

MULTICULTURAL MOSAIC? STUDYING THE CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN ‘THAI HIGHER EDUCATION 4.0’

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ABSTRACT

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The cultural integration of international students in Thai Higher Education (Thai HE) is spurred by a government initiative known as *Thailand 4.0*, and has raised the educational bar. It is a lucrative move; increased university costs and access to home countries’ courses ensure capable international students now seek affordable degree education in Thailand. Thus, in this paper, we offer empirical findings based on a case study drawn across a longitudinal, year-long investigation. Using examples from a mixed-methods approach, we report a ‘cultural mosaic’ of multiculturalism resistant to cultural assimilation in our setting, which contrasts themes in Thai HE policy. This policy often embraces nationalist themes, found embedded in General Education (GE) courses and the habitus of Thai HE, which impacts the potential to integrate overseas students effectively into Thai culture and society. With this in mind, we question the nature of multiculturalism in the classroom, suggesting a changing phenomenon with implications for Thai HE’s future. Meanwhile, we use this paper to establish the validity of tools needed for critical discussion about learning culture across the Thai HE community as we move towards *Thailand 4.0*. We aim to describe the cultural integration of a growing base of international students, hoping to inform the development of Thai HE, which could be a world-class and leading platform for education.

Keywords: Cultural integration; student experience; education; Thailand 4.0; higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

Thai Higher Education (Thai HE) has been internationalizing for two decades. There is a push to attract foreign students by a government initiative known as *Thailand 4.0* (Day and Skulsuthavong, 2019). *Thailand 1.0* was an agricultural ‘food bowl’ incentive, *Thailand 2.0*, an industry of manufacturing, and *Thailand 3.0*, a push for domestic resource production (Bangkok Post, 2020). *Thailand 4.0* seeks to develop unique, nationally owned sophisticated infrastructure and world-class education (Sereemongkonpol, 2016). This is a challenge; the newly formed 2019 government has rebuilt some economic stability, but has emphasized cultural

nationalism, a problem for overseas students. Hence, this led the authors to question their cultural integration. We were supported by a Thai private Higher Education Institute (HEI), Payap University in Chiangmai, who sponsored a data project, resituated to provide the insights within this paper (Waters, 2019). Much like Kitjarooncha and Kitjaroonchai (2012), we wanted to create a case study about the expansion of a Thai university. This setting and higher educational landscape is changing; rapid expansion of university seats after 2000, combined with the Thai 'baby bust' in the 1990s, meant a surplus of university seats from 2010 (Surichai, 2002; Nichols, 2016).

This is a problem. Universities are prestigious institutions in Thailand. Their credentials are gatekeepers, shaping Thai society as a whole. Indeed, for Ajarn, known in western settings as a Lecturer, although this role has greater capital and responsibility in Thailand, their job is a 'high social status' role. Thai universities, however, offer a unique teaching and learning culture. This begins with elaborate initiation rituals, communal living relationships, loyalty to the university, and enforced nationalism about Thai society (Surichai, 2002; Crocco, 2018; Nichols, 2016). Payap University, our case study site, was the first international private university in the country. It began in 1974, with a new International College from 2003, innovative at the time. Internationalization was possible at Payap because missionaries had been involved in teaching, led by the Church of Christ in Thailand. Like many Thai universities, its internationally-minded systems clashed with the traditions of Thai hierarchy and authoritarian education, alongside rivalry with public universities, which have government funding (Crocco, 2018).

What Payap University did differently was to embrace its American (US) roots. As of 2021 it offers Bachelor's and Master's degrees taught in English and Thai, and a Ph.D. program. In 2015, Payap was accredited by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for armed forces scholarships. Burmese students, sponsored by churches, or parents, were sent after 2010 when travel became more manageable. Finally, from 2016, relationships with Chinese universities brought in approximately 100 Chinese students. By 2018 there were about 200 international students in the English-speaking International College, around 40% of whom were Thai and approximately 3,000 students in the 'Thai-side' faculties. Payap University, we felt, was a prime case for Thai HE cultural integration studies, given students from as many as 31 countries engaged in the study of an English-medium Thai degree curriculum, intended as a basis to inform academics within the Thai HE system (Thomas, 2011). Moreover, Payap University has authorized the data-set release (Waters, 2019).

