama excerpts, but these efforts lack theoretical grounding and standardized assessment methods (Werner, 2020). A key challenge is balancing traditional pedagogy (e.g., textbook-based instruction, calligraphy) with modern digital tools that align with students' interests. Research also disproportionately focuses on English education, leaving gaps in understanding how Thai learners engage with Chinese media for language acquisition (Werner & Tegg, 2020). Addressing this requires teacher training and policy adjustments to harness popular culture's potential in fostering intrinsic motivation while maintaining educational rigor.

Research Objectives

- 1) To identify the preferred ways through Thai university students' engagement with Chinese popular culture in Chinese Language Learning.
- 2) To explore Thai university students' opportunities for using Chinese popular culture in learning Chinese as a foreign language.
- 3) To discuss intercultural challenges encountered by Thai university students towards the use of Chinese popular culture in learning Chinese as a foreign language.

Literature Review

Preferred Ways Engagement

Preferred ways of engagement indicate the communication, interaction, and participation methods favored by individuals or groups in a certain context, and they are vital to enhancing

learning outcomes in educational research. As personalized teaching evolves, respecting students' learning preferences has become a focus for boosting their motivation and cognitive engagement. In language learning, leveraging familiar cultural media, such as Chinese popular culture, has emerged as a key research area to spark students' interest and cultural identity. Various studies have explored this concept, Jang et al. (2016) introduced a teaching model aligned with students' preferences, showing it enhances autonomy and engagement. Louws et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of learner-centered approaches, while Bowes (2018) identified preferred learning styles and academic self-efficacy as predictors of engagement. Ilin (2022) explored how users' media preferences relate to participation in digital learning environments and stressed "user participation" over "teacher indoctrination", providing a model for studying preferred participation in digital contexts. Heilporn et al. (2021) found that allowing students to choose topics and express personal and cultural interests effectively stimulates enthusiasm. Overall, preferred ways of engagement provide a theoretical foundation for understanding learner behavior and offer strategic support for cross-cultural language teaching. Integrating students' cultural preferences with teaching goals and incorporating Chinese popular culture can effectively promote language acquisition and cultural integration in Chinese as a second language (CFL) teaching scenario.

Opportunities

Opportunities encompass external conditions facilitating learners' access to language and culture. For Thai university students learning Chinese, popular culture offers rich, immersive resources beyond classrooms. Unlike textbooks, materials like dramas and social media provide authentic language in real-life contexts. While traditional CFL classes focus on "elegant culture" elements requiring advanced skills, popular culture is more accessible to beginners. Scholars have started exploring its use in CFL education. Wei (2020) argued that integrating Chinese popular culture into CFL education is feasible and beneficial, but requires careful content selection. Yuan (2021) emphasized that popular culture elements can enhance classroom dynamics. Pai and Duff (2020) provided examples of integrating popular culture into CFL programs, but called for more research on its long-term effectiveness.

The integration of popular culture into CFL education signifies a shift toward more dynamic teaching methods. Research highlights the importance of carefully selecting popular culture elements that align with learning objectives. Task-based activities, such as creating a vlog about a Chinese festival or writing a review of a Chinese movie, are effective ways to incorporate popular culture. These activities require learners to use the language meaningfully and practically.

The most prominent feature of short videos (such as TikTok) is that short videos are updated frequently. When teaching Chinese language and culture to foreigners, teachers can utilize these resources related to Chinese culture to assist their teaching. Choosing recently updated short videos to let CFL learners come into contact with fresh information about China, so that the cultural contents can be closer to the actual life of young people in contemporary China. Yuan (2022) affirmed the advantages of short videos by comparing the application of traditional videos and TikTok short videos in CFL. Guo (2022) discussed the feasibility of using short videos in CFL from three aspects: the characteristics of short videos themselves, their practical value, and their theoretical basis.

