

Building the Next Generation of Thai-Chinese: The Role of Chinese-Sponsored Schools in Hat Yai

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Abstract

This article examines the role of Chinese-sponsored schools in Hat Yai, Thailand in passing a Chinese cultural heritage on to the younger generations of the Thai-Chinese community. Three schools, Srinakorn Foundation, Kobkarnsuksa Foundation, and Khunnatham Wittaya, serve as key institutions for binding the ethnic Chinese community together, for teaching succeeding generations Chinese traditions, language and culture, as well as for connecting the community to a network of other ethnic Chinese communities. Evidence from interviews, questionnaires, and observation indicate that Thai-Chinese students are positively influenced by the Chinese-sponsored schools and value the Chinese elements of their blended Thai-Chinese community culture.

Introduction

“I’m proud of being ethnic Thai-Chinese, which has a diverse culture. I feel very happy and lucky to be a person to have the opportunity to learn two cultures which can exist harmoniously together.... ever since I grew up I had the feeling the culture in the community hasn’t changed a bit, and I feel I have a part in that community.” This quote from a twenty-something, third-generation Thai-Chinese female dental student illustrates the persistent power of a blended Chinese-Thai culture in the commercially important Southern Thai city of Hat Yai.

For centuries Chinese people have been coming to Thailand as traders, travelers, and workers. Many have stayed to call Thailand home, mutually transformed by and transforming the local culture. At times it has been a struggle for those who wish to carry on the traditions of their ancestors, faced by challenges from periodic hostile government policies and pressure to conform to Thai society and culture. But Chinese cultural characteristics rest on a long and proud tradition that the older generations have felt worth preserving; while Chinese immigrants have been quick to adapt and integrate into Thai society, they have formed organizations and institutions designed to maintain community cohesion and pass on the aspects of Chinese culture that make the younger

generation, such as the aspiring young dentist, proud of their heritage and community.

Chinese-sponsored schools serve as key institutions for binding the ethnic Chinese community together, for teaching succeeding generations Chinese traditions, language and culture, as well as for connecting the community to a network of other ethnic Chinese communities. Relying on in-depth administration and teacher interviews, 175 student responses to attitudinal questionnaires, and extended observation conducted between November 2011 and August 2013, this article examines three Hat Yai schools that are sponsored by ethnic Chinese organizations: Srinakorn Foundation School, Kobkarnsuksa Foundation School, and the most recently opened Khunnatham Wittaya School. Along with other organizations, such as regional dialect associations and Chinese-sponsored charity organizations, the survival and prospering of the schools reflects a collective defense and triumph against often aggressive anti-Chinese policies of nationalist Thai governments. The schools also serve as cultural centers of focus for the community, particularly the Srinakorn Foundation School, which hosts a major portion of the annual Chinese New Year celebration. Although the schools do not teach in Chinese, other than language classes, and follow the nationally mandated Thai curriculum, they nonetheless serve an important role in passing on a Chinese legacy to Thai-Chinese students via the language teaching and cultural activities. Finally, the schools serve as nodes in a network that connect the Hat Yai community with other ethnic Chinese schools and institutions in Thailand, Malaysia and China via the teaching staff, exchanges, and institutions within the schools promoting a link to Chinese culture. As a result, the schools have helped preserve significant elements of the Chinese heritage and instilled a sense of community that retains a blended cultural identity among succeeding generations of Thai-Chinese people.

Characteristics of the Hat Yai Thai-Chinese community

Hat Yai is a relatively young yet significant city primarily built by Thai-Chinese migrants, the majority of whom have ancestral roots in two southern coastal provinces of China, Fujian and Guangdong, and the island province of Hainan. Within these three provinces are five regional cultural-language groups—Hakka, Teo Chew, Hokkien, Kwong Siew (a part of Guangdong) and Hailam (Hainan)—which make up the most influential language associations and social networks of Hat Yai's ethnic Chinese community. Chinese immigrants came to Hat Yai from four main sources: railway labor, immigration from Malaysia and other parts of Southern Thailand, direct immigration from China, and, as economic opportunity increased, internal migration from central Thailand.

