

A Study of the Current State of Chinese Language Textbooks in Chinese Schools for Ethnic Chinese Students in Laos: Current Practices and Future Directions

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Abstract: There are 11 Chinese schools in Laos that use 19 different Chinese language textbooks. Currently, the most commonly used textbook for Chinese education in primary and junior high school is “Chinese Language,” while in senior high school, “Chinese Language and Literature” and “HSK Standard Course” are adopted most frequently. This study has conducted interviews and analyzed textbooks, discovering issues with contemporary Chinese language textbooks such as cultural misunderstanding caused by differences in culture and values, insufficient localization of textbooks, outdated information, and the absence of Lao language annotations. Based on the research findings, this article proposes solutions including textbooks localization, compiling strategies, and curriculum design to address these problems.

1. Introduction

Teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students/overseas Chinese students is distinct from teaching Chinese to non-ethnic Chinese students/international Chinese language education, as it is a component of education for overseas Chinese and ethnic Chinese peoples, which provides education in Chinese language and culture. Teaching Chinese to non-ethnic Chinese students primarily aims to teach the Chinese language and written characters to non-ethnic Chinese foreigners [1]. Schools that provide teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students are referred to as Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students.

Initially, the establishment of Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos aimed to serve overseas Chinese, ethnic Chinese, and descendants of Chinese heritage. Subsequently, in accordance with national policies, these schools implemented bilingual instruction in both Lao and

Chinese languages, and also admitted non-ethnic Chinese students. Laos currently has a total of 11 Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students, with five schools established prior to the 1990s. As a result of “Belt and Road” initiative and the acceleration of cooperation between Laos and China, teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students has developed rapidly. Six new Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students have been established in the north of the country. However, the basic infrastructure of teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students has not kept pace, particularly in the area of textbooks, which have a direct impact on the quality of education. This study investigates the textbooks and related issues in the 11 Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos via surveys and interviews, and proposes corresponding strategies based on practical circumstances.

2. Overview of the Chinese textbooks used in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos

Table 1: Statistics on the usage of Chinese language textbooks in Chinese schools in Laos

No.	Book Title	Editor	Press	Date
1	Chinese Pinyin	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2000
2	Preschool Chinese Language	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2002
3	Chinese (Hua wen) for Ethnic Chinese Students (Elementary School Version)	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2019
4	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Junior High School Version)	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2019
5	Chinese Language (Primary School Version)	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2007
6	Chinese Language (Junior High School Version)	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2007
7	New Edition: Chinese (Primary School Version)	College of Chinese Language and Culture, Jinan University	Jinan University Press	2019
8	New Edition: Chinese (Junior High School Version)	College of Chinese Language and Culture, Jinan University	Jinan University Press	2019
9	Old Edition: Chinese (Primary School Version)	College of Chinese Language and Culture, Jinan University	Jinan University Press	2006
10	Old Edition: Chinese (Junior High School Version)	College of Chinese Language and Culture, Jinan University	Jinan University Press	2006
11	Experiencing Chinese language (Lao Version)	Center for International Language Research and Development, Confucius Institute at National University of Laos.	Higher Education Press	2013
12	Chinese Language and Literature (People’s Education Press)	Rumin Wen	People’s Education Press	2020
13	Basic Spoken English	Guoxiong Zheng, Guanglei Chen	Beijing Language and Culture University Press, BLCUP	2002
14	Bridge	Zhuobian Chen	Beijing Language and Culture University Press, BLCUP	2012
15	Chinese Language Course	Jizhou Yang	Beijing Language and Culture University Press, BLCUP	2016
16	Practical Accelerated Chinese	Haohao Tian, Mingli Shi	Shanxi Normal University Press	2007
17	Speaking	Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College	Jinan University Press	2007
18	HSK Standard Course	Liping Jiang	Beijing Language and Culture University Press, BLCUP	2014
19	Happy Chinese Learning	Shaomei Guo	Nanmeebooks Publication	2009

Table 2: Grade-wise statistics on the usage of Chinese language textbooks in Chinese schools in Laos