The use of short videos in CFL teaching does not always lead to positive feedback, and researchers have identified a number of shortcomings. Wang (2022) issued like untargeted or difficult content, low usage rate in key content, students' poor focus, minimal effect on homework submission, and lack of teacher explanation. To address these, Li (2020) suggested selecting short videos based on teaching audience characteristics, content, and quality. Zhang (2021) proposed selection principles: for elementary learners, choose popular and practical videos; for intermediate ones, use semi-popular videos with cultural and grammatical explanations. Xu (2023) emphasized the importance of video selection. However, current research on short videos in CFL teaching is still exploratory, with few specific teaching designs.

Popular songs, with their contemporary language and cultural elements, are highly engaging for students. Scholars suggest integrating popular music into CFL instruction can effectively teach culture and boost motivation if song selection follows certain principles. Zhang (2023) emphasized that songs should have suitable difficulty, conform to grammar, offer diverse genres, have clear pronunciation, be practical, and contain cultural meanings and positive content, also highlighting choosing songs with medium to slow tempos. Yang (2024) added that lyrics should contain typical knowledge points and match students' proficiency and stages. Deng (2018) stressed that sufficient repetitions in lyrics and songs to aid memorization.

Intercultural Challenges

Intercultural challenges involve cognitive, emotional, and communicative difficulties when navigating different cultural frameworks. Thai university students engaging with Chinese popular culture in language learning may face challenges of cultural misunderstandings, value dissonance, or symbolic misinterpretations. While Chinese media may provide linguistic input, but the embedded Confucian ideals and social norms can conflict with Thai students' expectations, causing confusion. The symbiotic relationship between language and culture forms the cornerstone of effective language acquisition, particularly when linguistic proficiency must align with intercultural competence.

As Oxford and Gkonou (2018) posit, language and culture are mutually constitutive, jointly shaping our cognitive frameworks. A language's cultural context not only clarifies its nuances but also reveals how values and beliefs permeate linguistic practices (Cain et al., 2018). This interdependence manifests acutely in Thailand's Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) education. China's global ascendancy has elevated Mandarin's status, driving a surge in Chinese learners worldwide. However, this growth exposes a critical pedagogical gap: the "empty shell" phenomenon, wherein learners master grammatical structures yet lack cultural fluency for meaningful communication.

A central contradiction underpinning Thai CFL pedagogy lies in the misalignment between static curricular materials and dynamic learner needs. Dominant textbooks (Experiencing Chinese, New Practical Chinese Reader) emphasize classical cultural artifacts (calligraphy, Beijing Opera) and obsolete linguistic scenarios, alienating Thailand's digitally immersed youth. Wei and Weerasawainon (2024) evaluated teaching materials at major Thai universities, revealing dissatisfaction with the textbooks' practicality and engagement, with students preferring topics like food, travel, and shopping. Such findings underscore the

urgency of rethinking cultural integration strategies to bridge pedagogical inertia and learner expectations.

Emerging scholarship posits popular culture as a transformative medium to address this "empty shell" dilemma. Yuan (2021) argued that digital popular culture (e.g., TikTok trends, web dramas) provides low-anxiety entry points for novices, TikTok democratizes cultural access, by allowing learners to engage with contemporary expressions (e.g., the phrase "躺平" lying flat, critiquing societal pressure). Such content lowers entry barriers for beginners compared to classical forms like Beijing Opera (Pai & Duff, 2020). For instance, Thai students engaging with TikTok trends (e.g., HanfuChallenge) not only acquire colloquial expressions but also negotiate hybrid identities, navigating the "Third Space" between Thai and Chinese cultural norms as theorized by Kramsch. Empirical studies further validate this approach: popular culture has a positive impact on foreign language learning, motivation, engagement, and student achievement outcomes (Javaid et al., 2023). However, challenges persist, including content suitability and overreliance on entertainment-driven platforms. Liu (2022) revealed that excessive TikTok usage without structured guidance can fragment learning outcomes, learners often struggle to differentiate between educational content and entertainment; this ambiguity can significantly reduce the efficiency of language acquisition, particularly among those with limited proficiency and poor self-discipline.

In conclusion, while the "empty shell" phenomenon underscores systemic inertia, strategic integration of popular culture can revitalize Thai CFL education. Future efforts must prioritize longitudinal studies on pedagogical efficacy and dismantle institutional barriers notably outdated textbook paradigms to integrate cultural fluency with linguistic mastery.