In the early history of Hat Yai, the Hakka group (whose members often speak a dialect very similar to Teo Chew) likely had more influence than their relative numbers due to the prominence of two founding figures, Jia Ki Si and See Kim Yong. Hakka Chinese immigrant Jia Ki Si supervised the many thousands of Chinese immigrant railway laborers, who consisted of mostly Hakka, Teo Chew and Cantonese, required for the tough construction through Southern Thailand's mountainous jungle wilderness. As the rail line approached the sparsely inhabited area that would become Hat Yai circa 1912, Jia Ki Si envisioned a grand future for this important junction. He purchased

50 *rai*¹ of land centered around the current Hat Yai junction railway station for a mere 175 Baht, and began developing row houses, shops for rent, and roads. Following Jia Ki Si's lead, other Chinese and Thai visionaries and investors built an infrastructure to accommodate travelers passing through this hub station, at which the track split into three separate directions. Another Hakka, See Kim Yong, followed his railroad-worker father from China, making his fortune in real estate development. A generous donor to public causes such as local temples and charities, including the land for Srinakorn, his picture graces many buildings in downtown Hat Yai.

Hokkien influence has also been strong in the Hat Yai region due to the historical governorship of Songkhla by the Hokkien Na Songkhla family from the late 18th to the early 20th century. Social disruption in China produced refugees from the Fujian area, as well as immigration from Hokkien-dominated areas in Malaysia and Southern Thailand. As Hat Yai rapidly grew from a small backwater to a center of economic activity in the region, these ethnic Chinese immigrants helped to swell the population and fuel the economic expansion of the area via rubber plantation technology brought in from Malaysia, tin-mining, processing of seafood and fish products, and the service industry catering to and entertaining regional travelers. Some key members of the Hokkien community have also exerted influence by being active in politics. For example, the current Hat Yai mayor also holds a position on the Southern Thailand Hokkien Association committee.

Teo Chew Chinese, whose numbers dominate in Bangkok and Central Thailand, have come to play an increasingly important community role as the Hat Yai economy has expanded. Opportunity attracted many Teo Chew business interests, particularly in the growing hotel and service industries. The largest local Chinese-sponsored charity organization, Siang Teung, was founded in 1951 by a group of Teo Chew Chinese who gathered socially to play traditional Chinese instruments. Today, one of the wealthiest and influential Teo Chew-origin Thai-Chinese, the owner of the Lee Garden Plaza and other hotels, heads this Siang Teung Charity, while another influential second generation Teo Chew senior business man, Nikhom Preechawiragul, holds a particularly honored position in the local community as the triple head of the 22-organization Hat Yai Federation of Associations and Charity Foundations, the Srinakorn School Foundation, and the Teo Chew Association of Hat Yai. Teo Chew strength in the community has also been felt in the establishment of Chinese-sponsored educational institutions, as the Kobkarnsuksa Foundation and Khunnatham Wittaya schools are associated with the Hat Yai Teo Chew Association and the Teo Chew-sponsored Teik Kha Hui Chee Nam Kok Charity Foundation.

Estimating the proportion of ethnic Chinese as a percentage of municipal Hat Yai's population of 158,218 (2012) is quite difficult, as the Thai government does not keep reliable statistics on Thais with ethnic Chinese backgrounds, and neither are statistics available that show the proportions of the various language groups. One might imperfectly estimate the relative population of these language groups by language association membership, though the correlation to population may not be exact, and

¹ 50 *rai* = 19.76 acres, or 80,000 sq. meters

record keeping between the organizations may have significant differences. Nonetheless, interviews with association administrators suggest the following breakdown:

Hakka - 1200 members
Pun Sun Khak (a sub-group of Hakka people) - 225 members
Teo Chew - 600 members
Hokkien - 506 members
Kwong Siew - approximately 300 members
Hailam - just over 200 members

Regardless of the proportions, ethnic Chinese-associated organizations in Hat Yai have worked over the years to maintain a link with the community's Chinese heritage. The active presence of the consulate of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Songkhla at Hat Yai's social and cultural events, the connection through the Chinese-language schools, and other exchanges highlight the continuing link shared with the China. Hat Yai's ethnic Chinese community leaders are extended invitations to attend PRC national day celebrations, or other international conferences, and are often honored as dignitaries or cultural ambassadors. Pictures in several Thai-Chinese organization commemorative books give visually striking images of the status accorded to Hat Yai's Thai-Chinese organization leaders. The Siang Teung Charity Foundation's Thirtieth Anniversary book shows that when former PRC Premier Zhao Ziyang stopped in Bangkok in 1981, the Siang Teung president was included in the welcoming delegation. In another undated photo, the Foundation president is seen honorably positioned at the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in Beijing. (Siang Teung Foundation, 1989) The Srinakorn and Teo Chew anniversary books have remarkable images of the Teo Chew community's senior leader Mr. Nikhom's numerous interactions with Chinese officials and events. To emphasize the honor given to the organization via his status, two pages of the Srinakorn commemorative book are dedicated to grainy screen shots of Chinese TV and other photos covering President Jiang Zemin's 1999 visit to Phuket, where he greeted the dignitary. (Srinakorn Building Committee, 1999) Other photographs show leaders at the fiftieth and fifty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the PRC, attending other events in China, and receiving the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs deputy director at Srinakorn.

