Translanguaging Practices and Ideologies: Lao Students' Identity Construction on WeChat and Facebook

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Abstract

In the shifting paradigm of the world economy, China has become one of the popular destinations for international students crossing the border and receiving high education. To reinforce the regional cooperation between China and its neighbouring countries, China's border provinces have been discursively constructed as the platform for intiating international communication. Given the transformed positioning of China's Southwest provinces, Yunnan has turned itself into an educational hub receiving international students from Southeast and South Asia. Based on a longitudinal ethnography with five Lao students receiving China's higher education between September 2019 and July 2021, this study examines the ideological meanings of their translanguaing practices on WeChat and Facebook. The multiple types of data were collected through participant observation online and offline, WeChat and Facebook screenshots and semi-structured interviews. The study finds that translanguaging practices are often deployed by Lao students during their stay in China and in Laos. Their translanguaging practices contain different language forms and patterns, and display various types of social meanings including the intertextuality of the local voice, the identity construction of language learners and global citizens, and the sociocultural inbetweenness. This study indicates that Lao students tend to perform their transnational identities online and their translanguaging practices intersects with social, cultural, political and economic factors.

Key words: Translanguaging; Language ideologies; China; Laos; Social media

1. INTRODUCTION

In an unprecedentedly globalized era, international students have been distributed around the world and migration trajectory has been evolved traditionally from periphery to center and recently from periphery to semi-periphery. As the key medium linking the world, international students play the important role as cross-cultural inbetweenness. Apart from acting as cultural brokers, international students play the roles as human resources. Frequent cross-cultural cooperation leads to the thrive of international companies with the progress of internationalization. Meanwhile, different countries build up multiple cooperation to achieve multiple benefits. Therefore, the needs of multilingual talents increase and international students are increasingly conceptualized as human capital serving for international communication and enhancing the global, transnational and local economy. In the context of China's integration into the regional and global system, it is of great importance to understand the learning experiences of international students receiving China's higher education in China.

Previous studies on the learning experiences of international students tend to be conducted in West-European and Anglophone countries. In recent years, with the rise of Asian economy, an increasing number of studies have been produced in non-Anglophone countries, China in particular, where international students choose as their learning destination. Despite the increasing research conducted in China, little is known about the learning experiences of Lao students crossing the border and receiving higher education at China's border university.

As one of the countries along China's Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI), Laos constitutes a very important geopolitical position linking China to Southeast Asia. Strengthening cooperating relations with neighboring countries and expanding China's influence in South and Southeast Asia, Chinese government puts forward "Belt and Road" initiative in 2015, by which China can achieve multiple benefits with involved countries. Under the framework of B&RI, Lancang-Meikong Cooperation (short for LMC) is built up to achieve multiple benefits between China and five Southeast Asian countries around the Lancang-Meikong River Basin, which are Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. The reasons from three perspectives are involved in Laos' strategic importance to China. Firstly, Laos owns natural geographical advantage in LMC, which Laos occupies the centre of other five LMC countries bordering with China, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam so that Laos functions as the important pivot connecting the other five LMC countries and improving the cooperation among LMC countries. Secondly, Laos' domestic political situation is relatively stable which turbulent political situation seldom happens in Laos under the government of Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Lastly, the long-standing friendly diplomatic relations have been established between Laos and China which this year, 2021, is the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-Laos relations pushing bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership into a higher level. Laos always maintain friendly diplomatic relations with China and is a reliable partner of China. Given the geopolitical importance of Lao to China's global strategy, it is of great importance to cultivate Lao students for enhancing their understanding towards China and for the better cooperation between China and Laos.

Yunnan province is geographically and geopolitically important for China and ASEAN. Yunnan province lies in the Southwest region of China bordering with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Yunnan province functions as the important opening up widow for China's facing South Asia and Southeast Asia. Yunnan province's advanced geographic condition and its multinational cultural resources all contribute to Yunnan province's friendly relationships with Southeast Asian countries. In recent years, China emphasizes the markets of inland region under the policy of advanced all-round opening-up so that Yunnan province is built up as radial centre of South and Southeast Asian countries (Gao, 2021; Han, 2020). Chinese government increasingly putting forwards the cooperation with South and Southeast Asian countries facilitates Yunnan province's importance to China and ASEAN countries.

In context of China's B&RI, Yunnan has become an ideal destination for offering educational programs targeting the international students from neighbouring countries. Given the geographical location and the cultural intimacy between Yunnan and Lao, an increasing number of Lao students cross the border and receive China's higher education at Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan. This study aims to explore the learning experiences of Lao students receiving Chinese-medium instruction at a university in Yunnan with a particular focus on their online translanguaging practices.

2. TRANSLANGUAGING AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Translanguaging is a term closely related with language education and pedagogy (Alimi & Matiki, 2017). Given its transdisciplinary feature, there is no fixed definition on translanguaging. One of the frequently cited definition can be defined as:

An approach to the use of language, bilingualism and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages (García & Li, 2014).

Based on the previous studies (Androutsopoulos, 2015; lackledge & Creese, 2017; García & Li, 2014; García & Leiva, 2014; Han, 2020; Li, 2011a; Li, 2011b; Li, 2016a; Li, 2016b; Li, 2018)(Li & Shen, 2021; Moore, Nussbaum & Borràs, 2013; Song & Cho, 2021), tanslanguaging involves the linguistic phenomenon of multilingual speakers or learners which is their flexible shifts and usage of language they have mastered or learned acting as an agent of making multicultural meanings emerging all the linguistic, cultural and social resources as they bring into contact different biographies, histories and linguistic backgrounds.

Many terms have been conceptualized by applied linguists and sociolinguists to explain multilingual practices. The nuances are found between the concept of translanguaging and the terms of metrolingualism, multimodality, code switching and code mixing and language pluralism. Metrolingualism attempts to examine the way language users manipulate their language resources they mastered (Maher, 2010; Marshall, 2010; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010) and emphasizes "creative linguistic conditions across space and borders of culture, history and politics" (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010). Multimodality is widely used to describe language that language, or human communication, is and has always been multimodal which the multimodality of language is reflected through face-to-face interaction, speech signals such as gestures and body languages, methods like textual, aural, spatial and visual which helps to construct and interpret messages (Li, 2018). Code switching and code mixing are partial to the distinct division and boundaries between languages. In code switching, an

instance of interaction integrates meaningfully two languages, while in code mixing (language mixing), one encounter integrates two languages which is meaningful in the global sense (Alimi & Matiki, 2017; Moller, 2008). Language pluralism, or linguistic pluralism, is a term which is used to portray "the acceptance of linguistic diversity, a scenario where all people (majority and minority) have the right to speak their own language in public and private domain without fear of condemnation (Hailu & Abebe, 2020)." Translanguaging examines the dynamic process of multilingual practices and the flow of linguistic resources and focuses on multilingual speakers' process of transferring over the language boundaries.