Popular Culture in Language Learning and Teaching

Popular culture is a subject that most people are familiar with and exposed to on a daily basis (Edensor, 2020). Since the late 1980s, globalization has driven teachers to prioritize authenticity and practical language use in materials, advocating for popular culture in language classrooms (Warner & Dupuy, 2018). Theory and research indicate that popular culture positively impacts foreign language learning, motivation, engagement, and achievement (Javaid et al., 2023). Many educators use multimedia tools to create immersive learning environments (Cheney & Terry, 2018). For instance, incorporating clips from popular Chinese TV shows allows students to practice listening and speaking while learning cultural norms, such as how to address elders or handle formal situations. However, textbooks often underrepresent popular culture's linguistic and conceptual features. The author suggests teachers should be more aware of popular culture's benefits and textbooks should include more of these features to enhance authenticity and prepare students for societal trends. Although existing research emphasizes the need for cultural integration, the following gaps remain: (1) there is a lack of longitudinal studies on the long-term teaching effectiveness of popular culture in CFL; (2) the application of new media tools such as short videos mostly remains theoretical discussion, and empirical support is urgently needed; (3) the development of cultural competence in teacher education programs has not yet been systematized.

Theoretical Framework

The synthesis of language learning and cultural engagement necessitates a clear delineation of core constructs to address the "empty shell" phenomenon in Thai Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) education. Grounded in Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model and Kramsch's (2009) Third Space theory, this section establishes a theoretically rigorous and empirically actionable framework for analyzing cultural integration in language pedagogy and is illustrated in Figure 1.

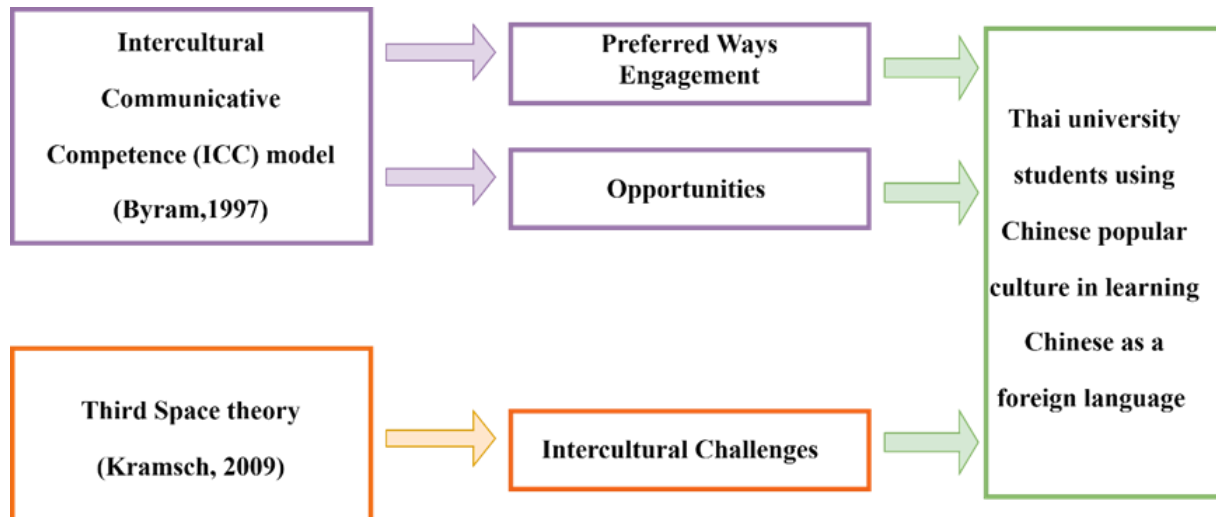


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Byram's (1997) ICC model informs this study's operationalization of cultural integration through four measurable dimensions:

- (1) Knowledge: Understand cultural background knowledge, including Chinese history, social customs, and values.
- (2) Attitudes: Maintain openness and respect toward Chinese language and culture while retaining confidence in one's native cultural identity.
- (3) Skills: Apply Chinese effectively in cross-cultural communication and resolve cultural conflicts.
- (4) Critical Awareness: Deconstruct cultural stereotypes through analytical reflection.

