

# Research on the Impact Mechanism of Integrative and Instrumental Motivation on the Persistence of Chinese Language Learning Among International Students in China

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**Abstract:** *From the perspective of motivation theory, this paper explores the influence of integrative and instrumental motivation on Chinese language learning. First, it elaborates on the connotations and characteristics of integrative and instrumental motivation. Second, it analyzes the manifestations of motivation's impact on the persistence of Chinese language learning from both integrative and instrumental perspectives. Finally, the impact mechanism of motivation on Chinese language learning is examined in detail at psychological and behavioral levels, further revealing the critical role of motivation in Chinese language acquisition.*

**Keywords:** Motivation theory, Integrative motivation, Instrumental motivation, Chinese language learning, Persistence, Impact mechanism.

## 1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of deepening globalization, Chinese, as an important international language, has attracted an increasing number of international students to come and learn it. However, there are significant differences in the persistence of international students in the process of learning Chinese. International students in China come from different countries and cultural backgrounds, and they face varying challenges and opportunities when learning Chinese. Some students may develop integrative motivation out of a love for Chinese culture and a desire to integrate into Chinese society, while others may develop instrumental motivation to meet practical needs such as academic requirements or career development.

Researching the impact mechanism of integrative and instrumental motivation on the persistence of Chinese language learning helps us better understand the learning psychology and behavior of international students, thereby providing more targeted strategies and methods for Chinese language teaching. By deeply analyzing the ways these two types of motivation function, we can optimize teaching content and methods, improve teaching effectiveness, and help international students maintain learning persistence more effectively.

The persistence of Chinese language learning is crucial for international students to truly master the language and use it flexibly in real life. However, current research on factors affecting the persistence of international students' Chinese language learning, especially regarding motivation, is not yet deep and comprehensive enough. This paper surveyed a total of 242 international students from three vocational colleges in Jiangsu Province. The results showed that career development and cultural experience are listed equally as the two major driving forces for studying abroad. Based on these survey results, this paper will discuss the impact mechanism of integrative and instrumental motivation on the persistence of Chinese language learning among international students in China, which has important theoretical and practical

significance for Chinese language teaching.

## 2. Overview of Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

### 2.1 Connotation and Characteristics of Integrative Motivation

Integrative motivation has unique connotations and characteristics in the Chinese language learning of international students in China. Integrative motivation mainly refers to the learning drive generated by learners out of interest in the target language culture and society and the desire to integrate. This motivation is not based solely on external utilitarian factors but stems from an inner desire to integrate into a new environment and establish close connections with the target language community.

The connotation of integrative motivation is rich and diverse. First, it manifests as a deep curiosity and appreciation for the culture carried by the Chinese language. International students may be attracted by China's long history, rich traditional culture, and unique customs, longing to understand and integrate deeply; this cultural yearning drives them to learn Chinese actively. Second, integrative motivation is also reflected in the expectation of establishing good relationships with Chinese people. Hoping to communicate with Chinese people without barriers, participate in their lives, and share experiences and emotions, thereby gaining a sense of fulfillment and belonging in interpersonal interactions [1].

Integrative motivation has some notable characteristics. First, it has strong autonomy. Learners actively pursue Chinese language learning due to their own interests and internal needs, rather than being driven by external pressure. Second, this motivation has persistence. As it stems from inner passion and desire, it can maintain relatively stable drive during the learning process and is not easily abandoned due to short-term difficulties or setbacks. Third, integrative motivation is comprehensive. It focuses not only on the acquisition of

language knowledge but also on the improvement of language application ability to achieve true cultural integration and interpersonal communication. For example, some international students are enthusiastic about participating in celebrations of Chinese traditional festivals, actively communicating with locals, and constantly improving their Chinese proficiency through these methods. They actively read Chinese books, watch Chinese movies, and strive to understand the deep connotations of Chinese culture. This proactive and persistent learning attitude and behavior are typical manifestations of integrative motivation.

## 2.2 Connotation and Characteristics of Instrumental Motivation

Instrumental motivation is an important type of motivation in the Chinese language learning of international students in China. Its connotation primarily focuses on using Chinese language learning as a means to achieve certain practical goals or obtain certain practical benefits. For example, to pass the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) to obtain qualifications for studying abroad, to increase competitiveness in future career development, or to obtain economic benefits such as scholarships.

