



Thai Ethnic Chinese People's Attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Inspired by Skinner's assimilative theory that Thai Chinese assimilation to Thai society would be completed by the fourth generation, this pilot study investigates the second and the third Thai Chinese generations' attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese in Bangkok, Thailand. Data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews at a government university in Thonburi, Bangkok. Findings from questionnaire suggest that both generations show positive attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese by emphasizing their Thai national identity with some of them acknowledging their Chinese ethnic identity. The interview suggests that even these informants had some positive attitude toward Mandarin Chinese, as it was mostly instrumental rather than integrative. It concludes that rather than becoming indistinguishable from the indigenous Thais, the second and the third Thai Chinese have been assimilating and becoming Thai through language hybridity and cultural flexibility which Skinner failed to predict. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: *Thai ethnic Chinese, language attitude, language and identity, assimilation*

1. Introduction: Ethnic groups and Thai Ethnic Chinese in Thailand

In Thailand, there are many different ethnic groups, such as Thai Lao, Thai Lanna, Thai Mon, Thai Malay, Thai Karen, other highland indigenous groups, and they all are Thai. According to the Minority Rights Group International (Minorities and indigenous peoples in Thailand, online), Thai Lao or Thai Isan from Northeastern Thailand could be the largest ethnic group in Thailand with 13 million followed by Thai-Chinese descendants (9.5 million), Thai-Malay Muslim with 1.5 million, Thai-Khmer with 1.4 million, and highland indigenous groups 923,257 million respectively.

In Thai history, Sino-Thai relations can be traced back many centuries, from the Kingdom of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Rattanakosin (Siam or Thailand) until today. Since Thai people migrated from southwestern China to mainland Southeast Asia in the 11th century (Thailand, online), Chinese people have been welcomed to migrate to Thailand and to assimilate their culture to Thai culture in the unique way by Thai monarchs so far. Over centuries, Thai ethnic Chinese have been at every level of the society from the Royals, the nobilities or elites, and to the commoners. Thai Chinese as the second biggest minority group in Thailand, the degree of Chinese assimilation into Thai society is among the highest in South Asia (Amyot, 1972, cited in Morita, 2007a). Therefore, it is worth investigating ethnic Thai Chinese people's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese in Thailand. Since Siam was changed to Thailand in 1939, it is elusive to identify who is a real Thai or purely ethnic Thai. Therefore, it is sensible to categorize Thai ethnic Chinese by First, Second, Third, or Fourth generation in this study. Lee (2014) noted that much of the extant literature on the issue of language maintenance amongst Thai Chinese communities are based on a sample of third-fifth generation's language-use data, which excludes the large sample of first-generation overseas Chinese and second-fifth generation ethnic Chinese immigrated to Thailand more roughly between 1970 and 2000. The current study includes both the second and third generation, thereby rounding out a much fuller picture of the current sociolinguistic situation of Thai Chinese descendants domiciled in Thailand.

Mandarin Chinese emerged as the language of the ruling class during the latter period of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Since Mandarin Chinese was adopted as the national language, renaming it as Putonghua in 1956 by the Communist government (Li, 2004), it has been stereotyped that Chinese people home and abroad accept and use Mandarin Chinese as prescribed officially. However, language attitude may change during social and political upheaval or transition (Pennington & Yue, 1993; Hyland, 1997) and



consequently there has been changing policies over language planning, especially as it relates to the education system (Morita, 2007a; 2007b). This leads to a significant impact on Thai Chinese's language attitude toward Mandarin Chinese in Thailand. Although there have been a number of language attitude studies on Mandarin Chinese undertaken in Hong Kong, especially since "the Handover" from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China on 1 July 1997. The majority of these studies have dominantly focused on comparisons between Cantonese, English and Mandarin Chinese in PRC (e.g. Hyland, 1997; So, 1998; Lai 2001, 2005). To the current researcher's knowledge, so far, no studies have specifically focused on the overseas Chinese people's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese. On the contrary, the widespread belief that they 'commonly' use of Chinese at home and abroad was largely taken for granted.

