

The Localization's Barriers and Countermeasures of Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asian Countries: The Case of Confucius Institutes in Thailand

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Abstract : Advanced by “the Belt and Road” initiative, international Chinese language education is becoming the main approach of promoting cultural exchange and achieving the goal of mutual understanding. After conducting a questionnaire survey on 16 Confucius Institutes in Thailand, the paper focuses on studying the localization level and barriers of Confucius Institutes in Thailand. The study shows that the Confucius Institutes in Thailand attached great importance to localization development. These institutes in Thailand have constantly improved the localization level by recruiting a great variety of students, exploring various training modes and offering rich courses, however, in the process of localization, these institutes are faced with many problems such as lack of local teachers and lack of training. Considering all the factors above, the paper proposes some measures such as doing a good top-level planning, strengthening local teachers training, and enhancing the professional level and collaborative innovation to accelerate the localization level of Confucius Institutes in Thailand.

Key word: Confucius Institutes in Thailand; Localization Barriers; Countermeasures Analysis

1. Research background

Mutual understanding is the driving force of deeply advancing “the Belt And Road” initiative and the humanistic foundation of constructing “the Belt And Road”. Yet, the important bridge of achieving mutual understanding should be cultural exchange. And the effective way to promote cultural exchange is international Chinese education which is the main approach of international Chinese communication. In the process of international Chinese communication, the Confucius institutes have become an important platform. The Confucius institutes are the global institutions of promoting Chinese language and displaying Chinese culture. They help the world understand Chinese culture, learning Chinese, playing an important role in the export and spread of Chinese culture and language. The unique oversea Chinese culture in ASEAN countries, the principal nations to put “the Belt and Road” initiative into effect, keeps the Chinese language learning as a good tradition. In ASEAN countries, the enthusiasm on Chinese language learning is constantly rising, which can be concluded from the establishment of the Confucius institutes. Until the end of June, 2019, 37 Confucius institutes has been set up in ASEAN countries, accounting for 6.86% of total number of the Confucius Institutes in the world. Among them, 16 Confucius institutes has been built in the Kingdom of Thailand, accounting for the 43.24% of total number of ASEAN Confucius institutes^[1]. Their 16 Confucius institutes in Thailand, who becomes the country with the most Confucius institutes among the 11 countries in Southeast Asia, make great contributions to international Chinese education and China-Thailand cultural and educational exchanges.

The rapid expansion of Chinese education in ASEAN countries causes some inevitable problems. The first problem is the uneven distribution of Confucius institutes in Southeast Asian countries. For example, Indonesia has the largest share of population and GDP among the 11 countries in Southeast Asia.[2] But, so far, the country has only seven Confucius institutes, accounting for 18.91% of the total number of Confucius institutes in Southeast Asia; And the Philippines, the second most populous country in Southeast Asia, has only four Confucius institutes, accounting for only 10.81% of Confucius institutes in Southeast Asian countries; Myanmar has only three

Confucius classrooms rather than Confucius institutes; Neither Brunei nor East Timor has established a Confucius institute or a Confucius Classroom. Thailand, however, has established 16 Confucius institutes, although its population and GDP are not large among Southeast Asian countries, accounting for 43.24% of the total number of Confucius institutes in Southeast Asian countries. Besides, it has 21 Confucius classrooms, the largest number of Confucius classrooms in Southeast Asian countries. The second problem should be shortage of Chinese teachers and poor adaptability of the Chinese sponsored teachers. The huge demand of Southeast Asian nations on Chinese learning requires the increasing number of Chinese teachers, but the number of Chinese teachers sponsored by China does not cope with the rapid growth of demand. Though the excellent students from Chinese universities are selected by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (Confucius Institutes Headquarters) to teach Chinese as foreign language at abroad, some of them know less about their teaching countries' culture and the learning habit. So their teaching method bring about low teaching effect. The third problem is the shortage of talents in managing Confucius institutes. The director in charge of Confucius institute must possess teaching skill and administrative skill. And the Chinese director must not only have multidisciplinary knowledge but also be familiar with his staying nation's operating model and fundamentals of law. It is scarce that such kind of directors can play an important role in the development of Confucius Institutes and actively expand the influence of Confucius Institutes. The fourth problem is inappropriate textbooks. Some textbooks are compiled by the Confucius institute according to its own willingness rather than the teaching conditions, the students' learning demand or social practicability of the nation. These problems are more obvious in Thailand with the most Confucius institutes and Confucius classrooms in Southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, the distribution of Confucius institutes, first of all, is not reasonable. Most of them are located in Bangkok area^[3] and cooperate with public schools rather than with influential private schools; Secondly, Thailand is shortage of Chinese teachers and the local teachers are insufficient in teaching ability. The large number of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in Thailand have a great demand for local Chinese teachers, but the training speed of local Chinese teachers is far behind the actual demand. The volunteer teachers from China are lack of practical experience and, with low level of Thai language and too much turnover, they cannot get good teaching results; Finally, the teaching materials of Confucius Institutes in Thailand are not localized enough and cannot be compiled according to local needs.

