

An Analysis of Chinese Language Teaching Strategies under Sino-Thai Cultural Differences

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Abstract: In the context of growing cultural exchanges between China and Thailand, this paper examines the impact of Sino-Thai cultural differences on Thai students' Chinese language learning and proposes targeted teaching strategies. It outlines key cultural distinctions between the two countries — such as values, customs, and educational traditions — and highlights their influence on Thai learners' study habits and cognitive styles. These cultural gaps often lead to challenges in comprehension and differences in thinking patterns, which may hinder learning outcomes. To address these issues, the paper recommends three main strategies: incorporating Thai cultural elements into Chinese language instruction, fostering intercultural communication competence, and applying flexible, student-centered teaching methods. These approaches aim to enhance Thai students' engagement, adaptability, and overall effectiveness in learning Chinese. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural understanding in today's globalized world. By aligning teaching practices with students' cultural backgrounds, educators can improve the quality of Chinese language education and strengthen cultural ties between China and Thailand.

Keywords: cultural differences, teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL), teaching strategies, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

In recent years, cultural exchanges between China and Thailand have grown significantly, fostering closer ties in areas such as education, tourism, and business. As a result, the demand for Chinese language learning among Thai students has increased rapidly. However, teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) in Thailand is not merely a matter of language instruction—it also involves navigating and bridging cultural differences that can influence students' learning outcomes. While Thai learners are often enthusiastic about studying Chinese, many face challenges that stem not from linguistic difficulties alone, but from deep-rooted differences in cultural norms, educational values, and communication styles.

This paper focuses on the impact of Sino-Thai cultural differences on Chinese language education in Thailand and explores how these differences affect students' cognitive patterns, learning behaviors, and classroom interactions. Key differences in values, etiquette, and teaching traditions may lead to misunderstandings, reduced motivation, or ineffective teaching outcomes if not adequately addressed by language instructors. Therefore, developing culturally responsive teaching strategies is essential for improving the effectiveness of TCFL in Thai educational contexts.

The purpose of this study is to identify the major cultural factors that influence Thai students' Chinese learning and to propose targeted teaching strategies that align with their cultural background. The central hypothesis of this study is that teaching strategies which integrate Thai cultural elements and promote intercultural competence will enhance Thai students' engagement, comprehension, and overall performance in Chinese language learning.

By addressing the intersection of culture and language education, this study aims to contribute to both the academic field of TCFL and the practical improvement of Chinese language teaching in Thailand. Furthermore, it highlights the broader importance of intercultural understanding in language education and offers insights applicable to other cross-cultural teaching contexts.

2. Overview of Sino-Thai Cultural Differences

Although China and Thailand are geographically close, there are significant differences between the two countries in terms of culture. These differences are not only reflected on the surface—such as in language, religion, and customs—but also extend to deeper levels, including values and ways of thinking. The following is a brief overview of the cultural differences between China and Thailand.

First, language is a key carrier of culture. Risager (2005)[1] argues that languages and their languacultures spread across cultural contexts and discourse communities. This view has a range of far-reaching implications for the content

and identity of language teaching and learning. Chinese and Thai belong to different language families: Chinese is part of the Sino-Tibetan family, while Thai belongs to the Austroasiatic family. In terms of writing, Chinese uses logographic characters, while Thai employs an alphabetic script. This difference leads to distinct ways and styles of expressing thoughts and conveying information in the two cultures.

Second, religious beliefs form the core of cultural identity. Smolicz (1980)[2] argues that religion might serve as a powerful influence on an individual identity assuming that the person involved is deeply religious or significantly committed to his/her religion. China's dominant belief systems include Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, while Thailand is predominantly a Buddhist country. Although both countries have Buddhist traditions, the forms of practice and religious expressions differ. These distinctions influence the two peoples' values, moral norms, and lifestyles.

In terms of social customs, there are many contrasts as well. For example, in culinary habits, Chinese cuisine emphasizes variety in ingredients and sophisticated cooking techniques, with attention to color, aroma, and taste. Thai cuisine, on the other hand, values the freshness of ingredients and a balanced flavor profile. Regarding family values, Chinese culture stresses filial piety and family hierarchy, whereas Thai culture places more emphasis on individual freedom and family harmony. In terms of etiquette, Chinese people commonly shake hands to show friendliness, while Thais use the traditional "wai" gesture with palms pressed together.

Moreover, differences in values are also evident. Chinese culture tends to prioritize collective interests over individual ones and places emphasis on emotional connections. Thai culture, while also group-oriented, highlights familial and clan relationships in particular. These differences shape how people from each culture perceive issues and interact with others.

In summary, Sino-Thai cultural differences are multi-dimensional. They not only influence daily life and social interactions but also profoundly shape people's thinking and behavior. These cultural distinctions have important implications for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). Teachers must recognize and understand these differences, and adopt flexible teaching approaches to meet Thai students' learning needs and promote deeper cultural exchange and cooperation between the two countries.