Carried out over 2018, a longitudinal approach improved spatial triangulation of the subject (Holloway, 1997). We focused on General Education courses (GE) which all students take. These exist in part to satisfy government 'Thainess,' an issue of particular interest for our case study (OHEC, 2014). We assumed that the GE courses found in the first year of all Thai international undergraduate degrees sought to encourage student socialization into Thailand's cultural and thus 'melt' international student's culture into 'Thainess'. This was not a great leap; GE titles offered at Payap include 'Truth and Service', 'The Path to Wisdom' and 'Peace and Aesthetics of Life', with the latter explicitly including 'good citizenship' themes. Our approach echoes efforts by Shan and Christians (2015). Both authors call for us to find where 'intercultural communicative systems are bounded, or perhaps even bonded, by shared cultural symbols' and communities of practice that include places and modes of study (Shan and Christians, 2015).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THAI HE, GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Thailand 4.0 seeks more students. Thus internationally-minded programs have emerged. But, the question arises: how Thailand can create an academic system that will accommodate culturally diverse students and encourage integrated, sympathetic, loyal and fully contributing members of Thai society? International education in Thailand is not new. Thai HE has origins drawn from the European education tradition. From the late nineteenth century, Thai nobility began sending their children to universities in Europe. After World War II, American influence in Thailand increased. During the Vietnam War, Thailand's military-dominated government kept Thailand from becoming a battlefield, which Thais still identify with pride (Ouyyanont, 2001). However, regional conflict brought an influx of cultures (Chanlett, 2009; Boontinand and Petcharamesree, 2018). During the 1970s forces drawn from Buddhism, first in Bangkok, later in Chiangmai, and beyond, shaped learning and drove Thai HE towards an emphasis of service, culture and citizenship that then became tethered to the idea of teaching and the role of educator within Thailand (Boontinand and Petcharamesree, 2018). Thai HE even draws its honorary title for academic service, Ajarn, from Thai Buddhism. Yet, 'international' programs are staffed by Thais, with varying language skills and qualifications, which itself poses a challenge for 'reinventing' Thai HE as sought in 2021 (Lao, 2015; Day et al., 2021).

Tensions, therefore, arise from immigrating academics with differing philosophies. This might include disagreeing over Thai emphasis on teacher-student hierarchy (Surichai, 2002; Crocco, 2018). Subsequently, some feel Thai education does not offer assurance of 'measuring up' with international degrees built on critical

thinking (Mala, 2019). Ajarn is a role of authority, not necessarily equality (Lao, 2015; Khang and Sandmaung, 2013). There have been concerns raised about mandatory GE nationalism and adherence to the state, which some feel ‘melt’ university students into ‘ritualistic learning’ grounded in such a sense of hierarchy (Nichols, 2016). This emphasis reflects patron-client relationships common in Thailand. Yet, Thailand is now a less-outlandish destination resulting in greater higher education uptake by international students (Ouyyanont, 2001; Bovornsiri, 1998). This international ‘modernisation template’ began when Thailand’s birth rate has dropped to by nearly a quarter compared to thirty years ago; there are fewer coming-of-age university Thais (OECD, 2016).

Meanwhile, academic preparation is limited by a heavy emphasis on university tradition (Lao, 2015). This differs from international education, based on more liberal ideas of the student-as-equal. Whilst English is the second language of Thailand, fluency levels are also below other ASEAN countries; English education was for tourism, not *Thailand 4.0* (OECD, 2019; Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai, 2012). As a de-facto status quo, Thai Rote learning tradition was reinforced after the 1990s. ‘Teacher Training Colleges’ trained Thai elementary school teachers for rural schools; in 2005 these colleges were turned into Rajabat Universities, establishing four-year undergraduate degree programs. This alone created over 100,000 university seats, around 15 years after Thailand’s birth-rates dropped (Nichols, 2016). Thailand’s education policy is thus complex. Part of the reason for such complexity is because ‘Thainess’ is explicitly embedded as a GE theme; quality assurance metrics that rule higher education at a time when globalisation facilitated by the Internet is changing the landscape of education, empowering Thai students (Day, 2019; OHEC, 2014; Nitungkorn, 2001).

Thailand 4.0 seeks to promote Thai modernity (Day and Skulsuthavong, 2019). But, what does this mean for cultural integration of foreign students? There are likely to be even less Thai students in the future, as birth rates continue to be low, due to gender emancipation and education, often influenced by western media, which has begun to change views of patriarchal ‘Thainess’ that have long prevailed, influencing younger generations of Thai women (Skulsuthavong, 2016). Meanwhile, it is a demanding process to satisfy the Thai *Office for Higher Education Commission* that likewise has its own themes of ‘Thainess’ (OHEC, 2014), which requires international courses to undergo Thai quality assurance (Lao, 2015; Nitungkorn, 2001). This paper suggests balances can be struck, often by students, not policy, which questions GE relevance (Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai, 2012). We present this paper as the first of a series based on a data set to prepare Thai universities to understand cultural integration of international students immigrating into the country under *Thailand 4.0*.