So far, many studies have been conducted on investigating language assimilation and identity maintenance among Chinese immigrants abroad (e.g. Han, 2012; Groves, 2008; Li, 2004; Zhang, 2012), however, little attention has been directed to how Thai ethnic Chinese of the second and third generations from different Chinese dialects and their attitudes toward Chinese Mandarin. At this point, the current study serves to bridge this researchable gap by exploring Thai ethnic Chinese people's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese in Bangkok, Thailand. Specifically, the research questions addressed are:

- 1) What are Thai Chinese people's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese?
- 2) What reasons can be attributed to their reported attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese in Thailand?

This remaining paper is divided into six parts. The second section discusses theoretical frameworks of language attitude, identity, and assimilation, respectively. The third section provides a critical overview of the literature available on language attitude surveys. The fourth section explains methodology in terms of data collection and data analysis. The fifth section presents findings and discussions. The sixth section evaluates the significance and limitations of the current study. Finally, it concludes with the author's reflections on an alternative to assimilation. These are designed to be applicable to participants from various social strata and educational backgrounds.

2. Theoretical frameworks

2.1 Conceptualizing language attitude

According to Appel and Muysken (1987, p. 16), behaviourist and mentalist views as two theoretical approaches are generally used to distinguish the study of language attitudes. The former one views that "attitudes must be studied by observing the responses to certain languages, i.e. their use in actual interactions". The later "considers attitudes as an internal, mental state, which may give rise to certain forms of behavior". As Fasold (1987, cited in Coronel-Molina, 2014) points out, most researchers tend to follow the mentalist attitude looking into the individual's feelings, beliefs and behavior. For the purposes of the present study, I also follow the mentalist attitude by focusing on the individual speaker's attitudes towards his own language use. Since the objective of this language attitude survey is to find out how Thai ethnic Chinese feel about Mandarin Chinese in relation to Thai, the wider perspectives that deal with issues of language planning, for instance, are not so relevant.

2.2 Language and identity

"A language is not simply a tool of communication or national unification; it is also a very powerful symbol of the cultural and social identity of the man or woman who speaks it" (Bauer, 2000, p.55, quoted in Groves, 2008). Saville-Troike (2006) reports that recognition of a language goes beyond linguistic consideration because such recognition enhances the social identity of the people who speak it (them). Whereas, language attrition or loss, which usually begins with an attitude shift, can affect the identity of a community (Ansaldo, 1995). Identity, whether on an individual, social, or institutional level, is something that we are constantly building and negotiating throughout our lives through our interaction with others. Neither identity nor language use is a fixed notion; both are dynamic, depending upon time and place (Norton, 1995). In discussion of ethnic identity, many people have pointed out that language is not an essential requirement to identify with an ethnicity (e.g., a person may identify themselves as Chinese yet not speak any Chinese). Additionally, an ethnic group or individual ascribing to that group may have a symbolic attachment to an associated language (a Chinese dialect), but may use another more utilitarian language (Thai) instead.



3. Relevant literature

3.1 Thai ethnic Chinese and their descendants in Thailand

Thai Chinese refers to people who have full or partial Chinese origin and currently hold Thai citizenship and dwell in Thailand outside the territories administered by the People's Republic of China (mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, 2010, cited in Auethavornpipat, 2011) World Facebook identifies that 14 percent of Thailand's current population is Thai ethnic Chinese, or Thai of Chinese origin, often called Thai Chinese, refers to people who have full or partial Chinese origin and currently hold Thai citizenship and dwell in Thailand outside the territories administered by the People's Republic of China (mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau) and the Republic of China (Taiwan) (Thai ethnic Chinese, online).

Since Thai Chinese primarily belong to various southern Chinese dialect groups (Smalley, 1994; Lee, 2014) from Yunnan (southern China) or Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, they mostly speak dialects such as Cantonese, Hainan, Hakka Hokkien, and Teochews (Lee, 2014). They view themselves as ethnic Chinese whereas first-to-third generation Hong Kong, Singaporean and Taiwanese identify themselves as either overseas Chinese (will eventually return to their home country) or ethnic Chinese (who plan to stay permanently in Thailand). Lee (2014) identified five waves of Chinese migration to Thailand (see Table 1).