Instrumental motivation has some notable characteristics. First, it has clear goal orientation. When international students possess instrumental motivation, they often set clear, specific, and measurable learning goals, such as achieving a certain HSK score within a specific time frame. These clear goals provide definite direction and motivation for learning. Second, instrumental motivation is highly utilitarian. Learning Chinese is not out of love for the Chinese language and culture itself or a desire to integrate, but to achieve external practical benefits. This may lead learners to focus more on the efficiency and outcomes of learning during the process, paying relatively less attention to cultural experiences and emotional investment [2]. Furthermore, instrumental motivation has a certain degree of instability. When external conditions change, such as if the anticipated benefits cannot be realized, or more attractive alternatives appear, the learner's instrumental motivation may weaken, thus affecting the persistence of their Chinese language learning.

However, instrumental motivation is not entirely without positive effects. It can prompt international students to concentrate and learn Chinese efficiently in the short term to reach the required level as quickly as possible. Simultaneously, by achieving the goals set by instrumental motivation, international students may gradually develop an interest and love for Chinese, thereby transforming instrumental motivation into a more lasting internal learning drive.

## 3. Manifestations of Motivation's Impact on the Persistence of Chinese Language Learning

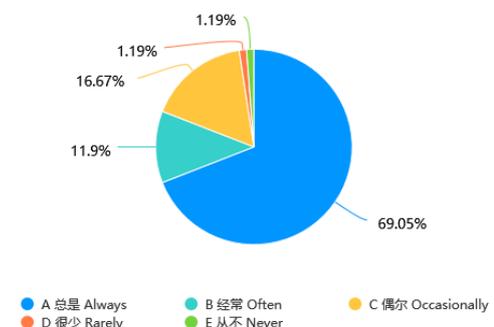
### 3.1 Manifestations of Integrative Motivation in Promoting Learning Persistence

Integrative motivation plays an important role in promoting the persistence of Chinese language learning among

international students in China. This motivation, stemming from genuine interest in the target language culture and a desire to integrate, makes learners exhibit more lasting drive and a positive attitude during the learning process.

Integrative motivation makes international students more willing to actively participate in various Chinese communication activities. Their longing to establish deep friendships with Chinese people and integrate into local society leads them to actively seek opportunities to communicate with others in Chinese, continuously exercising their language skills [3]. For example, they will actively participate in Chinese corners, cultural exchange activities, etc., and through communication with different people, continuously improve their Chinese listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities.

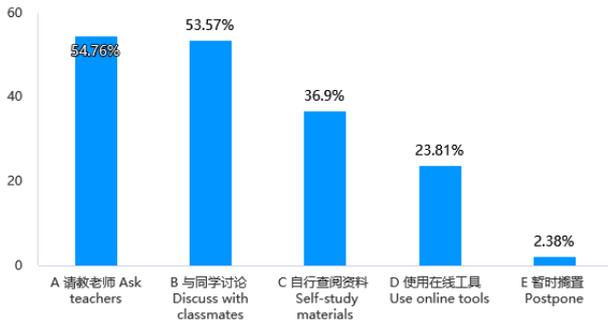
Integrative motivation prompts international students to understand Chinese culture more deeply. They not only learn language knowledge but also develop a strong interest in Chinese history, traditions, customs, etc. This deep exploration of culture further enhances their motivation to learn Chinese. For instance, they will actively read Chinese literary works, watch Chinese movies, visit museums, etc. Through these methods, they better understand the cultural connotations behind the Chinese language, making Chinese learning more profound and persistent. Figure 1 shows that 69.05% of students actively participate in various Chinese cultural experience activities (e.g., making dumplings, characteristic cultural practices, etc.), occupying an absolutely dominant proportion, reflecting the high enthusiasm of international students for participating in cultural exchange activities and their strong integrative motivation.



**Figure 1:** International Students' Participation in Classroom Interaction

Furthermore, integrative motivation can help international students overcome difficulties encountered during the learning process. When encountering complex grammar rules, unfamiliar Chinese characters, or pronunciation challenges, due to their strong inner desire to integrate, they persevere and do not give up easily. This firm belief and perseverance enable them to maintain a positive learning attitude when facing setbacks, constantly seek solutions to problems, thus ensuring learning persistence [4]. Integrative motivation also prompts international students to actively seek more learning resources. They utilize online platforms, libraries, and other channels to obtain abundant learning materials, continuously enriching their knowledge reserve. At the same time, they also actively seek advice from teachers and classmates, constantly improving their learning methods and strategies. When asked "How do you usually solve problems encountered in learning?"