3.The Impact of Cultural Differences on Thai Students' Chinese Language Acquisition

Spackman (2009)[3] found that culture is experienced through language, however because language is inseparable from culture. Cultural differences exert a profound and multifaceted influence on the acquisition of Chinese by Thai learners. These influences extend beyond linguistic features and surface-level learning behaviors, manifesting in students' cognitive styles, study habits, and emotional cognition. Understanding these impacts is essential for optimizing teaching strategies and improving educational outcomes in the context of international Chinese language education.

3.1 Cognitive Styles

One of the most salient impacts of cultural differences is reflected in the cognitive styles of Thai learners. Thai culture typically emphasizes intuitive and affective thinking, with a focus on personal feelings and sensory impressions. In contrast, Chinese culture is rooted in logical, analytical reasoning and values structured, rational thought processes. This divergence presents challenges for Thai students when engaging with the logical underpinnings of Chinese grammar and sentence structures.

For example, the standard Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order in Mandarin Chinese, the use of aspect markers, and the application of rhetorical and cohesive devices often require a high level of logical reasoning and abstract thinking. Thai students, accustomed to a more intuitive learning approach, may find these features difficult to master, particularly at early stages of language learning.

To mitigate these challenges, Chinese language educators should place emphasis on the development of students' analytical and logical reasoning skills. Instructional strategies might include the use of deductive grammar instruction, problem-solving tasks, and structured dialogues that require students to analyze and construct meaning. Simultaneously, teachers can leverage the intuitive strengths of Thai learners by integrating visual aids, situational teaching, and experiential learning activities that appeal to affective learning channels.

By aligning cognitive strategies with students' cultural dispositions while gradually introducing alternative modes of reasoning, educators can bridge the cognitive gap and enhance overall language competence.

3.2 Learning Habits

Hill and Jordan (2021)[4] argue that we are constantly learning every day and in every area of our life, doing this we use different learning styles, methods, techniques and are having different learning habits. Learning habits shaped by cultural

context significantly influence Thai students' engagement with Chinese language learning. Compared with Chinese students, Thai learners often display a more flexible, learner-centered approach. Their learning is typically driven by interest and personal rhythm, and they place greater emphasis on experiential learning and peer interaction.

However, Chinese language acquisition—particularly in areas such as phonetics, character recognition, and grammar—often demands systematic study, repetition, and memorization. This discrepancy may result in initial resistance or slow progress as students adjust to more structured learning requirements.

Moreover, while Thai students are generally enthusiastic participants in classroom discussions and group activities, limitations in linguistic competence may hinder their active involvement and oral expression. Consequently, opportunities for communicative practice may be underutilized, impacting both confidence and language output. Teachers must therefore foster a supportive and interactive classroom environment while simultaneously enhancing students' Chinese proficiency, particularly in spoken and written communication.

Additionally, Thai students' preference for gradual, cumulative learning may clash with exam-oriented instructional goals, such as those associated with standardized Chinese proficiency tests. This mismatch can contribute to elevated stress levels and diminished motivation. It is imperative for educators to design personalized learning plans, adopt differentiated instruction, and provide clear learning pathways to accommodate such preferences while maintaining academic rigor.

In sum, cultural variation in learning habits necessitates adaptive pedagogical approaches. Effective instruction should account for learner autonomy and incorporate interactive, experiential components, while also reinforcing disciplined study practices essential for long-term language acquisition.

3.3 Emotional Cognition

Emotional cognition—how learners perceive, process, and express emotions—represents another domain where cultural differences exert a notable influence. In the context of Chinese language learning, Thai students often encounter challenges in interpreting and expressing emotional nuances embedded within linguistic structures due to differing cultural norms.

Thai culture generally encourages open and direct expression of emotion, whereas Chinese culture is characterized by restraint, subtlety, and contextual ambiguity in emotional expression. As a result, Thai learners may struggle to accurately interpret the emotional undertones of Chinese utterances or may misread implicit emotional cues, leading to misunderstandings in communication.

Furthermore, disparities in emotional vocabulary and culturally-specific expressions may hinder learners' comprehension. Certain emotional concepts familiar to Thai learners may lack direct equivalents in Chinese, requiring additional explanation and contextualization to ensure accurate usage and cross-cultural understanding.

These cultural divergences may also affect learners' emotional engagement with the content of instruction. Variations in values and worldviews could result in discomfort or resistance when encountering emotional content that diverges from their cultural expectations. Thus, fostering intercultural awareness is critical to promoting not only linguistic competence but also emotional literacy and acceptance.

Educators should integrate explicit instruction on the emotional dimensions of language, using examples from authentic contexts to illuminate cultural practices surrounding emotion. In addition, opportunities for intercultural communication—such as exchanges with native Chinese speakers or exposure to Chinese media—can facilitate a more nuanced understanding of emotional expression and enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence.

In conclusion, emotional cognition is a culturally mediated dimension of language learning that requires thoughtful pedagogical intervention. By cultivating intercultural sensitivity and providing graduated support, educators can help Thai students navigate emotional discourse in Chinese and develop greater communicative effectiveness.

