

DEVELOPING CHINESE TEXTBOOKS TO MATCH THAI LEARNERS' IDENTITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION, THAILAND

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Abstract: This paper aims to develop Chinese textbooks targeting Thai learners by assessing the overall effectiveness of the Chinese textbooks used in the international programs in higher education institutions, Thailand, as well as by analyzing Thai learners' perceptions toward the textbooks. The three Chinese textbooks being used were analyzed in terms of the amount of grammar, the level of difficulty of grammar, topics, vocabulary and cultural knowledge. One hundred and sixty-nine college students participated in the study to express their attitudes towards the textbooks. The results showed that although the Chinese textbooks target beginners, there was a lack of content consistency. Moreover, there were significant mismatches between the textbooks and the Thai learners' needs and wants in terms of text topics, cultural knowledge, and real-life application. The researchers, therefore, would like to propose that Chinese textbooks in Thai market should adopt a learner-centered approach to satisfy Thai learners' identity.

Keywords: Textbooks Analysis, Chinese Language Teaching, Higher Education, Thai Learners, Learner-Centered Approach.

Introduction

Instructional materials play a crucial role in language education. Especially, textbooks are the most used teaching materials that closely contribute to the quality of both teaching and learning. They not only provide a framework for teachers to achieve the teaching purposes, but also make the existing knowledge easily accessible to learners in a selected and organized format. Besides, as Hycroft (1998) pointed out, textbooks are psychologically essential for students since their progress and achievement could be measured concretely. Therefore, the textbook has become one of the most essential tools used by learners to study the target language in the classroom.

With the rapid development of the Chinese economy, Chinese language has gradually become the second most important language for Thai learners. However, the status of Chinese textbooks in Thailand is problematic. There is a lack of appropriate Chinese textbooks that can be used to teach Thai students; there are no standardized policies regarding Chinese textbooks and teaching references; the selection of textbooks are mainly based upon the free choices of each school. (Zhao, 1997; Wu & Yang, 2008; Zheng, Jiang & Chen, 2014). Therefore, the investigation of existing teaching materials has become an urgent task. Only by understanding the deficiencies of the existing teaching materials, can effective ways be found to improve and replace the existing teaching materials or prepare nationalized teaching materials that are more suitable and appropriate for the identity of Thai students. Especially for the beginners, they mainly rely on teaching materials to learn Chinese language and acquire knowledge about China. Therefore, the study of comprehensive textbooks in Thailand in the primary phase is particularly important.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to develop the Chinese textbooks targeting Thai learners by assessing the overall effectiveness of the Chinese textbooks used in the international programs in higher education institutions in Thailand, as well as by analyzing Thai learners' perceptions toward the textbooks.

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Research Objectives

1. To identify the features of the current Chinese textbooks used in the international colleges, Thailand;
2. To analyze Thai learners' attitudes toward the Chinese textbooks used in the international colleges, Thailand;
3. To assess the overall effectiveness of the current Chinese textbooks used in the international colleges, Thailand.