A bulk of literature on translanguaging has been conducted in English speaking countries. Literature on translanguaging practices in West-European countries and Anglophobe countries mainly concentrates on two main fields which are the construction of the theory of translanguaging practice and pedagogical translanguaging.

Regarding the theoretical aspect of translanguaging, the previous studies focus on the discussion of the theoretical motivation behind translanguaging, the added values of translanguaging, the study of constructing translanguaging space, seeing translanguaging as linguistic semiotics in practice. For instance, some previous studies show that translanguaging practice is the kind of practical theory of language. Translanguaging is proposed by Welsh scholar, William (Williams, 1994), and is proved to be an effective pedagogical practice empowering both the teachers and the learners, transforming linguistic repertoire and emphasizing the process of meaning making, language learning experience, and identity development (Li, 2018; García, 2009; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Translanguaging regards language as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource of making sense and meaning and is able to utilize the structural characteristics of some of languages they acquired under different codes which are shaped by the intrinsic characteristics, histories, social values and culture (Cook & Li, 2016; Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Blackledge and Creese (lackledge & Creese, 2017) argue that translanguaging practice happens by the way of disposition of extensively used semiotic repertoires as the overlapping of people's biographical and linguistic histories. These studies focuses on the construction of the theory of translanguaging.

Besides enhancing the theoretical development previous studies of translanaguaging practice conducted in Anglophone countries also focus on the pedagogical translanguaging practices in school contexts. In these studies (Cenoz, 2017; Cenoz, & Gorter, 2017; García, 2009; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012), translanguaging is interpreted as a pedagogical strategy involving multilinguals' engagement of translanguaging practice to make sense of their language practices which happen not only in school but also out of schools.

With improvement of technology and digital communication, online communication becomes the tendency of the globalized era in which the younger generation communicates frequently with peers through social mass media, like Facebook, WeChat, Instagram, Twitter and Whatsapp. Online translanguaging communication has been addressed by several sociolinguistic scholars.

Following the qualitative inquiry, emerging studies of translanguaging practices examine how university students mobilize their multilingual repertoires to construct their transnational, global and local identities and how their identities are ideologically constituted in the particular social, cultural and political discourses. For instance, in international students' translanguaging space, they can highlight their transnational identities and translanguaging identities whilst they can flexibly take control over positioning themselves (Block, 2006; Li & Zhu, 2013; Marshall, 2010; Preece, 2006). The previous studies of university students' online translanguaging prefer to examine how university students shift, perform and construct their transnational identities by creating an online translanguaging space or community.

Previous studies of translanguaging practices on social mass media platforms highlight multilingual speakers' creativity and criticality on their social media apps. For instance, many studies on Korean migrant youth group in U.S (Gwak, 2008; Kim, 2018; Min, 2011; Terrazas, 2009) tend to analyze the way how transnational digital engagement mediates these youths' identity, which can encourage educators to use the translanguaging in the classroom. Through the analysis of the translanguaging or multilingual practices on Facebook, these studies (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Lee, 2011; Li, Tsang, Wong, & Lok, 2020) aim to explore multilingual speakers' creativity and criticality and highlight the subversive nature of the translanguaging practice. These studies of online translanguaging practices confirm the common values of the creativity of criticality of translanguaging multilingual speakers utilize on social mass media, such as Facebook.

Despite the importance of exploring online translanguaging practices, our knowledge of how young people employ their translanguaging practices via China-made social media remains poorly understood. Given the increasing number of international students crossing the border and receiving China's formal education and settling in China for study and work (Li, 2020a; Li, 2020b; Li, 2020c; Li & Han, 2020; Li & Zheng, 2021) v, it is of great importance to understand how international students mobilize their multilingual resources to construct their transnational identities via translanguaging practices in China. This study will focus on how Lao students construct their multiple identities through Facebook and WeChat, two of the most popular social media among young people.

Aligned with the previous studies exploring the

translanguaing practices on Facebook, it is important to examine how WeChat may function as a social space for international students' multilingual and multicultural communication. Wechat is the English name of an app called 微信 launched by China's Internet giant Tencent in 2011. In Chinese pinyin, Wechat is called Wēixìn, whose literal meaning is "micro-message". Wechat is the most popular social mass media app in China. Wechat has a number of 1251000000 monthly active users, which is the cut-off statistics data of June 30th, 2021, from 21st Century Business Herald website. Chinese Wechat average users cost more than 70 min a day in Wechat according to the American venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers (KPCB) analyst Mary Meeker in 2016 (Levy, 2016). Given that the large among of users' number of Wechat and great influence of Wechat towards people's life, the study of Wechat has scientific basic and realistic meaning, meanwhile, it promotes people's understanding to the usage of Wechat. In China, Wechat is used by about 80 percent of Chinese people and occupies an important part of people's life. Based on published by Statista Research Department, September 10th, 2021, Facebook owns roughly 2890000000 billion monthly active users, which makes Facebook the biggest social network worldwide. Average users cost more than 50 min a day on Facebook according to KPCB analyst Mary Meeker in 2016 (Levy, 2016). Thus, both Wechat and Facebook are popular in China and in the world and people spend much times on social mass media, so that the translanguaging resources on these apps posted by multilingual learners are abundant for researchers to explore the implications behind.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Recruitment of Participants

Five Lao international students were selected as participants in this study. These participants are the third-year undergraduates majoring in international economic and trade at a Chinese university located in Yunnan, Southwest of China bordering Lao, Myanmar and Vietnam. This university is famous for recruiting international students from South Asia and Southeast Asia. Before the outbreak of Covid-19, there were over 3000 international students registered at this university. Aligned with the previous studies with international students in Yunnan (Li, Ai, & Zhang, 2019; Li & Han, 2020) (Li & Han, 2020; Li & Zheng, 2021; Li & Shen, 2021), my intention was to investigate how international students received Chinese-medium courses at a university. However, my field work was severely impacted due to the global spread of Covid-19. Given my previous close contact with five Lao female students, I was able to interact with them while they were receiving online courses in Lao. Between September 2019 and September 2021, I have kept frequent contact with these five students whose online language practices open a new space for me to explore how they maintain their transnational identities and achieve their academic and social success. This is how I came to focus on these five participants for in-depth inquiry.

