

Negotiating Identity: Bicultural Adaptation and Cultural Integration through Self-Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines bicultural adaptation between Thailand's openness and China's empiricism and elder rule. Integrating existential psychology (the courage to be disliked, loneliness) and self-regulation theory, it introduces "self-intervention" as a proactive process of self-monitoring, judgment, and reaction. Findings reveal a spiral model of disintegration, repair, and rebirth, reframing being disliked as authentic self-clarification for identity negotiation.

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1. Introduction

Self-development is a dynamic, temporally embedded process of cumulative learning and ongoing self-reconstruction. Far from being linear or passive, it involves the simultaneous dissolution of habitual behavioral frameworks and the active co-construction of identity through lived experience. Culture and environment function not as static backdrops but as constitutive forces-shaping perception, structuring relational possibilities, and mediating meaning-making. Drawing on the author's bicultural upbringing across Thailand's pluralistic, syncretic cultural landscape and China's empirically grounded, ritual-infused social order, this study examines how individuals negotiate cultural adaptation and identity formation at the interstices of divergent epistemic and normative systems.

This paper aims to explore the cultural adaptation and integration of individuals growing up in a dual cultural background of Thailand and China, the support points formed in the self through the acceptance of "the courage to be disliked" and loneliness, and the self-intervention and analysis using the expertise of organizational development. By constructing a self-intervention trajectory, this paper builds a growth experimental trajectory that integrates the philosophy of

time, existential psychology, and organizational development under the impact of culture and society, providing an introspective and reflective theoretical path for cross-cultural identity research.

2. Literature Review

This section takes the combination of three research theories - bicultural adaptation and cultural integration, "loneliness" and "courage" in existential psychology, and the A/B theory in philosophy of time - as the support for this study. At the same time, this research also fills in the blank areas in previous studies.

2.2 Bicultural Adaptation and Cultural Integration

The research on bicultural adaptation has always focused on how individuals negotiate their identities between two cultures (Sun No et al., 2010). The traditional model emphasizes "integration" as the optimal strategy, which means maintaining one's original cultural identity while actively learning the dominant culture. However, critics point out that these models often presuppose that culture is static and has clear boundaries, while ignoring the diversity within cultures and the individual's agency (Vora et al., 2019). In the context of Chinese culture, the "diffuse pattern," "rule-based order," and "elderly rule" (Fei Xiaotong, 1947/1992) profoundly reveal how individualism and hierarchical order regulate individuals in Chinese society. In this structure, the self-expansion of individuals is often suppressed. In contrast, Thai society is influenced by marginal politics and presents a convergence of Eastern and Western cultures. It has a feature of strong individual autonomy (Zhu Rui, 2023). However, existing studies have rarely explored how individuals actively negotiate themselves in two completely different cultural environments, especially as a resource for growth under cultural tension.

2.2 Existential Psychology: Loneliness, Courage and Self-Development

Existential psychology holds that individuals have a psychological response when facing freedom, loneliness, meaninglessness, and death (Yalom & Bugental, 1997). Meanwhile, Isolation, Loneliness, and Aloneness are the ways that truly mature behavior requires one to learn to coexist alone (Jacobsen, 2008). In East Asian societies, individuals often fall into the patterns of pleasing and complying due to the fear of being disliked (Fei Xiaotong, 1947/1992). Individual psychology posits that inferiority complex and the pursuit of recognition are the core driving forces of personality development (Adler, 1930). However, "the courage to be disliked" (Ichiro Kishimi & Koga Fumitake, 2019) has become rebellious behavior in the "perfectionism" of East Asian families. This study attempts to incorporate "the courage to be disliked" as an active ability to accept negation and reduce excessive reliance on external evaluations into the model of bicultural growth.

2.3 Philosophy of Time: Theory A vs Theory B

The concept of time is of fundamental significance for understanding self-growth. The A-theory of time in social philosophy and B-physical time (Zhu Rui, 2023) form a dual contrast on the upper level. This is an illusion in the contemporary physics standard model and the arrow of time in social time. However, from the perspective of life experience, the flow of time perceived by individuals has an irreplaceable constructive significance (Stolarski et al., 2026). This study adopts the perspective of life time, regarding time as a linear axis that connects individual growth variables.