Literature Review

Textbooks in Classroom

Cunningsworth (1995) identifies a textbook as a resource in presenting the material, a source for learners to practice and do the activities. Tong (2001) states that without textbooks, a program may have no impact. Besides, the use of a textbook in a program can guarantee that students in different classes will receive a similar content and therefore, can be evaluated in the same way. In other words, textbooks provide the standards in instruction and evaluation. Grant (1987, p.8) claimed (the) 'perfect book does not exist', yet the aim was to find out the best possible one that will fit and be appropriate to a particular learner group. However, the failure to analyze learners' needs and wants is the major issue in the current textbooks, which fails to satisfy various requirements in terms of changes of countries, learners, and learning context (Tan, 2017). Lin (2009) also argued that appropriateness is the top priority when writing overseas Chinese textbooks. The entire structure, contents and activities must be designed according to the concrete needs of learners in the domestic countries, such as learners' age, learning background, study purpose, and time limitations are taken into consideration when compiling textbooks (Li, 2006). In addition to the consideration of learners' needs, the analysis of teaching contents also plays an important role. Richards and Rodgers (2001) argued that the teaching of any subject matter is usually based upon an analysis of the nature of the subject and the suitable teaching methods or approaches that can be applied in classroom practice. The subject matter in language teaching is language per se. Learners try to master the language through texts selected in textbooks. The quality and the variety of the texts will directly influence the quality of the textbooks and learning, especially at elementary level. The topics in Chinese textbooks have been categorized into four areas, according to Zhu, Jiang & Ma (2008), which refer to topics related to people, family, society and culture. Moreover, such topics should foster students' interest in learning, which has been the consensus of all the textbook writers (Liu, 2008). In addition, exercises or activities are another essential aspect to be considered when evaluating the quality of textbooks. They will produce direct influence upon teaching and learning outcomes (Li, 2006 & Lv, 2008). Tok (2010) stated that textbooks do not only provide a framework for teachers in achieving the aims and objectives of the course, but also serve as a guide for the teacher on how to conduct the course. Despite the popularity of the modern communicative language teaching approach (CLT) in second language teaching, the traditional grammar-centered approach has always played a dominating role in the Chinese classroom. The mainstream understanding in teaching Chinese has always been grammar-oriented. As Liu (2008) argued, Chinese language has its own characteristics, therefore, focus on grammatical structures should still be the fundamental principle when teaching Chinese as a second language. Fang (2008) also highlighted the importance of grammar in elementary Chinese textbooks. Without solid grammatical knowledge, it will be more and more challenging for students to have good command of advanced levels of Chinese language. Teaching and learning of any language cannot be separated from the culture that it is rooted in. The cultural concerns of textbooks have, therefore, become more prominent. Language and culture are closely related to each other. For all language users, it is important to understand the target culture to enhance learning motivation and interpersonal relationships. Chinese language is no exception. Textbooks should satisfy the requirements of social, educational as well as classroom environment. However, some proponents of authentic classroom language models have argued that the problems of many textbooks are not that they carry social or cultural biases, rather, they are too artificial or oversimplified in presenting the target language (Tong, 2001). Sokolik (2007), Suaysuwan and Kaitzke (2005) and Yuen (2011) criticized that many global textbooks lack cultural appropriateness when being used in certain contexts (cited in Harwood, 2014).

Learner-Centered Classroom

Barr and Tagg (1995) argued that higher education institutions need to emphasize a learning paradigm in order to succeed in the 21st century (cited in Wei, 2018). Therefore, the role of learners has become more and more important in classroom. Learners are active participants in learning and co-constructors of knowledge, in contrast to a teacher-centered classroom, where the instructor is the active presenter of knowledge, as argued by Meece (2003). In other words, learners should be the main agents in this constructive learning process. Learners are encouraged to make some decisions about all components in the learning process: the content of their courses (i.e. what they learn), the ways in which the course topics are learned (i.e. how they learn), the ways in which students' learning is evaluated, and classroom policies (Blumberg, 2009; Doyle, 2008; Weimer, 2002). In a learner-centered classroom, students' voices should be heard to enhance both teaching and learning. The most influential work in line with hearing students' voices in classroom is Fielding's (2012) typology of patterns of partnership to explain how adults listen to and learn with students in school, thereby suggesting six forms of interaction between adults and young people in schools and other educational contexts. This typology is summarized as follows: Students as data source – in which staff (teachers) utilize information about student progress and well-being.

- Students as active respondents – in which staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning and professional decisions.
- Students as co-enquirers – in which staff take a lead role in providing high-profile, active student support.
- Students as knowledge creators – in which students take lead roles in the classroom with active staff support.
- Students as joint authors – in which students and staff decide on a joint course of action.
- Intergenerational learning as a lived democracy – in which there is a shared commitment and responsibility towards the common good of the educational institution.

Student voice has served as a catalyst for change in schools, including helping to improve teaching, curricula, and teacher–student relationships, leading to changes in student assessment and teacher training (Fielding, 2001; Lodge, 2005; Mitra, 2003). However, very few studies analyzing students' role in designing textbooks in relevant literature. To improve the quality of the Chinese textbooks used in Thai teaching and learning context, this study aimed to adopt a learner-centered approach by identifying Thai learners' learning needs and interests in the course content, designing teaching and learning activities based on students' needs and interests, and inviting students to engage in critical thinking about their own studies.

Research Methodology

Selection of International Colleges, Thailand

The international colleges in Mahidol University (MU), Chulalongkorn University (CU), Thammasat University (TU) were selected in this study based upon the following reasons:

- MU, CU, and TU are the most well-known national universities in Thailand;
- MU is the first university that established international college; CU is the first university that offered Chinese-major program; TU is the first university that set up the Chinese program in its international curricula;

Therefore, the research about these three universities can accurately reflect the status of Chinese teaching in Thai National University in the existing stage.