Stages Textbooks Schools	Kindergarten	Primary Schools	Junior high School	Senior high School
Pakse Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Primary School Version) Chinese Language (Primary School Version)	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Junior High School Version) Chinese language (Junior High School Version)	Chinese Language and Literature (People's Education Press)
Chung Teak School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Language (Primary School Version)	Chinese Language (Junior High School Version)	HSK Standard Course Bridge
Liewtou Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Language (Primary School Version) Speaking	HSK Standard Course, Experiencing Chinese Language (Lao Version)	HSK Standard Course
Thakhek Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Language (Primary School Version)	Chinese Language (Junior High School Version)	HSK Standard Course
Xinhua School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Language (Primary School Version) Happy Chinese Learning	Chinese Language (Junior High School Version)	HSK Standard Course Chinese language course
Laos North Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Language (Primary School Version)	Chinese Language (Junior High School Version)	Chinese Language and Literature (People's Education Press)
China-Laos Friendship School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	New Edition: Chinese (Primary School Version) Old Edition: Chinese (Primary School Version)	New Edition: Chinese (Junior High School Version) Old Edition: Chinese (Junior High School Version) Basic Spoken English	Chinese Language and Literature (People's Education Press) HSK Standard Course
Gong Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Primary School Version) Chinese Language (Primary School Version) Speaking	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Junior High School Version) Chinese Language (Junior High School Version)	Chinese Language and Literature (People's Education Press) HSK Standard Course Chinese Language Course Practical Accelerated Chinese
Zide Cheng Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Language (Primary School Version)	HSK Standard Course Chinese Language and Literature (People's Education Press)	
Chung Hwa School	Preschool Chinese Language	Chinese Pinyin Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Primary School Version) Speaking	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Junior High School Version)	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Junior High School Version)
Liao Chinese School	Preschool Chinese Language, Chinese Pinyin	Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students (Primary School Version)		

Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos offer a complete education system from kindergarten to high school. This “one-school-fits-all” system ensures both the continuity of teaching and prevents the loss of student enrollment [2]. Bilingual teaching is implemented in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos, where students learn subjects such as math, physics, and chemistry, in addition to the Chinese language. Most textbooks used in these classes are purchased from China. Moreover, students are required to learn all mandatory courses offered in Lao national primary and secondary schools.

As of December 2022, among the 11 Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos, there have been 19 types of Chinese language textbooks used, as shown in Table 1. Among them, 18 textbooks are published in Chinese mainland, while 1 is a locally published textbook from Thailand. The publication dates of these textbooks are all after 2000. All schools in Laos face the problem of insufficient localized Chinese language textbooks. Currently, the only national Chinese language textbook targeting Chinese language learners in Laos with Lao language annotations is the “Lao-Chinese Course” published by Chinese mainland, aimed at beginners. The textbook places great emphasis on localization but lacks specificity and novelty for Chinese school students, which leads to limited usage. It is evident that in terms of textbooks, teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students in Laos started relatively late compared to other countries such as Singapore and Indonesia.

Among these 19 textbooks in Table 2, the most commonly adopted ones are “Chinese Language” published by Jinan University Press, “HSK Standard Course” published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press, and “Chinese Language and Literature” published by People’s Education Press. Although “Chinese Language” was renamed as “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” in its new edition published in 2019, most Chinese schools still use the 2007 version. Neither “Chinese” nor “Chinese Language” has a high school edition, so Chinese language textbooks in high school mainly adopt the “Chinese Language and literature” or “HSK Standard Course” published by People’s Education Press.

3. Comparison of Chinese Language Textbooks

3.1 Interview on the use of Chinese Language Textbooks in Laos

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the utilizing of the aforementioned Chinese language textbooks in Chinese schools in Laos, we conducted interviews with 38 in-service Chinese language teachers, including 34 Chinese volunteers, 1 Chinese dispatched teacher, 1 ASEAN dispatched teacher, and 2 Lao teachers. The summary of the interview content is as follows.

The textbook “Chinese Language” encompasses the following advantages. Firstly, this textbook is systematic, with strong continuity, clear and logical chapter structure. Secondly, “Chinese Language” contains rich Chinese cultural knowledge, which includes ancient poetry, tongue twisters, etc., showcasing diverse cultures. Thirdly, “Chinese Language” offers a wide range of article genres such as expository texts and novels, which can expand students' vocabulary. Fourthly, “Chinese Language” takes sentences as the basic teaching unit, which integrates the teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, thus achieving comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Fifthly, “Chinese Language” emphasizes the writing of Chinese characters, with post-lesson exercises on stroke order, etc. Lastly, this textbook “Chinese Language” is equipped with excellent illustrations, facilitating students' understanding. However, there are some drawbacks to this textbook. Firstly, it lacks localization, with no translation into Lao language. Teachers of lower grades need to have bilingual abilities or seek assistance from Google Translate and local teachers to ensure smooth classroom activities. Secondly, the difficulty of the texts and vocabulary poses a challenge for non-ethnic Chinese students or transfer students, especially the students at the junior high school. Moreover, the listening audio is too difficult and lacks everyday

context. Furthermore, this set of textbooks is not suitable for teaching oral skills and listening comprehension, which focus only on the cultivation of Chinese language knowledge. Additionally, there are few example sentences for grammar points, which increases teachers' preparation workload. Moreover, the textbook is relatively old-fashioned, be short of timeliness, and has insufficient content on modern Chinese stories. Lastly, "Chinese Language" is short of accompanying teaching resources.

The advantage of "Experiencing Chinese Language" (Lao language version) is involving explanation of grammar with Lao language, which makes it easier to understand it for students. Additionally, the content of this textbook is progressively organized according to difficulty, which facilitates teachers in tracking the teaching progress. However, it has some drawbacks including an outdated version and limited timeliness. Some of the content in this textbook does not align with contemporary language usage habits. For instance, there are fewer practice activities in the textbook, and teachers may find it challenging to establish a strong correlation between the activities and the teaching content during lesson preparation.