Kramsch's (2009) Third Space theory is reconceptualized here as a pedagogical environment where learners dynamically negotiate cultural contradictions through engagement with Chinese popular culture. Thai students exemplify this process by interacting with Chinese idols and TikTok trends, negotiating local identities within globalized Mandarin-language content. Such spaces enable critical engagement with both cultures, fostering nuanced understanding of intercultural contrasts.

Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach, utilizing complementary data collection instruments (a self-administered questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) following a sequential exploratory design. In this approach, quantitative data informed subsequent qualitative probing (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design enabled a comprehensive understanding of Thai university students' perceptions, challenges, and opportunities encountered when using Chinese popular culture in learning Chinese as a foreign language.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted at a university in Bangkok, Thailand. The target population consisted of 400 undergraduate students enrolled in a Chinese language program at the same university. Participants were distributed across four academic cohorts (Years 1–4), with ages ranging from 17 to 24 years and varying durations of Chinese study.

This cross-sectional study utilized stratified random sampling to examine undergraduate Chinese majors (N=400) from four academic years (100 students per year). Stratification by enrollment year controlled for two key variables: (1) curricular progression in Chinese language proficiency, and (2) cumulative cultural exposure duration. Sample size determination followed Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) parameters for a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, yielding 196 total participants (49 per stratum). To ensure adequate sample size while accounting for potential attrition in online surveys, we distributed 208 questionnaires (52 per stratum) via the Wenjuanxing platform, exceeding the calculated minimum requirement of 196. This oversampling strategy yielded 202 complete questionnaires, successfully compensating for expected attrition while maintaining the stratified structure's integrity.

For semi-structured interviews, participants were selected using stratified purposive sampling to ensure representation across different levels of cultural engagement. Participants were ranked by total scores from a composite index of Likert-scale responses (items 10-19) and divided into three engagement strata: High (top 30%, n=5), Moderate (middle 40%, n=5), and Low (bottom 30%, n=5). Fifteen students were invited, ensuring diversity in gender, age, and academic year. Final interviewees were selected based on voluntary participation and availability, with ethical considerations maintained.

Research Instruments

This study used questionnaires as the primary data collection tool due to their ease of preparation and administration (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). However, in order to gain deeper insights, six-question semi-structured interviews were also used. The questionnaire was to be translated into Thai and had four parts: Basic Demographic Information, Engagement Preferences, Perceptions, and Opportunities and Challenges.

Part 1 collects basic demographic data to contextualize the study. Part 2 explores participants' preferences and habits regarding Chinese popular culture and its role in language learning. Part 3 uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure learners' cognitive and affective responses to Chinese popular culture in terms of linguistic benefits, affective engagement, and pedagogical challenges. Part 4 also employs a 5-point Likert scale to assess the benefits and

challenges in using Chinese popular culture in foreign language acquisition among Thai university students. The questionnaire was to be translated into Thai to ensure understanding.

Data Analysis

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2018) to analyze data using integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches. The collected questionnaire data were coded and examined by the researcher using the Statistical Package in Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics including frequency, mean scores, percentages, and standard deviation are used to analyze the questionnaire responses. The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews were systematically analyzed using the Lichtman's 3Cs Model. The three-stage process began with coding raw interview transcripts to identify salient phrases and patterns, followed by categorizing these codes into thematic clusters that reflect shared characteristics. Finally, conceptualizing elevated the categorized themes to abstract constructs that are anchored in theoretical frameworks, thereby generating actionable insights. The data analysis process involved a combination of descriptive statistics for quantitative data, and thematic analysis for qualitative data. This integrated approach provided a comprehensive and robust analysis, aligning with the research objectives and questions.