Selection of Three Chinese Textbooks

- MU

Chinese Course (2006 Revised Version) Jinzhou Yang, Beijing Language and Culture University Press.

- CU

Integrated Chinese (2006) Daozhong, Yao & Yuehua Liu, Cheng & Tsui Co., Ltd.

- TU

Boya Chinese (2006) Xiaoqi Li, Peking University Press.

Research Method

Objective 1: To identify the features of the Chinese textbooks used in the international colleges, Thailand Content analysis was used to compare and contrast the similarities and differences among these selected Chinese textbooks. *Objective 2: To analyze Thai learners' attitudes toward the Chinese textbooks used in the international colleges, Thailand.* The questionnaire was used to find out Thai learners' attitudes towards the Chinese textbooks. There were 169 students who participated in this study. All of them took Chinese courses at the beginning level in the selected three universities in 2016. The data collection instrument was designed to find out students' learning motivation and interests in Chinese language; students' preferences about topics related to Chinese, as well as their satisfaction with the Chinese textbooks being used. The questions were translated into both English and Thai to ensure accuracy of understanding.

Findings

Research Objective 1 Features of Chinese Textbooks Similarity

All the three textbooks have achieved prestigious names in teaching Chinese beginners. *Integrated Chinese* is considered the most popular textbook adopted in American colleges. *Chinese Course* has been influential in Non-Chinese speaking countries. *Boya* has gained great popularity in teaching foreigners in Chinese higher education.

Differences by Grammar

Table 1: Number of Grammatical Points

Item/Textbook	Chinese Course		Integrated Chinese		Boya Chinese	
	Book 1	Book 2	Book 1	Book 2	Book 1	Book 2
Number of grammar	18	15	72	57	75	67
Total	33		129		142	

Table 1 indicates that the numbers of grammatical points included in *Boya Chinese* (142) and *Integrated Chinese* (129) are much greater than that in *Chinese Course* (33).

Table 2: Level of Difficulty of Grammar

Textbook/Item	A	B	C	D	Others	Total
Chinese Course	16	2	0	0	0	18
Book 1	88.89%	11.11%	0	0	0	100%
Chinese Course	17	8	3	0	2	30
Book 2	56.67%	26.67%	10.00%	0	6.67%	100%
Integrated	54	13	5	0	0	72
Chinese Book 1	75%	18.06%	6.94%	0	0	100%
Integrated	25	14	12	2	4	57
Chinese Book 2	43.86%	24.56	21.05%	3.51%	7.02%	100%
Boya Chinese	61	8	2	0	4	75
Book 1	81.33%	10.66%	2.66%	0	5.33%	100%
Boya Chinese	33	9	4	5	16	67
Book 2	49.20%	13.43%	5.97%	7.46%	23.88%	100%

Table 2 presents the level of difficulty of grammar included in Chinese textbooks. According to Chinese Grammar Outline, there are four basic levels (A, B, C and D) in terms of difficulty level of grammar and the number of grammar points. The *Outline* defines the Level A and Level B belong to the elemental level; and Level C intermediate level as well as level D advanced level. According to Table 2, *Integrated Chinese* (72 in Book 1 & 57 in Book 2) and *Boya Chinese* (75 in Book 1 & 67 in Book 2) consists of greater number of grammar points than *Chinese Course* (18 in Book 1 & 30 in Book 2). In addition, the

corresponding level of difficulty in the former two textbooks is higher than that of the latter. For instance, Level C grammatical points in *Integrated Chinese* Book 2 accounts for more than one fifth of the total grammatical points (21.05%), which is significantly higher than those in *Chinese Course* and *Boya Chinese*, the numbers stood at 10.00% and 5.97% respectively. Lastly, both *Integrated Chinese* and *Boya Chinese* even covered advanced grammatical knowledge, which accounts for 3.51% and 7.46% respectively.

Differences by Text

The three textbooks have different features in terms of text topics, as shown in Tables 3, 4, & 5. Topics in *Chinese Course* are sentence-oriented and campus life-related since it was structured based upon grammar and written for overseas students studying in China. Different from *Chinese Course*, topics in *Integrated Chinese* are much more general and flexible. Compared with the other two textbooks, topics in *Boya Chinese* are not only broad, covering campus life-related discussions as well as social life-related conversations, but also aim to allow students to experience Chinese culture.

