



Folk Elements Compilation in Chinese Textbooks for Thai Elementary Schools

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Received 02/11/2023

Revised 29/11/2023

Accepted 10/12/2023

Abstract

Background and Aim: Folk customs are an important part of culture, studying Chinese folk culture not only enhances Chinese learners' language proficiency but also promotes their cultural exchange and fosters cross-cultural understanding. This research focuses on the folk elements in Chinese textbooks for Thai elementary schools, aiming to analyze the compilation of folk elements in terms of quantity, proportion, content, and difficulty level.

Materials and Methods: A combination of literature review, comparative analysis, and interview methods is employed in this article to analyze the folk elements in six representative sets of Chinese teaching materials used in Thai elementary schools.

Results: It was found that 1) The six representative sets of Chinese textbooks for Thai primary schools have rich and diverse folk elements, totaling over 4500. 2) Material folk elements are the most prominent, accounting for about 40.1%. They are followed by linguistic folk elements, comprising about 33.1%. Social folk elements comprise approximately 20.8%, while spiritual folk elements are the least represented, making up about 6.0%. 3) The folk elements are related to various social life topics and the associated Chinese vocabularies and expressions. 4) The difficulty levels of folk elements can be divided into elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Among them, elementary-level elements constitute the majority, comprising about 82.8%.

Conclusion: Most of the representative Chinese textbooks in Thai primary schools have various types of folk elements. These folk elements may help Thai children grasp elementary Chinese vocabulary, social rules, and customs, and cultivate their awareness and ability for cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Thai Elementary Schools; Chinese Language Textbooks; Folk Elements; Compilation

Introduction

Folk customs are an integral part of culture, and within Chinese folk culture lies a wealth of vocabulary and expressions. By delving into the associated vocabulary, Chinese language learners can gain a deeper understanding of and proficiency in the language. Acquiring knowledge of Chinese folk culture aids learners in better comprehending the Chinese mindset and communication habits, facilitating smoother interactions and collaborations with Chinese individuals. Moreover, gaining insight into traditional Chinese festivals and customs serves to ignite the interest of learners in studying Chinese.

By analyzing and summarizing the proportion and specific presentation of folk elements in Chinese textbooks used in Thai elementary schools, as well as evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of their composition, this study may provide a reference for the future development of Chinese textbooks targeting Thai elementary students. The results may enhance the selection and presentation of folk elements, promoting the creation of more rational, scientific Chinese textbooks. This research may assist Chinese language teachers in gaining a better understanding and mastery of folk elements, guiding them in effectively incorporating these elements into Mandarin instruction. This research, in turn, can improve their teaching capabilities and optimize classroom outcomes. The findings of this study may offer guidance to Chinese and Thai scholars regarding selection in Chinese



textbooks, and practical approaches to teaching folk elements in the classroom. Ultimately, this research may enhance the practicality and effectiveness of Chinese textbooks in Thai elementary schools.

Objectives

This article aims to 1) analyze the quantity and proportion of folk elements in Chinese textbooks for Thai elementary schools. 2) To analyze the content and difficulty level of folk elements in Chinese textbooks for Thai elementary schools.

Literature Review

Folk elements are the most basic units that constitute folk culture. The content covered by folk customs is very extensive, and different scholars have different opinions on the classification of folk content. In this research, Chinese famous folklorist Mr. Zhong Jingwen's four-category classification (1998) is adopted, dividing folk customs into four major categories: material folk customs, social folk customs, spiritual folk customs, and linguistic folk customs. Among them, material folk customs are further divided into seven subcategories, including production, clothing, food, housing, transportation, commerce, and medical care. Social folk customs are divided into four subcategories, including kinship, life etiquette, seasonal customs, and folk sports and entertainment. Spiritual folk customs are divided into five subcategories, including folk beliefs, witchcraft, ethical concepts, philosophical thoughts, and folk arts. Linguistic folk customs are divided into six subcategories, including idioms, slang, jargon, folk stories, folk songs, and myths and legends.