"HSK Standard Course" includes the following advantages. On the one hand, the color combinations in this textbook are well-designed, and the illustrations are unambiguous. On the other hand, the difficulty of the texts gradually increases, and the content of the texts is closely related to real life. However, it has some shortcomings, such as the absence of Lao translation, insufficient illustrations in the texts, and inadequate vocabulary exercises.

"Chinese" encompasses a merit that lies in incorporation of a significant amount of Chinese knowledge, which provides profound and detailed cultural content that is easy to understand it for students. The defects of this textbook involve three aspects. Firstly, there is a large quantity of vocabulary, and the difficulty level of these words is high. Secondly, there are too few Pinyin annotations throughout the text. Lastly, this textbook is short of translations in the Lao language.

One of the advantages of "Speaking" is that it focuses mainly on sentence pattern practice, which makes it relatively practical. However, the shortcoming of "Speaking" involves the excessive use of written language, being written a long time ago. Additionally, many of the vocabulary words are outdated and no longer used or rarely used, lacking timeliness.

"Chinese Pinyin" embodies the following advantages. The textbook covers basic content, has richly illustrated pictures, and is suitable for young Chinese learners who are starting to learn Pinyin. As the learning progresses, each lesson also contains some simple Chinese characters corresponding to the syllables. Furthermore, this textbook also has a companion workbook.

The strengths of the "Chinese Language and Literature" textbook (People's Education Press edition) lie in its timeliness and extensive coverage of Chinese cultural knowledge. However, it has drawbacks in terms of lengthy and challenging texts, as well as deficient engaging elements.

3.2 Comparative Analysis

The most regularly used textbooks are "Chinese Language" in primary and middle school stages of Chinese schools in Laos. In high school, the most frequently used textbooks are "Chinese Language" and "HSK Standard Course" (As shown in the table 2). This section will compare and analyze the content and structure of the three textbooks, namely "Chinese Language" (for Junior High school), "Chinese Language" (for High school), and "HSK Standard Course."

In terms of text structure, each lesson in "Chinese Language" is divided into four parts: introduction, text, vocabulary list (including proper nouns), and reflection questions. Each section of "Chinese language and Literature" consists of five parts: pre-reading, text, reflection and exploration, expansion of knowledge, and reading and writing. Each section of "HSK Standard Course" is divided into eight parts: warm-up, text, new words, annotations, exercises, Chinese

characters, application, and idioms. The common feature among these three textbooks is that they all provide an introduction and vocabulary annotations before the text. The difference lies in the fact that “Chinese Language” does not list grammar points, while both “Chinese Language and Literature” and “HSK Standard Course” include grammar exercises. Additionally, “HSK Standard Course” offers a greater number of grammar exercises as it serves as an exam-oriented textbook.

From the perspective of Pinyin representation, “Chinese Language” only assigns Pinyin to the glossary, “Chinese Language and Literature” only assigns Pinyin to some new vocabulary, while “HSK Standard Course” assigns Pinyin to the warm-up, text, and vocabulary sections. “Chinese Language and Literature” is taught to Chinese domestic middle school students who have already completed Pinyin instruction in elementary school, so the junior high edition only includes Pinyin notation for unfamiliar vocabulary. “Chinese Language” is taught to Ethnic Chinese Students who have less linguistic foundation compared to Chinese domestic middle school students, so Pinyin is included for new vocabulary. “HSK Standard Course” teaches students with no prior knowledge of the Chinese language, hence Pinyin notations are provided throughout the text to facilitate faster and easier understanding.

Regarding the presentation of vocabulary, in both the “Chinese Language” and “HSK Standard Course” textbooks, the grammatical properties of new vocabulary are duly noted, while “Chinese Language and Literature” does not. “Chinese Language” only lists new vocabulary in the glossary without specific definitions but indicates their level. In “Chinese Language and Literature”, new vocabulary is listed at the end of each text with the same order as in the text, which makes it convenient for students to refer to them while reading. Furthermore, all new vocabulary is listed in the “reading and writing” section, increasing the reproducibility of new vocabulary. “HSK Standard Course” lists new vocabulary and their English translations on the right side of corresponding texts, facilitating vocabulary reference while reading. In sections 1 and 2 of the exercises, corresponding practice is provided, which also increases the repetition rate of new vocabulary.