Thailand is the first country to incorporate Chinese teaching into its national education system and also a typical country in the global upsurge of learning Chinese. It has a large number of Confucius institutes and Chinese learners, and also in the development of Confucius institutes, it is faced with many problems, which are basically the common problems existing in the Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asian countries. By referring to relevant literature, this paper learns about the current situation and existing problems of Confucius Institutes both in Southeast Asian countries and in Thailand. By means of questionnaire survey and data analysis, the paper studies the situations of Confucius Institutes in Thailand including teachers, Chinese learners, teaching, teaching materials and assessment methods. According to the literature review and the data analysis, this paper summarizes the obstacles existing in the localization of Confucius institutes and puts forward corresponding countermeasures for improvement. The main implication of this paper is that it could help Confucius Institutes in Thailand to understand the main obstacles in the localization process; it could help provide certain reference and basis for the smooth implementation of localization of Confucius institutes in Thailand; it, to some extent, could be a reference model for Confucius institutes in other southeast Asian countries, partly due to the localization problems existing in the Confucius institutes in Thailand being of the common ones in the Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asian countries; it will be helpful to improve the localization research of Confucius institutes in Southeast Asian countries, offering some references for other related researches; It will help promote cultural and educational exchanges among Southeast Asian countries along the line of "The Belt And Road" and the implementation of "The Belt And Road"

initiative.

2. Sampling survey research on localization of Confucius institutes in Thailand

(i) Research object and research method

This study takes the Chinese teachers of Confucius institutes in Thailand as the research object and the questionnaire survey as research methods. Based on literature and reference of others' study, this study designed a questionnaire of seven aspects, mainly including the basic information, teachers, Chinese teaching, teaching material, Chinese Proficiency Test(HSK), Chinese learners and the development of Confucius institutes, aiming to provide effective basis and solutions for the development of localization of Chinese language teachers. The questionnaire was conducted on the internet and collected 63 validated questionnaire for statistic analysis. The participants were randomly recruited, of which 49 respondents were female, accounting for 77.78% of a total of respondents, and 14 were male, accounting for 22.22%. The respondents were mainly from 16 Confucius institutes in Thailand, including The Confucius Institute at Chulalongkorn University, The Confucius Institute at Khon Kaen University, The Confucius Institute at Burapha University, The Confucius Institute at Chiang Mai University and the Sea Silk Road-Confucius Institute at Phranakhon Rajabhat University. See Table 1 for other basic information.