Results

All details regarding the data and findings of the study have been presented. Based on the gathered data, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. Thai university students preferred ways engagement with Chinese popular culture in CFL Learning

The research on Thai university students' engagement with Chinese popular culture in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learning reveals that digital platforms are the predominant channels for accessing Chinese popular culture. Among these, short-form video platforms like TikTok (72.28%) and YouTube (68.81%) are the most popular. Students also utilized other platforms like iQiyi, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and language-learning apps such as Hello Talk. Offline events had lower engagement (34.16%) compared to digital platforms. The qualitative interviews further substantiated these findings, showing that students valued these platforms not only for content accessibility but also for their interactive features that facilitated language practice. The quantitative and qualitative data consistently demonstrated that: (1) Digital platforms served as primary access points for Chinese popular culture. (2) Short-form video content was particularly effective for language learning. (3) Platform choice correlated with language proficiency levels. This multimodal engagement supported linguistic and intercultural development, as evidenced by high engagement scores (mean=4.21).

2. Opportunities for using Chinese popular culture in learning CFL

Questionnaire data indicated a positive impact of Chinese popular culture on language learning, with a mean score of 4.40 reflecting strong agreement on its educational value. High scores were seen in Enjoyment (4.50), Belief in effectiveness (4.48), Vocabulary expansion

(4.46), and Authentic expression acquisition (4.45). Other items like "active attention to new vocabulary" (4.35), "deep understanding of social norms and values" (4.31), "understanding of politeness norms" (4.30), and "recognizing regional differences" (4.26) also scored above 4.2, showing students' recognition of rich learning opportunities. However, speaking frequency improvement had the lowest score (4.28), indicating limited verbal interaction within popular culture contexts. Interviews added depth to these findings, with most participants reporting enhanced listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary, reduced learning anxiety, and increased study motivation. Chinese popular culture boosts listening, vocabulary, and motivation (mean scores >4.30), but offers less support for writing and speaking.

3. Challenges for using Chinese popular culture in learning CFL

The analysis of questionnaire data reveals that students face challenges when using Chinese popular culture for CFL learning. These include cultural adaptation difficulties like culture shock (mean=3.90), religious and social norm conflicts (mean=3.85), and entertainment value interference (mean=3.95), as well as understanding non-standard language structures (mean=3.92). Additionally, students often struggle to interpret humor, idiomatic expressions, and implicit cultural references in TV dramas and online discussions, with about 30% reporting cultural shock. Interviews further highlight challenges in comprehending language features such as hidden meanings, jargon, slang, and dialects, especially in fast-paced dialogues. Despite these challenges, engagement with Chinese popular culture can boost cultural curiosity and encourage cross-cultural interaction. The results suggest that while beneficial, cultural engagement through popular media requires additional guidance and contextual learning to navigate complexities effectively.

Discussion

Quantitative data revealed that 72.28% of participants relied on TikTok for short-form content, while 68.81% utilized YouTube for diverse media consumption, including music videos, drama clips, and educational channels. These findings aligned with broader trends among younger learners who favor interactive and visually engaging platforms (Wang & Tananuraksakul, 2023). Qualitative data showed a proficiency-dependent split in preferences: higher-level learners (HSK4-6) gravitated toward long-form narratives such as C-dramas (e.g., *The Romance of Tiger and Rose*), which they described as "natural classrooms" for incidental language acquisition (S8). Conversely, beginners (HSK2-3) prioritized short-form videos (e.g., Li Ziqi's rural vlogs) for their digestible input and contextualized visual cues, enabling comprehension despite limited vocabulary. This highlighted the need for proficiency-specific teaching strategies, such as using TikTok clips for lower-level learners and drama dialogues for advanced learners to explore sociolinguistic patterns. The shift towards digital platforms reflected a move from traditional resources to informal, learner-driven environments, consistent with media-enhanced language acquisition research (Ye, 2024).

Platforms like Bilibili (37.13%) and WeTV (36.14%) provided immersive exposure to China-originated content, while language-learning apps (e.g., Hello Talk, 36.63%) facilitated semi-structured interactions. Such multimodal engagement reflects students' strategic use of media not merely for entertainment but as tools for incidental skill development, particularly in listening comprehension (mean=4.41) and vocabulary acquisition (mean=4.46). These findings resonate with Otajonova's (2024) assertion that authentic cultural materials enhance

learner engagement by bridging classroom instruction with real-world language use. Students surveyed through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews overwhelmingly viewed Chinese popular culture as a valuable resource for enhancing language acquisition and intercultural understanding. One of the most prominent linguistic opportunities is the integration of Chinese popular culture into language learning provided students with authentic input that textbooks often lack.