2.4 Existential Psychology: Loneliness, Courage and Self-Development

Organization Development (OD) is a discipline that plans and intervenes to enhance organizational effectiveness. Its individual-level interventions typically refer to measures initiated by the organization or external consultants, such as psychological assessment, 360-degree feedback, and coaching (Rodriguez & Cavallo, 2026). However, this article focuses not only on external interventions but also on the self-initiated intervention by individuals - that is, "self-intervention". Firstly, psychology provides the fundamental mechanism for self-intervention. The self-regulation model includes three core processes: self-monitoring, self-judgment, and self-reaction (Enrique et al., 2017). Individuals actively modify their behaviors by managing cues, cognitive processes, and consequences (Kira et al., 2024). This mechanism precisely maps onto the context of cultural adaptation: individuals identify conflicts between their behaviors and cultural norms, evaluate the rationality of the conflicts, and proactively adjust their behaviors. Secondly, action science and reflective practice theory suggest that individuals identify the gap between their behaviors and the consequences of social systems through reflection, and recognize the inconsistency between "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use" (Phillip M. Edwards, 2010). This provides an important perspective for the continuous learning process in self-intervention (Hemmler & Ifenthaler, 2024). Of course, this also involves a bit of autonomy from the Self-Determination Theory (Phillip M. Edwards, 2010). Only when individuals no longer rely on external recognition do their behavioral choices truly shift from "heteronomy" to "autonomy". Moreover, individual changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors are key to effective organizational change, but organizations, in turn, also change individuals - this bidirectional tension is particularly prominent in the Chinese cultural context (Racine et al., 2021). The "elders' rule" and "differential pattern" described by Fei Xiaotong (1947/1992) are institutionalized manifestations of organizational change on individuals, and the self-intervention discussed in this article is precisely the process by which individuals proactively "reverse change themselves" under such cultural pressure.

2.5 Research gaps and the contributions of this paper

To sum up, the existing research has the following gaps:

- (1) There is a lack of a self-growth model that integrates bicultural adaptation, existential psychology, and the philosophy of time.
- (2) There is a lack of academic construction regarding the emotional ability of "the courage to be disliked".

2.6 Conceptual Framework

This study is structured into three primary phases, each with specific steps to ensure a systematic and comprehensive approach to achieving the research objectives. These phases are interconnected and contribute to the overall success of the project.

Phase 1: Self-awareness. In this stage, the researchers conduct a judgment and examination of the pre-intervention phase of self-regulation. They delve deeply into the cultural backgrounds between the two countries to conduct in-depth exploration and reflection on their own behaviors. The theory utilized in this process is the Timeline A/B Theory, which enables them to analyze themselves. Phase 2: Criticism and Reconstruction. In this stage, self-intervention involves criticism and reconstruction. Reconstruction involves weaving these fragments into a coherent, dynamic, and directional new narrative. Criticism is the examination of the intervention. Phase 3: Self-intervention. Self-intervention is the process of integrating the newly formed cognition and narrative after self-reconstruction. It is neither a passive stance of waiting for enlightenment nor a

random exploration of blind trial and error. Self-intervention is the construction of a brand-new self-map, with clear boundaries, healthy beliefs, and coherent narrative ability. This is a very important step towards completing the self-intervention.

At the same time, the outcome of Phase 3, self-intervention, directly affects the supporting points of the environment in Phase 1 regarding cultural integration and adaptation.