Table1 Basic information of the respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency/per one	Proportion%
Position	Chinese directors	10	15.87%
	Thai directors	14	22.22%
	Chinese sponsored teachers	39	61.9%
Age	under 25 years	26	41.27%
	25-35 years old	22	34.92%
	35-45 years old	7	11.11%
	over 45 years old	8	12.7%
Education background	bachelor	21	33.33%
	master	39	61.9%
	doctor	3	4.76%
Teachers' categories	Chinese-sponsored teachers	16	25.4%
	Chinese volunteers teachers	39	61.9%
	others	8	12.7%
Service time at Confucius institute	less than one year	31	49.21%
	1-2 years	23	36.51%
	2-5 years	5	7.94%
	5-10 years	3	4.76%
	More than 10 years	1	1.59%

(ii) Survey results and analysis

1. The survey data analysis of teachers

First of all, it can be seen from the analysis that these Confucius institute in Thailand possesses a larger number of well-trained faculty from China but less local Thai teachers. It is known that the strength of faculty has a direct impact on the quality of Chinese teaching, but also the development of Confucius institutes. Through the statistical data analysis of the survey samples, it is found that those institutes has the advantage of Chinese teachers but they are shortage of local teachers. And the local teachers could not have a good grasp of Chinese. About 85% participants viewed that the number and quality of teachers were enough in Confucius institutes, but 12.7% viewed that as insufficiency for the development of Confucius institutes. Most Confucius institutes have less than 5 local teachers and the institutes with more than 10 local teachers only accounted for 1.59%. The data analysis fully shows that there are fewer local teachers in Confucius institutes, so it is urgent to increase the number of local teachers and continuously strengthen the local teachers of Confucius institutes.

Secondly, these Confucius institutes recruit their teachers more broadly, and offer multiple ways to cultivate local teachers but less training opportunity are offered. The data analysis shows that the institutes recruit teachers from different channels, respectively accounting for 25.4% of Chinese-sponsored teachers, 61.9% of volunteers from China and 12.7% of others. The variety of teachers provides a strong guarantee for the teachers of Confucius Institute. In addition, multiple approaches are offered to improve the local teachers level. For the local Chinese teachers, three kinds of cultivation, including domestic universities in Thailand, Chinese universities' scholarship and joint training between China and Thailand, to improve the localization level of teachers. The Confucius institutes, however, offer less training for teachers every year. Only 44.44% of the institutes give one training for local teachers every year, which fully shows that the Confucius institutes do not pay enough attention to teacher training, so it is necessary to strengthen localized training for local Thai teachers and improve their comprehensive ability to meet the requirements for comprehensive education.

2.The survey data analysis of Chinese teaching

First of all, Chinese teaching is highly valued by these Confucius institutes, but the teaching equipment needs to be updated. These Confucius institutes actively carry out various forms of teaching activities and effectively infiltrate traditional Chinese culture through the activities to continuously enhance the influence of traditional Chinese culture. Through the analysis of the statistical data of the survey samples, it is found that these Confucius institutes have opened at least 100 Chinese courses, with a total of more than class hours. But about 10% respondents views that their teaching equipment are seriously insufficient to the smooth development of their teaching activities.

Secondly, though these institutes open plentiful courses, a curriculum system has not yet been established. All the time, The Confucius institutes attach great importance to the role of curriculum in human physical and mental development and regard the curriculum as an important way of education. it is found in the data analysis of the survey that the Confucius institutes offer diverse and rich courses with contents such as *Chinese Language Course*, *HSK Tutorial*, *Chinese Culture*, and *Chinese Talents*. Nevertheless, about 25% of the respondents have the common opinion that the curriculum setting of their Confucius institutes is unreasonable, which indicates that the curriculum system needs to be further strengthened and a systematic curriculum system needs to be built to give full play to the important value of curriculum education.

Thirdly, these Confucius institutes have made great efforts to carry out and support Chinese teaching, and there is no significant difference among the teachers at different ages and with different education backgrounds. Through analyzing a single factor of supportive degree of different ages of teachers with different education

backgrounds on teaching, it is found that the P values are 0.199 and 0.713 respectively. Both of figures are greater than 0.05 and did not reach the significance level, indicating that there was no significant difference in the development and supportive intensity of the teachers at different ages and with different education backgrounds.