(Figure 2), options A (Ask the teacher) and B (Discuss with classmates) accounted for 54.76% and 53.57% respectively, showing that over half of the learners rely more on socialized learning support to actively solve problems encountered in learning.



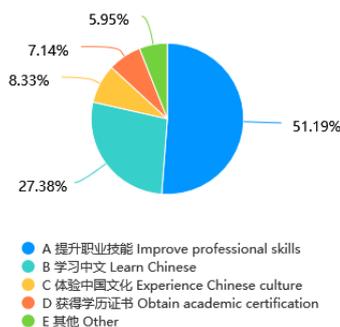
**Figure 2:** Approaches for International Students to Solve Learning Problems

In summary, through manifestations such as stimulating active participation in communication, deep understanding of culture, overcoming difficulties, and actively seeking resources, integrative motivation effectively promotes the persistence of their Chinese language learning, providing strong motivational support for their continuous progress on the path of learning Chinese.

**3.2 Manifestations of Instrumental Motivation in Promoting Learning Persistence**

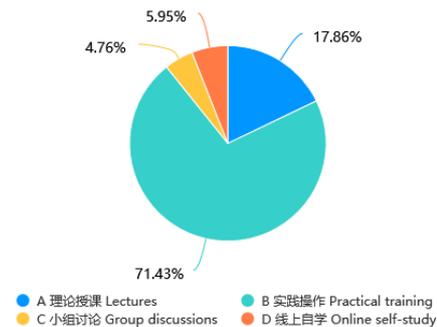
In the process of Chinese language learning, instrumental motivation promotes learning persistence in various ways. Instrumental motivation mainly stems from learners' expectations of the practical benefits and goal achievement that Chinese language learning can bring [5].

From the perspective of career development, many international students in China recognize that mastering Chinese can open broader paths for their future career planning. For example, for students hoping to develop in international trade or business, fluent Chinese ability can help them cooperate better with Chinese enterprises, expand business scope, and increase professional competitiveness. This clear pursuit of future career development enables them to maintain sustained motivation in the process of learning Chinese. In this survey, regarding "What is your main purpose for studying abroad in China?" (Figure 3), 51.19% of respondents chose option A, showing that career development is the core driving force, far exceeding the proportion of other options.

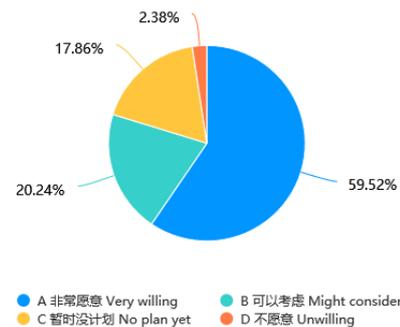


**Figure 3:** Main Purpose of International Students Studying in China

Figure 3 shows that 51.19% of international students take career development as their core purpose for studying abroad, confirming the dominant role of instrumental motivation in Chinese language learning. Such students tend to view Chinese as a key tool for enhancing career competitiveness, paying particular attention to practical teaching (as shown in Figure 4, 71.43% of international students in China choose practical operation as the optimal learning method) and industry-university cooperation opportunities to achieve the direct transformation of "language skills --- career needs." Furthermore, 59.52% of respondents explicitly expressed an intention to stay in China for employment, further highlighting the strong correlation between instrumental motivation and career goals (Figure 5).



**Figure 4:** International Students' Choice of Learning Methods



**Figure 5:** International Students' Intention to Work in China After Study

In terms of academic research, the professional fields of some international students are closely related to research achievements in China. To access richer academic resources and gain an in-depth understanding of cutting-edge research trends, they recognize the necessity of mastering Chinese proficiently. This motivation drives them to persevere on the path of learning Chinese, continuously improving their language level to meet the needs of academic research.

The importance of Chinese language test scores in study abroad applications and scholarship assessments also stimulates instrumental motivation. To obtain better study abroad opportunities or scholarships, international students will strive to improve their Chinese proficiency and maintain long-term learning enthusiasm.

In summary, by closely integrating with learners' practical needs and goals, instrumental motivation provides sustained drive for their Chinese language learning, prompting them to overcome difficulties and make continuous progress in the learning process to achieve their expected goals.

