

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Teaching Chinese Language Outside of China: The Case of Chinese Teachers in Thailand

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**Abstract:** To respond to the increasing demand for Chinese language teachers in Thailand, Hanban, a non-governmental, public organization affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, has employed many Chinese teachers on a voluntary basis. Weighing on this matter, this study explored the perceptions of 13 Chinese language teachers of the difficulties and challenges of being Chinese teachers in Thailand. Online survey questionnaires and individual follow-up interviews were used to collect the data. Findings revealed that participants held a positive perception with regards to being Chinese language teachers in Thailand. Some reasons why they came to teach in Thailand included Thailand's ancient culture and a chance to broaden their working experience and horizon. However, they also reported that the language barrier, lack of classroom management experience, and inappropriate textbooks for tertiary education hampered their teaching. The findings indicated that Chinese language teachers urgently need professional and ongoing training to ensure their teaching quality. In addition, further efforts for developing textbooks for higher education are demanded.

**Keywords:** Chinese teachers, teaching in Thailand, volunteer teachers, teaching challenges, teaching motivation

摘要：

为了应对泰国对汉语教师的需求的增加，许多中国教师来到泰国为国家汉办担任志愿教师。这项研究探讨了十三位汉语教师对在泰国教汉语所面临的困难和挑战的看法。本文作者运用在线问卷和个人后续访谈来收集数据。调查结果表明，参与者对在泰国当中文老师持积极的看法。吸引他们来泰国教书的因素包括泰国古老的文化，以及借此机会扩大他们的工作经验和视野。但是，他们还报告说，语言障碍，缺乏教室管理经验以及不当的高等教育教科书给他们的教学带来困扰。调查结果表明，中文教师迫切需要专业且持续的培训，以确保他们的教学质量。另外，撰写合适，合益的高等教育教科书同样是重中之重。

关键字：中文教学，泰国教学，志愿教师，教学困扰，教学推动力

With the economic reform and opening-up policy since 1978, China's economy has grown significantly (Karthikeyan & Peng, 2015), which led to China becoming the second-largest economy in the world (Zhu, 2012). In fact, China plays a crucial role in science and technology globally (Veugelers, 2017). Thus, with China's rising international status, a need for mastering the Chinese language has risen accordingly in other countries (Scrimgeour, 2014; Wang, 2016), including in Thailand, whose GDP growth largely relies on the tourism industry (Huang, 2019). China's booming economy has brought a large number of tourists to Thailand. The report released in 2012 showed that China replaced Malaysia and became the major source country of foreign visitors to Thailand, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Scrimgeour, 2014). Being able to speak Chinese is one of the advantages that potentially provide more opportunities to obtain a better job among Thai people.

Historically, in Thailand, Chinese language education was dated as early as 1782, when the first Chinese language school was established (Manomaiviboon, 2004). Learning Chinese has been enormously popular among Thai people since 1992 (Manomaiviboon, 2004). The year 1998 witnessed the Chinese language's integration into the Thai syllabus to fulfill high school students' requirements. Yet, while the number of learners was increasing, Chinese language teachers were becoming scarcer. Fortunately, the problem was greatly addressed with the help of Hanban. Hanban or Confucius Institute is a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, furnishing countries worldwide with Chinese language and cultural teaching resources as well as services. Hanban dispatches teachers selected and trained from universities in China to Confucius Institutes all over the world. Chinese teachers' serving period varies from one to maximally five years, up to the need of the host countries (Karthikeyan & Peng, 2015). As to Thailand, the maximum length is three years. The first attempt of Hanban in Thailand started in 2003, whereby 23 volunteer teachers were sent to the aforementioned country to facilitate the teaching of the Chinese language (Jiang, 2011, as cited in Zhang H, 2012). The number of Chinese volunteer teachers has increased ever since, as announced by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (2019), there are more than 17,000 volunteer Chinese language teachers are teaching in "over 1,000 universities,

primary and secondary schools in 73 provinces in Thailand."