The background information of these Lao students is listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Lao International students' profile

Participants	Ethnicity	Age	Linguistic backgrounds	Pre-migration backgrounds	Chinese proficiency	Parental backgrounds
Fu	Phunoi	21	Lao, Thai, Chinese	National University of Laos (biology) / Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College	HSK4	Civil Servant / Civil Servant
Hong	Phunoi	20	Lao, Thai, Chinese, English	Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College	HSK4 (275)	Civil Servant / Civil Servant
Lin	Laos Loum	20	Lao, Thai, Chinese	Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College	HSK4	Firm Owners
Luo	Heitai (Black-Thai)	20	Lao, Thai, Chinese	Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College	HSK4	Teacher/Shop Owner
Mei	Laos Loum	20	Lao, Thai, Chinese	Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College	HSK4 (250)	Freelance Consultant / Furniture Saler

All of these participants are from Laos. Among them, two of them are Lao Loum people which are dominant ethnic groups in Laos, two are Phunuo and one is Heitai. All of them can speak at least three languages. Regarding their language backgrounds, their Thai language's proficiency can reach the level of their mother tongue in that Lao people are raised up under the Thai language's influence. As for Chinese proficiency, both Fu and Lin's writing ability is higher than their oral competence, Hong's listening and reading are remarkable but her

oral expression is unsatisfactory, Luo's listening ability is the highest while her oracy and reading are the most unsatisfactory, and Mei's writing competence is better than her listening and reading but her oral competence is the weakest. Before their application for the University, these Lao students had learned Chinese in Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical College which has plenty of international students from South Asia and Southeast Asia. After one-year training, they passed HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) level-4 and then went to Yunnan University. Unlike

other participants who came to Xishuangbanna soon after high school's education, Fu is the only participant who has been to National University of Laos and studied biology for year before she studied Chinese in Xishuangbanna. From their family background listed in Table 1, most of these participants are from the middle class.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

A longitudinal ethnographic study has been conducted from September 2019 to September 2021. The data collection methods include field notes, online interactions via Wechat and Facebook, and semi-structured interviews.

In September 2019, I entered a class where all of the international students majored in International Business and Trade, and the majority of them migrated from Laos and others from Thailand and the Middle East. I did not collect any formal data for the first semester just to make sure that my participants would feel comfortable of my existence and to build rapport with them. However, I was not able to continue with my ethnography because of the global spread of Covid-19. All of my participants stayed in their own countries and had online class. My years of interactions with five female Lao students did provide me with sufficient data for a new research inquiry. Based on their online multilingual practices, I realized that Lao students made use of the virtual space to construct different transnational identities and to fulfill their aspirations in one way or another. Since September 2020, I decided just to focus on their online language practices. In total, I have collected over 100 posts from WeChat and about 150 from Facebook.

After the outbreak of pandemic crisis, international students were required to stay in their countries and take online courses. The data of international students' performance in class were unlikely to access because of the poor internet connection, international students' double burden in learning Chinese and catching up with their subjects, and many international students' dropping out or absence in class. Despite the difficulties in accessing the classroom interactions, another type of data emerged as sufficient, which turned out to be interesting and useful to map out Lao students' transnational communication practices. I took frequent contacts with the five participants via Wechat and Facebook, two of which social media are what these students like to use while staying in Laos. Meanwhile, I also keep online interaction with my participants for maintaining our friendship and clarifying some questions.

Based on the established friendship with them, I conducted semi-structured interviews the five Lao international students and the interviews ranging from half an hour to two hours. The interview questions include their ethnicity, linguistic background, values towards different languages, education background, family background, reasons for choosing Yunnan province to finish their academic achievement in China, their employment expectations after graduation and its relations with their studying in China.

3.3 Data Analyzing Method

The data analyzing method in this study is content analysis. Content analysis is the frequently used data analyzing method in sociolinguistic studies with international students (Li, 2020a; Li, 2020b; Li, 2020c; Li, Ai, & Zhang, 2019; Li & Han, 2020; Li & Zheng, 2021). Ole R. Holsti defines content analysis as "any technique for making inference by objectively and systemically identifying specified characteristics of messages (Holsti, 1969)". The study was about five Lao international students' translanguaging practices, and the salient themes emerged from the data include "intertexuality of the local voice", "language learners and global citizens" and "sociocultural inbetweenness".

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Lao students in the study are multilingual in Lao, Thai, English and Chinese. They share some common in terms of their linguistic repertoires. All of them speak Lao as their mother tongue. They can understand Thai because of the shared linguistic system between Lao and Thai and because of the dominant impact of Thai mass media in Lao. Regarding their English proficiency, they have learned English in Lao before migrating to China, but none of them is able to use English for daily communication. English tends to be used in expressing their best wishes and mixing up with other languages online. Before migrating to the focal university, all of the Lao students have passed HSK-4. Their choice of using Chinese online is also frequently mixing up with Lao, English and Thai. Following the previous studies on the translanguaging practices online (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Dovchin, 2017; Han, 2020), this section presents and analyzes the three types of translanguaging for Lao students by relating to the individual, social, cultural, economic and political dimensions.

4.1 Intertextuality of the Local Voice

Followinig Bauman & Briggs (Bauman & Briggs, 1992), this study sees Lao students' translanguaing practices online in intertextual terms. That is, the way Lao students choose certain language or semiotic resources including emoji, punctuation marks, coor or other styling genres can embody the intertextual relationship between translanguaging and discourses circulating at cultural, social, economic and political dimensions. Through the analysis of their translanguaging practices shown on Wechat and Facebook, the local voice is integrated into their express of economic or reputation acquisition and cultural permeation.

The following Figure 1 posted by Hong in her Wechat Moments intertexutalises English as lingua franca and gendered Lao cultural practices as commodified resources.