Table 1. Waves of Chinese migration to Thailand

Waves of Chinese migration to Thailand	Occupations	Population
13 th -19 th century	Traders	Large-scale of immigration of Chinese to Thailand did not commence until the 1800s
19 th -20 th century (1918-1933)	Coolie/poor, illiterate, unskilled, landless agricultural laborers/peasants	Increase to 450,000 (1882-1917) 500,000 (1918-1931) The greatest n=15,460 in 1927 Decreased to 250,000 (1932-1955)
After 1949 (1950's-1960's)	More educated and literate class	Yunnanese arrived after 1950s, in as much as the Communists took over China (A rough estimate of 89,000 in 1982)
After 1970's	Entrepreneurs/foreign direct investors from Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong	With the influx of Taiwanese and Singaporeans into Thailand (<i>no official statistics</i>)
Present-Day	Academics, business owners, ethnic entrepreneurs, journalists, politicians, et al.	10%-14% of Thailand's current population is of Chinese descent with an estimated 3.5-8 million population

Adapted from Lee (2014, pp. 178-179)

Based on Lee's (2014) categorized waves of Chinese migration to Thailand, in this study, the first Thai Chinese generation refers to Chinese who migrated to Thailand in the early 19th century (1918-1933). Their children, aging between 40s to 70s years are considered as the second generation, and their grandchildren, aging between 20s-40s, are viewed as the third generation. The kinds of the third generation are the fourth generation of ethnic Chinese in Thailand. The researcher would like to emphasize that Thai Chinese are neither identical to the Chinese in China (PRC, POC, Hong Kong and Macao) nor to indigenous Thai. Meanwhile, they remain Chinese in regard to their cultural heritage and language attitudes and willingness of maintaining and promoting Chinese culture and language(s).



3.2 Thai ethnic Chinese assimilation into Thailand

Language assimilation (alternatively language shift) is the progressive process whereby a speech community of a language shifts to speaking another language. The rate of assimilation is the percentage of individuals with a given mother tongue who speak another language more often in the home (Wikipedia, 2009b). Since Thai Chinese has been reported as the highest well-assimilated ethnic group in Thai society (Morita, 2005), it would be insightful to trace the language assimilation process of Thai Chinese assimilation into Thailand. Political developments in both Thailand and China impacted significantly the Thai Chinese and their use of language in Thailand, positively as well as negatively. Along with the migration of the Chinese people to Thailand in the 19th century, the study of the Chinese language used to be done by hiring a private tutor to teach at home, at temples, or sending children to study in China. After the communist victory in 1949, Chinese language study was considered illegal in Thailand and anyone undertaking it was considered to be a communist or communist sympathizer. In 1975, Thailand and China re-established diplomatic relations. The Chinese language gradually became more popular once again, and in 1992 the study of the Chinese language was made accessible to the public as China emerged as a major player in the world economy. Since 1998, public and private schools have been offering courses on the Mandarin Chinese after it became a subject in the national entrance examinations (Morita, 2005, 2007a).

In Southeast Asian countries, Thailand has succeeded greater in integrating Chinese immigrants into its society compared comparing to other its neighbors such as Indonesia and Malaysia (Morita, 2007a; 2007b). Skinner (1957) proposed an influential theoretical framework asserting that within two to three generations, descendants of the Chinese would become assimilated to Thai and asserting that assimilation would be complete by the fourth generation. According to Skinners (1957), the assimilation success of the Thai Chinese was a result of the wise policy of the Thai government. Without direct exposure to Chinese history, culture and education, together with the pro-Thai policies, “the Thai government has it within its power to bring closer the day when descendants of Chinese immigrants will be fully assimilated and completely loyal citizens” (Skinners, 1957, p.382). It is further asserted that assimilation would be completed by the fourth generation and the majority of Chinese descendants became indistinguishable from the indigenous Thais (Skinner, 1973, cited in Morita, 2005, 2007b). Morita (2007b) attributed the assimilation and language shift to the decline of Chinese education, pro-Thai policies, and positive attitudes toward Thai society in 1950s. In 1948, Thailand’s Ministry of Education restricted the establishment of new Chinese schools and teaching Chinese language was controlled only seven hours a week by using the prescribed syllabi and textbooks supplied by the Thai government (Chantavanich & Sikharaksakul, 2001). Since the 17th century to 1950s, nearly all Thai Chinese’s sole self-identify as Thai was due to their close integration and successful assimilation into Thai society. The rapid and successful assimilation of the Thai Chinese has been celebrated by the Chinese descendants themselves, as evident in contemporary literature such as the novel *Letters from Thailand* by Botan (1977).