Chinese language education in Thailand has not been without challenges, and there have been several studies exploring and revealing the challenges of Chinese education in Thailand. Because the vast majority of the volunteer teachers are new graduates with no experience in teaching Chinese abroad before teaching in Thailand, one common obstacle in effective teaching of the Chinese language is the teachers' lack of experience (Chen, 2015; Kanoksilpatham, 2011; Lin et al., 2014; Ronnaphol, 2013). This is further expanded by literature which states that factors such as appropriateness of textbooks designed, efficiencies of classrooms, and the integration of technology in teaching are the key elements in ensuring effective learning of the Chinese language (Alshammari, 2020; Ronnaphol, 2013; Yeh, 2014, Ye, 2017). However, as none of the data from the abovementioned papers was gathered solely from Chinese volunteer teachers, the present study endeavors to explore native Chinese language teachers' motivations and the challenges they face in living and teaching in Thailand. It is hoped that the results of this study will gain a profound understanding of Chinese language teachers and facilitate them to adjust to Thailand's work and non-work environment, thereby developing and elevating Chinese language education in Thailand. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key factors motivating native Chinese teachers to teach in Thailand?
2. What difficulties do the native Chinese teachers experience in their living in Thailand?
3. What challenges do they face in their teaching in Thailand?

## Literature Review

### *Chinese Education in Thailand*

Manomaiviboon (2004) elaborated on the history of Chinese language education in Thailand in the paper "Chinese Language Teaching in Thailand." Chinese language education in Thailand can be traced back to 1782, when the first Chinese language school was established on an island in Ayutthaya Province. Afterward, due to some historical reasons, Chinese language schools were opened and closed continually. Not until 1989, Thai people started

realizing the importance of the Chinese language; apart from English, Chinese was offered in primary schools. In 1992, the Chinese language, together with English, French, German, and Japanese (four foreign languages taught in Thailand for years), was authoritatively accepted in Thai schools. Since 1998, Chinese has been woven into the Thai high school syllabus. Consequently, teaching and learning Chinese has drawn more attention from the Thai Ministry of Education.

Manomaiviboon (2004) also laid out five factors that led to the popularity of learning the Chinese language in Thailand since 1992. First, China has a considerable influence on the Thai economy; therefore, speaking Chinese has become an essential skill in bilateral trade. The evidence was that during the Thai financial crisis, although numerous employees were let go, the ones who could speak Chinese survived. Second, Thai royal members' visits to China sparked an interest in teaching and learning Chinese. Third, the Chinese language was included in the Thai high school syllabus in 1998, which means Chinese is one foreign language of the university admission test. Fourth, the rise of China's international status. China became a member of WHO in 2001. In 2008 and 2010, China hosted the Olympic Games and the World Expo, respectively. Last, in 2003, China and Thailand commenced an agricultural produce Free Trade Area. Manomaiviboon (2004) stated that these factors accounted for the popularity of the Chinese language and spurred Thai people to learn it.

According to Manomaiviboon (2004), Chinese language teachers with a bachelor's degree were woefully inadequate as a consequence of the rising status of the Chinese language by 2004. Coincidentally, 2004 was the year in which Hanban rolled out the Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program officially (Zhang, 2018).

### ***Hanban***

Hanban, or the headquarters of Confucius Institute, is a non-governmental, public organization affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. The main objective of Hanban is to provide teaching resources of the Chinese language and culture and services all over the world, aiming to fulfill foreign Chinese learners' needs and make a contribution to developing the world's multiculturalism and harmony. The functions of Hanban are threefold, encompassing: (a) making

principles and developing plans to boost Chinese language teaching worldwide, (b) facilitating Chinese language programs at each type and level of education organizations out of China, and (c) setting Chinese teaching standards internationally, and developing and enhancing Chinese language teaching materials (Hanban, n.d.-a).

### ***Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program***

The Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program, which is under the charge of Hanban, is set up to dispatch volunteer Chinese teachers from China to overcome other countries' shortage of teaching force. Volunteer teachers who have to major in disciplines of liberal arts are recruited and selected from newly graduated undergraduates, in-school master students, as well as professional teachers. After taking a training course, qualified volunteers will be sent off to different countries. The maximum period of teaching is three years if their performance is satisfactory (Hanban, n.d.-b).

### ***Previous Studies***

A large number of studies that focused on challenges confronted by native Chinese language teachers were undertaken in western countries. Although many researchers attempted to explore the difficulties faced by Chinese language education in Thailand, there is a lack of research produced specifically to find out the challenges from the native Chinese teachers' perspective as well as the factors that motivate Chinese language teachers to teach in Thailand.