Figure 1
Hong posts her Lao costume in English in a tourist-centered region

In her WeChat moment, Hong is wearing Lao costume sitting in a Lao traditional building made of wooden structure. English is used to capture the theme of her post with the word "Luangprabang" as her caption. Luang Prabang is one of the most popular tourist destinations located in north central Laos. It is argued that the choice of using English here is only for the symbolic meaning of constructing the place of Laungprabang as the world famous tourist destination even though the top three source countries are Thai, Vietnam and China. Her lack of English proficiency in spelling Laung Prabang rather than "Luangprabang" also proves such asymmetry between the language displayed in public and the language needed in reality.

Another interesting intertextual meaning is related with the commodified and gendered representation of Lao people from the tourist gaze. In daily life, Hong wears T-shirt and jeans like most of her young peers. It is only on formal occasions such as joining a wedding or going for an interview that Hong wears traditional Lao costumes. Hong has expanded her Chinese networks by receiving her higher education over the past three years. It is argued that dressing like typical of Lao with traditional Lao costume may enhance Hong's human capital and also display the exotic feature of Lao people from the perspective of Chinese gaze. It is noted that there is an inconsistency between authentic representation and the commodification of the Lao identity in this figure. According to the interview, Hong is not Laos Loum but Phunoi. The costume Hong is wearing is neither her ethnic custom nor Lao's traditional costume based on the interview with Hong for clarification. Hong, as a young and pretty lady, is aware of her potentiality of advertising her resources as an authentic Lao for foreign visitors/ business people to explore Lao markets. Her gendered representation of revealing part of her body also resonates with many previous studies on the commodification of minority women in China and many other peripheral countries.

Besides English, Chinese language is also frequently used in Lao students' social media to convey different social meanings. The following Figure 2 indicates how Chinese language and other semiotic icons such as Chinese lanterns, red color and her choice of red costume manifest the theme of celebrating Chinese New Year. Figure 2 includes Lin's expressions towards Chinese New Year: "January 5 of the lunar calendar. Wish everyone good health, wish everyone successful in career and wish one enjoy happiness in love. Good luck each day and good fortune each year!"

Figure 2
Lin's celebration of Chinese New Year in Lao on Facebook

Two types of intertextualized meanings are anchored in Figure 2. On the one hand, Chinese only is used on Facebook targeting both Lao and Chinese people working and living in Lao (Facebook is officially banned in mainland China). When Figure 2 was posted, Lin was working as a part-time translator for a Chinese boss selling motor cars in Laos. The choice of Chinese can not only establish and reinforce her relationship with her Chinese customers and Chinese boss, but also indicate her competence in Chinese. In Figure 2, Lin displays her Chinese proficiency by composing several sentences with poetic rhythm, full of creative greetings and festival atmosphere. On the other hand, her facebook sharing also indicates the increasing impact of China upon Lao.

In the context of China's B&RI, Lao is turning itself from a landlocked country to a landlinked transition between China and other Southeast Asia. An increasing number of Chinese companies have been established in Lao and young people like Lin and other participants see the value of speaking Chinese to promote their value and social prestige. Thus, China has output its cultural resources to these countries. Due to the continuous cultural output of China, Chinese culture, such as Chinese festival's customs, is widely accepted by Southeast Asian countries. People in these countries are willing to acquire the knowledge of Chinese culture and imitate Chinese customs. As a transnational students studying in China, Lin is able to present her Chinese proficiency and her proficiency in Chinese culture to her friends.

Different from Hong using Chinese to show her language competence, the choice of Chinese on Lao students' social media can also index their transnational identity. Figure 3 is the selfie of Mei and me on WeChat. Mei expressed her thankfulness for my years of help with her study and my care and friendship. "哆啦A梦姐姐�’(emoji: cutie)晚安✌️(emoji: oh yeah!)".

Figure 3
The screenshot WeChat about the selfie of Mei and Ge Tingjiang

I have been conducting two years of ethnography with Lao students includinig Mei. During the two years when Mei was in China and returned to Lao for online courses, I kept helping her register for her QQ account to get access to Chinese university courses. I also offered Mei assistance in her Chinese language learning and her subject learning. Because of my care and friendship, Mei posted this photo in her WeChat. Using Chinese is not only for showing her appreciation for her Chinese friend, but also for indexing their shared knowledge of childhood experiences. Young people have been influenced by Japanese anime culture. Doraemon is one of the most

influential Japanese cartoons in their childhood memory. In the animation, Doraemon is a cat robot and is sent to take care of Nobi Nobita who always fails in class and is often bullied by his peers. Doraemon always helps Nobita whenever requested and uses his magic to overcome possible troubles. In Mei's WeChat, the choice of Chinese also indexes her transnational experiences of watching Japanese cartoons which is also shared by Chinese students crossing the border. Doraemon is written in Chinese but represents their shared cultural experience and acknowledgment on Japanese icon.

In fact, the impact of Japanese culture can also be traced in Fu's translanguaging practices online. Similar to other Lao students, Fu decides to choose to come to China for higher education because of the promising prospect. Unlike her Lao peers, Fu tends to use Thai, sometimes mixing up with English and Chinese to construct her transnational identity. The choice of Lao language is also erased in her WeChat and Facebook accounts. Her preference of using Thai is related with her aspiration to write up Chinese fictional novels and become an entrepreneurial writer in future as indicated by her birthday wishes on her Facebook in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4
Screenshot of celebrating Fu's 22th birthday on Facebook

In Figure 4, Fu uses English and Thai to celebrate her birthday and expresses her birthday wishes. English is only for global expression with "Happy birthday to me" as the most frequently greeting among young people. Fu also follows this tradition among teenagers. By using English, she can not only get more international friends' recognition but also present her internationalism. The following symbols are cracker ribbons🎉and birthday cakes🎂 which symbolizes celebrations, congratulations, birthday and cakes. Then, she transforms to Thai to express her sincere birthday wishes. The first wish is that she hopes everything nice can happen to her, which

expresses her expectation towards life. The next wish is related to her ambition of becoming an excellent writer. She ends up her post with two emojis 🥹 which is a smiling face with tears in her eyes. This symbolizes smiling with crying helplessly and funnily. This emoji is widely used in both Wechat and Facebook, which also takes the responsibility of communicating Chinese culture and Lao culture.