Table 3: Topics in *Chinese Course*

Chinese Course			
Book 1		Book 2	
1-5	How are you?	16	Do you often go to the library?
Focusing on	Chinese is not difficult.	17	What is s/he doing?
Phonetics	See you tomorrow.	18	I go to the post office.
	Where are you going?	19	Can I try?
	This is teacher Wang.	20	I wish you a happy birthday.
6	I study Chinese.	21	We will start off at 7.15 a.m. tomorrow.
7	What do you eat?	22	I plan to find a teacher to teach me Peking Opera.
8	How much is it per kilogram?	23	Is there a post office on campus?
9	I want to exchange money.	24	I want to study <i>Taiji</i> .
10	Where does s/he live?	25	She studies well.
11	We are all overseas students.	26	Where is Tianfang?
12	Where do you study?	27	Mary is crying.
13	Is this Chinese medicine?	28	I came right after I finished my breakfast.
14	Is your bike new or old?	29	I did all correctly.
15	How many employees in your company?	30	I have been in China for two months.

Table 4: Topics in *Integrated Chinese*

Integrated Chinese			
Book 1		Book 2	
1	Greeting	11	Talking about Weather
2	Family	12	Having meals
3	Time	13	Asking directions
4	Hobby	14	Birthday party
5	Visiting friends	15	Seeing a doctor
6	Making appointment	16	Dating
7	Learning Chinese	17	Renting
8	School life	18	Sports
9	Buying stuff	19	Traveling
10	Transportation	20	At the airport

Table 5: Topics in *Boya Chinese*

Boya Chinese	
Book 1	Book 2
1 How are you?	31 The airplane is delayed.
2 Where are you from?	32 I want to move out.
3 Is that your book?	33 She is wearing a yellow shirt.
4 Where is the library?	34 There are not many bikes in America.
5 At the west of the Oriental University.	35 The food in this restaurant is tasty.
6 What time is it?	36 There is a notice on the billboard.
7 Will you have class tomorrow?	37 It's time to change a bigger fridge.
8 What is your phone number?	38 The match is excellent.
9 How much is one bottle of this?	39 I cannot get inside.
10 How many people in your family?	40 The mountain view is fabulous.
11 It's cold in winter in Beijing.	41 Fried eggs with tomato
12 What are you doing?	42 Moving to a new place
13 I go to post office to pick up my package.	43 A letter
14 Do you like the light colors?	44 How long will it take to succeed?
15 Tomorrow is my friend's birthday.	45 Wait a moment
16 What do you at weekend?	46 Which side should I begin to eat a banana?
17 Visiting a friend (1)	47 Lijun's dairy
18 Visiting a friend (2)	48 I watched Peking opera
19 I am used to it.	49 If one day...
20 Visiting a patient	50 Good coffee is always in the hot cup.
21 He caught a cold	51 Golden week: Have a good fun.
22 I drank alcohol.	52 One call
23 How long have you been studying Chinese?	53 Jokes
24 Please come to see me after you finish your breakfast.	54 Life
25 You should work out more.	55 Miss Dessert
26 The examination is coming soon.	
27 My father and mother want me to go home.	
28 How was your examination?	
29 I've bought a ticket.	
30 I want to join a party.	

The total number of vocabulary items in *Boya Chinese* is the greatest, which stands at 1425. The *Chinese Course* and *Integrated Chinese* contain similar amount of vocabulary that are 906 and 866. However, there are the average of 43.3 words in each unit in *Integrated Chinese*, which is much more than the other two textbooks due to its fewer units (20 units in total) (see Table 6).

*Differences by Vocabulary***Table 6: Vocabulary**

Textbook/Item	Number of Unit	Number of Vocabulary	Average number of vocabulary per unit per book	Total	Average number of vocabulary per unit in total
Chinese Course Book 1	15	370	24.7	906	30.2
Chinese Course Book 2	15	536	35.7		
Integrated Chinese Book 1	10	453	45.3	866	43.3
Integrate Chinese Book 2	10	413	41.3		
Boya Chinese Book 1	30	684	22.8	1425	25.9
Boya Chinese Book 2	25	741	29.6		

Differences by Culture

Even though there are some information related to Chinese culture mentioned in all three textbooks, the degree of the importance varies. As shown in Table 7, only *Integrated Chinese* provides a unique section titled *Cultural Highlights* with detailed explanations to learners, together with authentic pictures to increase learners' interests in the target language.