In regard to grammar instruction, “Chinese Language” does not have a specific grammar section, and more closely resembles a reading textbook. However, the accompanying teacher’s guide does highlight and explain language points, and the accompanying exercise book also includes relevant exercises. “Chinese Language and Literature” does not explicitly indicate grammar points in the texts or the teacher’s guide, but “The Chinese Curriculum Standard of Compulsory Education (2011-year Edition)” states in the tenth reading section that students should learn basic vocabulary and grammar knowledge while reading to help them understand difficult language knowledge [3]. This implies that grammar instruction is not the focus of “Chinese Language and Literature.” Each text in “HSK Standard Course” includes 2-4 detailed explanations of grammatical points with English translations, and the corresponding exercise sections also include a considerable number of targeted exercises. It can be seen that grammar instruction is a key focus of “HSK Standard Course.”

In relation to illustration placement, “HSK Standard Course” may embody illustrations in all sections except for the texts and vocabulary sections, and all illustrations are photographs with high relevance to the content they accompany. “Chinese Language” only includes one sketch in the text section, demonstrating high relevance to the text content. In the section of “Chinese Language and Literature,” there are 1-2 ink paintings, which are highly relevant to the content of the texts.

4. The Problems That Currently Exist in Chinese Language Textbooks

4.1 Cultural and Values Differences

Culture, as a sum of traditional customs, beliefs, lifestyles, and behaviors, usually has a profound influence on a region or peoples, and the influence of local culture on people living in that area is

generally subtle and deeply ingrained. Therefore, when people try to understand and accept another culture or engage in cross-cultural communication, they often unconsciously exploit their own language and cultural habits. Accordingly, engaging in the interpretation or explanation of the other culture can lead to cultural misunderstandings [4] [5]. Correspondingly, the emergence of cultural misinterpretation can significantly increase the learning cost of second language acquisition. Nonetheless, cultural misunderstandings are a widespread occurrence in cross-cultural communication and teaching. Chinese language textbooks serve the purpose of disseminating knowledge in both the Chinese language and Chinese culture. Failure to adequately address cultural differences resulting in cultural misinterpretation can significantly impact the effectiveness of Chinese language instruction [6].

In language textbooks, the “Text” section occupies the largest proportion and contains the most comprehensive content, which also increases the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings. We have sorted all Chinese language textbooks and divided the texts into five categories: folk legends and traditional stories, idioms and fables, stories about historical figures, excerpts from classical novels, and modern literature. Taking “Chinese Language” as an example, the texts that are most likely to cause cultural misunderstandings are mainly in the categories of folk legends and traditional stories, idioms and fables, and stories about historical figures.

The results of a questionnaire survey showed that 38% of Chinese school students in Laos considered fables the most difficult to comprehend, followed by folk tales at 29% and stories about historical figures at 15%. About half of the students were not interested in these stories but preferred to learn about modern Chinese stories. Taking Lesson 8 “Sima Guang” in Book 4 of “Chinese” as an example, the story of Sima Guang breaking a jar to save his friend is well-known, and we see Sima Guang as very intelligent and brave. However, when considering the illustrations accompanying the text, some of the interviewees believe this to be an implausible scenario. They argue that the jar is much taller than the child, which makes it unlikely for the child to fall into it. Some students assume Sima Guang should first seek the help of parents or adults. Another group of students ponders the course of action if a stone were to accidentally hit the child inside the jar... Therefore, differences in values result in students losing focus on the key points of knowledge. As a result, teachers are unable to effectively achieve teaching objectives, and it may even negatively impact students' motivation to learn.

Due to the readers are short of knowledge of the historical background of the text, they are limited by their own knowledge and are unable to find matching concepts when facing new information. This could result in unconscious misinterpretation. For instance, Lesson 10, “The Story of Sun Yat-sen,” in the 7th volume of “Chinese Language,” serves as a typical example of cultural misinterpretation. This text primarily narrates the story of Sun Yat-sen's frugal lifestyle during his study abroad in England to purchase books for learning. However, in the text, this behavior of Sun Yat-sen is not understood by the students. Some of the interviewees maintained that “Yat-sen is supposed to go to the library to borrow books for free,” while others contended that “he should buy more delicious food, as health is the most important thing.” The main reason for this misunderstanding is the difference in values between the old and young generations. Lao people faces less competition and has a relatively laid-back environment, so students have difficulty arriving on time for class, and they are not so extremely eager for knowledge. Moreover, Sun Yat-sen's story has taken place over a hundred years ago, and the contemporary era has encountered significant transformations. Therefore, it is arduous for individuals of the fifth and sixth generations of Chinese descent to fully comprehend the story of Sun Yat-sen.

