

ARTICLE

A Case Study of a Chinese Program in Thai Higher Education

Yong Tan*

College of Foreign Languages (International School), Southwest Forestry University, Kunming 650224, China

ABSTRACT

The Chinese Program is an adaptation and initiative of Thai higher education institutions (HEIs) for Chinese international students, borrowed from International Programs to embrace the trend of the “One Belt and One Road Initiative” (BRI), and was subsequently adopted by most ASEAN higher education institutions (HEIs). This study applied a comparative educational experiment to explore the similarities and distinctions between Chinese and International Programs in Thai HEIs, with a case study from a top Thai private international university. The study conducted the teaching process for one whole semester in the same course, with two batches instructed in Chinese and English, respectively. At the end of the semester, the research found that the Chinese Program originated from the International program, which shared the same syllabus, curriculum, and even teaching methods; the Chinese program could get similar effects to the international program and be a win-win approach to China-ASEAN collaboration.

Keywords: Chinese Program; Higher Education; Thailand; Chinese International Students

INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization and internationalization, obtaining opportunities to study abroad has become increasingly popular among younger generations. UNESCO reported that Asia is becoming the largest source of international students providing area in the world^[1].

Compared with the traditional target areas for international students, such as America, Britain and Australia, the regional education hubs are also attracting increasing numbers of students from neighboring countries and areas.

Transformation of Higher Education in Thailand

The past few decades have witnessed the fast transformation of Higher Education in Thailand. Thai HEIs have a long tradition of engaging with international trends.

The roles, structures, and responsibilities of public and private HEIs in Thailand have changed dramatically in response to demands for increased quality and student participation. Major reforms are related to government organization, quality assurance, institutional autonomy, and admission systems. Global university rankings show that Thai HEIs are in the wide range of “Higher Education” quality. This also means that Thai HEIs could meet the different demands of international students, particularly diverse Chinese students. As Chinese students constitute a large population of the international student market in Thailand, both public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have adjusted their programs to meet the escalating demand from Chinese international students. And the Chinese programs, which were the most attractive highlight provided in Thai HEIs, are emerging rapidly.

Thailand Initiated Chinese Programs

The Education Office of the Chinese Embassy in Thailand

*Corresponding Author:

Yong Tan, E-mail: tyswfc@126.com

Received: 7 January 2026; Revised: 11 January 2026; Accepted: 22 April 2026

<https://doi.org/10.67229/stemer.26080022>

 This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, which allows others to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format non-commercially, as long as the author is credited and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

and defined Chinese Programs as all programs or schools that involve textbooks or teaching activities in Chinese language and may accept Chinese students, including but not limited to all-Chinese programs, Thai-Chinese programs, English-Chinese programs, and Thai-English-Chinese trilingual programs^[2]. These emerging programs in Thai HEIs were apparently “borrowed” from English-instructed International Programs designed for international students.

Stimulation from “One Belt and One Road initiative”

As China has promoted the “One Belt and One Road initiative” (BRI), more and more Chinese families have become interested in overseas study opportunities for their college-aged children to follow this policy trend. This has contributed to a rapid increase in the number of international students from China since 2013, coinciding with the implementation of the BRI.

Regional Education Hub Strategy

Accordingly, Thailand declared its intention to establish itself as the regional education hub in ASEAN countries for the target of the following years. These factors have brought both positive and negative trends to Thai Higher Education. More and more Chinese students have been admitted to Thai HEIs; it was reported that more than 70% of Chinese students in Thailand were recruited by Thai private HEIs^[3]. On the other hand, the fierce competition for student recruitment has resulted in some unhealthy and blind competition.

RESEARCH GAP

In December 2016, six private Thai HEIs were warned by the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE), and three were even identified as being of particular concern. Meanwhile, the Education Office of the Chinese Embassy in Thailand declared an education risk alert for the mentioned Thai HEIs and sent the Management Norms of Chinese Programs to all the related Thai HEIs.

In ASEAN countries, skepticisms have emerged in recent years regarding the quality of Chinese programs of Southeast Asian academic degrees since 2023, particularly doctorates, largely stems from a combination of institutional quality assurance issues, the proliferation of “fast-track” programs targeting the Chinese market, and the resulting public perception of these credentials as “low-quality”, “Unofficial degree” or “Non-accredited degree” (“water” degrees in Chinese saying).