Culture is core within this paper, seen as a collective co-construction that forges a socio-technical network (Latour, 2007). Put another way, a cultural actor is part of a network representing habitual assimilation of activity, performativity and thus behaviour. Cultural assimilation produces homogeneity rather than heterogeneity. To borrow from Chao and Moon (2005) “cultural mosaics” are built on heterogeneity. This describes how societies, and groups of actors, integrate as a cohesive ‘people’ yet maintain different features. A mosaic is where one united set of actors like a diamond reflect new discourses and tool usages, under ‘different lights’ rather than a singular ideological view of identity. For Chao and Moon (2005) a balance of ‘multiculturalism and cultural integration is itself the point of a cultural mosaic’. It is echoed in our findings, because, to borrow from the authors (2005: 1129): we posit that individuals draw on combinations or patterns of tiles such as ethnicity and gender. However, just as any colour picture, at its core, comprises three primary colours, we define an individual’s cultural mosaic as comprising three primary categories: (a) demographic, (b) geographic, and (c) associative features of culture.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We applied this idea to our design, seeking instruments we believed could identify all three in this patchwork ‘mosaic’ where ‘collectivity’ created a network of ‘actors’ who incorporate different prisms of ‘international identity’ (Foucault, 1977). This is not unique to Thailand; cultural integration studies consider, for example, students in the United States and integration of multicultural heritage. One way shown is in differences study methods and engagement with the teacher as ‘tell-tale’ signs of either cultural assimilation, or a mosaic diversity (Patton and Renn 2016). We assumed if Thai GE were successful, there would be evidence apparent in shared study and social engagement practices between Thai and other groups, which has been hinted at in other international settings (See: Nathan, 2005; NSSE, 2017). For Payap students, we wanted to consider whether such factors exist, or if the role of “culture shock” disrupts a mosaic (Pellegrino, 2005). Hall (1983) points out that there is a difference between ‘one-thing-at-a-time cultures’ and the ‘everything at one time’ poly-chronic cultures of Thailand. This framed our interest to consider the relationship between international students and their cultural integration into Thailand.

After all, some *Ajarn* consider teaching of loyalty to the nation as a priority, whilst others do not provide accurate information to fulfil government metrics (Lao, 2015). Unsurprisingly, government agendas dominate upon writing, in a landscape of cultural reform, protest and disagreement within Thailand, raising new implications for international education (Day et al., 2021; Day and Skulsuthavong, 2021b). So, our methodology emerged from noting educational centralisation in Thailand, affecting culture and curriculum design, which could impact international students sense of cultural integration. We set out to study if multiculturalism in Thai HE, something not well-explored, was resistant to cultural assimilation in our setting. Likewise, we sought to highlight which tools are needed for critical discussion about the Thai higher education community. To this end, our analysis of data reported in this paper asked:

- What cultural assimilation can we detect amongst international students within a Thai private HEI institutional and does this reflect other cultural settings?
- How similar are international students and Thai students with regard to 'assimilative' mechanisms, such as study methods?
- Are research instruments drawn from cultural integration studies helpful to studying Thai HE?

We felt if differences were notable when analysed, it would answer these questions, helping Thai HE towards the aim of a 'modern, cutting edge skills hub of knowledge capital' (Day and Skulsuthavong, 2019; OECD, 2016). This idea is found in Thai higher educational policy QA and academic metrics (OHEC, 2014). Both influence *Thailand 4.0* concerning direction and potential for successful integration of overseas students.

3.1 Research Instruments

Within the study, we utilised various methods that produced considerable data towards answering questions such as these; this paper presents an 'initial snapshot' of our findings drawn from two of six instruments, with numerous themes:

- Demographic questions (11 questions)
- Survey questions adapted from the National Youth Survey (1987) and National Survey of Student Engagement (1998) (16 questions)
- Survey questions adapted from the National Survey of Student Engagement (18 pages, 115 questions). This survey was developed in the United States and focuses on student engagement with undergraduate experiences (Coates and McCormick 2014)
- Survey via CEFR (2018) Self-assessment Grid for language facility (five self-ratings in English and Thai versions, three in Chinese)
- Survey via Hofstede (2011) "Cultural Compass" rating system (purchased licenses) used to compare culturally-themed questions to internationally equivalent evidence
- Qualitative interviews

In this paper, we present insights drawn from an emphasis on two particular responses in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and an overview of data from Hofstede's Cultural Compass. These surveys are validated outside Thailand. The NSSE reflects values, culture, and traditions of higher education in the United States. The survey was first administered in 2000 and is now used in about 1600 universities in the US. Embedded in the survey are assumptions about student relationships between faculty, other students, and administration. Patterns surveyed explore 'high impact' practices relevant to Thailand, because they examine study modes, suggested above as culturally integrative. As for the Hofstede Cultural Compass instrument, it too is widely used in studies of international business culture; results from countries are published widely, though often not directly compared to education.