4. Instructional Strategies for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language to Thai Students

Urh and Jereb (2014)[5] suggested that instructional strategies are defined as the instructional materials and procedures that enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. Given the cultural differences between China and Thailand, educators must adopt instructional strategies tailored to the specific characteristics of Thai learners. These strategies should aim to enhance students' language acquisition as well as their intercultural communicative competence, thereby promoting more effective learning outcomes in the Chinese language.

4.1 Integrating Elements of Thai Culture

To align Chinese language instruction with the cultural and experiential background of Thai students, educators can incorporate elements of Thai culture into classroom activities. For instance, when teaching vocabulary and expressions

related to festivals, teachers may introduce traditional Thai holidays such as Songkran (Thai New Year) and the Loy Krathong Festival. By explaining the origins, customs, and activities associated with these events, students' interest in learning Chinese can be stimulated, while also encouraging them to use Chinese to describe and discuss familiar cultural phenomena. Furthermore, teachers can make use of culturally resonant materials such as Thai cuisine, landscapes, and public figures as instructional content, thereby creating a relaxed and engaging learning environment that fosters greater interest in and identification with Chinese language and culture.

4.2 Emphasizing the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005)[6] argue that intercultural communication competence (ICC) is an area of study that is becoming more relevant in the increasingly multicultural communities that we live in. Given the significant cultural divergence between China and Thailand, it is essential for Chinese language instruction to emphasize the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. Educators can design classroom activities such as discussions and role-playing to guide students in understanding the differences between Chinese and Thai customs, etiquette, and value systems. Such exposure not only enhances students' comprehension of Chinese cultural norms but also aids in their adjustment to cross-cultural communication contexts. In addition, teachers are encouraged to promote real-world intercultural interactions, including language exchanges with native Chinese speakers and participation in cultural immersion activities, to strengthen learners' intercultural awareness and communicative effectiveness.

4.3 Employing Flexible and Varied Teaching Methods

Recognizing that Thai students' learning habits and preferences differ from those of Chinese students, educators should employ flexible and diversified instructional methods to better accommodate their needs. Game-based learning can be utilized to design interactive and enjoyable activities that facilitate language acquisition in a relaxed setting. Simultaneously, multimedia tools—such as images, videos, and audio materials—can be employed to visually and audibly reinforce linguistic structures and cultural content, thereby improving instructional effectiveness.

Moreover, teachers should offer individualized learning support based on students' specific difficulties. For example, for learners struggling with pronunciation, targeted phonetic drills can be implemented; for those facing challenges with vocabulary retention, effective memorization strategies can be introduced. Such personalized instructional support can help meet diverse learner needs and improve the overall efficiency of language acquisition.

In conclusion, the formulation of Chinese language teaching strategies for Thai students should take into full account their cultural background, learning characteristics, and educational needs. By integrating Thai cultural elements, emphasizing the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence, and employing flexible and personalized teaching methods, educators can create an engaging and effective learning environment that not only facilitates Chinese language acquisition but also enhances students' cross-cultural communication abilities.

5. Conclusion

The cultural differences between China and Thailand exert a significant and multifaceted influence on Thai students' Chinese language acquisition. These differences are not limited to linguistic structures or communicative styles, but extend deeply into learners' cognitive patterns, study habits, and emotional cognition, thereby affecting their overall language learning outcomes. Consequently, Chinese language instruction for Thai learners must be culturally responsive and pedagogically adaptive, with strategies tailored to their specific learning characteristics and cultural backgrounds to enhance both linguistic competence and intercultural communicative ability.

Specifically, the integration of Thai cultural elements into Chinese language teaching is essential to contextualize learning and increase relevance. By embedding familiar cultural content — such as traditional Thai festivals, cuisine, and customs — within instructional materials, teachers can foster greater engagement and cultural resonance. Moreover, cultivating students' intercultural communication skills is a vital component of effective instruction. Through structured activities such as classroom discussions, role-plays, and cultural comparisons, educators can help learners navigate the differences between Chinese and Thai cultural norms, promoting deeper understanding and smoother adaptation to Chinese communicative contexts.

In addition, the adoption of flexible and diversified teaching methods is critical to meeting Thai students' varied learning preferences. Gamified instruction, multimedia resources, and individualized learning support can enhance motivation, accommodate individual differences, and improve overall language proficiency. Teachers should also consider the specific challenges faced by learners—such as pronunciation difficulties or vocabulary retention—and provide targeted interventions and personalized guidance.

In sum, effective Chinese language instruction for Thai learners requires a holistic and culturally informed approach that aligns content, pedagogy, and learner context. By integrating cultural relevance with pedagogical innovation, educators can create a dynamic and supportive learning environment that fosters both linguistic development and intercultural competence. Future research should further investigate best practices in culturally responsive language instruction and employ empirical methods to evaluate the effectiveness of tailored strategies in diverse learning contexts.

The findings and recommendations of this study offer not only theoretical insights for the field of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), but also practical guidance for classroom practitioners, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers. It is hoped that through continued intercultural research and pedagogical advancement, Chinese language education can serve as a bridge for deeper cultural exchange and mutual understanding between China and Thailand, as well as contribute to broader collaboration in education, culture, and beyond.

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