Official Warnings and Quality Assurance Failures

The Chinese Ministry of Education (through the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange) has re-

peatedly issued public warnings and strengthened verification procedures for several Southeast Asian universities. For example, institutions like Philippine Eternal University and its branch campus have been flagged for offering low-quality online courses and for providing conflicting or false information during verification checks. In one case, Thailand’s Phitsanulok University had its degree authentication service suspended because it provided “conflicting and inaccurate information” to the authentication center. These official actions publicly signal that the quality of education at these institutions cannot be reliably guaranteed.

The “low-quality Degree” Phenomenon and Commercialization

A significant factor is the rise of “fast-track” or “water” master’s and doctoral programs. These programs are often aggressively marketed in China with promises of low admission thresholds, fast completion times, and minimal residency requirements. This has created a perception that these degrees are easily obtainable commodities. Reports of universities in China “batch-hiring” dozens of PhD graduates from these Southeast Asian institutions have fueled public outrage and anxiety. This phenomenon leads to the belief that the degree’s primary value is a purchased credential for career advancement rather than a symbol of rigorous academic achievement.

Uneven Academic Standards and Perception

Concerns about the actual academic rigor are supported by research. A 2025 study of Chinese doctoral students in Southeast Asian developing countries found that many expressed disappointment with the academic standards. They noted that “relatively low admission and graduation standards” had “diminished the symbolic value of the doctoral degree”, making it harder for them to leverage the degree for career success back in China. Furthermore, the region itself faces challenges in creating a harmonized and uniformly high-quality higher education system, with persistent disparities in resources and quality assurance frameworks across different countries and institutions.

Link to Perceived “Rigged Hiring”

The controversy is also intensified by public anxiety over “rigged hiring” in China’s public sector. When a highly prestigious hospital lists a single PhD from a repeatedly “warned” university alongside graduates from top Chinese medical schools, it may trigger suspicion that the position was specifically tailored for an internal candidate who simply needed any doctorate to meet bureaucratic requirements.

While skepticism is widespread, it is not without its critics. Some argue that the blanket dismissal of all South-

east Asian degrees is a form of “knowledge discrimination” that ignores the existence of reputable and academically rigorous institutions in the region. They contend that the reputation of a few questionable programs has unfairly tarnished all institutions from the region. However, the scale of the issues flagged by official bodies has made this a prominent feature of the current perception.

However, there are 11 member countries in the ASEAN family around Southeast Asia, and the education systems and backgrounds are diverse, and the flexible application system enrollment is quite different, which makes the skepticism itself untenable.

To narrow this gap, this research traces the development of Chinese Programs back to Thailand, where they originated, and selects a leading private international university as a case study to conduct an educational experiment examining the validity and effectiveness of Chinese Programs.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore the similarities and distinctions between Chinese and International Programs in Thai HEIs. Descriptive research was applied to describe the overall educational experiment, while comparative research was used to examine the characteristics of the Chinese program and the differences with the international program in Thailand.

The researcher of this study was granted by a top Thai private international university to conduct the whole one-semester teaching process and was appointed to teach the same course to two batches instructed in Chinese and English, respectively. At the end of the semester, the Teaching Affairs Department provided the official teaching evaluations as feedback, which was sound evidence to justify this research objective.

The researcher conducted parallel experiments involving the Chinese Program and International Program at the bachelor's level, including their daily academic management, to observe and compare the two programs throughout the semester. The experiments consisted of three parts: curriculum design, course instruction, and evaluation.

To examine the quality of the Chinese Program, one 3-credit Fundamental Course for Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) named Organization and Management was offered, and both groups were given to 10 Chinese students with Chinese-language instruction and 10 non-Chinese students (mainly Thais and Burmese) with English-language instruction, respectively, in the same session in the same semester.

During the teaching process, the researcher conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, including one-on-one and group chats, with all the respondents to collect their thoughts and ideas about this course. At the end of this course, the researcher organized an on-site field trip for the two batches to the East Economic Corridor (EEC)'s Valeo Plant in Thailand. This activity was intended to allow students to apply the knowledge learned in class to a real-world setting; meanwhile, any differences between the two groups could be observed throughout the process.