### ***Studies on Chinese Teaching in Western Countries***

Chen and Yeung (2015) examined the different factors that affected the self-efficacy of Chinese language guest lecturers in Sydney. Chen and Yeung (2015) assigned factors into three categories: teacher factors, student factors, and contextual factors. Zhu (2015) revealed that failing to use the medium of instruction—English—fluently and a lack of teaching experience lead the participants to perceive themselves as unqualified teachers. Students' poor motivation and classroom discipline are the factors from students. Moreover, the teachers' educational culture and class size are deemed to be the contextual factors.

Lu et al. (2019) carried out a study to reveal the professional development they were longing for, in addition to the challenges and difficulties the Chinese native teachers had encountered in British schools.

In this research, a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 31 Hanban teachers. The researchers categorized the challenges into three aspects, namely, linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-cultural. Shortages of knowledge of the English language, intercultural competence, knowledge of the local education system, and skills of effective teaching and classroom management were reported as the prominent hindrances in this study. In terms of professional development, the participants wish to acquire more practical and targeted training to optimize their teaching in the host country.

Liao et al. (2017) also examined the challenges faced by novice native Chinese language teachers and how the challenges transformed throughout their first two years of teaching in U.S. public schools. Instructional strategy and classroom management were the participants' major concerns in the beginning. However, with the accumulation of teaching experience, challenges of classroom management declined profoundly. Meanwhile, the teachers' focus gradually shifted to student assessment and accommodating learner differences.

The previous research mentioned above revealed that the language barrier, lack of skills in classroom management, lack of teaching experience, and shortage in professional training are the main challenges encountered by the beginner Chinese language teachers who were teaching in western countries.

### *Studies on Chinese Teaching in Thailand*

Studies carried out in Thailand disclosed that mismatched textbooks, volunteer teachers' lack of teaching experience, and their short serving periods are the major challenges of Chinese language education in Thailand.

### *Textbooks*

Most textbooks used in Thailand are not tailored for Thai learners (Kanoksilpatham, 2011; Ronnaphol, 2013; Wei & Weerasawainon, 2019). According to Ronnaphol (2013), who undertook a study gathering data from 574 primary and secondary schools countrywide, the textbooks are inappropriate: some are designed for English-speaking learners; there are no Thai explanations. Xie (2018) also studied the problems and challenges of Chinese language education in a region in northern Thailand and found that the content of the textbooks is not up to date, dull, and uninteresting, and the selection of textbooks is not systematic. Wei and Weerasawainon (2019) analyzed three Chinese textbooks being used by three Thai universities and revealed that "there lacks significant consistency in terms of the amount of grammar, the difficulty level of grammar, text topics, and culture" (p. 151), and "there are significant mismatches between the adopted textbooks and the needs and wants of the specific group of Thai learners in terms of text topics, cultural knowledge, real-life application, etc." (p. 151).

**Table 1**  
*Participants' Demographics*

Participants' Demographics		Percentage	Number
<b>Age (years)</b>	20-25	7.7	12
	30-35	92.3	1
<b>Gender</b>	Male	92.3	1
	Female	7.7	12
<b>Education</b>	Bachelor	53.8	7
	Master	46.2	6
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	>1 year	92.3	12
	<10 years	7.7	1
<b>Teaching Institution</b>	Kindergarten	7.7	1
	Elementary	7.7	1
	Secondary	53.8	7
	University	30.8	4

Another research done by Bao et al. (2020) also supported this notion of unsuitable Chinese textbooks being manufactured for non-native Chinese language learners, whereby participants of the interview stated that the information listed in textbooks are not well-translated and that some information is “misleading.”

### ***Inexperienced volunteer teachers***

In Ronnaphol’s (2013) study, the researcher found out that half of the Chinese language teachers did not have a Chinese language teaching certification. Many teachers had never attended any formal training courses prior to their teaching. However, the researcher did not clarify the nationality of the teachers in this research. Although Kanoksilpatham (2011) discovered that around 92% of her Chinese participants had less than one year to five years of teaching experience, Hanban’s three-year serving limitation constrained their contribution.

### ***Volunteer Teachers’ Limited Serving Periods***

Due to Hanban’s restriction on volunteer teachers’ serving length (three years maximum), volunteer teachers are replaced on a yearly basis, which renders the teaching force unstable (Xie, 2018), and the contribution of the Chinese teachers are limited (Kanoksilpatham, 2011).