3.The survey data analysis of teaching materials

Firstly, the variety of teaching materials of Confucius institutes is rich, and their pertinence needs to be improved. The different kinds of textbooks adopted by these institutes include “*Great Wall Chinese*”, *A book for Thai People to Learn Chinese*, *Boya Chinese* etc. The various teaching materials are rich in content but their pertinence needs to be improved according to the respondents’ feedback. Among them, about 68.25% suggest that the Chinese teaching material should be matched with associated exercises and CD, 76.19% accompanied with Chinese culture introduction, 63.49% marked with Chinese Pinyin in the text, 55.56% noted with detailed grammar and 92.06% compiled with the content of lively and interesting life. Meanwhile, most of the respondents think that it is essential to add localized Chinese textbook according to the genre of the students. Therefore, in the use of teaching materials, it is also necessary to strengthen the pertinence of teaching materials, so that the learners can more easily accept the content.

Secondly, the teachers show low satisfaction with textbooks, and there is no significant difference among the teachers with different educational backgrounds. The survey data shows that, the teachers of the Confucius institute are not satisfied with the current teaching materials, accounting for 47.61%, however, 4.76% seem to be satisfied. Through a single factor analysis of textbooks’ satisfaction on the teachers with different educational backgrounds, there is no obvious difference with the P value of 0.713 ($P>0.05$). Therefore, the institutes need to choose textbooks suitable for the development of teachers and students. In the selection process, the pertinence and practicability of textbooks should be taken into account, so as to improve teachers’ satisfaction with textbooks.

4.survey data analysis of Chinese Proficiency Test(HSK)

Firstly, diverse Chinese proficiency tests are held by the Confucius institutes but few tests are taken in the classroom. The Chinese tests held by the Confucius institutes are diverse and meet the needs of different groups, but there are few classroom tests. Through the data analysis of survey sampling, it is found that the institutes hold a series of Chinese tests including HSK(Chinese Proficiency Test), YCT(Youth Chinese test), HSKK(Oral Chinese Proficiency Test), BCT(Business Chinese Test), HSKE(Classroom Chinese Proficiency test), International Chinese Certificate Test and pre-test training. Among them, the proportion of HSK test is held as high as 96.83%, however, the proportion of HSKK is as low as 6.35%. Therefore, in the process of deepening Chinese test, classroom test should be provided to meet the needs of different groups.

Secondly, the more applicants register the test, the higher passing rate will be. The data analysis shows that an increasing number of applicants took the HSK in 2018. Through the data analysis, 42.86% of the respondents give their feedback that their examinees were under 499, 4.76% between 500 and 999, 9.52% between 1000 and 1999, 11.11% between 2000 and 2999, 3.17% between 3000 and 3999 as well as between 4000 and 4999, and 22.22% between 5000 and 9999. And the majority examinees could pass the exam, but somewhat, the exam passing rate varied at different institutes.

5.The survey data analysis of the Chinese learners

Firstly, the categories of Chinese learners are diverse with less difference in proportion. The Confucius institutes attach great importance to the recruitment of different types of students and design different courses to

meet the learning needs of different students. Through the data analysis of the survey samples, it is found that the Chinese learners of the Confucius institutes are from different levels, including students from universities, middle and primary schools and people from all levels of society. The proportions does not differ much from the highest 95.24% of college students to the lowest 61.90% of primary school students. Different levels of students can learn from each other and deepen their understanding of Chinese culture.

Secondly, the increasing number of Chinese learners does not differ from different institutes. The active recruitment of Confucius institutes increases the number of the Confucius institutes. Through the analysis of the statistical data of the survey samples, it is found that the number of students of the Confucius institutes is gradually increasing every year, among which more than 80% of the respondents think it is normal. The analysis of the increase of students in different institutes shows that with a P value of 0.735 ($P > 0.05$), there is no significant difference. It fully shows that the gradually increasing number of students of different kinds of Confucius institutes are independent of their own influence.

6.The survey data analysis of the Confucius institute' development

Firstly, the Confucius institutes are faced with many development challenges and needs to be constantly improved. As the development of the Confucius institutes moves on, many challenges will be exposed to the institutes. Through the analysis of the statistical data of the survey samples, more than 70% of respondents tell that the development challenges of the Confucius institutes mainly focus on professional Chinese teaching, Chinese cultural communication, China-Thailand cooperation and exchange and about 30% respondents view academic research, social services and the cultivation of Chinese and Thai high-end talents as the current priorities. As the Confucius institute are faced with many development challenges, the coordination of various key tasks must be advanced to promote the continuous prosperity and development of Confucius Institute.