However, Skinner’s thesis has been challenged by recent scholars since there has been prevail among Thai Chinese that, rather than being totally absorbed into Thai society and losing their sense of being Chinese, many Thai Chinese have become increasingly willing to openly show their Chinese heritage (Bun & Kiong, 1993; Chantavanich & Sikharaksakul, 2001; Koning & Verver, 2013; Lee, 2014; Morita, 2007a; 2007b; Tong, 2010; Vatikiotis, 1996). They observed that rather than becoming absorbed into Thai society and losing their sense of being Chinese, many descendants of immigrants continue to regard themselves as Chinese and have become increasingly open about their language and culture heritage. It is argued that ‘Thai government policies and the lack of formal Chinese education had led to the assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society’ (Morita, 2005, p. 127). According to Chantavanich and Sikharaksakul (2001), although the Chinese in Thailand are recognized as aliens best assimilated into the Thai society, the Chinese would always wish to keep their traditions, customs, language which constitute their identity. Meanwhile, they made great efforts to become part of Thai community and society. Furthermore, Auethavornpipat (2011) noted that although the ethnic Chinese are legally claimed their Thai citizenships, there has been a re-assertion of reclaiming their ethnic Chinese identity as a way to express their cultural heritage. In order to trace the factors contributing to the high degree of assimilation Chinese into Thai



society and their maintenance of Chinese language(s) and cultural identity, the ensuing section presents a brief review on Thai Chinese's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

An exploratory case study research paradigm was adopted to provide an in-depth description of the Thai Chinese people's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese in Thailand. The research involved a cross-case studies design since the respondents were of different generations. As a result, the respondents were categorized into different groups accordingly. Each group was treated as a case study for salient patterns and themes (Yin, 1994). Typical patterns and themes were identified across cases and six respondents were selected for follow-up interview for further detailed information.

4.2 Data collection

Data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews at a government university in Thonburi, Bangkok.

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The primary instrument for the current study was a self-designed, paper-and-pencil questionnaire based on sociolinguistic theories concerning language and identity and language attitude (See Appendix). Since the first generation of Thai Chinese is rarely found alive and the fourth generation is too young to give valid data, only the second and third generations were contacted for data collection. Also, it must be noted that informants of the first generation were not sourced with great efforts as the researcher had very limited social networks when conducted this pilot study.

4.2.2 Follow-up interview

The follow-up interview was an audio-recorded semi-structured interview aiming to find out in-depth reasons of the selected respondents' attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese based on the questionnaire results. Since the 18 respondents were divided into two groups (nine are second generation Thai Chinese and another nine are third generation) for a comparison between generations, two respondents from each group were selected for follow-up interviews. The following questions were used to guide the follow-up interview:

- 1) *Do you think you are Chinese or Thai? Why?*
- 2) *Do you like to be identified as Chinese? Why or why not?*
- 3) *Do you think Mandarin Chinese is important nowadays? why?*
- 4) *Do you think you are going to use Mandarin Chinese more in the near future? Why?*

The first two questions which were prone to the interviewees' sense of cultural identity. Questions three and four were asked for probing more information on the respondents' attitudes toward and their future use of Mandarin Chinese. For the purpose of comparison, the respondents who do not speak Mandarin Chinese at all were singled out. Five respondents who do not speak Mandarin Chinese were found out belonging to the third generation. Ultimately, four out of 18 respondents were selected for follow-up interviews, and two from the second generation, two from the third generation were interviewed.

4.2.3 Obtained data and analysis

Totally 18 out of 25 questionnaires were responded. The small sample (n=18) of Thai Chinese of different ages, Chinese dialects, levels of education and English proficiency responded the questionnaire and six of them were interviewed afterwards. All 11 out of 18 respondents have both Thai and Chinese names. There were ranged in ages from 20 to 68, at levels of education from PhD to registered university students, in generations from the second (n=9) to the third (n=9) speaking different Chinese dialects. Their proficiency of speaking Mandarin Chinese ranges from 'good' to 'not at all'.