Table 7: Cultural

Textbook/Item	Topics related culture	Vocabulary	Exercise	Detailed explanations
Chinese Course	Chinese traditional food; the Spring Festival, the Moon Festival, Taiji; etc.	Yes	No	No
Integrated Chinese	Addressing Family concepts; schooling information; Peking opera; Chinese holidays; preferred foods, etc.	Yes	Yes (after-class exercises)	Yes (via <i>Cultural Highlights</i> ; explanations in English; authentic illustrations, such as family pictures, social life pictures, shopping receipts, etc.
Boya Chinese	Visiting friends; different food preferences between northern and southern areas; water house; etc.	Yes	Yes (after-class exercises)	No

Research Objective 2

Thai Learners' Attitudes toward Chinese Textbooks

Part I Personal Information

As shown in Figure 1, female students account for more than two thirds of the total participants (71%).

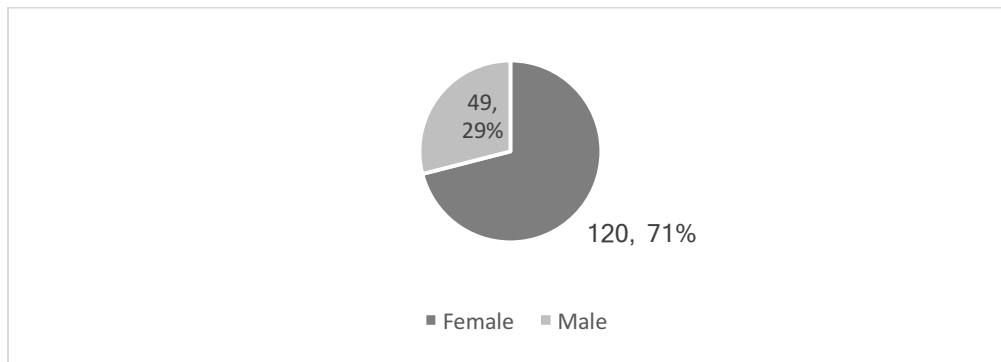


Figure 1. Gender

Part II Study Purposes

Study purposes were categorized into four major types: Academic-oriented, Career-oriented Personal Interested-oriented, and Family-orientated. Figure 2 indicates that almost half of the participants (80) study Chinese for better career opportunities after graduation. The second most important reason is related to students' family background; such as study for developing family business or fulfilling parents' requirements. The other 36 participants study Chinese to complete the general education requirements or improve GPA; and it is interesting to find out that only seven participants follow their own interests, which is less than 5% of the total participants.

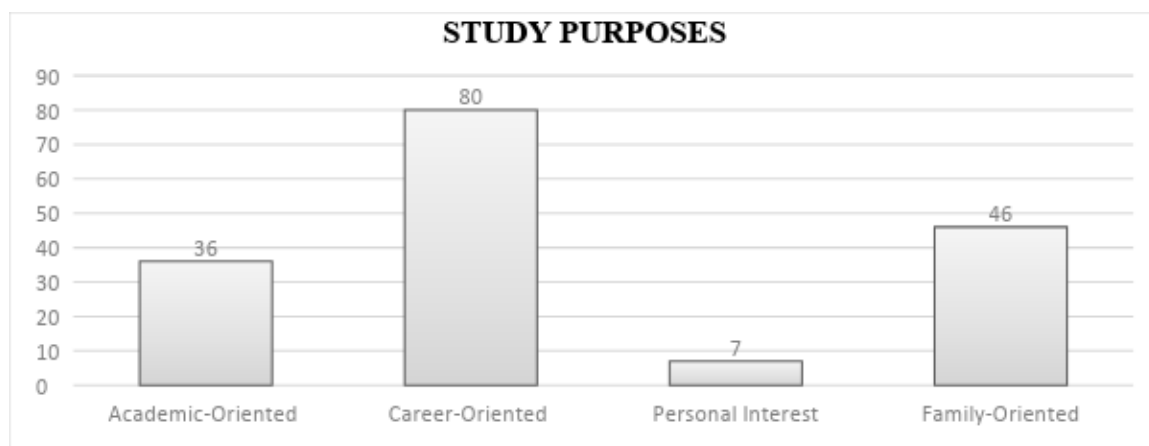


Figure 2. Study Purposes

Part III Students' Preferences

According to Figure 3, Food, Travel, and Shopping are three major topics preferred by Thai participants, the numbers stood at 46, 36, and 28 respectively. The second type of topics are Phone calls (23) and School life (20). The other topics, such as Transportation, House Rent, Bank, and Hospital failed to attract the participants' interests significantly.