Secondly, "Chinese+" patterns are characterized by diversified practice, and different development patterns need to be further improved. The Confucius institutes attach great importance to Chinese teaching and constantly explore new approaches and training models, which is effective to improve students' Chinese proficiency. Through the statistical data analysis of the survey samples, the Confucius institutes have adopted various forms of training, including "Chinese + vocational education", "Chinese + disciplines", "Chinese + culture", "Chinese + degree", etc. Among them, the "Chinese + vocational education" is adopted with the best proportion of 73.02%, while other methods are used with the least proportion of 6.35%, which fully shows that Confucius institutes attach great importance to "Chinese+", however, the different practices need to be further improved. In the operation process, the institutes should standardize the procedures of different practices and effectively guide "Chinese+" to the right direction, so as to ensure that "Chinese+" can truly play its role.

III The countermeasures to achieve localization of Confucius institutes in Thailand

The Confucius institutes are faced with many barriers in the process of development. To solve the above mentioned obstacles and achieve sustainable development, the Confucius institutes must achieve localization. The construction and development of the Confucius institutes in Thailand are the representatives in the world. They have accumulated good experience in the process of localization, however, they are also faced with many difficulties and common problems. Taking the Confucius Institutes in Thailand as a reference, the following countermeasures are proposed.

i) Do a good top-level planning and integrate resources to form a resultant force

Over the past ten years, the Confucius institutes has been adopting the cooperative mode of co-construction, joint management and sharing between two institutions. According to the development experience over the past ten years, localization is the only way to realize long-term sustainable development of Kongyuan. Specifically, the localization includes the localized construction of teachers, the local development of teaching resources, localized teaching methods, and the utilization of teaching achievement. These localized measures will help the Confucius institutes take root indigenous Chinese teaching and local service to make positive contribution for the co-operative universities on local talents' cultivation, the economic and social development. To realize the localized development of the Confucius institutes in Thailand, it is necessary to do a good job in top-level design and take advantages of resource. In terms of the development planning, optimal allocation of resources, and teachers' training, the Chinese partner universities must fully take the characteristics of the partner universities and institutions into consideration. They must strive to do a good job in top-level design on projects according to local conditions and provide strong support. From the perspective of the Confucius institutes in Thailand, And the Thai cooperation institutions should be based on their own reality to give full play to their power and actively explore for the development of the universities and the community. It should turn the local demand into the endogenous driving force of the institutes' development, It should turn the local demand into the endogenous driving force of the institutes' development, research and development of teaching materials, and local courses. This will help advance the Confucius institutes for better localized integration, to be an important part of the local education and cultural ecology. Thus, both cooperation institutions should fully excavates individual resource and efforts to seek for the support, constantly promoting the localization process of the Confucius institutes in Thailand.

ii) Focus on main business and enhance the cultivation of local teachers

The key to the localization development of Confucius institutes in Thailand is the localization of Chinese teachers. At present, the development of Chinese teaching in Thailand is in a critical period, and the transformation from expanding the quantity to improving the quality requires the cultivation of a stable and high-quality team of local Chinese teachers. In promoting the training of local Chinese teachers, the Confucius institutes in Thailand play an irreplaceable role. From the survey, it can be seen that the current situation of local Chinese teachers in Thailand is insufficient in quantity and low quality, which urgently needs to establish and improve the training and long-term guarantee mechanism of local Chinese teachers. At the same time, the root cause of the shortage and instability of local Chinese teachers in Thailand is that there is no standardized assessment standard for local Chinese teachers. So the major current problems is how to develop a scientific, systematic and unified assessment standard for local Chinese teachers. The future domestic Chinese teachers' training and funding should take full use of advantages of Thai unique advantages and unite the government institutions, education department and the social figures from all walks of life to make policy, perfect mechanism, and establish the projects. For instance, a better area can be considered be a pilot to drive the development of surrounding areas and even the entire Chinese teaching in Thailand. All Confucius institutes in Thailand should further play their own advantages and play a leading and guiding role in local teachers' cultivation and training. By analyzing the actual local needs, this paper puts forward with that, presently, the cultivation and training of local teachers in Thailand can take the approach of undergraduates cultivated in Thailand' universities, of postgraduate by both Chinese and Thai universities, of high-level talents of doctor by Chinese universities into consideration.