Development of the Cultural Compass as a research method and instrument began with Geert Hofstede's studies in the 1960s. By the 1990s, he had developed well-validated survey instruments now widely used. There are six dimensions to Hofstede's Cultural Compass; we acknowledge each has limited scope in applicability to small samples. In the results and discussion section of our paper, we could not validate the internationally published results by Hofstede, a point which we find interesting for its own sake. However, the need to consider a wider 'sociological' approach to educational studies is long established, for example, in studies by Durkheim (1956; 1973) that emphasise learning culture and identity.

3.2 Participant Demographics

Participants studied at Payap University over the academic year of 2018. Our sample included 179 students who took the four surveys, including 32 students selected as a sub-group who participated in Hofstede's rating system. 18 students participated in qualitative interviews. General Education (GE) courses were identified as the point of access. Participation was by open invitation. Survey takers spoke Thai and

English. In the case of Chinese students, English-Chinese translation was used. Chinese and English versions of the Hofstede survey were also available. Payap University is a non-selective, non-profit university open to students, at the international undergraduate level, with basic English fluency (i.e. a TOEFL 61 / IELTS 6.0 / Proficiency B2). To this end, the interviews drew on in-situ observation (Holloway, 1997). As expressed in Table 1 Thai/Chinese control groups improved data triangulation in a study setting where familial etiquette places parents, teachers and older generations as ‘rule-generating institutions’ (Waters, 2012; Foucault, 1977).

Table 1: Sample Age Demographics by Study Group Type

	Mean Age	N.	S. D.	Median
Chinese	20.4	54	1.57	19
International	22.4	88	6.532	19
Thai	19.4	36	1.348	19
Total	22.0	179	4.858	19

We wanted to minimise concerns that institutions construct a ‘habitus of behaviour’, which can affect validity. This explains why assimilation is desirable for ‘otherness’ as it keeps an educational habitus stable (Foucault, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1976). In our study, the sample of females and males was roughly equal in the Chinese and International groups (Table 2) yet in the Thai control group there were 60% males. The population in the International group was 30% Thai (25/89), with 9% (10/89) indicating a dual identity with Thai/western nationality, with a spread of students engaged in different majors across the groups (Table 3).

Table 2: Sample Gender Demographics by Study Group Type

	Chinese	International	Thai	Total
Female	29	44	15	88
Male	25	44	21	90
Missing/NA	0	1	0	1
Total	54	89	36	179

Consequently, our study took place with students integrated under one of several degree programs, with diverse nationalities. We engaged a cosmopolitan population, with numerous first-languages (Table 4). The convenience nature of the sample accessed via GE had a slant towards the Communication Arts (29/36) and Economics (7/36) majors in the Thai group (Table 3). This does not reflect the ‘uptake’ of majors at the university. Nevertheless, we hope our findings offer an understanding of cultural nuances in Thai HE.

Table 3: Program Major of Students in Sample vs. Study Group Type

	Chinese	International	Thai	Total
Communication Arts	0	0	29	29
English Communication	0	20	0	20
Economics	0	0	7	7
English	4	1	0	5
Exchange Student	0	1	0	1
Finance/ Banking	24	0	0	24
Hospitality	0	33	0	33
International Business Management	0	22	0	22
Information Technology	0	10	0	10
Thai for Communication	25	0	0	25
Part-time student	0	1	0	1
Missing/NA	1	1	0	2
Total	53	89	36	179

Table 4: First Language Spoken Demographics vs. Study Group Type

	Chinese	International	Thai	Total
Burmese/Myanmar	0	3	0	3
Cantonese	0	1	0	1
Cebuano	0	1	0	1
Chinese	54	12	0	66
English	0	19	0	19
German	0	2	0	2
Hmong	0	1	0	1
Italian	0	1	0	1
Japanese	0	5	0	5
Kachin	0	3	0	3
Karen	0	3	0	3
Khmer	0	1	0	1
Korean	0	4	0	4

Table 4: First Language Spoken Demographics vs. Study Group Type (Continued)

	Chinese	International	Thai	Total
Lao	0	1	0	1
Pennsylvania German	0	1	0	1
Russian	0	2	0	2
Shan	0	2	0	2
Thai	0	24	35	24
Tibetan	0	1	0	1
Yong	0	0	1	1
Missing/ NA	0	2	0	0
Total	54	89	36	179