## **Methods**

This study is qualitative that employs interpretive phenomenology analysis (IPA) as its research framework. According to Eatough and Smith (2017), IPA emphasizes “the detailed examination of personal lived experience” (p.193). This approach could provide researchers with meaningful, profound, and explicit experiences and perceptions of the participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Therefore, a semi-structured interview was used to collect the needed data for this study. The interview was conducted between January 2020 and February 2020.

### ***Context and Participants***

This study was conducted in Thailand because the researchers work in the aforementioned country. Given that the focus of the paper was on native

Chinese language teachers, all the participants were Chinese passport holders who are teaching the Chinese language in Thailand. Thirteen Chinese teachers (12 female and 1 male) from nine schools in the country participated in the study. Twelve of the participants with one year’s teaching experience are in their early 20s, and the only one who is not a volunteer is 34 and has been teaching Chinese in Thailand for 12 years. Additionally, one teacher was teaching in kindergarten, one in elementary school, seven in secondary, and four in colleges and universities. Table 1 is a summary of the participants’ demographics.

### ***Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis***

Before the conduct of the study, we contacted them via Wechat to inform them about the study. Furthermore, it was stressed that their responses would be treated with complete confidentiality. The links of the interview invitation, which were written in Chinese, were forwarded to two Wechat groups that consist of merely Chinese language volunteer teachers in Thailand. Three teachers from the first group and 10 teachers from the second group responded to the invitations for interview. Afterward, we carried out a face-to-face interview with six of the participants who were colleagues in two schools; the rest who were located too far from our location responded to the interview through the messaging function of Wechat for convenience. All face-to-face interviews were recorded through the recording function of a mobile phone.

The interviews consist of two parts. Part 1 focused on background information, such as name, gender, age, teaching experience. Part 2 is composed of open-ended questions that aim to elicit in-depth information in terms of reasons for teaching in Thailand and the challenges encountered in regards to living and teaching in Thailand. The data from the interviews were transcribed and translated to English so it could be carefully analyzed. The transcript was then analyzed through the identification of keywords and phrases that match the following criteria: reasons for volunteering to teach Chinese in Thailand, challenges of living in Thailand, and challenges of teaching in Thailand. The selected phrases and keywords were then highlighted using different colors to ease the classification and analysis process.

## Findings

Based on the interviews, there were three main themes that emerged: reasons for teaching Chinese in Thailand, problems in living in Thailand, and challenges in teaching in Thailand.

### *Reasons for Volunteering to Teach Chinese in Thailand*

Thai culture was the dominating determinant of teaching in Thailand, followed by boosting personal life experience and internship. Seven participants stated that they were attracted by Thai culture, lifestyle, and Thai people's hospitality. The release of "Lost in Thailand" in 2012, a hit comedy film about three Chinese men's adventures in Thailand, inspired an enormous number of Chinese tourists (Kornphanat, 2013), as well as volunteer teachers to visit or work in Thailand.

"Thai students are lovely and Thai people are hospitable, meanwhile, China and Thailand are close neighbors, and we show respect and strong affection for each other." (Participant 1)

"Thai people are very kind and warm-hearted; they are happy to give us a hand whenever we need help. Their relaxed lifestyle also admires me." (Participant 5)

"I watched the movie 'Lost in Thailand,' the beauty of natural scenery, the ancient temples, and the rustic countryside amazed me immediately. Since then, I decided to travel to Thailand if I had a chance." (Participant 9)

Seven of them expressed that working in a foreign country (Thailand) is a big and exciting challenge that would enrich their lives. Participant 11 reported that it was a great experience living in Thailand and that it has provided him the opportunity to grow as a professional educator and as an individual. Meanwhile, the rest of the participants chose Thailand as the country to work in merely because of the internship they received from selected universities in Thailand.