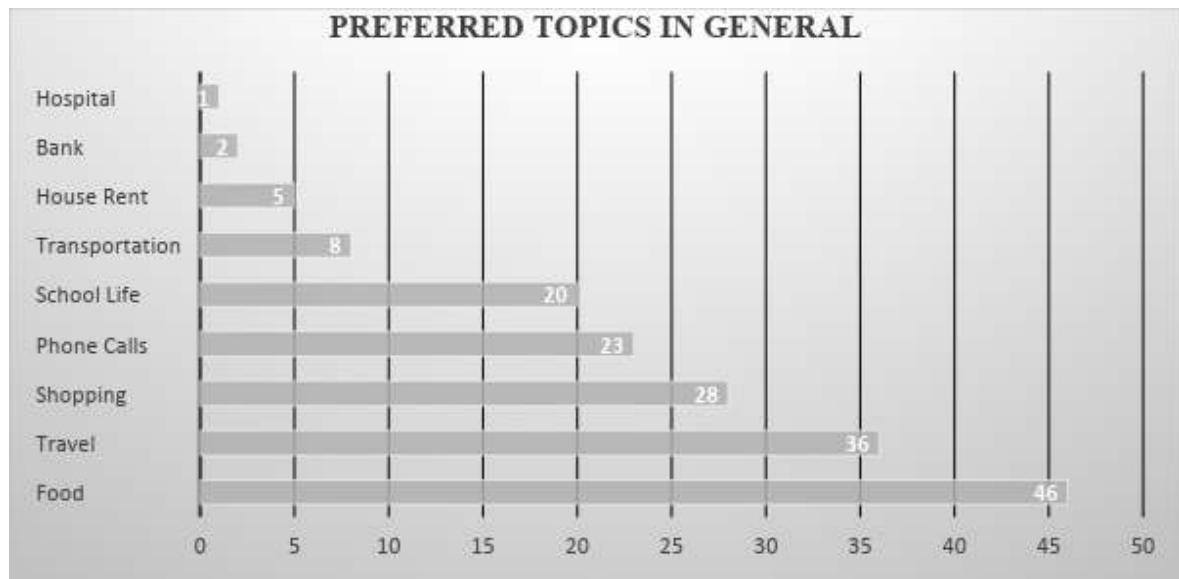


Figure 3. Preferred Topics in General

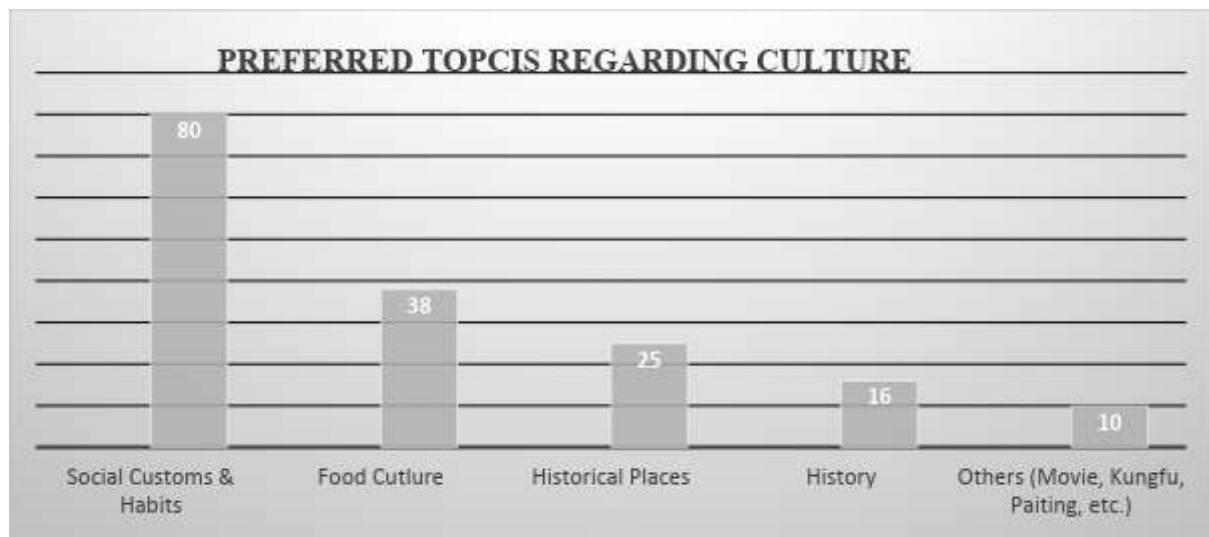


Figure 4. Preferred Topics regarding Culture

Figure 4 demonstrates that almost half of participants (80) was interested in the social customs and habits in China. Cultural knowledge related to food and historical places (25) were also preferred by Thai participants, which matches with the participants' interests in Food and Travel, as indicated in Figure 3. Besides, 16 participants preferred to learn Chinese history and other 10 would like to learn more about Chinese movies, Kung Fu and Painting, etc.)

Part IV Attitudes toward Chinese Textbooks

Figure 5 shows students' attitudes toward the design and content of the textbooks. 3 indicates "absolutely agree, and 0 "absolutely disagree". In general, participants were more satisfied with the Design (3.2) than the Content (2.9). In terms of Content, real-life application and activities achieved the second lowest score (2.9) compared with the least satisfying non-text content (2.8). As regard to Design, the quality of printing format and size (3.5) was considered as the most satisfying aspect compared with other features.