3.3. Data Analysis

As studies go, it is unusual to find Tibetan native-speakers learning alongside a Pennsylvania German student or sub-regional languages such as Burmese (3), Kachin (3), Karen (3) and Shan (2). The quantitative survey data was analysed using SPSS 3.23 and interviews transcribed by native speakers. Quantitative results included interval, ordinal, and nominal data. Appropriate measures of central tendency were used to evaluate age distributions. T-tests were used to compare differences between the means of the International, Chinese, and Thai students Hofstede scores. Chi-Square was used for assessing the comparisons between the three groups of students in many NSSE tables using Likert scales. Chi-square involves comparing observed frequencies in cells, and comparing them to an “expected frequency”, which assumes that there is only random variation between the groups tested. The Chi-square statistic is generated to tell whether or not there is more variation than would normally be expected at a particular level of significance. The findings use a minimum 0.05 level to evaluate variation within the cell matrix. They include the “expected” value in each cell so that the reader can evaluate which cell has the most significant difference between the observed and expected values.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chinese and International groups reflected a large proportion of the students at Payap University (i.e. approximately 100 Chinese students, and 200 international students). Thai students forged a larger proportion (approximately 3000 Thai students at that time), stratified because we sampled via convenience access Communication Arts and Economics majors. Latour (2007) would lend us the perspective suggesting networks unfold from mobilisation in response to shared problems; for example, the way students study or engage with teachers and each other creates stable networks. Classroom cohesion lends itself towards cultural integration, as discussed in our literature review. So, within a wide range of data and multiple questions used across the different instruments, we have within this paper elected to discuss data that directly relates to the concepts of cohesion and identity as related to cultural assimilation, discussed as a framework above.

4.1 Discussing the NSSE Survey Findings

The NSSE survey was used to establish differences in how students from the three groups understood educational experiences. NSSE questions attitudes toward teaching, types of assignment, and time in further study, for example. There were differences, particularly with how students reported using their time, and interest in studying in groups. We suspect that some of the differences are due to language barriers to communication, and thus integration. Most of the international and Chinese students are studying in a foreign language. This was not an issue for the Thai students in the Thai curriculum, of course. As a tool, the NSSE effectively created detailed data, adaptable to the Payap University and wider Thai HE by eliminating questions peculiar to American university culture about the “Greek” system, American specific race categories, and particular learning/teaching styles.

Hence, NSSE questions reflecting a Thai HE setting need to be developed in future work, such as the importance of rituals, values/moral education, nation-state political views. In Payap University, the collegial structure is in fact similar to the USA. Indeed, comparing existing NSSE data to Thailand, and our work, is one way forward. In choosing how best to consider whether study methods and classroom components influenced cultural integration, we opted to present data related to study with each other, and their relationship to the teacher alongside broader family. This best fit our questions expressed in the methodology of this paper. We seek to offer a brief analysis purposefully; when framed in the above discussion the data speaks for itself. However, we acknowledge this requires some familiarity with both tools.

Table 5 reflects international student emphasis on preparing for class, some 11-15 hours per working week against six to 10 in the Chinese grouping. Thai, likewise, placed far less emphasis on preparing for class

but had greater off-site working and familial responsibilities. Table 6 shows that Chinese students were often likely to talk about and interact course discussion with others, with 39.2% of Chinese students exceeding 28.2% of international students. Whereas Thai students greatly exceeded both; 72% of Thai agreed they often would ask questions or contribute to course discussion. This is intriguing, as critical thinking, discussion, and dialogue are features of westernised pedagogy, yet have been established as less likely occurring in Thailand due to a lack of educational development. This may suggest a relationship between the Thai student and relationships with Ajarn not necessarily observed by casual observation. There is evidence to suggest, then, that Thai students in our case break norms of accepting their teacher at face value and question critically.

Simultaneously, this suggests that the proximity of the Ajarn, who are a revered figure in Thai culture, may be getting less central to learning. Chinese and International students were seen in qualitative observations to express more independent learning and communicate more actively within their national groups. Hence, Table 6 goes some way to suggest this gradual pedagogical shift may be valid. All three NSSE questions, therefore, help us to address some insight to our research questions framed. Firstly, we can see evidence of cultural assimilation amongst all three groups by the similar distribution of their answers. Yet, the variance between International and Thai students suggests some independence is retained, highlighting the value of the NSSE as a complex instrument for exploring Thai cultural integration and learning.