Figure 5 posted by Fu is her novel group on one of her Facebook accounts which contain the intertextuality. The intertextuality of the local voice is incorporated into polyphyletic culture presentation and multilingualism of Lao international students shown on their social media emphasizes their transnational identities. Though it is quite similar between Laos and Thai, the language she chooses in this Facebook account is Thai. This Facebook account is special for her that it functions as a "work account" containing only posts about her "work", writing novels in Thai. She chooses Thai language to write her original novels which have abundant components and elements of Chinese culture, especially Chinese myths and fairy tales. The reasons are: Lao students are brought up under the influence of Thai language that most TV programs and news in Lao country are Thai because of Laos' long-term dependent state of Thai and the isogeny of these two countries' the main nation in history, so that Thai language comes naturally them; the diplomatic relationships among Thailand, Laos and China maintain relatively stable leading to the cultural inter-infiltration and multiple dissemination, so that young generation of Lao has been reading plenty of Chinese novels translated or written in Thai; Lao science and technology impede the development of Lao online novels, which means there is no Lao indigenous online novels app, so with regard to cater to Thai online novels' market demand, Thai language is easier to be accepted by Thai readers; according to her words, Lao people read novels less than Thai people, so her potential market is limited. Through writing online novels with Chinese characteristics in Thai, Fu can transform intangible language assets into reputation and even tangible economic asset. The background picture of the home page on her Facebook contains a typical Chinese female character wearing ancient Chinese costume and owning some magic power from Chinese ancient myth, which reveals both Lao and Thai people's identity of Chinese culture. As showed in example above, Lao international students, potential Thai readers and Chinese culture form an organic entirety. Different language and culture interact with each other and are brought into a holistic unity. Lao identity, Thai language and Chinese culture assemble in a special way to bring this Lao student fame and benefit when Lao students are applying for China's bachelor degree. Through intertwining Chinese culture and Thai language as a Lao people, Lao student tends to link three countries together.
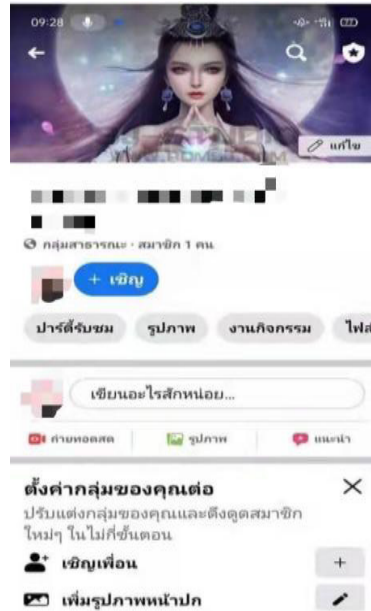
Figure 5
Fu's introduction of one of her Chinese fictional novels in Thai on Facebook

Figure 6 posted by Fu is screenshot from her Facebook account which is related with intertextuality. In this example, the intertextuality of local voice is indicated by her using Thai language to write novels carrying Chinese elements in spite of her Lao identity. Her motivations of writing novels, the motif of her novels and the reasons why she chooses this class to write about indicate the intertextuality of the local voice.

Her motivations of writing novels are to attract more fans and spread her fame leading to economic gain in the end:

At present, I am just writing novels to read free, because they want to attract fans. (At present, I am just writing novels without setting VIP chapters to let readers pay for my novels, because I want to attract more fans to read my novels.) (Fu, 20200904, Wechat chatting)

I am now planning to write novel for money. (Fu, 20210228, Wechat chatting)

According to her, language is transformed into her capital to gain fame and profit. It is the inner power to encourage her to keep on finishing her novels. Even though she does not mean to realize the local voice's intertextuality, she becomes a connecting point which links different counties, language and culture together. The motif of her novels and the reasons why she chooses this class to write about also indicate the intertextuality of local voice.

The motif of her novel is "中国武侠小说" (Chinese Wuxia fiction/Chinese swordsman fiction), a type of China's unique and original novel, which focuses on the society constituted by martial artists class and emphasizes the spirits of "侠客(Xiake, chivalrous expert)". It is special for a Lao student to write novels about Chinese

literature, particularly Chinese Wuxia fiction involving ancient Chinese traditional culture which is difficult for foreigners to understand. The reasons why she chooses this class to write about are:

I like reading this kind of novel... The version I read is translated from Chinese to Thai... There are so many Chinese fictions translated from Thai on the Internet (There are so many Chinese fictions translated to Thai on the Internet.) (Fu, 20201204, Wechat chatting)

I like reading this kind of novel, so I can write. I have been reading it since I was 19 years old... When I read Xiaoqiye's Wuxia novel (After I finished Xiaoqiye's Wuxia novel), I decided to own my own novels... I found this kind of novel by myself, on some novel apps created by Thailand. (Fu, 20201205, Wechat chatting)

According to her explanation, her interests to Chinese novels and Chinese culture and the admiration of her favorite writer contribute to her determination on writing her own novels about Chinese Wuxia. Chinese culture, Thai language and Lao identity interact with each other through novels writing.

Besides her motivation and the reasons of writing Chinese Wuxia novel, something behind her usage of Thai language instead of her mother tongue is worth analyzing. In fact, she not only chooses Thai language for reasons mentioned before, but also tries to hide her identity as a Lao through using this language. She is reluctant to let out her real identity to her potential readers on account of the historical reasons causing some Thai people's hatred towards Lao and some Lao people's towards Thai. It seems not to be difficult for her to hide her real nationality on account of Laos high proficiency of Thai language and the similarity between these two languages. As she revealed:

The grammar and pragmatics of Laos and Thai are same. (Fu, 20201206, Wechat chatting)

When it comes to the nuance between them, she turns to her Thai friends' help. They correct her mistakes and teach her how to express her ideas in Thai. She also admits that vocabulary about loyal household is out of her competence.