The links with China maintained by ethnic Chinese organizations in Hat Yai indicate a general concern by community leaders to maintain a cultural connection with their Chinese origins. In the relatively short history of Hat Yai, the five major language groups have enjoyed considerable cooperation on many fronts to support this goal. The five groups have joined to form charity organizations, to provide welfare to the ethnic Chinese in the community, and to promote the Chinese cultural heritage through organized festivals. Most relevant to this study, the five groups have allied since the earliest years to pass on Chinese culture to the next generation through educational institutions.

The role of Chinese-sponsored schools in binding the community together

Formal teaching of ethnic Chinese students began in Hat Yai in 1923 with thirty students. By 1925, community leaders organized to construct the town's first Chinese school, Jongfa Yichin, on land donated by See Kim Yong. (Srinakorn Building Committee, 1999) The teaching was in both the Teo Chew dialect and Mandarin. Shortly after its foundation, however, in what would be a repeated pattern over many decades, the social and political atmosphere in Thailand, in terms of the attitude towards Chinese people, changed dramatically. In a turbulent world atmosphere of growing fascism and hyper-nationalism, Thailand was undergoing its own significant changes, highlighted by the replacement in 1932 of an absolute monarchy structure with a nascent semi-democratic group of Thai nationalists. The government viewed Chinese organizations as non-Thai groups with possible external links and agendas that were not in alignment with their nation-building efforts. Many Chinese were seen as promoting radical democratic-republican ideas such as those of the pro-Sun Yat-sen Tongmenghui Society. Sun Yat-sen, as a Hakka, was likely popular among the influential Hat Yai Hakka Chinese population of the time. (Maliwan, 2000) The government was concerned not only about the politics of the Tongmenghui and other Chinese individuals and groups, but also about remuneration being sent to their Chinese homeland. The government estimated that during the reigns of King Rama VI and King Rama VII, between 1927-1932, more than 160 million Baht left the country for China. This report came just as the World Depression was deepening. The government began to pressure the Hat Yai Chinese schools to change their Chinese-centered curricula to the officially-sanctioned Thai curriculum, with limited teaching of Chinese as a second language. Organizations that were helping fund the schools came under official scrutiny, such as the ethnic Chinese charity organization founded by Jia Ki Si, the Chung Hua Foundation, which was subject to formal investigation in 1928 and again in 1940. Under this pressure, the Jongfa Yichin School closed around 1935, and although Jia Ki Si led an effort to reopen it, by 1938, Phibul Songkhram's nationalist assault on the Chinese community officially closed all Chinese schools in the region. (Suphakan, 2010)

Immediately after the Second World War, a freer atmosphere provided opportunity for the Chinese community in Hat Yai to more formally establish itself. This was an era of the official registration and activity of the various dialect organizations and schools. The same group that had established the Jongfa Yichin School reopened an evening school named Jongfa Yiasiow. Shortly thereafter, the five major dialect groups of the region established a full-time day school, named simply Jongfa. Working cooperatively and donating according to the strength of their organizations, the Teo Chew and Hokkien Associations each funded ten classrooms, the Hakka Association six, and the Hailam and Kwongsiew Associations provided two classrooms each. Although buying land and registering the school proved problematic under changing government policies and hostile attitudes, construction of the fairly simple thatched-roof school building was completed in 1950, under the name Srinakorn (or, in Chinese, 合艾國光學校, "Hat Yai National Glory School"). (Srinakorn Building Committee, 1999)