Beyond linguistic gains, engagement with Chinese popular culture fostered intercultural communicative competence (Barker, 2016). By consuming media such as historical dramas (*The Untamed*) and reality shows (*Who's the Murderer*), students gained insights into Chinese social norms, historical narratives, and contemporary youth subcultures. This exposure enabled them to navigate cultural nuances, such as indirect communication styles in professional settings or the use of humor in informal interactions. The "authenticity effect" of popular culture also facilitated intercultural mediation (Pai & Duff, 2020). For instance, participation in online fan communities (45.54%) allowed learners to practice written Chinese while negotiating cultural meanings. As S8 explained, "Discussing plot twists on Weibo taught me how Chinese netizens express sarcasm—something I'd never learn in class." Such interactions positioned students as cultural interpreters, bridging Thai and Chinese contexts through shared interests.

These findings align with the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), where low-anxiety environments enhance language acquisition. For instance, mimicking drama dialogues (69.31% of respondents) allowed students to internalize tonal patterns and colloquial expressions without formal pressure. However, the limited improvement in speaking frequency (mean=4.28) suggests a gap in active verbal practice, as most engagement remained passive (e.g., watching rather than conversing). This dichotomy implies that while popular culture enriches receptive skills, structured speaking activities (e.g., role-playing drama scenes) are needed to bridge productive skill gaps.

Chinese popular culture offers rich intercultural opportunities but also challenges for Thai university students learning Chinese (Kahanurak et al., 2023). Students struggled with fast-paced dialogues (mean=3.92) and regional dialects prevalent in Chinese media (e.g., Sichuanese in *Nezha*). Beginners (HSK2-3) faced particular difficulty decoding slang and idioms, as S5 noted: "In modern dramas, characters use phrases like ‘社死’ (social death) that textbooks never explain." Such challenges align with Bahrani and Sim-Tam's (2012) warning that unstructured media consumption may overwhelm learners, necessitating scaffolded support (e.g., annotated subtitles). Also, there's a risk of forming superficial cultural understanding. Chinese popular culture often presents idealized narratives, romanticized relationships in idol dramas or aspirational lifestyles in reality shows (Fang, 2015). Without guided analysis, students risk internalizing stereotypes, mistaking fictional portrayals for societal norms. This underscores the need for critical media literacy training to distinguish between entertainment tropes and authentic cultural practices.