iii) Improve professionalization and perfect management mechanism of the Confucius institutes

The scale, quantity and quality of the Confucius institutes in Thailand ranks the top in the world, which make them be the strong representatives and demonstration. Currently, the Confucius institutes in Thailand has entered a new development period. During this period, the core task is to improve "quality and efficiency". For this purpose,

it is necessary to deepen the reform measures and to establish and improve the management mechanism. Also, great efforts including the supporting policy support, over planning service and two cooperation institutions should be devoted into building a group of professional Chinese teacher to realize the localization development lay a solid foundation. Even so, the professional construction of teachers, teaching materials, courses and management must be vigorous promoted to strengthen the connotation of the construction and constantly improve the quality of schools. Besides, the construction of international Chinese teaching materials and courses should be further strengthened by supporting and encouraging experts from China and Thailand to jointly tackle problems. The compilation of teaching materials should adopt teaching methods suitable for Thailand, which can improve the local adaptability of teaching materials, and boost the Confucius institutes to set up more basic and coherent core courses. Additionally, in terms of professional management, it is necessary to summarize the effective practices of the management system and operation mechanism of the Confucius institutes in Thailand and to explore the guidance scheme for the standardized management of Confucius institutes from the aspects of standardized process, quality control and evaluation system. In combination with their own actual conditions and local needs, the Confucius institutes in Thailand strengthen their cooperation with the departments of their cooperative universities and local education institutions to form a positive interaction. They actively coordinate with the reform measures of Confucius institute headquarters to develop local teaching materials and courses. They take root in the local Chinese teaching to build the backbone of high-quality teachers and refine and improve the scientific and effective management operation mechanism, constantly improving the quality and professional level of schools.

iv Strengthen collaborative innovation and expand the functions of Confucius institutes

In achieving localization development, the Confucius institutes in Thailand should expand educational function and improve teaching quality according to their own actual situation. They should go forward to the characteristic direction development of academic research, cultural exchanges and vocational training. Beside, they should actively participate in “The Belt and Road” construction and all-round cooperation in various fields such as schools, friendly province/state, cultural exchanges and economic and trade exchanges between China and Thailand. As the saying goes, “When everyone adds firewood, the fire burns high”. In order to achieve long-term development and localized development, the Confucius institutes in Thailand should not only focus on their own quality and efficiency, but also strengthen the cooperation among the regional Confucius institutes and the local government, enterprises and other social institutions. Every institute should make full use of their resources and give play to their respective expertise to design and organize characteristic activities from different angles and different areas. Also, they should cooperate with others in the region to achieve the group effect in that region, which will achieve the effect of “1+1” being greater than 2. A variety of forms cultivation of talents, policy consultation and school-enterprise cooperation will bring about more tangible benefits in local educational institutions and local social development. At the same time, the Confucius institutes in Thailand need to build their core competitiveness through continuous innovation. The current Chinese courses and cultural activities, to a certain extent, satisfy the basic needs of understanding of Chinese language and culture, but as cultural exchange gradually deepens, the needs of Chinese learners are also rising. Therefore, the Confucius institutes in Thailand must actively bring forth new ideas to explore new and more effective teaching methods, enriching the cultural activities. In addition, only do the institutes constantly raise their teaching level and education level and expand the school-running functions can bring about eternal vitality and vigor. Especially, while the advent of the digital information age is on the stage, the development of science and technology is profoundly changing our way of production and life. The Confucius institutes in Thailand also need to grasp this development opportunity and with digital ideas and methods, actively promote the construction and development of the Confucius institutes.

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