To avoid unnecessary tension and interruption, students from two parallel classes were not informed that they were participating in an educational experiment throughout the process, which could help minimize potential effects on equality, independence, and accuracy.

CURRICULAR DESIGN

Southeast Asian Countries prefer to adopt and apply the English-taught international programs in HEIs, and Thailand is no exception[4]. All the syllabi and curricula are aligned with the International programs' requirements, which are delivered in English. For the Bachelor's curriculum, there are about 136 credits within a flexible three- to four-year curriculum. As Chinese programs are specialized for Chinese international students, who do not strictly follow the score of the International English Proficiency Test, English-intensive courses and crash courses on Thai language and culture are added to meet the graduation requirements and facilitate daily communication. These are followed by intermediate courses taught in Chinese or bilingually and senior-level courses taught in English.

Compared to English-taught international programs, courses in Chinese Programs are more intensive in three stages as follows. As the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) is the most popular program for Chinese international students, this chart refers to this program (Figure 1).

After sorting the curriculum, it can be easily seen that all the courses in the three levels are consistent with gradual adaptation to the requirements of the international program. In other words, the Chinese program is rooted in the international program and ultimately pursues the same educational objective.

COMPARATIVE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT

The experiment was conducted during the intermediate stage of the BBA program since those Chinese students

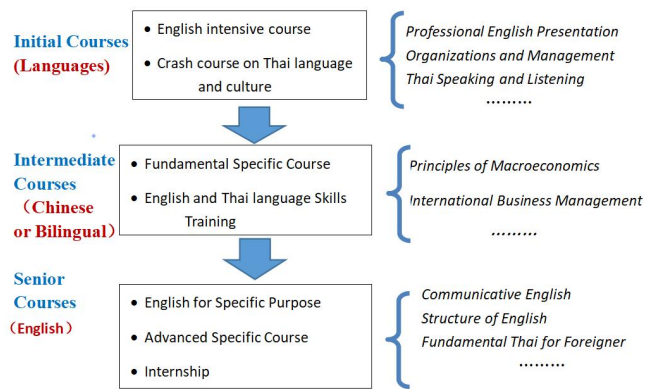


Figure 1. General Chinese Program Bachelor Curriculum (around 136 Credits)

were adjusting and immersing themselves in the English instruction environment. The two batches were distinctively from the Chinese and English programs in the same semester and in the same university. To meet the requirements of the course description, the researcher prepared the course syllabus and teaching materials, established the classroom rules and teaching plan, and designed an evaluation process based on a final field trip and workshop involving the two parallel classes. The comparison therefore focused on Chinese and non-Chinese students and, correspondingly, Chinese and International Programs.

Guideline of the Chosen Course
Course Syllabus of MG 1002 Organization and Management^[5]
Course Code: MG1002 **Credit:** 3.0

Course Description: This course introduces basic concepts and practices of management, including the environment of business operations, business processes, business organization and control, formation and implementation of business plans, as well as major functional areas of operations, marketing, finance, information systems, and human resources.

Course Objectives: The objectives of this course are to enable students to define management; to describe the nature and scope of management; to know the difference between management and administration; to understand various levels of management; and to describe the various skills that are necessary for successful managers.

Teaching/Learning Methods: Lecture and discussion; Cooperative learning; Brainstorming; Demonstration; Practicum/Project

Activities/AssignmentsIn Class Outside Class Via network system

Project/Lab report; Oral/Poster presentation/Exhibition

Group/Individual report; Discussion

Autonomous learning via online media; Exercise; Field Trip

TEACHING/LEARNING MATERIALS

Text/Handout; PowerPoint; Electronics and website media; Recommended Readings are related Texts, Articles and Websites. (Table 1)

Table 1: Teaching plan of MG 1002 Organization and Management*

Week	Topic/Activity	Venue
1	Introduction	Classroom
2	Definition of Management	Classroom
3	Characteristics of Management	Classroom
4	Management Functions/ the Process of Management	Classroom
5	Nature of Management	Classroom
6	Management Vs. Administration	Classroom
7	Levels of Management	Classroom
8	Managerial Skills	Classroom
9	The Manager and his job	Classroom
10	Principles of Management	Classroom
11	Significance of Management	Classroom
12	Definition of Organization	Classroom
13	Organization Chart	Classroom
14	Organizational Behaviour	Classroom
15	Team Building	Classroom
16	Case study	Classroom
17	Field Trip	Valeo Rongyong Plant
18	Workshop and Summary	Auditorium

Note: * The study plan is subject to change in order to accomplish course requirements.