## 4. Specific Analysis of the Impact Mechanism

### 4.1 Impact Mechanism at the Psychological Level

When exploring the impact mechanism of integrative and instrumental motivation on the persistence of Chinese language learning among international students in China, the psychological impact mechanism is of great significance.

From a cognitive perspective, integrative motivation prompts international students to engage more actively in Chinese language learning. Their strong desire to truly integrate into Chinese culture and society drives them to pay higher attention and be more sensitive to Chinese learning psychologically. They actively seek to understand the cultural connotations and ways of thinking behind Chinese, striving to break down language and cultural barriers, thus continuously deepening their cognitive understanding and use of Chinese [6].

In terms of emotion, integrative motivation enables international students to have more positive emotional experiences during the learning process. When they can communicate with Chinese people using Chinese and participate in cultural activities, they gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction. These positive emotions further enhance their motivation for continuous learning. Conversely, instrumental motivation is more based on practical needs, such as obtaining a degree or job opportunity by passing a Chinese exam. This motivation may stimulate strong learning motivation in the short term, but in long-term learning, if goals are not achieved or difficulties are encountered, it can easily lead to anxiety and a sense of frustration.

Self-efficacy also plays a key role at the psychological level. International students with integrative motivation often have confidence in their ability to learn Chinese well, believing they can overcome difficulties and integrate into Chinese society. This positive self-efficacy enables them to remain resilient and keep striving when facing challenges. For international students driven by instrumental motivation, their self-efficacy may depend more on the achievement of external goals; once setbacks are encountered, self-efficacy may be significantly impacted [7].

Learners driven by instrumental motivation are susceptible to the degree of completion of external goals affecting their self-efficacy. Figure 6 shows that 94.05% of international students are in the medium to high learning pressure range, among which the instrumental motivation group may experience anxiety due to career competition pressure (Figure 7 shows that 75% of international students experience language barriers) and need to maintain motivation through achieving phased goals (such as passing the HSK exam). Conversely, students with integrative motivation, due to cultural interest (Figure 8 shows that 73.81% of international students are “very interested” in their major), are more likely to form positive emotional feedback, supporting their long-term learning resilience.

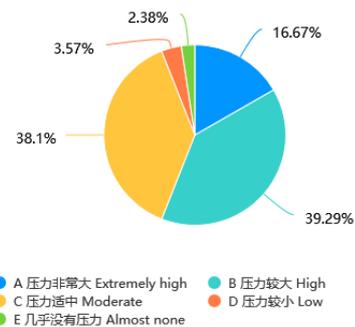


Figure 6: Learning Pressure of International Students

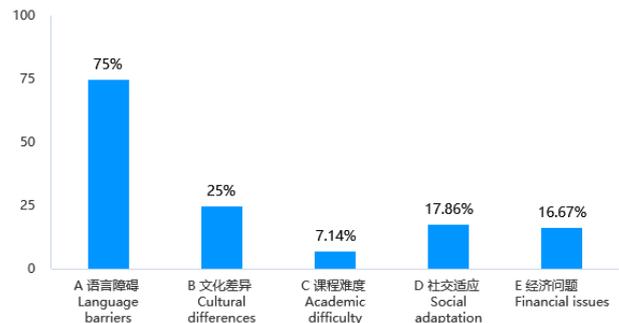


Figure 7: Difficulties Encountered by International Students During Learning

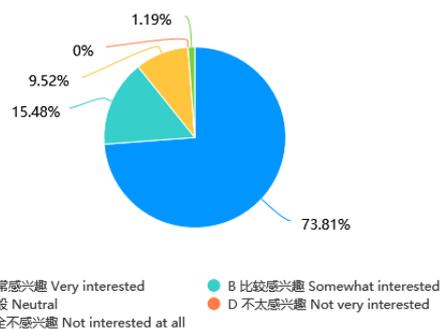


Figure 8: Level of Interest in Major Among International Students

The setting of learning goals is also influenced by psychological factors. Integrative motivation prompts international students to set longer-term and more comprehensive learning goals, focusing not only on improving language skills but also on cultivating cultural literacy. Instrumental motivation may lead international students to set more short-term and specific goals; once the goals are achieved, learning motivation may weaken.