Cultural differences can easily generate misunderstandings, particularly in terms of values. For example, in Lesson 12 of the textbook “Chinese”, the text is titled “New Year Arrives”. The text reads as follows: “xin nian dao...wo zhu da jia shen ti hao, da jia zhu wo xue xi hao” (New Year has

arrived... I wish everyone to have a healthy body, and everyone wishes me to achieve good results in my studies.). The supplementary reading material following the text is also a dialogue about the New Year “Fangfang: ye ye nai nai, xin nian hao!.....ba ba ma ma: zhen guai, wo men zhu ni xue xi hao.....” (Fangfang: Grandpa, grandma, happy New Year!... Mom, dad: How obedient you are, we wish you study well...) Throughout the entire text and supplementary exercises, the phrase “zhu ni xue xi hao” (I wish you to achieve good results in your studies) is repeatedly mentioned. In the eyes of the elders portrayed in the text, excelling in academics is of utmost importance. The results of a questionnaire survey indicate that 34% of students consider being the top student in their class as “good results in studies,” while 58% believe being among the top three students in their grade is “good results in studies.” In contrast, only 8% of students consider studying abroad in China as the benchmark for “good results in studies.” Therefore, students have varying standards for what constitutes “good results in studies,” and the majority of them feel it is difficult to achieve this standard. Additionally, parents do not place such high expectations on academic performance. As a result, students find it challenging to comprehend why prioritizing academic achievement is chosen as the means to express good wishes.

For instance, China has limited understanding of modern civilization, such as the “Four great inventions” and the “Silk Road,” and only up to the events of “Shenzhou V” and “Shenzhou VI” in aviation. However, with the success of “Shenzhou XIII”, China’s achievements in this area have greatly increased.

Statistical results show that “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” introduces more traditional Chinese culture, such as the “Four great inventions” and the “Silk Road,” but relatively little about modern Chinese culture. In the field of aviation, for instance, the textbook only introduces up to the “Shenzhou VI,” while the “Shenzhou XVI” was successfully launched on May 30th this year. For example, in Lesson 14 of the 12th volume of “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” (primary school version), which discusses the “Changes in China from my perspective” between 1985 and 1999, it has been 24 years since that time. The changes in China in the 21st century have been much greater, with new technologies and cultural phenomena emerging such as high-speed rail, electronic payments, and self-media. The content in “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” on the “bicycle kingdom” and “common phrases in the 20th century” is outdated. The timeliness of the textbook is low, with an overemphasis on traditional culture and a lack of attention paid to contemporary culture.

4.2 Insufficient Localization and Infrequent Updates

Currently, the content of these Chinese language textbooks does not closely relate to the actual lives of Lao students. As a result, it is challenging for Lao students to resonate with these textbooks, and their interest and motivation in learning are difficult to enhance. For example, in Lesson 5 of Book 3 of “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” (primary school version), which talks about “The four seasons in Beijing,” the text mainly describes the distribution of the four seasons in Beijing and their characteristics. In the practice section “Play a little,” learners are asked to match activities with each season. For example, the students should match winter with building snowmen and match summer with swimming. However, Laos only has dry and rainy season, with an average temperature of 24 degrees Celsius and a temperature difference of only about 10 degrees Celsius throughout the year. Based on the cognitive ability and social experience of second-grade primary school students, they cannot understand the characteristics of the four seasons or comprehend why swimming can only be done in summer. Moreover, as Lao students have not seen snow, for them, any season is suitable for swimming. Similarly, in Lesson 13 of Book 4, “New Year is Coming,” the content mainly focuses on Xiaohua making greeting cards to give to classmates and teachers.

However, the Lao New Year differs from China's. Laos celebrates their New Year, also known as the Water Festival or Songkran, from April 13-15 or 14-16 in the Gregorian calendar. They express their blessings by splashing water on each other, rather than making greeting cards. Given the limited empathy of second-grade primary school students towards unfamiliar things, it is highly likely that the students will have little interest in the textbook content and a poor learning outcome.

The existing Chinese language textbooks imported from China also have issues with infrequent updates [7] [8]. For example, most Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students still use the 2007 version of "Chinese Language", not the 2019 version of "Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students". There are two reasons as followed. Firstly, the Chinese language textbooks in Laos are mainly donated by the Chinese Embassy and Consulates in Laos, and the quantity is limited, which makes it difficult to meet the updating demands of every school. Secondly, most Lao students in Chinese schools have poor economic conditions, and purchasing new textbooks every semester is a significant expense. Therefore, Chinese textbooks for ethnic Chinese students in Lao schools are mainly inherited from the previous class, which results in infrequent updates. Moreover, as "Chinese Language" and "Chinese" textbooks do not have senior high school version, most Chinese schools use "Chinese Language and Literature" or "HSK Standard Course" from the People's Education Press, which leads to issues with connecting knowledge content between textbooks. Feedback from questionnaire surveys shows that these two textbooks are too difficult, unsuitable for Chinese school students in Laos, and demonstrate insufficient localization.