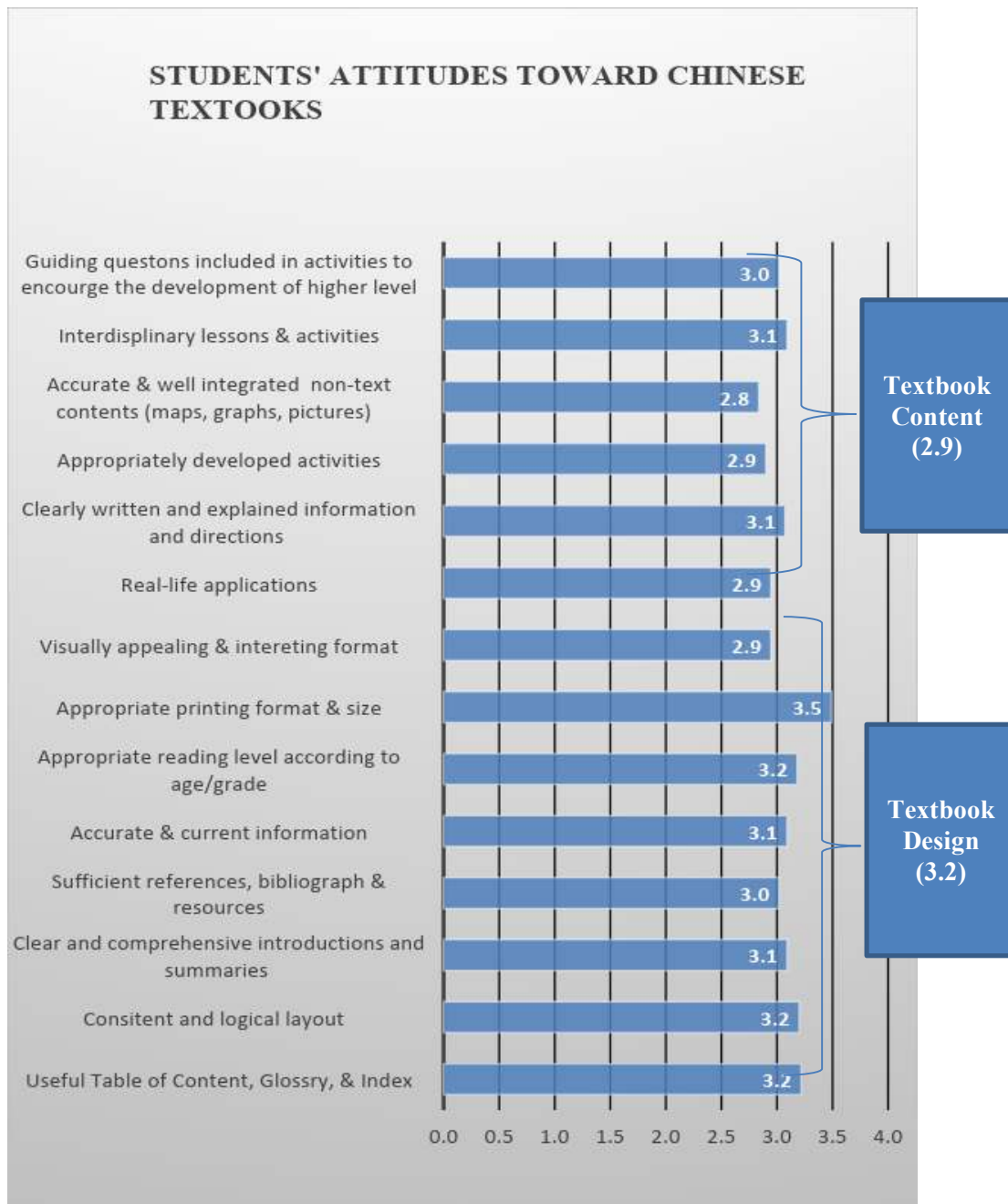


Figure 5. Students' Attitudes toward Chinese Textbooks

Conclusion and Discussion

In conclusion, even though the Chinese textbooks that are being used in the Thai international colleges targeted beginners, there lacks significant consistency in terms of the amount of grammar, the difficulty level of grammar, text topics, and cultural knowledge. There are no textbook series targeting Thai learners. Moreover, the study findings indicate that 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. The inconsistency and mismatch not only create difficulties for Thai learners, but also cause potential problems of evaluating learning outcomes as concrete evaluation is considered as one of the primary advantages of using textbooks (Hycroft, 1978). Based upon the research findings, therefore, the researchers would like to propose that Chinese textbooks should adopt a learner-centered approach to satisfy Thai learners' needs and wants via listening to students' voices in which students are regarded as data source (Feilding, 2012). This learner-centered approach should take the following aspects into consideration.

First, the results suggest that the majority of Thai learners are female, their study purposes are mainly career-oriented and family-oriented, and the most preferred topics are food, travel, and shopping. Besides, almost half of the learners express their interests in Chinese social customs and habits. It is, therefore, suggested the text topics should add new materials such as the traditional cultures and habits of doing fashion-related business in China. The appropriate activities and exercises should also be added to the book. The lack of real-applications is another critical concern based upon the research findings. This result matches what Tong (2001) argued that the current textbooks are too artificial or oversampled in presenting the target language.

For instance:

- Student A: What do you eat for breakfast?
- Student B: Chinese dumplings, noodles. How about you?
- Student A: I eat egg soup.