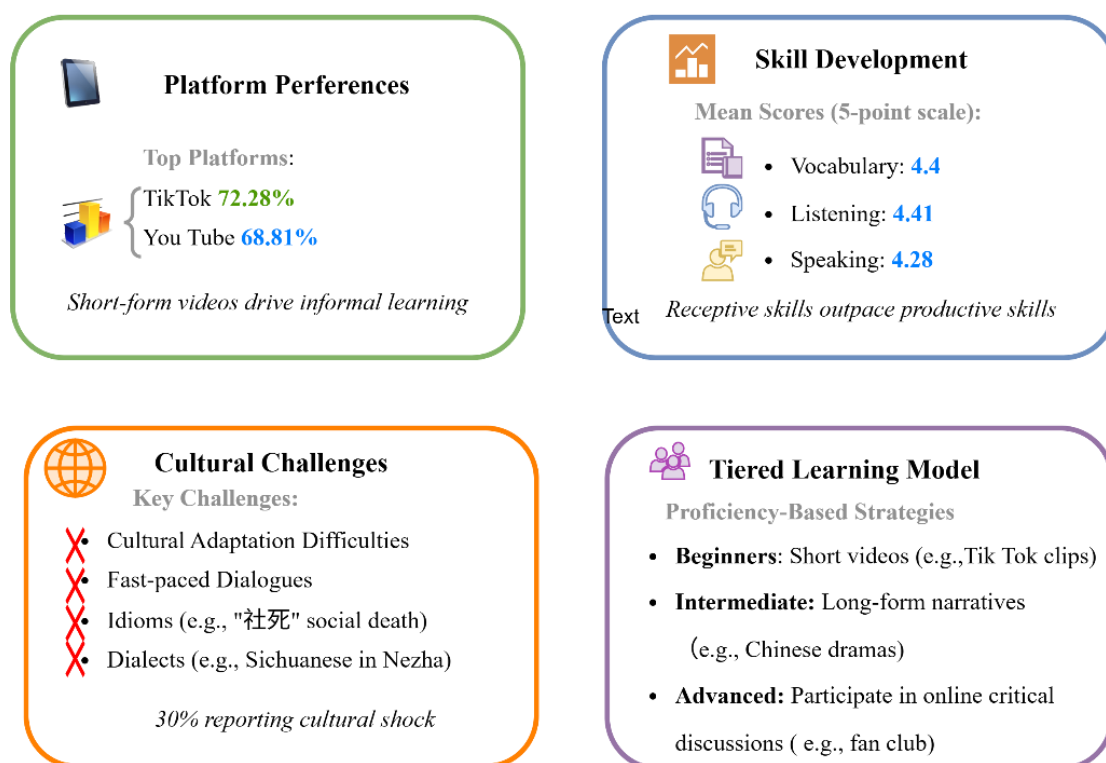
New knowledge

The study offers new knowledge on Thai students' use of Chinese popular culture in CFL learning, highlighting their platform preferences and the associated opportunities and

challenges (see Figure 2). Its originality is in exploring this under-researched area, providing a learner-centric model adaptable to digital trends and cultural authenticity. It contributes to optimizing CFL instruction and offers practical recommendations for educators.

CFL Learning via Chinese Popular Culture: Key Findings

Empirical Study on Thai University Students (N=202)



Mixed-methods design (N=202 surveys + 15 interviews)

Figure 2 CFL Learning via Chinese Popular Culture: Key Findings

Acknowledgments

Based on the research findings, it was found that there is a positive correlation between engagement with Chinese popular culture and language learning outcomes, while also highlighting the nuanced intercultural opportunities and challenges. There are recommendations for applying the research results and for future research as follows:

Recommendations for Applying the Research Findings

(1) The engagement of Thai university students with Chinese popular culture has significantly enhanced their language learning experience. It is recommended that educators integrate more Chinese popular culture elements, such as music, films, and digital platforms (e.g., TikTok, Bilibili), into their teaching strategies to increase student engagement and motivation (Tang & Hou, 2024).

(2) Thai university students have demonstrated positive perceptions towards the use of Chinese popular culture in learning Chinese as a foreign language. Collaboration with native Chinese speakers can further enhance students' language proficiency. Exchange programs, language partner initiatives, and online language communities can help students gain real-world exposure to Chinese language and culture (Jiang & Phusawisot, 2023). Therefore, it is suggested that Chinese language instructors actively utilize Chinese popular culture as a supplementary tool to make learning more enjoyable and relatable.

(3) The use of Chinese popular culture has provided both intercultural opportunities and challenges for Thai university students. To maximize the benefits, universities should offer guidance and cultural context explanations to help students navigate cultural differences effectively.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could investigate the long-term impact of using Chinese popular culture on language proficiency. Longitudinal studies can provide deeper insights into how engagement with popular culture influences vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking skills over time. Additionally, researchers can examine differences between students who frequently engage with Chinese popular culture and those who rely on traditional learning methods.

Another area for future research is the role of different types of Chinese popular culture in language learning. Studies can investigate whether music, television dramas, online videos, or social media content have varying levels of effectiveness in enhancing language acquisition. Researchers may also analyze how students with different learning styles respond to these various media formats.

Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons could provide valuable insights into how students from different backgrounds perceive and benefit from using Chinese popular culture in language learning. Comparative studies between Thai students and learners from other countries can help educators refine teaching strategies and develop more effective language programs that cater to diverse student needs.

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