The precondition of Fu's motivations and reasons of writing Chinese Wuxia novels and her reasons of using Thai to hide her nationality is that Internet technology provides her platform to achieve her dreams and ambition. Different from the traditional profession of writing which requires high language proficiency and writing skills of writers, online writing lowers the barriers of the writer that everyone can be writer and it enlarges the potential readers' market while more fictions resources are available. In addition, Internet technology prevents writers' privacy from leakage to the maximum extent that online writers are allowed to hide their information unless they want to get their work published. She can pretend to be Thai, provided that online novels app only presents the contents of her novels in front of her readers. Meanwhile, through advanced Internet media, her novels can be spread widely, which her motivation of gaining fame and profit can be reached.
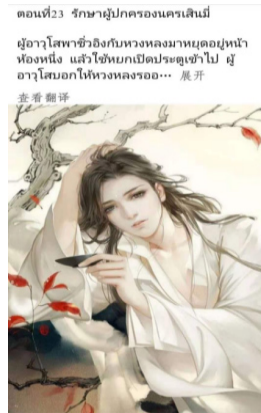
Figure 6
The novel written by Fu and shared on Facebook.

Lao international students' language choice indicates that multilingualists tend to deploy the full linguistic repertoires in communication (García & Li, 2014; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012; Li, 2018). They are not only choice languages, but also present languages' multicultural functions and languages' functions as gaining fame and profits.

4.2 Language Learners and Global Citizens
Lao students tend to use Lao English and Chinese on Wechat and Facebook to construct their identity as transnational language learners and global citizens. Their choices of languages are mediated in their transnational space both in China and in Laos. Lao students' translanguaging practices can index their progress in learning Chinese, their multilingual skills and flexibility in transferring from one language to another and their shared repertoires as international students receiving China's higher education as a new global identity.

Similar to other international students, Mei often posts her WeChat moment by asking her friends about Chinese-related terms or concepts. Receiving formal education provides Mei with different types of friends including Chinese like me. Mei finds it useful to be supported by asking questions in Chinese as indicated in Figure 7.

Figure 7
Screenshot of Mei's asking the Chinese expression for "桑葚" ("mulberry") on Wechat
Note: What is it in Chinese?

Figure 7 posted by Mei on Wechat confirms her self identity as a Chinese language learner. Mei identifies herself as a Chinese language learner in which she shows her yearn for learning the correct Chinese expression of a kind of fruit. By taking a photo of mulberry, Mei posted her question with the photo on her Wechat Moment and then asked her friends including her teachers for help. As shown in her comment area of Wechat, one of her Chinese teachers replied to her by answering her question in Chinese "山楂子" ("mountain-berry") and another friend of her followed up by offering a slightly different answer "桑葚" ("mulberry"). One of the answers is wrong and that's how Mei came to me for confirmation later. The name of this plant should be spelled as "桑葚" rather than "山楂". The mistake is mainly due to Mei's teacher's lack of Chinese proficiency in distinguishing /s/ from /sh/. Such pronunciation difficulty is very similar to what's reported in Li & Han's (Li & Han, 2020) study. Despite the fact that Chinese teachers are born and brought up in China, their capacity in speaking standard Putonghua is not satisfactory. It is through her interactions online and offline that Mei is able to acquire Chinese language and compensate for what her Chinese textbooks are not provided. Her identity as a Chinese language learner also makes her eligible asking question and receiving support both from her Chinese teacher and friends.

Apart from asking questions online, Lao students also like to use both Chinese and English to stand for their global identity as international students receiving university education abroad. Quoting from Chinese novels, movies or soap operas, Lao students like to perform their Chinese proficiency by posting beautiful sentences or expressions online. Luo is such a case in point. By adding English in the end, her post mixing up with Chinese and English sounds both fashionable and romantic. The combination of Chinese and English both conveys the expected identity as international students and Chinese language learners.

Figure 8
Screenshot of Luo's expression of her feeling.
Note: Your smile is like my 'Moonlight(English)' last night

Luo's post is a poetic sentence mixing up with English and Chinese combining with the picture of a beautiful scene which has a crescent moon hanging in the colorful night sky and a tree aside. She uses the picture to present the image of her sentence that the picture and the sentence interact with each other to convey the image of poetic beauty. Besides, mixing up with these two languages can present the beauty of language and rhyme. The English word "moonlight" sounds softer and gentler than Chinese word "月光" which dues to each word ("moon" and "light") in English word "moonlight" is monosyllable but each character in Chinese phrase "月光" is polysyllable. Monosyllable is pronounced easier than polysyllable which sounds softer and gentler. It increases the beauty of language and rhyme. Luo's translanguaging practice displays her identity as a language learner and her intention of presenting her proficiency of multilingualism by her poetic practice on her post.

It is interested to note that Lao students tend to use both Chinese and English to celebrate international festivals. The bilingual pattern of Chinese and English in their social media also indexes their global identity as indicated in Mei's post on Facebook in the following Figure 9.

Figure 9
The screenshot of Mei's celebrating Woman's Day on Facebook
Note: Happy women's day. To my mother: Wish you good health; may all go well with you. Love you. Kiss you. XOXO.

Figure 9 posted by Mei on her Facebook involves the multilingual practice of celebrating Woman's Day in Chinese and English. Mei's translanguaging practice involves more implications than Luo's simple expression mixing up the two languages. Her choice of Facebook instead of Wechat indicates that she wants to post it to more readers because the posts on Facebook are open to everyone who want to view it but the posts on Wechat can only be seen by the friends you have added before. In her post, she first posts "happy women's day" in Chinese and English. Then, she uses Chinese for-character idiom to express her blessings to her mother which is the typical expression of blessing in Chinese followed by Chinese conventional form. She ends up her post with the most popular expression among Chinese young generation,

"爱您么么哒 (Love you. Kiss you. XOXO)", to show one's love to the other. Besides showing her blessing and love to her mother, "爱您么么哒" is Chinese native expression, which means her usage of this expression can imply her proficiency in Chinese and Chinese fashion culture. According to language competence of these two languages, it can be inferred that her Chinese proficiency is higher than English which can be proved by her usage of Chinese local expression involving high language proficiency and Chinese cultural knowledge. Besides language learner's identity, she also presents her identity as a global citizen. Chinese has the largest number of language speakers while English is one of the world's most commonly used languages. English is acknowledged as the world's lingua franca and Chinese is aiming at becoming the world's lingua franca. Thus, mixing up these two lingua franca in the world indicates her identity as a global citizen. From this post, she confirms her identity as a language learner and global citizen.