### *Challenges in Living in Thailand*

Regarding the challenges encountered in adjusting to living in Thailand, eight participants reported that

language is the primary hindrance. All the volunteer teachers received a training course in which the Thai language is included before heading to Thailand, but most of the participants stated that they just learned some expressions for daily life, such as *jin kao* (eat a meal) and *bai nai* (where are you going). They find it difficult to communicate with local people or their Thai colleagues. Even though the Thai Chinese language teachers are willing to lend a hand whenever they need help, they felt that it would be easier to build a deeper relationship if they could speak more Thai. One teacher reported that

"My Thai language is rudimentary. I can only speak a few words like 'yes,' 'no,' and 'do you understand.' Normally, I speak Chinese with my Thai colleagues. We don't have trouble communicating with each other, but I failed to establish an intimate relationship with them on account of my atrocious knowledge of Thai." (Participant 2)

As a result, some Chinese teachers spend most of their time alone, and the feeling of loneliness triggers their homesickness for China. To make matters worse, they opt to work only for a year despite the three-year working limitation.

"My Thai language sucks, so most of the time I prefer staying at my dorm, reading books, or surfing the internet. Sometimes I feel lonely and I really miss my home. I guess I will not teach in Thailand next year." (Participant 6)

Sweltering weather, inconvenient transportation, as well as Thai people's lack of punctuality were factors that a small number of Chinese teachers found difficult to be accustomed to.

"The weather in Thailand is unbearably hot, which makes me sweat like a pig even in the mornings. For this reason, I have been trying to avoid the exposure of the sun as much as possible." (Participant 3)

"Unlike China's sophisticated transportation system, public transportation here is rather inconvenient. I can go nowhere since I don't have a motorbike or a car." (Participant 12)

“It appears that most Thai people are not time-concerned, which I simply can’t stand up to. Nine times out of ten, my Thai colleagues will show up late for the appointments we had, let alone Thai students. (Participant 11)

### ***Challenges in Teaching in Thailand***

With regard to inhibitions in teaching, big class size outweighs the language barrier, ranking number one, followed by Thai students’ lax discipline. Yet, textbook and Hanban teachers’ restrictive serving periods are not perceived as factors that influence Chinese teachers’ effective teaching.

### ***Class Size***

Ten participants who worked in secondary schools and universities pointed out they were frustrated by the big class size, which is 30 to 40 students. One teacher (Participant 2) noted that she had been teaching “Chinese Conversation,” but due to her 35 to 40-student class size, she could neither give every student opportunities to speak nor individual feedback.

The challenge that confronts Participant 5 is classroom management caused by the big class size.

“I have around 40 students in my classes. When we have group work, I can only focus on one group, while the other groups may be chatting with their friends instead of doing their exercises. I would ask them to be quiet and do what they were asked to, but a few minutes later, they would start talking again. I spend a lot of time maintaining discipline rather than teaching.” (Participant 5)

### ***Language Barrier***

The lack of Thai language knowledge is the greatest challenge in living in Thailand, although it ranked number two in terms of teaching. Participants reported that they are not able to employ their inadequate Thai language knowledge to explain abstract vocabulary or complex grammar points. Under these circumstances, they would turn to “Google Translator” to translate things into Thai. However, it is not always a perfect solution. For instance, Participant 1 expressed her concern as, “It is time-consuming to use translation apps, and what is more, I don’t know whether these apps could translate everything accurately since I can’t read Thai.” Apart from teaching some specific

knowledge, Participant 3 reported that it is hard to create a relaxing classroom atmosphere with his poor Thai language proficiency.

“I tried to tell jokes in my classes in an attempt to arouse students’ interest, but I couldn’t express myself clearly, and students couldn’t get my point, so finally I just asked them to disregard my jokes.” (Participant 3)

### ***Thai Students’ Poor Discipline***

Five teachers mentioned that compared to Chinese students, Thai students are slack and lack discipline. The thing that frustrated Chinese teachers most was Thai students’ talkativeness. All five mentioned that Thai students talk a lot in the class even while the teacher is instructing. Therefore, they have to repeatedly spend time enforcing discipline. Furthermore, Participant 6 pointed out she has to check students’ attendance at the beginning of every class, which she thinks is a waste of time simply because not all the students would be present in the classes. Class attendance is one of the important contributors to students’ final grades.

### ***Textbook***

The textbook issue, which was highlighted in a majority of previous papers conducted in the context of Thailand, was exclusively pointed out by four participants who worked in universities. They uttered that some textbooks are really outdated and some fail to match the objectives of the subjects, and they have to search and compose more appropriate material on their own. Participant 1 told us at the interview that the textbooks she used for the conversation subjects were old-fashioned, and many expressions in the books were not used anymore in any form of communication. Because there were no alternatives at her disposal, she had to turn to the Internet searching for appropriate materials. She also claimed that she had been overwhelmed by the heavy teaching load – the extra work for gathering teaching materials was exacerbating.