Table 5: NSSE Question “Median Number of Hours Doing Different Things for Each of the Three Groups” with Response in “Hours per Week” at Each Task

	Chinese	International	Thai
Preparing for Class	6-10	11-15	1-5
Working with organizations	1-5	1-5	3-7
Work for pay on-campus	0	0	1-5
Work for pay off-campus	0	0	1-5
Community volunteer	0	0	1-5
Relaxing and socializing	16-20	11-15	6-10
Dependent care	0	1-5	6-10
Commuting	1-5	1-5	1-5
How much of the preparation time is assigned reading	Some	Some	About Half

If adapted correctly, we contend, based on our findings, that the NSSE has relevance and applicability to Thai HE and can be used to gain insight into cultural integration. Our study’s timing, 2018, was before scenes of mass protest driven by university students began in 2020 in response to various issues, including the 2019 election and then digital human rights (Day and Skulsuthavong, 2021a; Day and Skulsuthavong, 2022). Featured in the demonstrations still ongoing in 2021 were also complaints from high school and university studies about the authoritarian nature of Thai secondary and higher education, emancipated by ideas and education from the Internet. We can see that despite the presence of efforts found in GE courses, which focus mainly on study skills alongside nationalist education, the NSSE examples utilised in this paper suggest that international students approach learning-adjacent activities in different ways. As seen in Table 5, median responses in hours per week showed that Thai students spent 6-10 hours a week engaged in socialisation. International students had a much higher rating of 11-15 median hours. Whilst commuting was an equally weighted response, suggesting students were clustered in similar areas to each other, there were differences in external work roles that impacted integration. ‘Typical’ international student focused much on their studies, based on Table 5, and preparing for class, but had fewer obligations, as did the Chinese control group.

Thai students, it seemed, had less free time, in line with expectations of traditional familial responsibilities, alongside working, which limited class preparation time and, potentially, academic integration. This idea is reinforced by Table 6, which addresses course topics and ideas discussed with faculty members. Table 5 shows Thai students were forced, perhaps because of additional responsibility, to spend more significant time reading and thus in self-directed study than engaging in critical discussion or socialising with peers and the teacher. Yet, there were similarities in breaking of norms concerning power distance between students and Ajarn; asking questions and engaging over course topics with faculty does not fit the hierarchy proposed as existing within Thai HE (Lao, 2015). For example, we found that Chinese (45.1%), international (52.5%) and Thai (50.0%) all shared similar responses to engaging with teachers, implying power distance was reduced. Yet, whilst similarities across both the international and Thai/Chinese control groups can be found, there are still differences suggestive that students were aligned in some ways, but not others, promoting a mosaic effect.

Significantly, we found that students created, as claimed by Chao and Moon (2005) ‘patterns of tiles’ less about ethnicity and gender, rather particular ways of either studying, balancing their student/work/personal lives and teacher engagement. What both Table 5 and Table 6 demonstrate is that,

just as with 'any colour picture', we found common points of unification that overlapped, yet had a sense of individuality in a cultural mosaic born from '(a) demographic, (b) geographic, and (c) associative features' of, in this instance, educational culture. So, put another way, students still retained their differences. Still, their engagement and relationships showed similarity enough to suggest cohesion as a group, perhaps identifying themselves as 'peers' rather than identical across all the key areas discussed, which would indicate cultural assimilation. After all, if GE and Thai HE seek to create uniformity we would expect to see closer patterns of shared identity present in the way learners engage. Variations found within the data, then, imply that ideological melting has been less effective.

Table 6: NSSE Question "Have You Ever Discussed Course Topics, Ideas, or Concepts with a Faculty Member Outside of Class?"

		Chinese	International	Thai	Total
Very Often	Count	1 (1.7)	4 (2.2)	0 (1.2)	5
	% Within Column	2.0%	6.0%	0%	3.2%
Often	Count	9 (13.2)	18 (17.4)	13 (9.4)	40
	% Within Column	17.6%	26.9%	36.1%	26.0%
Sometimes	Count	23 (25.5)	35 (33.5)	19 (18.0)	77
	% Within Column	45.1%	52.2%	52.8%	50.0%
Never	Count	18 (10.6)	10 (13.9)	4 (7.5)	32
	% Within Column	35.3%	14.9%	11.1%	20.8%
Total	Count	51	67	36	154
	% Within Column	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-square 14.028, df = 6, Significance 0.029 (two-tailed), Missing Data = 25.

4.2 Discussing Hofstede's Compass Findings

Some insightful, yet complex, data can be drawn from our use of the Compass Survey from Hofstede, which indicates only a small variance between the students from the three groups. This situation is different from what was expected based on other Hofstede's studies (See: Hofstede Institute, 2018). These differences described below were statistically significant even with the small sample used, and unlikely to reflect random differences. The differences highlight one critical insight, that International, Chinese, and Thai students have similar responses to each other, but deviate from the reference data provided by the Hofstede Institute (2018). We measured all six of Hofstede's variables, i.e. Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term Orientation, and Indulgence, measured against international controls for Thai and Chinese found in prior studies. Much has been made of the pervasiveness of global youth culture crossing national boundaries. This data points to this being the case; students at Payap are more similar to each other on each of the variables, than the standard control group reported on by Hofstede (Table 7; 8).