There has been relatively limited research in the field of teaching folk culture in international Chinese language education. However, in recent years, this research area has yielded some academic achievements, notably the emergence of a series of folk culture textbooks designed for non-native Chinese speakers, such as *Chinese Folk Customs*, *An Overview of Chinese Customs*, *Chinese Festivals and Folk Customs*, and *Chinese Folk Culture*.

In addition to the publication of folk culture textbooks tailored for Chinese learners, many scholars have also paid increasing attention to the application of folk cultural elements in international Chinese language education. With the continuous expansion in depth and breadth of Chinese language teaching, the research scope has become increasingly extensive, leading to a gradual increase in relevant research outcomes. The literature on this topic can be classified as follows:

The first category consists of research that explores the relationship between folk culture and international Chinese language education. This type of research typically emphasizes that folk culture is an essential component of culture and underscores the need to strengthen research on its role in international Chinese language education. For instance, Chang (2002) proposed a more in-depth exploration of the cultural connotations embedded in linguistic folk customs based on language teaching. Tan (2001) discussed the relationship between folk language and international Chinese language education, highlighting the importance of strengthening the study of folk language and applying the research findings to international Chinese language education. This approach aims to enhance learners' sensitivity to cultural differences in Chinese folk culture, enabling them to overcome communication barriers and improve their cross-cultural communication competence.

The second category pertains to research on teaching materials for foreign folk culture. Studies in this category primarily offer relevant suggestions for the compilation of cultural teaching materials. For example, Wang (2007) drew on his own teaching experience to propose some reference suggestions regarding the selection, arrangement, and teaching methods of folk culture teaching materials. Jia (2003) provided analyses and insights into the existing folk culture curriculum, textbooks, and the entire teaching process. Li & Zeng (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of existing Chinese folk culture teaching materials for international students and offered insights into specific teaching methods.

The third category involves research on the application of folk culture in international Chinese language teaching. Studies in this category primarily focus on exploring teaching strategies and methods for incorporating folk culture into international Chinese language teaching practice. Scholars such as



Hua (2004), Mao (2008), Bai (2012), and Liu & Mao (2012) have mostly discussed specific teaching strategies and methods for aspects such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics in the teaching of foreign folk culture.

The fourth category pertains to research that examines folk cultural elements in specific types of Chinese language teaching materials. There are relatively few research findings in this category. Li & Zeng (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of existing Chinese folk culture teaching materials for international students. Xue (2019) conducted a study on the folk culture in the textbook Chinese Course, acknowledging its strengths in incorporating folk cultural elements while also pointing out its shortcomings. The study also compared these elements with those in two other general Chinese language textbooks, *Developing Chinese* and *New Practical Chinese Reader*.

According to the available literature, it is evident that although the teaching of folk culture in international Chinese language education has received attention from the academic community and has achieved some research results, the research in this area is still in the preliminary exploration stage. As the smallest basic unit of folk culture, research specifically focusing on folk elements in international Chinese language education is relatively scarce. Moreover, studies that target Chinese teaching materials tailored for a specific country or particular group about folk elements are even rarer. Therefore, this article takes the folk elements in Chinese teaching materials for Thai elementary schools as its research subject, with the hope of attracting more attention from scholars to this field.

Methodology

Literature Analysis: The author searched through the library and the Chinese academic journal database for research literature related to Thailand-specific textbooks and folk elements. The research also encompassed theories and methods related to cultural teaching, second language acquisition, cross-cultural communication, textbook compilation, and practical applications, drawing on the achievements and experiences of previous researchers to provide theoretical support for this article.

Comparative Analysis: Conduct a comparison and analysis of the folk elements in each set of Chinese textbooks for Thai elementary schools, including their categorization, content selection, quantity, presentation methods, and teaching strategies, to identify their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Interview: The author conducted interviews with Thai elementary school teachers regarding how they select textbooks, their understanding of and insights into the folk elements in the materials, and the teaching situation. Inquire about the teaching methods employed for teaching folk elements, the effectiveness of teaching folk elements, and their demand for or opinions on the content of folk elements in the teaching materials.