Four audio-taped recordings averaged 12 minutes in length for each interviewee were obtained. The follow-up interviews recordings were transcribed by the researcher herself and the full transcripts were generated. The four interviewees were assigned pseudonyms. Quantitatively, frequencies and percentages were calculated for descriptive presentation of the findings. Qualitatively, an 'emic' approach was used to analyze interview data by identifying key concepts for possible reasons of interviewees' attitudes and use of Mandarin Chinese.



5. Findings and discussion

In this section, questionnaire findings are presented in figures in terms of Thai Chinese people's overall attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese and a comparison between the second and the third generation. Then, the follow-up interview transcripts are scrutinized and interpreted. Findings from questionnaire suggest that both generations show positive attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese by emphasizing their Thai national identity with some of them acknowledging their Chinese ethnic identity. The interview suggests that even these informants had a positive attitude toward Mandarin, Chinese, as it was mostly instrumental rather than integrative.

5.1 Questionnaire

5.1.1 Overall Thai Chinese attitude toward Mandarin Chinese.

As can be seen by the visualized bar in Figure 1, 'strongly agree' (21%) and 'agree' (35%) together indicate a majority of Thai Chinese (56%) show positive attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese. However, it's striking to see that a relatively high proportion (28%) shows uncertainty toward Mandarin Chinese. Only 4% shows negative attitude toward Mandarin Chinese.

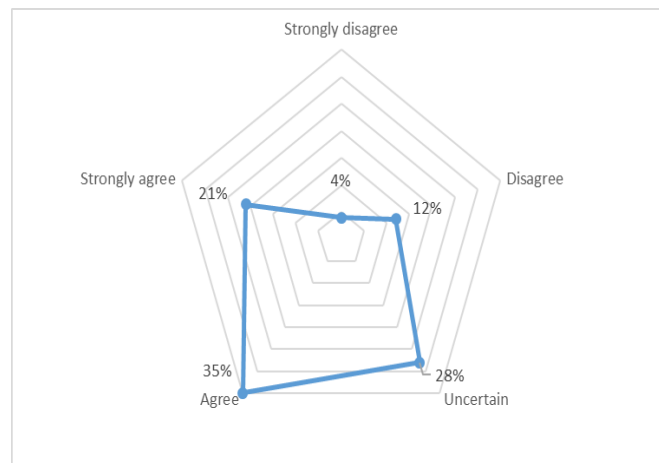


Figure 1. Thai Chinese overall attitude toward Mandarin Chinese (n=18)

5.1.2 The 2nd and 3rd Thai Chinese generations' attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese

Figure 2 presents that both generations hold positive attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese with the prominent higher rate of 'strongly agree' from the second generation (52%) and a moderate higher rate of 'agree' from the third generation (36%). It is striking that the third generation shows a significantly higher degree (38%) of 'uncertain' than the second generation (15%). The third generation shows comparatively higher negative attitude (11%) than the second generation (6%). These findings indicate that the third generation of Thai Chinese might be more assimilated to Thai society than the second generation. Alternatively, it can be interpreted that the second generation may be more likely to retain their Chinese cultural heritage by showing their positive attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese, which is perceived as a symbol of Chinese nation in the mind of Chinese people all over the world.