Classroom Rules/Policies and Academic Dishonesty

Class attendance will be recorded for all classes. There is no late policy. Students who are more than 5 minutes late for class will be considered absent for that day and will lose their participation points.

Students are expected to attend at least 80% of the classes. Students with more than six absences will automatically fail the course.

Students are expected to wear proper attire according to the university's regulations. All students are required to wear a tucked-in white shirt and black pants for males and a knee-length skirt for females.

Table 2: Students' Satisfaction from Chinese Program and International Program on MG 1002: Organizations and Management (5 points, 10 samples for each program)

Evaluated Factors	Chinese Program	International Program
<i>Part 1: General Course Satisfaction</i>	<i>4.167</i>	<i>4.583</i>
1.1 Details and Contents of Course.	4.0	4.75
1.2 The lecturer's teaching.	4.5	4.75
1.3 Assignments in the class.	4.0	4.25
<i>Part 2: Course Management</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>4.543</i>
2.1 The teaching plan and teaching topic.	4.5	4.75
2.2 Began teaching a class on time.	4.3	4.75
2.3 Finished teaching a class on time.	4.2	4.5
2.4 Described the assessment method or collection points for this subject explicitly.	4.3	4.5
2.5 Recommend books for studying and research references.	4.5	4.75
2.6 Preparing and teaching the course as well.	4.6	4.75
2.7 Consultation outside the classroom as well.	4.4	4.5
<i>Part 3: Teaching Methodology</i>	<i>4.525</i>	<i>4.871</i>
3.1 Explanation and practical examples are adequate.	4.2	5
3.2 The opportunity for students to ask questions and give comments.	4.7	4.75
3.3 The lecturer can answer the questions and explain them clearly.	4.7	4.5
3.4 Explains effectively.	4.7	5
3.5 Able to communicate in English very well.	4.2	4.75
3.6 Advises and helps the students to understand the course contents or the subject.	4.6	4.75
3.7 Measures a student's understanding of course content regularly.	4.6	5
3.8 The lecturer is a good teacher.	4.5	4.5
<i>Part 4: Other Teaching Issues</i>	<i>4.6</i>	<i>4.75</i>
4.1 The lecturer always maintains a good relationship with the students.	4.6	4.75
4.2 The lecturer has checked the students' attendance regularly.	4.6	5
4.3 The lecturer has a teaching style that is diverse and interesting.	4.7	4.75
4.4 The lecturer has a good approach to creating self-learning for students in various fields.	4.3	4.75
4.5 The students clearly understand the course's objective.	4.7	4.75
4.6 Overview of the course content and the appropriate teaching are up-to-date with the current situation.	4.7	4.6
<i>Total Average Satisfaction Score (out of 5.0)</i>	<i>4.505</i>	<i>4.726</i>

Students are expected to turn off their mobile phones during class. Sending or receiving text messages during class is also prohibited. If this becomes an issue, the stu-

dent will be asked to leave class.

It is very important for students not to miss any classes since assignments and/or in-class activities and exercises will be different each week. Make-up assignments, in-class exercises, and tests are absolutely not allowed for absences.

Students are expected to submit all assignments and homework on time. Late assignments will not be evaluated. Make-up tests will not be provided.

Students are required to participate in all classroom activities actively and to complete their assignments on their own. If a paper or assignment is plagiarized, the student will automatically fail the course.

Plagiarism includes using another writer's words or ideas without proper citation, using a paper-writing service, having a friend or acquaintance write a paper for you, using material from agency flyers, brochures, or documents, or obtaining a paper or parts of a paper off the Internet. Using another person's words or ideas as one's own constitutes plagiarism, even if done unintentionally. Students are required to provide appropriate citations and references.

No food or beverages are allowed in classes, except for a bottle of water with a cap.