4.3 Absence of Lao Language Annotations

Except for "Experiencing Chinese" (Lao version), the textbooks listed in Table 1 do not have Lao language annotations. Students are the primary learners, and their feedback is the first indication of the quality of the textbooks. We interviewed high school students with a Chinese language level of approximately HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) 3-4, and most of them believed that one aspect of textbook improvement is to add Lao language annotations. Most ethnic Chinese students with Chinese language backgrounds indicated that new vocabulary should be accompanied by Lao language annotations. Moreover, due to the extensive vocabulary in Chinese, the vocabulary in Lao language is relatively limited. As a result, a single word in Lao language can correspond to multiple words in Chinese. For example, "mei li (beautiful)," "piao liang (pretty)," and "hao kan (handsome)" only have one Lao word that corresponds to them. It is challenging for students to distinguish the differences between these words without detailed Lao language annotations, which could significantly help their accurate understanding of word meanings. A small number of Lao students without Chinese language backgrounds also suggested that the texts should have Lao language annotations, because the texts are too long and difficult [9]. The principal of Chung Teak school stated that, "Compared to countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, there are fewer ethnic Chinese in Laos. Teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students started late, and the development speed is relatively slow as well. Therefore, there is still no suitable Chinese language textbook with Lao language annotations for teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students in Laos."

4.4 Inadequate Adaptability of Mixed-Class Teaching

On teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students in Laos, the mixed-class teaching of ethnic Chinese and non-ethnic Chinese students represents a special instructional arrangement. Students in Laos Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students receive bilingual education from kindergarten to high school and study both Chinese and Lao courses. Therefore, the bilingual teaching environment of Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students has attracted a large number of wealthy Lao families, which included government officials. They have all sent their children to Chinese schools for

education. At Liewtou School, ethnic Chinese students only account for 20%, Lao students are in the majority, and there are also a few Vietnamese students [10]. The results of a survey show that in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students such as Xinhua School, Chung Teak Chinese School, Zide Cheng Chinese School, Chung Hwa Chinese School, China-Laos Friendship Chinese School, and Gong Chinese School, Chinese students account for about 20%-30% among these Chinese schools. The remaining majority are students from Laos, with a minority being Vietnamese students. The student demographics in these above schools are similar to those at Liewtou Chinese School. Due to the low proportion of ethnic Chinese students and the constraints of the actual situation of the school, it is difficult to conduct targeted separate teaching for ethnic Chinese and non-ethnic Chinese students. Currently, in Lao schools, students are grouped solely based on age without considering their proficiency in Chinese language. As a result, a situation arises where ethnic Chinese and non-ethnic Chinese students are mixed in the same class, which lacks targeted instruction. Non-ethnic Chinese students are in the majority, and using Chinese language textbooks for non-ethnic Chinese students is better from the perspective of preparing textbooks and achieving teaching results. However, the nature of the schools is Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students, which mainly provides Chinese language teaching and spreads Chinese culture for ethnic Chinese students, so Chinese textbooks for ethnic Chinese students should be used. Moreover, this would increase the difficulty of learning for non-ethnic Chinese students, which is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

4.5 Diverse Courses but Single Textbooks

Based on the schedules of Chinese language teachers in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos, Chinese language classes are roughly divided into four subjects: Chinese language and literature/Chinese language/Chinese for ethnic Chinese students, composition, conversation, and culture. However, Chinese language textbooks only have a primary course textbook titled “Chinese language and literature”, “Chinese language” or “Chinese for ethnic Chinese Students”, which is shared among multiple courses. There are also five courses for teaching Chinese to non-ethnic Chinese: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and integrated, and all of them have matching textbooks and teaching materials. However, the textbooks in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos are too homogeneous [11]. Apart from the exercise book, there are no other supplementary materials available in Chinese schools. Many Chinese school principals interviewed also stated that “there are too few exercises in the current textbooks, and we hope to have more exercises in future textbooks.” The phenomenon of teaching multiple subjects using the same textbook may be attributed to the consideration of the textbook editors towards the ethnic Chinese students in Chinese schools. These students, as Chinese descent, already have a foundation in Chinese language and a language environment. Therefore, the design of the textbook content is similar to that of primary and secondary schools in China. For the textbook editors, it suffices to lower the difficulty level of the textbook. Perhaps the situation is feasible for the first and second generations of ethnic Chinese who live in the Chinese community, but it is not suitable for the fifth and sixth generations ethnic Chinese students in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos. Their living environment and language environment are different from their ancestors, and in their families, their parents may not speak Chinese or only speak simple Chinese. Other than having Chinese blood, they are no different from Laos. Therefore, the students in Chinese schools of Laos cannot be regarded as primary and secondary school students in China. In addition, the textbooks should be designed according to the actual situation of second language learners [12].

4.6 Incomplete Teaching Program

In Laos Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students, Chinese language teachers are mainly

composed of three parts: first, local Chinese language teachers who are mainly students graduated from Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students; second, Chinese language teachers sent by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council; and third, volunteer Chinese Language teacher sent by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) and Chinese directors and sponsored Chinese teachers. The handover of responsibilities between the newly arrived and outgoing teachers sent by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and the Center for Language Education and Cooperation is not smooth or nonexistent. This issue is particularly pronounced among Chinese language teachers in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students since the outbreak of the pandemic. The impact on Chinese language teachers in Chinese schools has been significant. According to the survey questionnaire and interview analysis, many Chinese language teachers in Laos adapt the existing textbooks during the Chinese language teaching process, and only a few of them will compile their own textbooks. The teachers will select the content they consider to be better and adapt it. However, after their tenure ends, they do not hand it over to the next teacher well, so the adapted textbooks are put aside. The next teacher will integrate textbooks according to their own experience, so the students only receive fragmented information with insufficient systematicity and scientificity.