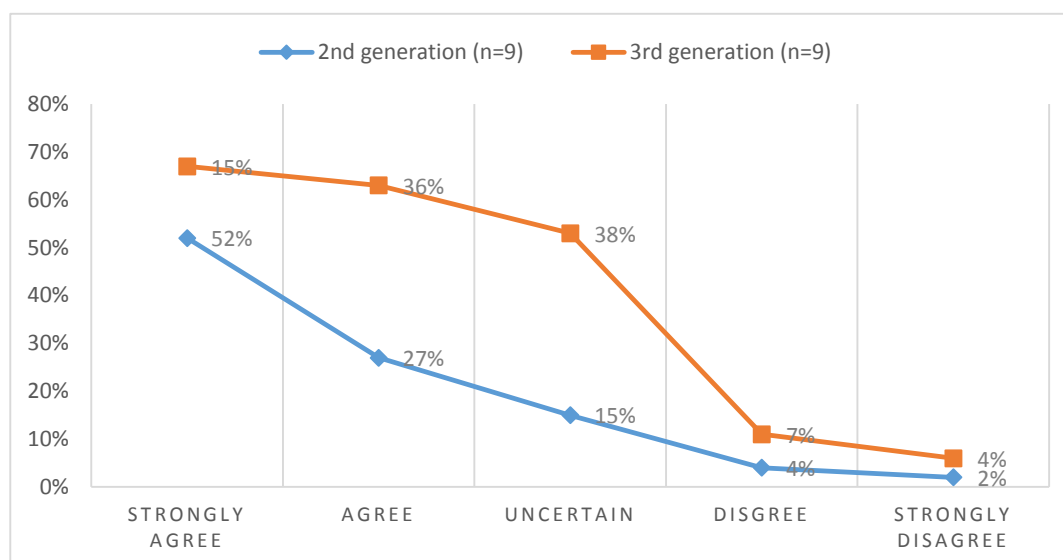


Figure 2 A comparative view of the 2nd and 3rd Thai Chinese generations' attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese

5.2 Follow-up Interview

Four themes emerged from the interview transcripts. Two themes from the second generation are: "I am Thai with Chinese cultural identify and I like to speak Chinese Mandarin" and "I am Thai with Chinese cultural identify but I don't speak Chinese Mandarin". Another two themes reported from the third generation are "I am Thai with Chinese cultural identity and I am willing to use Chinese Mandarin" and "I am Thai with Thai cultural identity and I will not use Chinese Mandarin". The parts highlighted in bold are the focus of analysis. W refers to the researcher and R1, R2, R3 and R4 refer to the respondents respectively.

5.2.1 Second generation

Theme one: 2nd generation "I am Thai with Chinese cultural identify but I like to speak Chinese Mandarin".

Excerpt 1

R1 is of second generation in late 60s with high Mandarin Chinese proficiency but prefers to speak English mixed with Chinese during the interview

Setting: WeChat video

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10. W: So, how do you think about Chinese mandarin, do you think it is important? Now?
11. **R1: Yes, much more important than before...**
12. W: Yeah, actually I like your words "more important"? Why do think is more important?
13. **R1: Because you know, in business context, so many things, because right now China is an influential country and Chinese is very/very powerful**
14. W: Powerful! You know, actually many foreigners don't like Chinese because Chinese people here work hard, take good positions and make good money. Actually, it is our tradition to work hard. You see, I can use WE now...***
15. R1: Never mind. ****
16. W: If we have chance to run a Chinese program or a Chinese course, are you going to teach Chinese?
17. R1: Yes, it is very popular, you know, especially Chinese mandarin.
18. W: You speak very good Chinese mandarin...you can teach...
19. R1: Just a little (没有啦) (switched in Chinese mandarin)
-

In Excerpt 1, the interviewee points out a 'more important than before' (Turn 11) situation of learning Mandarin Chinese in Thailand by attributing to Chinese growing-up economy (Turn 13).



Therefore, she expresses explicitly her willingness to teach and promote Mandarin Chinese in the future. It is worth noting that R1 switched to talk in Mandarin Chinese (from line 19 to the end) with the researcher and her proficiency in speaking Mandarin Chinese was found out good. In this sense, R1 switched code from English to Chinese halfway in the interview suggest that, even though the degree of assimilation of Chinese into Thai society is high, Thai Chinese language especially the older generation are willing to show their Chinese identity by speaking Mandarin Chinese.

Theme two: 2nd generation *“I am Thai with Chinese cultural identify but I don’t speak Chinese Mandarin”.*

Excerpt 2

R2 is of second generation in early 60s with limited Mandarin Chinese proficiency

Setting: Restaurant

-
1. W: In your opinion, do you think you are Chinese or Thai?
 2. **R2: Ok...Now, I am Thai rather than Chinese because know, I got used to Thai. Be rather than Chinese people and I was born here in Thailand. I think, I am Thai rather than Chinese.**
 3. W: I just check about some ideas based on the questionnaire. You, you just said you were born in Thailand, so you think about the birthplace. Ok, the place you were born make you think you belong to
 4. **R2: And many things not only the birthplace and you know, I have been in the Thai schools and everything including the Thai language and people around.**
-

In Excerpt 2, R2 admits his Chinese root but put a strong emphasis on their Thai identity explain that he was born in Thailand and has been closely immersed with Thai education, language and culture (Turn 4). Although R2 thinks he is 100% Thai and Mandarin Chinese is important, he explicitly states that he chooses not to speak Mandarin Chinese in his working place because he views himself as a Thai representative in an international company. That indicates he is more inclined to his Thai identity than his ethnic Chinese heritage. Additionally, he expresses he will not learn to use Chinese that much but he may use Chinese a bit only for fun in the future. This confirms his positive attitude toward Chinese language in his questionnaire responses.