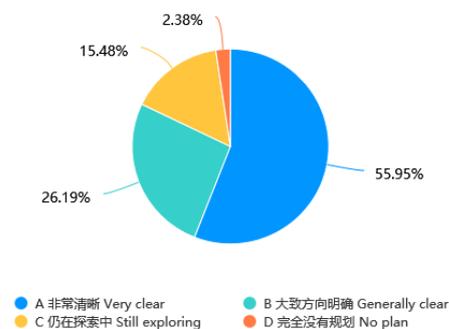
In summary, the impact mechanism at the psychological level is complex and diverse. Integrative and instrumental motivation affect the persistence of Chinese language learning among international students in China through aspects such as cognition, emotion, self-efficacy, and learning goal setting. A deep understanding of these mechanisms helps us formulate better teaching strategies, stimulate the learning enthusiasm of international students, and improve the effectiveness of Chinese language teaching.

### 4.2 Impact Mechanism at the Behavioral Level

When discussing the impact mechanism of integrative and instrumental motivation on the persistence of Chinese language learning among international students in China, the behavioral impact mechanism holds significant research value.

From a behavioral perspective, integrative motivation prompts international students in China to actively participate in various social activities related to Chinese. Their desire to integrate into the Chinese cultural environment leads them to actively communicate with Chinese people and frequently participate in Chinese corners, cultural experience activities, etc. This active social behavior not only provides them with more opportunities for language practice but also helps them understand and use Chinese in authentic contexts, thereby enhancing learning persistence. For example, they are more willing to travel with Chinese classmates, constantly correcting language errors during communication, and improving language expression skills [8].

Instrumental motivation drives international students to adopt targeted learning behaviors. For instance, to pass the Chinese proficiency test for scholarships or job opportunities, they will formulate detailed study plans, complete learning tasks on time, and participate in various training courses and mock exams. They will focus on learning grammar, vocabulary, and other knowledge related to the exam. This goal-oriented learning behavior helps maintain the coherence and persistence of learning. When asked “Is your future career planning clear?” (Figure 9), options A (55.95%) and B (26.19%) together accounted for 82.14%, indicating that most people have a clear or generally clear direction for career planning.



**Figure 9:** Career Planning of International Students

Furthermore, the behavioral impact mechanism is also reflected in the development of learning habits. International students with integrative motivation may develop habits of daily reading of Chinese books and watching Chinese films and TV shows to better understand Chinese culture and language. Students with stronger instrumental motivation may regularly engage in practice questions to strengthen memory and understanding.

Moreover, the feedback mechanism should not be overlooked at the behavioral level. For international students dominated by integrative motivation, affirmation and praise from Chinese friends will further stimulate their enthusiasm for participating in social activities, thereby continuously promoting Chinese language learning. For students primarily driven by instrumental motivation, positive feedback such as improved test scores and obtained certificates will reinforce their learning behaviors, making them more determined to

maintain learning persistence.

In summary, the behavioral impact mechanism plays an important role in the persistence of Chinese language learning among international students in China through various specific behavioral manifestations and feedback methods. A deep understanding of these mechanisms helps us formulate more effective teaching strategies and learning guidance plans to promote the long-term development of international students' Chinese language learning.

## 5. Conclusion

After researching the impact mechanism of integrative and instrumental motivation on the persistence of Chinese language learning among international students in China, it can be concluded that both integrative and instrumental motivation play indispensable roles in promoting the persistence of their Chinese language learning. Integrative motivation makes international students more eager to integrate into the Chinese language and cultural environment, enhancing their willingness to communicate and interact with Chinese society, thus providing an internal source of motivation for continuous learning. Instrumental motivation prompts international students to view Chinese learning as an effective tool for achieving personal goals; this clear goal orientation also strongly supports their perseverance during the learning process. Therefore, in future Chinese language teaching, measures can be taken such as adding industry-university cooperation courses, matching career guidance with bilingual training resources, alleviating language barriers, and strengthening the instrumental motivation of international students; enhancing cultural belonging through cultural festivals and Sino-foreign student joint projects, reducing language adaptation difficulties, and stimulating the integrative motivation of international students; designing “language + vocational skills” integrated courses to simultaneously meet instrumental needs and cultural integration demands, thereby enhancing the sustainable impact of integrative and instrumental motivation on the Chinese language learning of international students in China. Additionally, we will continue to strive to explore new methods and measures to improve the quality and persistence of Chinese language learning for international students in China and promote the prosperous development of international Chinese education.

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