The absence of classification standards for Chinese language textbooks in Laos is an urgent problem that needs to be solved. During the guidance process, the ultimate goal of teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students in Laos is to send students to study in China, to be disseminators of Chinese language and culture, or to have a Chinese language level equivalent to that of domestic teenagers. This is a problem that needs to be urgently considered and decided at the level of teaching standardization, as it is related to the teaching outline and classification standards for Chinese language teaching in Laos [13]. Only by clarifying the teaching objectives of each stage can corresponding content be assigned for vocabulary, grammar, themes, culture, and other sections. The types of Chinese language textbooks are diverse in Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos and there is no unified outline. Besides, the connection of knowledge points between each stage of learning is not good enough. From junior high school onwards, the differences in textbooks used by various Chinese schools become greater, and the teaching progress is not uniform. This is also a manifestation of the lack of a unified teaching syllabus.

In addition, it is necessary to establish corresponding examination standards. Examination standards are important content for teaching outlines and classification standards. Although Chinese language has been included in Laos' national education system, the Ministry of Education and Sports in Laos does not require specific Chinese language teaching. Since Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos implement bilingual education, and Lao and Chinese language have equal status. The Ministry of Education and Sports in Laos has clear requirements for Lao language teaching. The Lao language scores of Chinese school students cannot be lower than the average scores of students in public schools in Laos. The principal of the China-Laos Friendship School introduced: "Graduating classes of Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students at the primary, junior high and high school levels are required to participate in the Lao Language graduation examination supervised by the education administrative department." In contrast, for Chinese language, there is an absence of examination standards, there is no unified national proficiency exam, and most exams are formulated and conducted by the teachers themselves. Therefore, it inevitably causes a large difference in the Chinese proficiency level of students in the same grade in different schools. Currently, the HSK is the exam used to assess the Chinese proficiency level of students. However, not every school has a test center, and the cost of the exam is relatively high for the consumption level in Laos. As a result, generally only high school students participate in the exam. At the primary and junior high school level, there is an absence of Chinese language examination standards.

5. Deliberation on the Development of Chinese Language Textbooks in Laos

5.1 To Localize the Textbooks

Localization of textbooks can be carried out from two aspects: vocabulary localization and topic selection localization. Vocabulary localization refers to the use of words with local characteristics in textbooks. In Laos, it means selecting place names, character names, item names, and other words related to local ethnic characteristics in the text. These words not only play a certain role in communication, but also make students feel a sense of affinity and thus willing to learn. For example, Laos-localized vocabulary includes rubber, coconut, Dok Champa (the national flower of Laos), etc. It also includes local place names, such as Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Mekong River, etc. Traffic-related words such as motorcycles and tuk-tuks are also included, as well as food-related words such as sticky rice, bamboo tube rice, and papaya salad. Culture-related words include That Luang stupa, almsgiving, and kip (the national currency of Laos). Topic selection localization refers to the selection of local people's most interesting, representative and ethnic-themed topics when choosing the text of textbooks. Therefore, when developing localized Chinese language textbooks, attention should be paid to the practicality of the selected topics. Based on local characteristics, considering practicality and suitability, topics related to students' daily life or local characteristic content such as local myths, characters, customs, festivals, and entertainment methods should be selected. For example, Laos's historical stories include "The Legend of the Gourd", "The Legend of Kunluna Wua", "The Story of Laos National Flower", and "The Descendants of the Fire Thief"; Laos's festivals include Cherry Blossom Festival, That Luang Festival, Festival of the Souls of Rice, Vesakha Puja Day, Rocket Festival Magha Puja Day, the Water Receiving Festival, the Water Sending Festival, and the Loi Krathong. The main forms of entertainment include dancing and drinking. The topics can be diverse, but attention should be paid to avoiding contents that may lead to cultural conflicts.

5.2 Strategies for Compiling Textbooks

Any start of textbooks requires strong theoretical support. In terms of cultural teaching content, the "Framework of Reference for Chinese Culture and in International Chinese Language Education" has been published this year by Center for Language Education and Cooperation. However, there is currently insufficient systematic theoretical research on the selection and arrangement of grammar points in overseas Chinese language textbooks. While research on Chinese grammar in domestic contexts has reached a considerable depth, there have been continuous emerging research achievements in the field of grammar in teaching Chinese to non-ethnic students. However, theoretical guidance and principles regarding the selection and arrangement of grammar points in overseas Chinese textbooks are still not enough [14]. The scientific and systematic aspects of grammar point design and arrangement also need to be strengthened. A set of grammar writing norms and standards that adhere to the characteristics of overseas Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students should be designed. Therefore, it is urgent to develop a general outline for writing Chinese language textbooks for ethnic Chinese students.