Remarkable was the difference between the low level of Individualism reported by Hofstede (20 for both), and the higher values reported for the Thai (67.3) and Chinese (61.8) students at Payap University (Table 7), which are roughly the same. Notable differences are summarised in Table 8, including Hofstede's published data for China and Thailand. Chinese and Thai students have variance with respect to Long-term Orientation (difference 55 units), Uncertainty Avoidance (difference 34 units), and Masculinity (difference 32 units). The Hofstede compass offers a useful way to correlate national boundaries, with cultural concepts. We administered 32 Hofstede questionnaires; Chinese and Thai at Payap, were similar for Individualism (difference 0 units), and Power Avoidance (difference 16 units). Also notable is that both countries are at extremes with Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance compared to other countries in the control data and study control groups (Table 7, 8).

We acknowledge this tool is less useful for Payap's International Students, as there is no clear control group to measure against. However, our data offers a benchmark for such students in Thailand. The statistical t-tests of the obtained data, shown in (Table 7; 8), are reported by Hofstede for Thailand and China. 4/6 variables were outside the 95% confidence interval for the Thai students, and 6/6 for the Chinese students. In other words, the Payap students were significantly different from the reference data. This suggests Chinese and Thai students at Payap were significantly different from the Hofstede control, despite the extremely small sample size; the number sampled at Payap (10 Thai, 9 Chinese respectively) was low. Yet, despite this low number, there was a significant difference between what would be expected, and what we observed at Payap University. The response to Hofstede's "individualism" question was a bit surprising given Hofstede, and stereotypes about the Asian cultures being not very "individualistic". Naturally, we explored this question in the qualitative interview. We did this to understand how our students evaluated their situation, even though the three groups did not score much differently on the "individualism" measure. Reported across (Table 7; 8)

is that students from the three groups had similar scores on Hofstede's measure, but individualism, in general, and identity, in particular, stood out for International students, which included both students from Thailand, as well as from other countries.

From a theoretical perspective, Hofstede's six variables are inadequate for understanding the younger population of Asians at a university like Payap, except perhaps in reference to an older generation, shown in for example ideas of power distance (i.e. questions that generate this score relate to their parents, or perhaps Ajarn!). This reinforces an idea raised in the NSSE findings, that youth in Asia are changing in their attitudes toward the other Hofstede variables, including that Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term Orientation, and Indulgence. The 2021 protests led by Thai students, among others, perhaps reflect fundamentally different views from their parents or Ajarn. It has been suggested and researched, considerably, that new, younger generations of students see themselves as educated by the Web, and those they connect to within it (Day, 2019). This study seems to extend even beyond the original setting of its experimentation and confirm, in 2018, that a massive generational change was building not just for the Thai, but also for the Chinese youth who come to Payap. This is still the case upon writing (Day and Skulsuthavong, 2021a; Day and Skulsuthavong, 2022).

The utility of Hofstede's Cultural Compass for future studies is debatable but does have relevance in seeking to see and consider whether 'older' instruments that have been tried and tested have as much relevance in a landscape where 'culture' is inherently socio-technical, a point raised likewise across work by Latour (2007). Similar evidence was found in research studies and interviews carried out with academics in Thai HE, who questioned the many complex and overlapping systems impacting Thai educational academic culture, as well as changes between and within Ajarn themselves (Lao, 2015). We were limited because we could not question if the Cultural Compass values change across students' four years of study, which would have offered richer insight. However, more licenses would need to be purchased, an expensive proposition. As a tool, the above approach shows cultural diversity across groups requires a broader framework that allows researchers to study intercultural actors' views and gain a better understanding of their beliefs and opinions.

To evaluate aspects not covered by Hofstede (2011) and this is a vulnerability that inclines a macro-focus not necessarily suited to more deeply focused case studies that involve considerable detail and a unique, less reproducible setting. The control data for Table 8 was generated by the Hofstede Institute (2018) and offered a metric but was not exclusively intended to study student integration. Hence, we used the compass framework to study conceptual interpretations of students concerning their cultural identity and cultural rationalisation. The extent of the statistical difference measured against national control groups of responses shows a pattern of alignment, or disconnection, insightful to a researcher. Alone it would not be enough, which is why other tools were utilised, such as the NSSE student engagement survey that situates culture within the setting specific to the student. This tries to build upon an idea echoed in Hofstede's emphasis on cultural individualism. The person-centric orientation of Hofstede's compass emphasises insight despite using small sample groups against a much larger study, which we acknowledge may impact our data's validity.

However, the usefulness of the tool, if engaged nationally, could be valuable for Thai studies. Taken in isolation, Hofstede's toolkit seems to be very generalised, ensuring sweeping statements concerning the study of culture, often in a case-specific, such as business, environment. The usefulness of this applied to the study of cultural mosaics is more debatable; it would be fair to evaluate the tool as useful, shown in it generating data, but our capacity to make confident comparisons is limited further by the fact that Hofstede's work is intended for much larger sample sizes, spread across a national or organisational scale, rather than microcosm of both. Yet, when combined with the NSSE it does present an interesting contrast, as is the difference to what we found against what Hofstede suggested we could expect.