Results

This research selects the researched teaching materials based on the following criteria: the degree of relevance of the content to Thailand, the extent of their widespread use, the degree of systematic composition, the accuracy of the content, the timeliness of the editions, and the convenience of purchase. Based on these standards, this research has selected six representative sets of Chinese textbooks for elementary schools in Thailand. These books are *Primary School Chinese*, *Kai Kai Chinese*, *I Love Chinese*, *Chinese Friends*, *Happy Chinese Learning*, and *Experiencing Chinese (Elementary School)*. The following content presents the research findings:

The Quantity and Proportion of Folk Elements in Chinese Textbooks for Thai Elementary Schools

From the data collected by the author, it can be observed that in the Chinese language textbooks at elementary schools in Thailand, overall, the highest proportion is attributed to material folk elements





and linguistic folk elements, followed by social folk elements, with spiritual folk elements having the lowest proportion. In the statistical data for the elementary school stage, the average proportion of material folk elements is approximately 40.1%, linguistic folk elements approximately 33.1%, social folk elements approximately 20.8%, and spiritual folk elements approximately 6.0%.

Based on the proportion of folk elements in each category, it aligns with the learning situation and characteristics of students at the elementary school stage with a foundation of zero or just getting started. The main emphasis is on material folk elements and linguistic folk elements, with material folk elements primarily encompassing basic Chinese knowledge and commonly used item names in daily life. Different textbooks have different emphases within each subcategory. *Kai Kai Chinese* and *Primary School Chinese* have the fewest contents related to folk elements in the clothing category, while *I Love Chinese* has the fewest proportions of folk elements related to medical care among all the textbooks. *Chinese Friends* has the fewest proportions of folk elements related to commerce, and *Primary School Chinese* account for approximately 36% of material folk elements in the food category. *Happy Chinese Learning* and *Experiencing Chinese (Elementary School)* have the highest proportions of folk elements related to production and food among the textbooks. In terms of linguistic folk elements, proper nouns have a relatively high proportion in all textbooks, with *Primary School Chinese* and *Happy Chinese Learning* having the highest proportions of idiomatic folk elements, mainly related to idioms and folk tales.

Among the various textbooks, the proportion of elements related to life ceremonies in the social folk elements is the lowest, while the proportion of elements related to sports and entertainment is the highest. This is because the teaching at the elementary school needs to cater to the characteristics of students with short attention spans and high energy levels, hence more learning activity-related elements are included. As for spiritual folk elements, folk art, and beliefs are primarily emphasized. *Primary School Chinese* contains a relatively higher proportion of elements related to ethical principles, while the proportion of elements related to philosophical thoughts is the lowest.

Table 1: The Quantity and Proportion of Folk Elements in Chinese Textbooks for Thai Elementary Schools

The Name of Textbook	Material Folk Elements		Social Folk Elements		Spiritual Folk Elements		Linguistic Folk Elements		Subtotal
	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion	
<i>Kai Kai Chinese</i>	93	38.9%	40	16.7%	15	6.3%	91	38.1%	239
<i>I Love Chinese</i>	200	31.5%	176	27.7%	55	8.7%	204	32.1%	635
<i>Chinese Friends</i>	277	56.1%	102	20.6%	4	0.8%	111	22.5%	494
<i>Primary School Chinese</i>	475	41.6%	162	14.2%	100	8.8%	404	35.4%	1141
<i>Happy Chinese Learning</i>	401	31.2%	264	20.6%	60	4.7%	559	43.5%	1284



The Name of Textbook	Material Folk Elements		Social Folk Elements		Spiritual Folk Elements		Linguistic Folk Elements		Subtotal
	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion	
<i>Experiencing Chinese (Elementary School)</i>	293	41.4%	175	24.7%	48	6.8%	192	27.1%	708
Subtotal	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Subtotal
	1739	40.1%	919	20.8%	282	6.0%	1561	33.1%	4501

The Content and Difficulty Level of Folk Elements in Chinese Textbooks for Thai Elementary Schools

Professor Liu (2010) pointed out that at the elementary stage of teaching cultural elements, it is advisable to closely integrate conversation materials to reveal pragmatic rules. In the intermediate stage, an introduction to the national situation should be added, and in the later stage, it is possible to combine profound cultural connotations. Professor Li & Zeng (2010) emphasized the timeliness and moderation of cultural factor teaching, she stated that cultural teaching should correspond to various levels of language teaching.