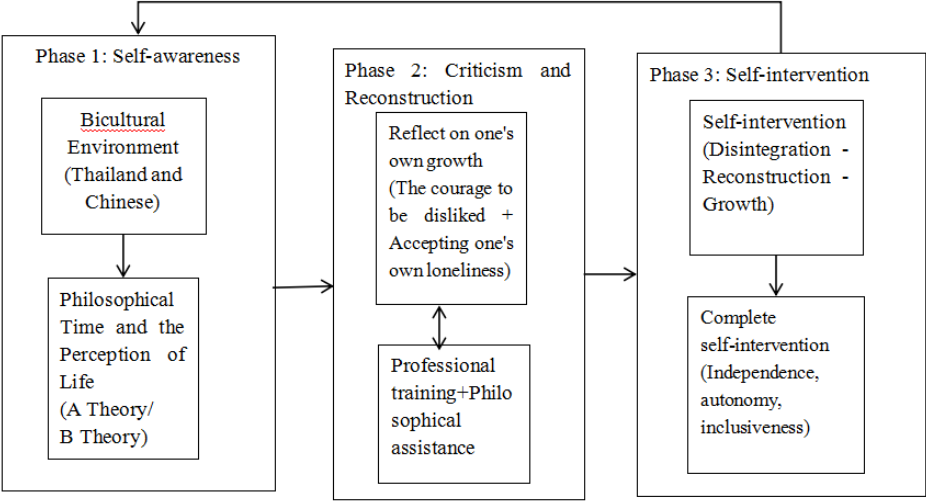


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology and Procedures

This study adopts self-analysis and auto-ethnography as complementary methodological approaches, positioning auto-ethnography as the central and guiding framework. Auto-ethnography is a reflexive qualitative research paradigm in which the researcher situates their lived experiences within broader sociocultural structures to generate rigorous, contextually grounded insights (Soini,2025). Its defining feature is sustained reflexivity: an ongoing, critical, and theoretically informed interrogation of the self—not as isolated subjectivity, but as socially embedded, historically situated, and culturally mediated. Drawing on over eight years of cumulative residence across Thailand and China, the author leverages expertise in organizational development both as an analytical lens and as a practice-based mode of documentation. Through retrospective analysis guided by existential psychology and the philosophy of time, this study identifies empirically discernible growth stages and articulates transferable core mechanisms underlying cross-cultural identity formation and professional maturation.

This process is divided into two stages. The first stage: free recall and narrative writing. Over a period of four weeks, the researchers recalled and organized a detailed self-reflection narrative (approximately 4,000 Chinese characters), documenting key experiences of cultural adaptation, emotional challenges , using philosophy as a supplement for self-analysis, and the entire narrative was entirely constructed based on self-analysis. This conforms to the "systematic sociological introspection" (Borgatta & Montgomery, 2000) theory. The second stage: refining the theme through repeated self-questioning. The author repeatedly reviewed the narrative and continuously revised and raised reflective questions. The records during this period were limited to daily completeness conversations and trivial exchanges on social media, and no systematic records were formed. This is the limitation of this study. However, the long duration of rich life experiences

(eight years) and the repeated in-depth examination of the narrative content reduced the risk of selective or distorted memories.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Conflicts and Experiences in a Bicultural Environment

The core challenge of bicultural adaptation lies in that individuals are simultaneously placed in social ecosystems where the cultural logics of the two cultures are significantly different, and they have to complete self-integration under the continuous cultural tension. The researcher has long shuttled between Thailand and China. The differences in social structure, cultural expectations, and behavioral norms between the two countries have formed the experiential basis for bicultural conflicts and experiences. Thai society presents a complex and diverse form, long influenced by geopolitics, with the continuous intersection of Eastern and Western cultures. Its permeability and guidance can inspire individual self-exploration: individuals can complete complex behaviors such as socializing and working at the level of autonomous consciousness, rather than passively following social requirements. For the researcher, Thai society and culture provide a relatively open and inclusive environment, which is conducive to the formation of a self-exploration and development model.

In practical experience, Chinese society tends to discipline individuals through empiricism and the rule of ritual. Empiricism is regarded as a reliable way to obtain the "correct" behavioral path, and the rule of ritual extends to the rule of elders, which constrains and regulates self-development. Under the structure of empiricism, individuals are required by the social environment and the rule of ritual to complete socialization training according to established factual experiences, thereby restricting self-expansion and exploration. However, the researcher believes that growing up in a rule-based social environment precisely requires the cultivation of critical thinking and logical ability, which is a dialectical thinking about social change and self-expansion. Although this criticality may be regarded as unfavorable or unacceptable to traditional order, it is precisely an important driving force for cultural adaptation and integration.