5.2.2 Third generation

Theme three: *“I am Thai with Chinese cultural identity and I am willing to speak Chinese Mandarin”*

Excerpt 3

R3 is of third generation with fair Mandarin Chinese proficiency but prefers to speak English.

Setting: Line video call

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1. W: I'd like to ask you...do you have Chinese blood?
 2. **R3: Yes.**
 3. W: Your parents or your grandparents came from China?
 4. **R3: Oh, oh...yes, my grandparents.**
 5. W: Yes, right?
 6. R3: Oh.
 7. W: Ok, Yes. So, how do you think? Do you think you are Chinese or Thai?
 8. **R3: Thai/Thai.**
 9. W: Thai? Why? Why?
 10. **R3: I was born in Thailand, I speak Thai.**
 11. W: Do you mind showing you are from a Chinese family?
 12. **R3: I don't mind. I have Chinese blood and I like so much Chinese language and culture. I love watching Chinese Martial Movies. I loved to be recognized as Chinese and enjoyed speaking Chinese when I was in an exchange student at a university in Shanghai, China. It was great!**
-

Excerpt 3 shows that the third generation Thai Chinese admits her Chinese root but emphasizes on her Thai identity by relating to Thai Language (Turn10). She shows her great interests in Chinese language and food as well as do shopping online in China. R3 views herself as a Thai because she was born in



Thailand and speaks Thai. However, she was more excited to talk about Chinese things during the interview.

Theme four: *“I am Thai with Thai cultural identity and I will not use Chinese Mandarin”.*

Excerpt 4

R4 is of third generation with no Mandarin Chinese proficiency and prefers to speak English.

Setting: Classroom

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31. W: Do you think you are Chinese or Thai? Why?
32. R4: **I am Thai because I have Thai nationality and speak Thai language.**
33. W: Do you like to be identified as Chinese? Why or why not?
34. R4: **No. I am Thai and I love Thai culture. I don't think people can recognize my Chinese Root because I don't speak Chinese or behave like Chinese.**
35. W: Do you think Chinese is important? Why?
36. R4: **Maybe...but not for me because I like Japanese more Than Chinese.**
37. W: Why do you like Japanese not Chinese?
38. R4: **I like Japanese cartoons, food and my family travel to Japan every year.**
39. W: Do you think you are going to use Mandarin Chinese more in the near future? Why?
40. R4: **No. I don't think I will use Mandarin Chinese in the near future since I am planning to study in Australia for my doctoral degree. Learning English is enough for me.**
-
41. W: I mean if you have chance, for example, if we have a Chinese class, are you going to learn Chinese?
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42. R4: **Maybe. But now**
43. W: So, do you think Mandarin Chinese is useful?
44. R4: **No, no people speak Mandarin Chinese around me. See...even you are speaking English to me.**
45. W: Ok...Now, I will speak Chinese to you now. Do you want to learn?
46. R4: **No...not me. I will bring my son to learn with you {laugh}**
-

In Excerpt 4, the interviewee (R4) thinks that he is Thai without any signs of being a Chinese descendant (Turns 32 and 34). Meanwhile, he expresses overtly that Mandarin Chinese is not important for him as he doesn't need it for his study and life (Turns 36 and 38). It is accountable that R4 is of the third generation Thai Chinese, which leads to S1's 'don't speak Chinese Mandarin' and 'don't think' or 'don't behave like Chinese' (Turn 34). Findings suggest that both generations show positive attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese by emphasizing their Thai national identity with some of them acknowledging their Chinese ethnic identity. The assimilation of Thai Chinese into Thai society is almost complete in terms of national and cultural identity, if not totally since both the second and the third generation indicates a strong sense of being Thai in this study. For example, R1 and R3 both claim their Chinese identity and R1 switched from English to Mandarin Chinese during the interview. This finding seemingly confirms Skinner's assertion saying that assimilation would be completed by the fourth generation (Skinner, 1973, cited in Morita, 2005). As the third Thai Chinese generation, R4 says it is not useful because people in his hometown don't speak Mandarin Chinese. It can be inferred from the script that he may have been forced by his family to learn Mandarin Chinese from young age, but due to the rare opportunity to use it, he thinks it is not useful (Turn 44). This finding is in line with Morita (2005) argument that 'Thai government policies and the lack of formal education had led to the assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society' (Morita, 2005, p. 127). However, when pressed for his future possibility to learn Chinese, R4 indicates his willingness for his son to learn and use it (Turn 46). Nevertheless, this signifies a possible regression of learning and using Mandarin Chinese among the younger generations in Thailand. At this point, Skinner's (1957) assertion may have to be modified along the globalization era.