In 1948 several Teo Chew Association committee members proposed to start another

Chinese school in the city. Construction was near completion when the government policy changed, allowing only two Chinese language teaching schools per province, so the project was set aside and the building was given to the Association to use. As in the pre-war era, a nationalist Thai agenda bent on conforming the population into one single Thai culture combined with negatively perceived external events in China, where the Chinese Communist Party declared victory and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. The establishment of a potential communist juggernaut to the north likely had a significant impact on the renewed governmental repressive policy towards Chinese schools. Moreover, in Thailand's south, Malaysian communists, mostly ethnic Chinese, crowded the border of Thailand, having been united in their fight against the Japanese during the war. In the period after the war, many Chinese residents in Hat Yai felt appreciation towards the communists for their anti-Japanese stance, with the popularity of the Communist Party in Thailand peaking around this time. Hat Yai Chinese organizational interaction with Penang, and even trips to China by association leaders, undoubtedly further raised the suspicions of anti-communists in the Thai government. In this atmosphere, the government suspected Chinese schools of promoting a separate language and identity, and potentially establishing links with subversive foreign elements.

Thus, Hat Yai's two Chinese schools struggled to remain open and effective. In 1952, the Teo Chew Association revived its school project, tasking two members with establishing a primary school to be named Kobkarnsuksa. The following year, the school opened classes. Enrollment increased rapidly, and the school seemed to be on its way to success. But with the second coming of the nationalist Prime Minister Phibul, policy focused on eliminating the perceived threat of Thai-Chinese communists and any institutions that might support them. The government closed down Kobkarnsuksa and investigated the recently opened Srinakorn school for violating the strict rules regarding teaching in a foreign language, resulting in the school's closure in 1953 for the next seventeen years.

The Hat Yai Chinese community would weather this storm, however, and maintain the vision of sponsoring Chinese language schools that would prevent their ethnic and cultural background from becoming a forgotten memory. Both Srinakorn and Kobkarnsuksa had reopened by the early 1970s, expanding quickly as magnets for Thai-Chinese families. The continuous renovation and construction of new buildings and development of the grounds became a visible symbol of the persistent presence of Chinese culture in the community.

After Srinakorn reopened in 1970, a new president of the Teo Chew Association announced plans in 1972 to construct a modern Kobkarnsuksa school, donating 400,000 Baht of his own money. Signifying the change of status of the Chinese community, a member of the Royal Family attended a ceremony at the future school in 1973, with classes finally reopening in 1975. (Teo Chew Association, 2009) The fundraising efforts of the Srinakorn Foundation for a renovation in 1983, as well as fundraising for additions to Kobkarnsuksa, also reveal the growing wealth and power that the Chinese community had acquired in Hat Yai, as well as the continued strength of ethnic identity and ties to China. Mr. Kangsaeng Srisawatnuphap, the Hat Yai Teo Chew Association president, donated 10.3 million Baht for Srinakorn. The next highest donor gave five million Baht;

the top eleven donors all donated over one million Baht each. Changes in government attitudes toward the Chinese even allowed the PRC consulate in Songkhla to donate 50,000 Baht, while the PRC Embassy in Bangkok donated another 30,000 Baht. The roster of donors also provides an interesting indication of the strength of the Chinese identity in the community—of the 775 donors listed, only twenty-two individual donors registered with Thai names, the rest using their Chinese names. (Srinakorn Building Committee, 1999) By 1997, the Teo Chew Association's Kobkarnsuksa school was so popular that it needed new classrooms. The Association president led the organization in raising about eight million Baht for this project. Further illustrating the sustained popularity of Chinese education, the Teo Chew-associated Teik Kha Hui Chee Nam Kok charity foundation opened Khunathaam Wittaya School in 2007 with demand driving continuous expansion of this project. The success of these schools thus represents a triumph of the Thai-Chinese community over adverse circumstances, providing a physical reminder of the community's Chinese roots.

Nothing quite illustrates the community pride and bonding provided by the schools as the annual spectacle of the Chinese New Year celebrations held on the grounds and surrounding streets of Srinakorn. There is perhaps no Chinese New Year celebration anywhere else in Thailand that is longer or more full of activity than that in Hat Yai, which is spread over twelve days. Srinakorn hosts an extravaganza of Chinese and Thai traditional and popular culture for five of those days. Food booths and promotional stalls occupy the school grounds, and the market sprawls along the streets in front of the main gate. Planning and producing this festival at Srinakorn is a major concern of the community Thai-Chinese organizations, in coordination with government agencies as well. According to the Thai Language Secretary of the Srinakorn Foundation administration committee, Hat Yai's numerous Thai-Chinese organizations work cooperatively under the umbrella of the 22-member Hat Yai Federation of Associations and Charity Foundations, with Srinakorn's registered foundation taking the lead role for the activities on the school grounds. The Srinakorn Foundation committee members individually donated 20,000 to 30,000 Baht for the 2012 festival, while the local government contributed about 300,000 Baht.