The tension between the two cultural experiences, as revealed through self-analysis, is profoundly influenced by the researcher's perspective on time philosophy. The root of adaptation and integration in a dual-cultural background lies in the individual's differential thinking about the timeline of life. The balance between life and time affects life emotions and individual growth; the meaning of space is usually indirect, while time permeates every dimension of life, and every emotion has its temporal significance (Zhu Rui, 2023). The A-theory (life time) and B-theory (physical time) in philosophy roughly correspond to the contradiction between the scientific view of time and the view of life time (Zhu Rui, 2023). The standard model of contemporary physics holds that the irreversibility of life time is an illusion, but the author of this article believes that time is like a linear axis, closely connecting individual life events to form an overall life experience. From this perspective, the free experience in Thailand and the disciplined experience in China are not mutually exclusive but rather different nodes on the time axis, jointly constituting the complete trajectory of individual growth.

4.2 "The Courage to Be Unloved" and Acceptance in Solitude

In East Asian societies, empiricism (Bacon, 1620) and the rule of elders (Fei Xiaotong, 1947/1992) often lead individuals to expect positive feedback and recognition. When an individual's thoughts undergo transformation through systematic reading and orderly training, growth often comes with a reliance on sincere praise, thus creating a false reward for oneself. However, the experience of growth in reality more often points to irreversible negation and being disliked. Negative feedback from multiple aspects can easily trigger self-doubt, and the core of

"the courage to be disliked" lies in acknowledging that in most cases, an individual will not be recognized by the majority. It is precisely this key understanding that requires an individual to mobilize more psychological strength to accept the fact of being disliked by others.

By adopting the organizational intervention perspective of organizational development and the analytical approach of autoethnography, researchers have found that the behavior of being disliked often stems from individuals being in a victimized position for a long time, leading to a psychological state of inferiority and even depression under continuous pressure. In the cultural context of East Asia, inferiority is often regarded as an unacceptable behavior. Society generally believes that individuals who are disliked will face significant social exclusion or group abandonment, and this behavior will cause irreversible trauma to East Asian families. Over time, individuals internalize the notion that being disliked is an unacceptable state, and thus turn to seeking approval and recognition.

However, researchers' experience indicates that a healthy and growing individual should possess the emotions and courage to be both disliked and liked. Only in this way can a complete intervention system and analysis approach be formed. Accepting being disliked does not require proving one's bravery in terms of skills or cognition, but rather a candid admission and acceptance of one's own psychological behavior. This acceptance implies acknowledging one's own flaws - a difficult yet necessary process in East Asian culture, and an essential path to shaping a full self. Researchers reflect that an individual should become someone who can be disliked, facing all negative emotions others have towards them. Generally, individuals prefer positive feedback, but after experiencing it many times, they will find that this expectation is essentially the selfish behavior of the group being imposed on the individual's self-growth. Candidly accepting being denied, questioned, and doubted means letting go of the expectation of always receiving positive feedback from the group, which is precisely the path to shaping a vibrant self.

This naturally leads to another core question: how to face the loneliness behind the group image and how to face one's own loneliness. In "An Invitation to Existential Psychology", distinguishes three concepts: isolation, loneliness, and aloneness. Loneliness can be either terrifying or exciting, depending on the individual's personality and environmental factors (Janoff & McPherson, 1997).

During the researcher's eight-year overseas study experience, the positive role of loneliness was verified. Loneliness was confirmed as a catalyst that can improve an individual's thought changes. Under the catalysis of time, the combination of theory and practice shapes a strong, decisive and courageous living individual. Of course, the researcher also agrees that people who have suffered severe losses or traumas are often troubled by a sense of meaninglessness, and helpers should respect the other party's sense of meaninglessness (Janoff & McPherson, 1997). Generally, acknowledging the other party's sense of meaninglessness and understanding this feeling is a protection of the individual's emotions and attitudes, and also an important way of reconciliation under self-awareness. The strong personality generated in the self-world should remain in the self-world and should not be overly imposed on the other party's world - this is itself a protective mechanism in interpersonal relationships.