### ***Volunteer Teachers’ Limited Teaching Experience***

In terms of teaching experience, 10 teachers used to work as student teachers, which was required by their universities. Four of them even completed their internships in Thailand. Only three teachers have not had a chance to teach.

All the Chinese teachers agree that prior teaching experience would be helpful and beneficial. This can be seen from the answers given in the open-ended questionnaire, which pointed out that “teaching experience is really helpful for [novice] teachers” (Participant 11) and that “the lack of teaching experiences before coming to teach in Thailand really [hinders] the performance of [her] teaching during the first three months” (Participant 4). Transcriptions from the individual interview also supported this, as all the three participants pointed out the importance of teaching experience in ensuring a smooth transition to a new workplace in Thailand.

Apart from that, five teachers, either with or without prior teaching practice, mentioned that the teaching experience they needed, especially in Thailand, was classroom management skills rather than how to impart knowledge. Participant 6 wrote that “Chinese students are well-disciplined. I didn’t bother to handle any chaos and I could put all my attention on teaching. But in Thailand, I spend a lot of time controlling students’ behavior, which is frustrating.” Participant 3 said that because she completed her internship in a primary school in Thailand, she longed for student assessment knowledge as she was teaching in a university as a volunteer teacher.

### ***Volunteer Teachers’ Serving Period***

Eight teachers believed that volunteer teachers’ serving period limitation would not affect students’ learning. Participant 7 wrote that “Our school has a detailed and rigid curriculum, so we can finish the teaching tasks since we have been following it.” Three teachers working in universities claimed that students’ autonomy plays a more crucial role than teachers’ teaching style.

## **Discussion**

This paper aims to explore the factors that motivated 13 native Chinese language teachers to teach in Thailand and reveal the challenges that confronted their living and teaching. The findings demonstrated that Thai culture is the prime factor that attracted most Chinese teachers to work in Thailand. The language barrier is the most outstanding problem in living in Thailand. In terms of difficulties of teaching, a lack of Thai language, knowledge of classroom management,

and appropriate textbooks are considered as the major barriers to effective teaching.

Regarding the motivation of working in Thailand, this study found that Chinese teachers who taught in Thailand were strongly attracted by the positive perception of the country. The factors listed by participants were as follows: the warm and friendly nature of Thai people, the relaxed lifestyle in Thailand, and the breathtaking scenery of the country. This notion is supported by all three interview participants, who referred to Thailand as The Land of Smiles (L.O.S), giving Thailand a positive impression in general. These positive factors provide Chinese teachers the opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle of the city life they had back in metropolitan China (Zhang X, 2012).

In terms of difficulties of living in Thailand, this study showed that Chinese teachers’ limited knowledge of the Thai language caused difficulties in interacting with locals, adjusting to Thai life, and building an intimate relationship with Thai colleagues all lead to their loneliness, resulting in giving up their privilege to work in Thailand for another two years. This finding is supported by the study done by Noman et al. (2020), which indicated that the language barrier issue was also experienced by some Chinese people who worked in Pakistan. The participants also reflected that they heavily relied on Thai colleagues in handling daily issues. Thus, it is important for them to keep on with Thai language learning even in Thailand, and a Thai mentor is suggested to assist them in sorting out problems in their lives.

In regards to challenges faced by native Chinese language teachers teaching in Thailand, this study found that there are three main areas affecting the effective teaching of the Chinese language in Thailand: knowledge of the local language, classroom management skills, and suitability of textbooks.

### ***Knowledge of Local Language***

Firstly, this study revealed that insufficient local language knowledge hinders successful instructions in the classrooms. This finding is in line with Alshammari’s (2020), Lu et al.’s (2019), and Zhu’s (2015) studies, which emphasized the importance of teachers having mastered the local language before teaching Chinese as a foreign language. In Thailand, students study Chinese as a foreign language; thus, the vast majority of them have no prior knowledge of the language. Therefore,



it would be profoundly helpful if Chinese teachers could speak Thai as well to give clear explanations about some complex language points. However, Thai is a foreign language to Chinese teachers as well. Despite the fact that they completed a Thai language training course in China before coming to Thailand, their knowledge of the Thai language is inadequate to employ as a means of instruction. When they failed to give a clear explanation, they would seek help from some translation applications to translate Chinese to Thai, which they considered time-consuming. This finding implies that Chinese teachers urgently need training programs emphasizing formal Thai language learning to ensure success in carrying out lessons. Besides Hanban's training courses, Thai host schools may also consider launching such programs for them before and throughout their teaching.