Figure 10
Three languages mixing up on Lin's WeChat post

Note: I am already 20 years old and grow one year older (Lao). Happy birthday to me (English). I am still available by this account (Lao).
Comments:
Indonesian friend: Happy birthday, Lin. (Chinese)
Lin's replay: Thanks, XXX (her friend's name). (Chinese)
Thai friend: Happy birthday, Lin. (Chinese)
Lin's reply: Thanks. (Lao)

Despite using English and Chinese to celebrate international festivals, Lao students often use Chinese as medium for daily communication with other international students. English is only used as symbolic meaning. In contrast, Chinese becomes the link between Lao students and other international students as indicated in the following Figure 10.

Figure 10 posted by Lin on her Wechat involves three language, English, Chinese and Lao, which presents her identity as a Chinese and English language learner. It happens between herself and her friend. This Wechat is posted at her 20th birthday and she also posts the same content on her Facebook. The contents of this post contain that she is at her 20th birthday and her friends can contact her by her account. Using Lao as her nationality identification implies that her posts are mainly targeting Lao friends. Similar with Fu's post of celebrates her birthday, Lin's posts also use the English expression of "Happy birthday to me". It proves that the expression "Happy birthday to me" in English becomes a globalized routine which receives the preference of the younger generation. The same emoji symbols shared on both Wechat and Facebook imply that both China and international world accept something common under different cultural circumstances. Most symbols are analyzed in the previous figures, remaining one emerging emoji left which is narrated diversely by the young generation in China and Laos. The emoji is a face with red hearts in eyes and saliva in mouth. In China, it originally means amativeness, then it extends to mean gluttony and desire. Different from Chinese young generations' interpretation, it reflects a feeling of heartbeat and shows her friends her love to them. In this post, the main language she uses is Laos which implies she emphasizes her motherland and confirms her identity as a Laos at her birthday which triggers the thought of birthplace. Meanwhile, through using Laos, she is connecting herself with her Lao relatives and friends. As for English, English is a way to show her identity as a global citizen because of the state of world's lingua franca of English. The usage of English is her way to show her international and fashionable. Through Chinese is not used in her post, it appears in their communication about this post. With the same transnational education experience, these international students tend to use Chinese rather than English as interlanguage. It indicates that Chinese becomes efficient and universal lingua franca for these international students studying in China. It is quite different choice since English is always preferred in communication happened between two people of different linguistic background. It also proves that Chinese is becoming a common interlanguage in the world. Hence, Lin's communicating with other friends in Chinese indicates her identity of global citizen on all accounts. Meanwhile, her identity as a language learner is also highlighted.

4.3 Sociocultural Inbetweenness

Besides performing the functions of the intertextuality of local voice and transnational identity as language learners and global citizens, Lao students' translanguaging is also concerned about sociocultural inbetweenness between Laos, China and the rest of the world, which means Lao students act like the cultural transmission between their homeland and the host country. The following figures all present languages' function of sociocultural inbetweenness.

Figure 11 is a questionnaire about young people's preference of T- shirt made by Mei in Laos and Chinese. Figure 12 is about Hong's e-commerce on Facebook. Figure 13 is Hong's ghostwriting service provided for her international peers. The intention of their translanguaging practice and multilingualism is to construct their identity as sociocultural inbetweenness. In these figures, their multilingualism reveals their effects on connecting two countries and their multilingualism functions as their methods of gaining profits and fame.

Lao students often act as cultural broker between China and Laos by doing their research project and sharing Lao-related customs. Similar to other international students, Mei was required to conduct her mini-project on the potential market of selling certain product as indicated in the following figure.

Figure 11
Screenshot of Mei's questionnaire of teenagers' preferred T-shirt and its content
Note: What kind of T-shirt would you like? Let me know something about it through this questionnaire. Thanks for your participation.

Figure 11 posted by Mei represents her identity as sociocultural inbetweenness between Laos and China. She plays the role as a cultural broker who breaks up the cultural barrier between Laos and China and combines Lao culture with Chinese culture. Mei posts a questionnaire to investigate young people's favorite T-shirt through two different languages, Laos and Chinese, which means her targeted groups are versed in Lao and Chinese. In her post, she simply tells that her intention is to investigate "what kind of T-shirt would you like?", ask her readers to finish this questionnaire and thank them for their participants. In her questionnaire, she primarily gives a brief introduction about her investigation and the contents of her questionnaire concluding participants' basic information, participants' preferred styles, designs and brands of T-shirt, expected price, popular types of T-shirt and expected T-shirt. In this post, Mei posts her requests by Chinese followed by Lao translation. As an international questionnaire targeting people from different countries, she chooses Chinese as interlanguage rather than English which is frequently used in international affairs. It implies that Chinese has become a tool to link two countries and two culture with each other and has become the world's lingua franca when they crossed the borderline to apply for higher education in China. Her setting Chinese in front of Lao suggests that she highlights Chinese more than her mother tongue during her studying aboard in China. Since she majors in international economic and trade, she plays a role as a middle person to get information about young people's preference of T-shirt of China and Laos that she is examining product information, market demand and market positioning. In this way, Mei identifies herself as a cultural broker for China and Laos.

Apart from proving their social and cultural knowledge, Lao students also take advantage of their transnational identity to make business and expand their social networks both in China and Lao as indicated in Hong in Figure 12.

Figure 12
Screenshots of Hong's e-commerce on Facebook

Figure 12 posted by Hong provides direct evidence how Hong transfers her linguistic competence into economic capital. It also suggests that her translanguaging practice and multilingualism construct her identity as a sociocultural inbetweenness. In other words, Hong is doing e-commerce and her goods are from China. Her business actually has some social background. According to the data published on June 11th, 2021 from the Guangxi tunnel in People's Daily Online, the bilateral trade

between China and Laos reached 3.55 billion U.S dollars in 2020, hence, China has become the second largest trade partner and the largest foreign direct investor of Laos. More specifically, Lao amount of imports were about 479 million U.S. dollars in May, 2021, and China was the second largest importing country of Laos that the amount of imports reached 117 million U.S. dollars. These are the statistical data on the website of Ministry of Commerce of the People's republic of China provided by the Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos affiliated Embassy of China in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. From previous data, China's goods have huge market opportunities in China. It is also confirmed by Hong's words:

Our daily supplies are all made by China and are delivered from China's express. Do you know our chopsticks are yours... Our Laos cannot make these things by ourselves so we cannot live without your products. (laughing) (Hong, 20210813, interview)