The findings suggest that Thai Chinese are neither not totally absorbed into Thai society nor losing their sense of being Chinese since they are still willing to openly show their Chinese heritage (Chan & Tong, 1993; Morita, 2007a; Morita, 2007b). This might be attributed to the fast-and-steady growing



Chinese economy and globalizing education. Additionally, Mandarin Chinese is currently becoming useful in many walks of life in Thailand as well as in other countries. The findings from this study may have implications for the possible long-term future of Mandarin Chinese in Thailand as well as in other overseas Chinese communities. This echoes to Auethavornpipat's (2011) view that ethnic Chinese are re-asserting their ethnic Chinese identity as a way to express their culture ascription.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, echoing the recent scholars (Chantavanich & Sikharaksakul, 2001; Koning & Verver, 2013; Morita, 2003, 2007; Tong, 2010; Vatikiotis, 1996), this study challenges Skinner's (1957) fully assimilative theory and Morita's (2005, 2007b) further assertion that Thai Chinese assimilation to Thai society would be completed by the fourth generation and the majority of Chinese descendants became indistinguishable from the indigenous Thais. It is believed that the above-mentioned assimilative theory was made on the basis of the particular political and economic factors in 1950s and 2000s. When it comes to the 21st world political and economic situations, it is evident that the second and the third Thai Chinese have been assimilating and becoming Thai through language hybridity and cultural flexibility which Skinner fails to predict. In addition, due to the globalization of the world economy and internationalization of the world education, to be assimilated into a new country will be principally a personal choice whether or not an immigrant will choose to identify himself in terms of language, culture and identity.

It should be pointed out that there are limitations as well as recommendations. First, the sample size is very small based on convenience using available social networks. Second, the respondents could be divided into different groups according to their ages, degrees of education, levels of Mandarin Chinese proficiency, varieties of dialectical backgrounds, and so forth. Third, a research team involving a Chinese, a native Thai, a Thai Chinese and a sociolinguistic expert is recommended. Finally, it is hoped this mini-study may shed some light on Thai Chinese people's attitudes toward and their use of Mandarin Chinese from a sociolinguistic perspective. Further and larger-scale research can be done by including both the first and the fourth Thai Chinese generation. The design of questionnaire questions needs to be categorized into behaviourist and mentalist views (Appel & Muysken, 1987) as two theoretical approaches in order to better distinguish the study of language attitudes with themes of individual's feelings, beliefs and behavior. The hope is that this pilot study serves to shed some light on how to explore language attitudes, particularly Thai ethnic Chinese people's attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese by using questionnaire and interview.

7. Final remark: An alternative to assimilation

Nowadays, Mandarin Chinese has become as important as the English language in this globalization era due to China's fast economic prosperity. The last ten years have witnessed the impact on and the contribution of the rising Chinese socio-economy and international education to Thai tourism and Thai education. The increasing enthusiasm of learning Chinese can be evidenced by the number of volunteer teachers from Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program, which surpassed 1,000 since 2009 and the number grows onwards. Approved by the Ministry of Education, the Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program was officially launched in 2004. It provides voluntary services to help meet Chinese teachers' shortage in other countries (Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program, online). This calls for a sense of transcultural and intercultural learning to become global citizens in the 21st century, for learners no matter what their first language is and no matter what cultural identity they prefer to hold, apart from learning their own national language, learning English as a global language should go parallel with learning Chinese as it will take the form of prolific uses in almost every social context, interpersonal or professional, private or public in the era of the globalization.



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