Table 7: Hofstede Institute (2018) 'Cultural Compass' Reports Measured Against Study Group Type Sample

College/Sub College Group		Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence
Intl. College	Mean	48.75	59.67	57.75	47.50	61.33	61.33
	N.	12	12	12	12	12	12
	SD	10.226	14.151	13.824	17.228	11.324	11.324
Thai	Mean	52.70	67.30	52.80	46.10	53.40	53.40
	N.	10	10	10	10	10	10
	SD	13.334	10.328	16.936	12.635	19.311	19.311
Chinese	Mean	44.89	61.75	50.00	51.44	59.11	59.11
	N	9	9	9	9	9	9
	SD	11.752	11.914	12.796	11.928	17.525	17.525
Total	Mean	48.90	62.74	53.90	48.19	58.13	58.13
	N	31	31	31	31	31	31
	SD	11.754	12.420	13.769	14.515	14.124	15.895

Table 8: Comparison of Hofstede Statistics with Research Sample Statistics

	Thailand Hofstede Figure (2018)	Thai Research Sample (N=10)	95% Confi. Interval	China Hofstede Figure (2018)	Chinese Research Sample (N=9)	95% Confi. Interval
Power Distance	64*	52.7	43.2-62.2	80*	44.1	35.9-53.9
Individualism	20*	67.3	59.9-74.7	20*	61.8	52.7-70.9
Masculinity	34*	50.9	41.1-60.8	66*	45.4	35.2-55.7
Uncertainty	64*	52.8	40.7-64.9	30*	50.0	40.16-50.8
Long Term Orientation	32*	46.1	37.1-55.1	87*	51.4	42.3-60.6
Indulgence	45*	53.4	39.6-67.2	24*	59.1	45-72.6

5. CONCLUSION

In presenting our data, we leave much interpretation to the reader. Concerning the questions that frame our data, we have shown assimilation elements among international students within a Thai private HEI via NSSE. We observed differences concerning other cultural settings, via Hofstede's control comparison. Undoubtedly, we addressed that some assimilation comes from 'melting' students but this did not seem directly linked to GE practice, rather reducing variances between international students and Thai students concerning 'assimilative' mechanisms, such as study methods. We think too that the "mosaic" described in the literature review better explains the status quo than an assimilation ideology embedded in the General Education curriculum at Payap University, or for that matter in other countries accepting international students. Hofstede's (2011) Cultural Compass model and dimensions are useful, but as a tool, they lack personalization, and culturally-focused nuance (Low et al., 2020). This is especially true when describing Thai HE, which is driven by unique cultural groups that come together in specific circumstances; with this in mind, with more data in our research set to explore and further evaluate to support this claim, a direction is found (Waters, 2019).

Hence, we suspect a need to examine a more detailed study of Thai HEI institutional and international culture, as temporarily contingent 'actor-network mosaics.' These challenge cultural practices in Thai education, society and culture, as an antecedent for behavioural alignment and cultural adoption (Bourdieu, and Passeron, 1977; Lonner and Adamopoulos, 1997; Latour 2007). One way forward from our tentative position, is to continue re-examining our data to track students' relationships alongside how, where and why such relationships cross cultural boundaries. This is necessary because the data presented in this paper is quantitative; qualitative data is available (Waters 2019). Mosaics are seen more easily with such qualitative data, which we collected and can be used to build upon this paper, so suggest another direction for our research. Nonetheless, we sought to contrast English-speaking "international students" with Thai and Chinese students, and found some interesting relationships within our study.

Moreover, our English-speaking students are, themselves, international, if taken from a non-colonial, multi-heritage sense of nationality. So, a mosaic, coming together. Based on this paper's insights, we posit a picture will emerge that echoes the data we have presented: international students culturally integrate over problems in Thai higher education, or practices in the classroom, but socialise with high individuality, in home-country cultural groups. Our insights are especially important as reform of education is underway at a time where students are also at the forefront of discussion regarding their disagreement with long-standing aspects of Thai culture (Day and Skulsuthavong, 2021b; Day et al., 2021). The data offered here is, therefore, useful to educators practicing in the higher education classroom: this often conjures an assumption of melted down, singular cohorts of scholars, whose cultural identities are replaced as 'students'. Consequently, Thai HE cannot fall back on old cultural habits of hierarchical domination, hazing and ideology and also be "international." As shown in our data, these methods do very little to extinguish that which is important to students, their identity, as both global digital citizens and members of a new multifaceted cultural generation.

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