The entertainment provided during Srinakorn's programming belies both the continued influence of Chinese culture as well as the influence of Thai, and even Western, culture. Entertainment includes local as well as nationally famous pop bands, student groups performing Chinese dance, Thai dancing to traditional music as well as Thai country music, and even modern break dancing. Amateur local Thai-Chinese, as well as Malaysian-Chinese, take to the stage to sing traditional and semi-modern Chinese songs karaoke-style. On New Year's Eve, young local school children, aged approximately six to twelve, compete to be the "Chinakids" champion. Contestants include not only children from the three Chinese schools in Hat Yai, but several other schools as well. This talent and dress-up image contest includes wearing elaborate Chinese-looking costumes with towering wigs, demonstrating some Chinese spoken ability, and performing traditional Chinese dance and song. Chinese language is used by some of the children in their self-introduction and in giving a rehearsed blessing for the New Year.



Figure 1. Stage at Srinakorn Chinese Festival Opening Ceremony, 2012. The president of the Tourist Business Federation of Songkhla is at the podium. Starting at third from left: the Hat Yai mayor, President of the Hat Yai Federation of Associations and Foundations, the PRC Consul in Songkhla, the Vice Governor, and other organization presidents and officials. The Songkhla Governor officially opened the festival.

Entertainment on the school grounds on subsequent days of the festival includes various children's dance presentations, performances of lion and dragon troupes from central Thailand, as well as performances by PRC acrobatic or musical groups brought in by the Srinakorn Foundation at great expense. The "Miss Hat Yai Chinese New Year" contest also celebrates the Chinese connection as young ladies adorn themselves in Chinese-style outfits and impress the judges with dance performances and speeches in Mandarin. The Chinese regional dialect associations provide generous prizes for the winners, and showcase their support and participation by sharing the stage with the winners to give out awards. All these activities pack the school grounds with thousands of local community members and tourists over all five days of the school-sponsored festival.

Srinakorn and the other schools thus serve as attractive forces for the community, playing critical roles in the maintenance of Chinese traditions, albeit mixed with considerable Thai and Western influence. They provide a physical focus for the gathering of people and resources with a primary purpose of promoting Thai-Chinese culture, and helping the community stay connected with its Chinese roots. Through years of struggle against anti-Chinese government policies, the Hat Yai community, with its various regional dialect groups, worked together to ensure survival of the schools, and in this aspect, the schools are a symbol of community pride and cultural activity.

On the other hand, a striking feature of the school-sponsored Chinese New Year festival in Hat Yai is a certain shallowness and commercialization of Chinese traditions. While parents inculcate their children with Chinese culture by bringing them to



Figure 2. Young children from many local schools dressed in Chinese-inspired costumes competing in “Chinakids 2012” at the Srinakorn Chinese New Year Festival. In the lower left picture, the Vice President of Hat Yai Federation of Associations & Foundations (who is also the Hakka Association President) gives the top award

participate in or enjoy watching New Year stage shows at Srinakorn or teaching them to *wai* (worship) their ancestors and Chinese gods at home and at the temple, some of the Chinese traditions appear as a stereotype—shallow and without deep cultural significance. To the children, dressing up in Chinese-like clothes may be just a costume game, and does not relate to a true historical link with Chinese civilization and culture. Moreover, when children do perform Chinese dance and song, it is an imagined art form from a nebulous, ahistorical ancient time. There is no deep knowledge of Chinese history or philosophy, nor a following of modern Chinese pop stars, movie stars, soap operas, or other modern popular culture. Instead, the pop culture consists of Hollywood or South Korean soap operas, and Thai television and singing stars. The big draws for the young crowds at the Srinakorn New Year festival were Thai pop stars, with no Thai-Chinese link whatsoever. It thus appears that modern Chinese culture does not hold as much attractive power as it could. Trends may change in the future; with the growing economic influence of China, interest in a deeper understanding of Chinese culture may

reemerge. Meanwhile, the Chinese-sponsored schools in Hat Yai are sure to continue in their role of providing the community with a focus on Chinese culture and tradition.