When compiling a set of new Chinese language textbooks for Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students, in-depth localization and nationalization studies must be conducted from the perspectives of teachers, textbooks, teaching methods, and other areas [15]. Collaborating with local scholars based on local practical needs is the best way to achieve this objective. Local Chinese language teachers understand students' learning backgrounds, learning psychology, and local culture better. This situation makes it easier for both Chinese and foreign communities to design a teaching syllabus and teaching method that suits local practical needs while also meeting Chinese language skill requirements. Southeast Asia has already set a successful precedent. For example, the College of Chinese Language and Culture of Jinan University and the Federation of Khmer Chinese in

Cambodia jointly edited and published the “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” textbook for Khmer Chinese primary schools in 1995 and 2006. This set of “Chinese for Ethnic Chinese Students” textbooks, co-written by both parties, is specifically designed for use in six-year primary education in Chinese schools in Cambodia. Laos can also learn from this approach and adapt the textbooks accordingly, with the leadership of the Lao Chinese Council and assistance from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. When adapting the existing “Chinese Language” textbooks, Lao customs and culture should be incorporated into the materials. This will provide a sense of familiarity, warmth, and belonging to Chinese school students during their learning process [16].

5.3 To Establish the Teaching Syllabus

Setting grading and examination standards is a top priority, which conforms to the actual situation of Chinese for ethnic Chinese students and Chinese language education in Laos. Teaching goals must be clear in order to match different teaching tasks and textbooks. Different Chinese schools in Laos have different teaching focuses, and the setting of a teaching syllabus should take into account the needs of various aspects, so as to better serve teaching activities and textbook selections with different teaching objectives. On this basis, the establishment of examination standards can give frontline teachers a better reference for evaluating Chinese language proficiency. In the absence of a unified Chinese evaluation standard in Laos, this can guide teachers to design test questions and the scope and degree of difficulty of assessments in a more reasonable and scientific way [17].

The teaching syllabus needs to clearly define the teaching audience. For Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in countries like Laos, where ethnic Chinese students comprise only 20-30% of the student population, their Chinese education exhibits a dual nature, which serves both teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students and teaching Chinese to non-ethnic Chinese students. Therefore, the teaching audience is different, and teaching objectives are different as well. Accordingly, the teaching methods will vary. Class-based teaching is the easiest solution, but it is too difficult to implement based on the national conditions and actual situations of Chinese schools in Laos. Therefore, the Chinese language teaching syllabus in Lao needs to address both types of teaching audiences. Teaching goals for a knowledge point can be graded based on the student’s level, such as beginner, intermediate, and advanced. For ethnic Chinese students, the intermediate standard should be at least achieved. For non-ethnic Chinese students, the beginner standard should be at least achieved. On the other hand, basic Chinese materials and elective enhancement materials can be set up. Basic Chinese textbooks can be taught in the classroom, and students can learn and choose enhancement materials on their own after class. To assess students’ learning results, question and answer sessions regarding the enhancement materials can be conducted in the last 5 minutes of each class.

6. Conclusion

The survey of 11 Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students in Laos indicated that 19 types of Chinese language textbooks have been used, which includes those published in Chinese mainland and Thailand. Currently, the most widely used textbooks in primary and junior high school are “Chinese Language” published by Jinan University Press, while in senior high school, “Chinese Language and Literature” published by People’s Education Press and “HSK Standard Course” published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press are the most commonly used. However, by interviewing Chinese language teachers and principals in Laos Chinese schools for ethnic Chinese students and conducting comparative analysis of textbooks, the following problems were identified: cultural misunderstandings caused by cultural and value differences, insufficient localization and infrequent updates of textbooks, absence of Lao language annotations, inadequate targeting of mixed-class teaching, limited textbooks despite diverse curricula, and incomplete

teaching syllabus. These problems can be addressed from the following three aspects. In terms of localization of textbooks, the selection of topics and vocabulary that are most relevant and representative to Laos is crucial. In terms of the development of textbooks, cooperation with local Chinese teachers and scholars is vital and it is also recommended to draw upon the successful experiences of Cambodia. In terms of setting teaching syllabus, it is necessary to consider the actual conditions of mixed-class teaching in Laos and establish grading and examination standards accordingly. Through this survey, Chinese school principals and teachers expressed optimism about the future of teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students in Laos, and believe that with the comprehensive deepening of cooperation between China and Laos, more and more students will learn Chinese. By means of policy guidance, investment in resources, and curriculum development, teaching Chinese to ethnic Chinese students in Laos will soon catch up with the progress seen in other Southeast Asian countries.

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