### ***Classroom Management Skills***

Secondly, this study highlights the importance of classroom management skills, which Chinese teachers conspicuously lack. The data from the survey questions and individual interviews indicate that students' poor discipline, big class size, and Chinese teachers' limited working experience contribute to the atmosphere of a chaotic classroom. Chinese teachers believed that big class sizes worsened students' behavior, and their lack of experience in handling misbehaved students gave rise to a disorganized classroom. As has been reported by Liao et al. (2017), Lu et al. (2019), and Zhu (2015), volunteer teachers in western countries also experienced classroom management problems. The possible explanation for the result is that the culture the volunteer teachers grow up with may have a significant impact on their perceptions of a well-behaved student; they expect that students with good discipline should strictly follow the teacher's instruction (Lu et al., 2019; Zhu, 2015). This finding suggests that volunteer teachers should acquiesce themselves to the Thai culture. Meanwhile, classroom management skills should also be included in the training program.

### ***Suitability of Textbooks***

Lastly, lacking appropriate textbooks is another challenge facing Chinese teachers who work in Thai universities. This result coincides with Wei and Weerasawainon's (2019) findings. Actually, Kanoksilpatham (2011) and Ronnaphol (2013) also pointed out that Thai Chinese language education

in primary and secondary schools is hampered by a shortage of textbooks tailored for Thai students. However, no data in this study support their finding. This may indicate that the textbook problems for Grade 1 to Grade 12 students have, to some extent, get solved, meaning some authorized institutions probably have developed textbooks suitable for them. Nevertheless, appropriate textbooks for undergraduates are still scarce.

With regard to volunteer teachers' three-year teaching restriction, which was reported as a factor hampering Thailand's Chinese language education (Kanoksilpatham, 2011; Xie, 2018), no obvious evidence could be found from this study to support this finding. Participants in this study acknowledge the importance of teaching experience. However, they feel that expertise for dealing with students lacking discipline far outweigh the strategies of imparting knowledge. The result indicates that prior teaching experience is essential, yet in the context of Thailand, given the culture gap, there is an acute need for classroom management skills.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

This study confirmed previous research on Chinese teachers, which states that the low mastery of local language, lack of teaching experience, and inappropriate textbooks negatively affect Thai students' acquisition of the Chinese language. However, this study also revealed that from the perceptions of the native Chinese teachers, expertise in classroom management takes priority in that of teaching and that their willingness to teach in Thailand is high despite the aforementioned challenges. This implies that extending foreign teachers' cross-cultural understanding and Thai language training should be given priority to help foreign Chinese teachers to adapt to and overcome challenges they may face while teaching in Thailand. Therefore, we suggest that both Hanban and Thailand's host schools should construct some cultural courses to deepen Hanban Chinese teachers' understanding of the Thai education system, Thai culture, as well as issues concerning teaching and learning among Thai learners. Apart from that, this study also showed that textbook-related problems are exclusively associated with tertiary education. This finding indicates that the textbooks used by primary and secondary schools

have been developed and improved to fit Thai learners' needs. Thus, to ensure that Thai learners receive quality materials in learning the Chinese language at the tertiary level, further effort in designing appropriate textbooks that cater to learners' needs is desperately needed.

### Limitations of Study

As this study was conducted among volunteer teachers in the southern region of Thailand, the results obtained can only be used as a reference for volunteer teachers who are located in the said region, and that it could not be generalized for all cases or situations in other parts of Thailand. Furthermore, as the study employs a semi-structured interview, it is safe to say that the data obtained are "personalized answers and views," in which case the results may not apply to and account for all volunteer teachers who are teaching in Thailand. Thus, we suggest that more comprehensive research that involves a larger group of participants and mixed methodologies such as survey questionnaires and focused group discussions should be done in the future.

### Declaration of ownership

This report is my original work.

### Conflict of interest

None.

### Ethical clearance

This study was approved by my institution.

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