The role of Chinese-sponsored schools in passing on Chinese culture

After family, education plays the most significant role in socializing the next generation with a particular cultural identity. The fact that Hat Yai supports three different Chinese-sponsored schools speaks loudly to the strength of Chinese identity. On the other hand, the schools are, in reality, not “Chinese schools”, but Thai schools that highlight teaching Chinese language (even in this aspect, they are not the only schools teaching Chinese language in Hat Yai). Student enrollment consists of as many or more pure Thai than Thai-Chinese, and in fact, Srinakorn Foundation School is the only one that explicitly emphasizes the Chinese nature of the institution in their school policy statement, declaring that the “identity” of the school is: “A school that promotes Chinese culture”—a fairly bold declaration given the historical government attitude toward Chinese education.

The Chinese-sponsored schools all face strong challenges in which they must pay homage to a strongly nationalistic, non-diverse government agenda that competes with students’ interest and attachment to any Chinese heritage. Each of the schools accommodates the government agenda by emphasizing in their school philosophy and vision statements their role in promoting ‘Thai-ness’ and good social morals above academic achievement. Nonetheless, the administration of the schools indicates that they have not forsaken the common goal of promoting Chinese language and culture as a significant element of their curriculum through language training and extracurricular activities.

From the table below summarizing and comparing characteristics of the three Chinese schools, one can see that the student bodies of the schools are not heavily Thai-Chinese, and language instruction comprises only a portion of the curriculum; otherwise, classes are taught in Thai language with a Thai curriculum.

The actual ethnic composition of the school population is a consolidated estimate from school administrators and instructors; none of the schools officially track the ethnic identity of their students. Results of the research questionnaire of 105 responding ninth graders at Kobkanseuksa, and seventy responding ninth and tenth graders at Srinakorn, can give some confirmation to these estimates of Thai-Chinese students. Only 8.6 percent (nine of the 105 respondents) of the Kobkanseuksa students identified themselves as Chinese, while a full 51 percent (36 of 70) of Srinakorn students indicated their ethnic Chinese status. The breakdown of generation of Chinese (Second, Third or Fourth) of these Thai-Chinese students is depicted in the chart. Of the fifty-seven students who responded to the survey question regarding languages spoken at home, seven identified Chinese as the primary language, while eighteen indicated Chinese was being used as a second language at home. Thus, not all students at the Chinese-sponsored schools identify themselves as ethnic Chinese, but the significant number who do identify as such may find the curriculum in Chinese language to be particularly meaningful and influential as they build their cultural worldview.

Comparison of Chinese-language Schools in Hat Yai as of 2011

Student body		
Srinakorn	Kobkanseuksa	Khunathaam Wittaya
2,000 to 3,000 Students	1,700 Students	1,040 Students
Grades K-10	Grades K-9	Grades 1-5
Up to 50% ethnic Chinese	20-30% ethnic Chinese	Up to 60% ethnic Chinese
Some Muslim. Some students with Malay Chinese parents, some from Tai Yai ethnic Chinese minority group from northern Thailand.	20% Muslim	Some Muslim
Teaching staff		
Srinakorn	Kobkanseuksa	Khunathaam Wittaya
Volunteer teachers: Regional recruits (5 teachers) and Confucius Classrooms program (Hanban) from China (11-13 teachers).	15 Chinese language teachers. 8 from China. Use Thai Office of the Private Education Commission to find teachers from China	15 Chinese language teachers from China.
Chinese language curriculum		
Srinakorn	Kobkanseuksa	Khunathaam Wittaya
PRC textbooks provided by the PRC consulate in Songkhla. Uses the Beijing China Language and Culture School edition (北京中国语言文化学校编), published by Jinan University Publishing Society (暨南大学出版社). Every grade studies Chinese. Primary Grade school 10 x 45-minute periods per week. Middle school only 4 periods per week. In 2014 opened an intensive language center in which students study Chinese for a half-day. In 2560 (2017) will open a Chinese program.	Malaysian textbooks. 陶華教育慈善中學中文教材 All students study Chinese language, 7 periods per week @ 50 minutes per period.	Formerly used Malaysian, now use PRC text books. Based on the China Jinan University Chinese Language Institute edition (中国暨南大学华文学院编), and published by Jinan University Publishing Society (暨南大学出版社). Every grade studies Chinese every day. Pre-schoolers learn 1 hour/day, other grades are 2 hours/day.