Based on the above contents, this article divides the difficulty levels of folk elements into three categories: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Elementary folk elements are mainly related to basic daily communication and fundamental Chinese language learning. Elementary folk elements can help learners establish a preliminary understanding of Chinese culture. For example, elementary material folk elements include representative household items, food, and clothing. Social folk elements include basic greeting etiquette, kinship terms, festival names, and recreational activities. Spiritual folk elements mainly involve some basic vocabulary of religious beliefs and folk beliefs, such as learners encountering words like Buddha statues and temples. Linguistic folk elements include phonetic rules, Chinese character writing, personal and place names, children's songs, and greetings. By learning these basic language rules, learners can understand and apply basic Chinese and help accumulate language materials to lay the foundation for further language learning.

Intermediate folk elements mainly involve learning content at the intermediate teaching stage, focusing on the meaning behind folk elements, explaining the reasons for the formation of folk elements, and the development and changes of these elements. For example, in material folk elements, this includes various cultivation methods related to agriculture, livestock breeding, and fishing practices. It also involves geographical environments, seasonal changes, climate differences, and weather changes related to natural environments and climate variations. Furthermore, it includes the production of representative national costumes such as Chinese and Thai silk, and the connotations of representative clothing elements from various countries. Additionally, it involves dietary customs, differences in dietary habits, and the practical production of representative diets. In terms of living customs, it encompasses cultural differences in architecture and transportation, as well as relationships within families and social etiquette related to greetings, hospitality, and gift-giving. Spiritual folk elements involve activities related to religious beliefs, such as chanting, ordination, tonsure, and secularization in Buddhism. They also involve ethical values like honesty, humility, respect, and reverence, as well as



philosophical thoughts on the operation of the world and interpersonal relationships. Intermediate linguistic folk elements mainly consist of common fixed phrases, emphasizing the accuracy of language use and the different meanings behind vocabulary, as well as the educational significance embedded in various folk tales.

Advanced folk elements encompass deeper and more complex material cultural customs, requiring a high level of language proficiency, cultural background knowledge, and analytical ability to understand the underlying profound meanings. They mainly involve the reasons for the differences in diets in different regions, the cultural connotations of traditional architecture, and the commercial concepts in commercial folk customs within material folk elements. Social folk elements include concepts of family and clan, the correlation between marriage customs and social development, the protection and inheritance of traditional festival customs, changes in national policies, and social habits and differences in intercultural communication. In spiritual folk elements, they involve advanced elements related to religious beliefs, such as karma, nirvana and rebirth, almsgiving, mass, baptism, confession, and original sin; as well as elements related to personal cultivation, and elements related to the history and inheritance of folk arts. In linguistic folk elements, they include idioms, slang, proverbs, and allegorical sayings as well as the profound meanings embedded in folk tales and mythical legends.

Table 2: The Content of Folk Elements in Chinese Textbooks for Thai Elementary Schools