This conversation is not authentic even though it aims to include traditional Chinese foods. It also lacks effective interaction to attract learners' interests as there is absolutely no connection with the learners' own life experiences. If this conversion is between a Thai and Chinese, it is suggested being revised as below:

*Student A (Chinese): How are you today, buddy? *(Cultural point: how to greet with each other)*
Student B (Thai): I am fine. How about you?
*A: I am just fine. Are you hungry? *(Cultural point: Asking people if they are hungry is not to buy them food)*
B: Yes. What do you want to eat?
A: I'd like to have some noodles. What are you interested in?
*B: Oh, I really want PADTHAI, I miss it so much. *(Introducing some food that the Thai learner is familiar with to build his/her interest)*
*A: Wow, what is that? *(Engaging more interactions)*
B: ...

The above conversation is more natural and authentic; what is more important is that it can motivate Thai learners to be more interested in how to express something that they are familiar with. The after-class activities can add more authentic Chinese and Thai food pictures for students to discuss and compare.

Limitation and Future Research

Despite its contribution, this research is not without limitations. This study lacks the teachers' perceptions toward the textbooks being used in the international colleges, Thailand. It is also useful to collect teachers' comments for educators who are interested in developing Chinese textbooks based on the learner-centered approach. Furthermore, this study lacks the various student choices that require more student participation. It is suggested that educators who are interested in developing textbooks based on the learner-centred approach involve a higher level of student participation, such as students as co-enquirers, students as knowledge creators, or students as joint authors (Fielding 2012). Last but not least, a similar research framework with different contexts targeting different learners could be considered.

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