Academic Dishonesty includes representing the work of another person as one's own work or cheating by any means. Academic Dishonesty also includes aiding, concealing, or attempting such activity. The usual penalty is an "E" for the course and possible suspension from the university.

Student Performance Evaluation Devices and Grading

Student Performance is evaluated based on the following components: Class Attendance (10%); Class Participation/ Ethics (10%); Group Assignments/Homework (10%); Group Project and Presentation (20%); Mid-term Examination (20%); Final Examination (30%).

Accordingly, grades will be given based on the following score range: A (85 and up); B+ (80 – 84); B (75 – 79); C+ (70 – 74); C (65 – 69); D+ (60 – 64); D (55 – 59); E (54 and below).

Official Evaluation Feedbacks

The evaluation process was conducted anonymously by the Academic Division of the university. Criteria Standard Component for Assessment Results are designed by the Office of the Higher Education Commission, Ministry of Education in Thailand, and are classified as: Very Dissatisfied (0.00–1.50); Dissatisfied (1.50–2.50); Neither

Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied (2.51–3.50); Satisfied (3.51–4.50); Very Satisfied (4.51–5.00).

The evaluation feedback for MG 1002 Organization and Management is presented in Table 2.

The Satisfaction Score for both programs was higher than 4.5 (meets the Satisfied level), which indicates that there is no significant difference between International Programs and Chinese Programs. Meanwhile, strict adherence to the curriculum and syllabus during instruction enabled both programs to meet the intended quality requirements.

It can consequently be confirmed that the Curricular Design and Instruction Style of Chinese programs originated from International Programs and benefit from its management system. Compared to Chinese students, lecturers who instruct these kinds of courses in Chinese Programs find it more challenging to interpret materials from English into Chinese and to illustrate familiar cases from China for better understanding.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Chinese Programs are an adaptation by Thai HEIs for Chinese international students, developed by borrowing from existing International Programs; both share similar curricula and academic requirements. At the beginning of the first semester, the students were highly dependent on the consecutive interpretation from English to Chinese provided by the teaching assistant, and were nervous to speak out. However, after completing only 3 courses and with continuous encouragement and support, they gradually became accustomed to English-taught courses and began to present their own ideas with the additional language support and learning strategies provided by the Chinese teaching assistant.

It indicates that at the very beginning of any Chinese program, English intensive skill training and bilingual support between English and Chinese are necessary. Only when the Chinese students are able to follow the English instruction and express their free ideas in English, the whole program achieves its intended educational objectives.

Meanwhile, the extra Advanced English Course was provided by native English speakers to meet the Exit requirement of English proficiency; If Chinese students registered and passed this Advanced English course, they were not required to take any other English Proficiency test, such as TOEIC, IELTS, or TOEFL. In other words, Chinese international students who study in

Thailand do not necessarily face the same language barriers since Chinese programs emphasize practical learning through English instead of learning English. Yet, this practical language policy has sometimes been misunderstood by Chinese applicants as no language requirement.

Meanwhile, Thai HEIs have adopted Chinese programs as a strategy to attract Chinese students and support Thailand's development as a regional education hub, which may provide a win-win model for education collaboration between China and ASEAN countries.

DECLARATION

Acknowledgments

The author thanks all the respondents in the overall process of this research.

Author contributions

Yong Tan conceived the idea of the study, performed the experiments, analyzed the data, and wrote the paper.

Funding

No funding.

Ethical approval

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Not applicable. There are no human participants in this study, and no personal information and human images can be identified.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] UNESCO, (2026). Global flow of tertiary-level students. Retrieved from URL of <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.
- [2] Education Office of China Embassy in Thailand, (2016). Proposal of operation norms for Chinese programs at Thailand universities. Retrieved November 15, 2016, from URL of <http://www.th-chinaembassyedu.org/publish/portal25/tab5220/info129714.htm>
- [3] Dessoiff, A, (2016). Asia's burgeoning higher education hubs. Retrieved from URL of https://www.nafsa.org/_/file/_/ie_julaug12_asia.pdf.
- [4] Rattana L, (2015). A Critical Study of Thailand's Higher Education Reforms: The culture of borrowing. New York: Routledge.
- [5] Yong T, (2026). Study around Southeast Asia, World Book Publishing Ltd., Boulder, 272–278.