Type of Folk Elements	Difficulty Level of Folk Elements	The Content of Folk Elements
Material Folk Elements	Elementary	Representative household items, food, and clothing, etc.
	Intermediate	Cultivation methods related to agriculture, livestock breeding, geographical environments, representative national costumes, etc.
	Advanced	The cultural connotations of traditional architecture, and the commercial concepts in commercial folk customs within material folk elements, etc.
Social Folk Elements	Elementary	Basic greeting etiquette, kinship terms, festival names, and recreational activities, etc.
	Intermediate	Dietary customs, the practical production of representative diets, relationships within families, and social etiquette related to greetings, hospitality, and gift-giving, etc.
	Advanced	Concepts of family and clan, the correlation between marriage customs, the protection and inheritance of traditional festival customs, etc.
Spiritual Folk Elements	Elementary	Basic vocabulary of religious beliefs and folk beliefs, such as Buddha statues and temples.
	Intermediate	Activities related to religious beliefs, such as chanting, ordination, tonsure, and secularization in Buddhism, etc.
	Advanced	Religious beliefs, personal cultivation, history and inheritance of folk arts, etc.



Type of Folk Elements	Difficulty Level of Folk Elements	The Content of Folk Elements
Linguistic Folk Elements	Elementary	Chinese phonetic rules, Chinese character writing, personal and place names, children's songs, and greetings. etc.
	Intermediate	Common fixed phrases, idioms, folk tales, etc.
	Advanced	Idioms, slang, proverbs, and allegorical sayings, folk tales, etc.

Table 3: The Difficulty Level of Folk Elements in Chinese Textbooks for Thai Elementary Schools

Type of Folk Elements	Difficulty Level of Folk Elements	The Name of Textbooks						Average
		<i>Kai Kai Chinese</i>	<i>I Love Chinese</i>	<i>Chinese Friends</i>	<i>Primary School Chinese</i>	<i>Happy Chinese Learning</i>	<i>Experiencing Chinese (Elementary School)</i>	
Material Folk Elements	Elementary	99%	94%	96%	87%	95%	96%	95%
	Intermediate	1%	5%	3%	10%	3%	4%	4%
	Advanced	0%	1%	1%	3%	2%	0%	1%
Social Folk Elements	Elementary	93%	80%	83%	88%	85%	88%	86%
	Intermediate	5%	17%	15%	8%	10%	10%	11%
	Advanced	2%	3%	2%	4%	5%	2%	3%
Spiritual Folk Elements	Elementary	60%	73%	50%	75%	82%	90%	72%
	Intermediate	33%	22%	50%	16%	10%	8%	23%
	Advanced	7%	5%	0%	9%	8%	2%	5%
Linguistic Folk Elements	Elementary	71%	90%	80%	74%	66%	86%	78%
	Intermediate	22%	9%	15%	15%	20%	11%	15%
	Advanced	7%	1%	5%	13%	14%	3%	7%

Conclusion and Discussion

According to this research, most of the representative Chinese textbooks in Thai primary schools have rich folk elements, however, some textbooks only focus on introducing Chinese folk elements, overlooking the introduction of local Thai folk elements. The selection and arrangement of folk element content in various textbooks generally follow the principle of gradual progression from simple to complex, aligning with Thai children's learning abilities and Chinese language proficiencies. Most of the selected folk elements in various textbooks are closely related to various social life topics, which may aid learners in applying them to daily communication, helping them grasp necessary social rules, etiquette, and customs. However, some advanced folk elements and associated Chinese vocabularies, especially the spiritual ones, are rather abstract and difficult for Thai children.

To improve Thai children's Chinese language proficiency and communication ability, the following elementary material, social and linguistic folk elements should be included in their textbooks: the names of representative Chinese and Thai food, festivals, basic greeting etiquettes, kinship terms, the basic phonetic rules, and daily Chinese conversational expressions and so on. Moreover, Chinese



nursery rhymes and traditional stories may accelerate Thai children's learning interests in oral expression and reading. However, children might be confused by some advanced folk elements, such as complicated religious beliefs, Chinese proverbs, and idioms. These elements are less connected to their actual application needs in daily life, so the quantity and difficulty level of these elements could be controlled moderately.

In general, when applying folk elements to Chinese textbooks for Thai elementary schools, it is essential to base them on a comparison between Chinese and Thai folk culture, consider the learning and thinking habits of Thai children, follow the teaching activities' rules and characteristics of Thai teaching, and aim to enhance Thai children's cross-cultural communication abilities.

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