The data prove that selling China's products can be promising in Laos that not only Lao customers have demand on Chinese products, but also Lao people have some preference on Chinese products. It shows the feasibility in Laos of Hong's business. Hong takes this opportunity to transfer her language competence into economic profits. From the following figures, it can be seen that she uses Laos to introduce the information of goods to attract potential Lao customers. After customers make the orders, she utilizes her Chinese knowledge to order customers' required goods on Pinduoduo APP. With the improvement of her Chinese proficiency, her business makes some progress. The former picture present her previous business flows which contain her seeking lovely goods, posting them on Facebook with information in Laos, Lao customers contacting her to order the product they want and then using her Chinese competence to order what they want on Pinduoduo. It means her former business is a passive process that she only needs to transfer her customers' demand into Chinese shopping APP. However, she has developed one more new business recently with the progress of her Chinese proficiency. She uses some methods to find out the contact information of the merchant who is Chinese and persuades the merchant to give her some discounts and to deliver the goods to Laos. In the whole process of seeking and contacting the Chinese merchant, she has to use Chinese. She buys a huge amount of short socks in this way and then she posts it on her Facebook waiting for the order from her Lao customers after she receives her express. Her usage of Laos and Chinese present her multilingualism and translanguaging practice. She utilizes her language advance to expand her business which brings her profits which support her on her tuition, campus expenses and even travel expenses. Thus, Hong's translanguaging practice and multilingualism help her to construct her identity as a sociocultural inbetweenness which also means her identities as an ethnic messenger and a cultural broker bringing her economic benefits.

While engaging herself in the transnational business, Hong has accumulated many cultural resources, which turns out to be a capital for her to "assist" her Lao peers to look for academic support in writing up their Chinese essay, submitting their assignment etc.

Figure 13
Screenshot of Hong's ghostwriting service on Facebook

Note: Provide ghostwriting of every kind of homework (Lao): 1. classroom assignment; 2. thesis; 3. English; 4. Mathematics; 5. Chinese language; 6. teaching plans; 7. every kind of texts; 8. word, excel, ppt; 9. Chinese purchasing agents; 10. travel consultation; 11. videos.(Chinese) If you need any help, please contact Hong (Lao).

Figure 13 posted by Hong shows how Hong transforms language into goods and how Hong treats her potential readers as human resources. In the modern era, language can be changed into goods bringing profits to people. This Facebook involves Chinese and Laos which implies her potential readers are transnational students in China who come to China to learn Chinese, particularly aiming at Lao international students. Her Facebook also reveals something about the phenomenon of ghostwriting industry among international students. Firstly, the formation of ghostwriting industry among these international students is the imbalance between these Lao students' Chinese proficiency and the required competence of their academic courses, which forces them to seek for the way of cheating for finishing their tasks and also leads to the prosperity of ghostwriting industry. Secondly, the ghostwriting industry provided to Lao students has been a mature industry and has existed for a long time, which can be proved by her wide range of businesses, including many subjects and projects. She learns and inherits this project from her senior schoolmates. Lastly, it also reflects some weaknesses in school's management of Lao international students that relevant supervision is still missing so the ghostwriting industry thrives and school lacks of Chinese courses meeting international students' language proficiency. Besides, Chinese language occupies more than ninety present spaces of this post, given that

most of her Lao schoolmates are studying under the Chinese medium instruction systems which means they are looking for Chinese ghostwriting service. Hong's use of Chinese indicates directly that her ghostwriting service is in connection with Chinese homework or tasks.

Overall, Lao students' translanguaging practice and multilingualism presented on their posts on Wechat and Facebook are the way of their sociocultural inbetweenness's identity construction. Through language transformation and multilingualism, these Lao students aim at obtaining particular information of transnational culture and gaining economic profit and fame.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The previous analysis has revealed that Lao international students draw upon their multilingual and semiotic resources from their whole repertoires so that they can enhance the effectiveness and functionality of their communication on social mass media like Wechat and Facebook. Assembled in the complicated way, Lao international students' multilingual and translanguaging resources imply exceeding the simple mixing mode of languages to create a translanguaging phenomenon that encompasses the features of online communicating and learning spaces across the national borders, linguistic repertoires with characteristics of their home country and the host countries and cross-cultural resources of both the countries.

Creating the translanguaging phenomenon involves not only linguistic issues, but also social, cultural and political factors. Firstly, Lao international students' translanguaging practice is a linguistic issue. Multilingual and translanguaging resources are drawn upon to present the creative and special ways of multicultural and translanguaging implications that combines the features of both languages. Secondly, it is pertinent to social and cultural factors. Translanguaging users do not automatically or mechanically copy the existing linguistic mechanism, instead, they actively and flexibly present their creation of translanguaging practice meeting situational needs and contextual effects. The implications of their translanguaging practice involve social and cultural meanings, which indicates that translanguaging used by translanguaging users functions as reflections of social and cultural agency. In this study, specifically, translanguaging practice presented by transnational speakers reveals the intertextuality of the local voice, helps transnational speakers to construct their identities as language learners and global citizens, and functions as sociocultural inbetweenness. Thirdly, translanguaging also involves political issues. For example, through translanguaging practice, some Lao international students show the invisible governmental political tendency which hides behind the words they present on social mass media.

This study focuses on trasnlanguaging practice of Lao international students presented on social mass media. Previous studies emphasize international students in elite schools of Western-European countries and immigrants students without further exploration of students from South Asian and Southeast Asian countries studying at China' bordering schools. Seeking the promise of personal prospect, Lao international students travel to a host university overseas. These students are also a special group different from elite students. Their translanguaging practices are pertinent to varied social, cultural and political factors in both the home country and the host country. Their motivation and reasons of translanguaging practice can be different from other international groups and they are worthy of more attention.

This study explores Lao international students' translangauging practices and ideologies revealed by their multilingualism and translanguaging practice presented on their posts on Wechat and Facebook. Based on the analysis of the data collected from the ethnographic study of five Lao international students majored in International Business and Trade in Yunnan University, this study presents the implications behind Lao students' translanguaging practices that their online translanguaging help to intertextualize the local voice, their transnational identities as language learners and global citizens are constructed through their online translanguaging practices, Lao students' translanguaging also presents international students' role as sociocultural inbetweenness between Laos, China and the rest of the world. This study suggests that Lao students tend to perform their transnational identities online and their translanguaging practices intersects with social, cultural, political and economic factors.

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