4.3 Self-intervention and Spiral Reconstruction

In "The Ego and the Id", Freud's division of the ego, the id, and the superego provides a psychological verification for understanding the "disliked" emotion. This verification not only involves the conflicts within an individual's internal psychological structure but also directly challenges the ritualistic order and the diffused pattern in East Asian family societies (Fei Xiaotong, 1947/1992). Researchers believe that during the individual's growth process, they continuously

form behavioral patterns of "social compliance" and "empiricism" (Bacon, 1620) by interacting with the surrounding people, believing that only through "experience" and "self-awareness" can they acquire social functions and survival skills. However, the formation of this pattern often involves continuous interference from the outer circle of the self, which is a direct intervention by the organization on the individual, and can profoundly influence the individual's judgment and cognition of social benchmarks. In the East Asian context, "empiricism" often becomes an excuse for interfering with self-development, and its root lies in the collective recognition of "empiricism" by the organization, which essentially is an unconscious elder rule (Fei Xiaotong, 1947/1992).

However, in the current social system, the emerging self-awareness (Sebanz, 2007) begins to collide with the "empiricism" of society. This social formation stems from the stronger support of social order and organizational structure for the current self-construction and consciousness. In this context, "the courage to be disliked" becomes a psychological behavioral way of affirming the self, and its behavioral derivation can be expressed as: "I do whatever I want, there are not so many audiences in the world." Projecting this proposition onto the current social system, it can be intuitively manifested as the rise of outdoor trends and the economic benefits of outdoor activities. This reflects a significant change in social values, which is a counteraction behavior against the elder rule: it to some extent counteracts the diffused pattern in the paternalistic experienceism. Researchers regard this as the "reward" obtained by "the courage to be disliked", and this "reward" is essentially an opposition: opposing the changes in the self and the evolution of the current society.

The development of the self, fundamentally, is the recognition and expansion of the self. Currently, the awakening of self-awareness during self-growth has been able to solve the confrontation with the evolution of the current society, which reveals a core issue: protesting against the elder rule in modern society is a voluntary change behavior.

The researchers reflect on themselves. Many behaviors that seem to be inconsistent with the logic of immediate realization actually stem from the deep reflection and defense of the current behavioral pattern. This change in behavior and its confrontation with the mainstream norms of society, to some extent, constitutes a challenge to the existing thinking paradigm. In the process of self-development, a more important aspect is self-intervention: this approach originates from the professional training of the researcher's own discipline, that is, actively intervening and adjusting the self during the changes of self-development. This development process from "losing the self" to "self-disintegration in the sublime experience" is a psychological intervention and reconstruction behavior of the self, which can effectively analyze the deep connections between behavior and psychology, presenting a three-stage spiral structure from disintegration, repair to rebirth. This self-construction process collides directly with the elder order in traditional society, and the social feedback is often "the 'convenience' brought by not following the rules and the etiquette order".

However, the researchers believe that this feedback is precisely a restrictive limitation on the individual's self-development, its underlying meaning is that "personal growth and strength do not conform to the current social behavior and development trends", essentially being an intuitive suppression of individual development. In most cases, the obstructive behavior of the social group on individual development will cause the individual to fall into the state of "losing the self", the imbalance of this state further affects the change of behavior, specifically manifested as the direct psychological intervention of external interference and guidance on the self-change.

It is through active self-intervention - that is, the systematic regulation and reconfiguration of one's own cognition, emotions and behaviors - that individuals can achieve the spiral ascent from disintegration to repair and then to rebirth. The awakening of self-awareness under the assistance of philosophical psychology is precisely based on the recognition of this intervention. Through

critical reflection and self-reconstruction, they regain the subjective control over their own life timeline. This process is not only the driving force for personal growth but also provides an operational theoretical model for understanding identity negotiation in a multicultural context.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study concludes that bicultural adaptation requires integrating contrasting cultural logics (Thai openness vs. Chinese empiricism and elder rule) into a coherent life narrative along a linear life-time axis. In East Asian contexts, the desire for positive feedback fosters a false self-reward, making the “courage to be disliked” essential for authentic self-development, while self-intervention follows a spiral model from loss of self to reconstruction, grounded in existential aloneness (Janoff & McPherson, 1997) and the A-theory of time. Practically, individuals should reframe being disliked as authentic self-clarification, practitioners should create safe micro-contexts for non-conformity and practice non-intrusive presence, and future research should employ mixed-method and longitudinal designs across dual-cultural settings to validate the spiral model. The main limitation is reliance on a single autoethnographic account, calling for larger and more diverse samples.

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