Activities		
Srinakorn	Kobkanseuksa	Khunathaam Wittaya
Extracurricular cultural activities, such as teaching Kung Fu, Chinese calligraphy, and Chinese songs. Religious activities concerning Buddhism. Emphasize fun festivals, including New Year and Moon Festival. Less fun festivals, like Cheng Meng, will merely be discussed in the classroom. Confucius Classroom.	Clubs: Music and calligraphy. Cultural activities during Chinese New Year, including contests, such as writing Chinese.	Multiple Chinese activities, including martial arts, dance, and music.
Language and Culture Exchanges		
Srinakorn	Kobkanseuksa	Khunathaam Wittaya
4-5 students on exchange to China in 2011 to study at High School level in Guangxi province. Foundation provides some scholarships to practice language in China for 1-2 weeks. They usually go to Nanning, Guangxi province or Guangdong province.	None.	Exchange with Penang school [Han Jiang 韓江]. Thai teachers were sent to Jinan, Shandong province to observe schools. Project to improve foreign language education, to allow 20 students in Southern Thailand to spend 2 weeks exchange in Malaysia, for students 12 years old and above.

The textbook contents are the only direct classroom opportunity to pass on Chinese culture, as none of the schools offer any other formal courses particular to Chinese history or other subjects. Although official Thai Ministry of Education materials for teaching Chinese language are available, all three schools deemed the government materials as inadequate for quality instruction. Kobkarnsuksa uses texts from Malaysia, while Srinakorn and Khunathaam Wittaya use texts from the PRC. According to school principal Malin Phanthara, Khunathaam Wittaya previously used Malaysian texts, but found Muslim content that was not relevant to the Thai context. (Malin, 2011) All three schools teach the simplified characters used in the PRC, not the traditional characters more commonly used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

With only the teaching of Chinese language available as a vehicle to convey culture from one generation to the next, how effective can such instruction be when devoid of teachings from other elements of ‘Chinese-ness’, such as history, literature, or philosophy? Although the Thai and Chinese languages share some similar properties (they are both uninflected, primarily monosyllabic, and tonal), the very nature of the

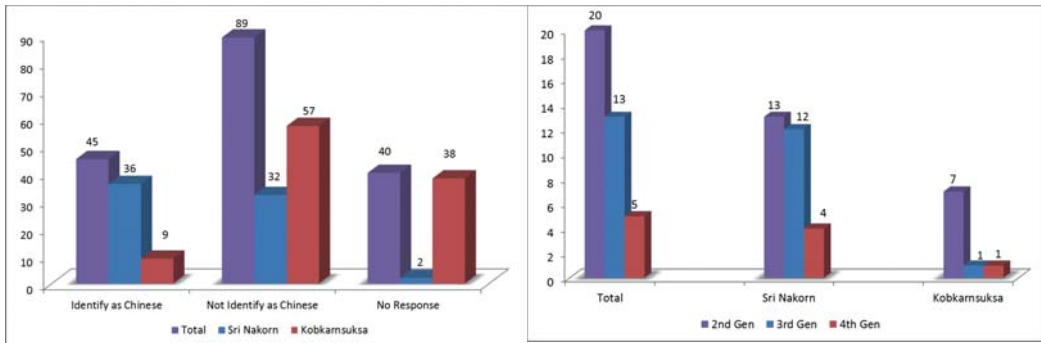


Chart 1. Students identifying as Chinese

Chart 2. Students identifying as 2nd, 3rd, or 4th generation Chinese

written Chinese language, with its basis in ideographs rather than a phonemic alphabet, sets it apart and provides some opportunity to provide a different worldview to students. As pictographs, characters embody Chinese cultural images of the things that the characters represent. Many of the characters the Hat Yai Chinese-language textbooks teach at the beginning to students are elements, because they are simple and have the fewest strokes—sun 日, moon 月, fire 火, earth 土, water 水, mountain 山. These are also key elements the children will see when they attend Chinese temples or observe Taoist ceremonies with their parents, giving them a connection with the religious beliefs of their ancestors. The knowledge of even the simplest characters could help a child unlock the mysteries of a Chinese temple, promoting interest in their cultural heritage.

Learning to read and write Chinese characters demands great discipline and memorization skills. The textbooks pay strict attention to stroke order, encouraging a way of thinking that is organized, requiring attention to detail. For example, exercises in the textbooks might ask the student to identify the ninth stroke of a character that requires nine strokes, as in the following example from a PRC-produced textbook used at Khunathaam Wittaya.

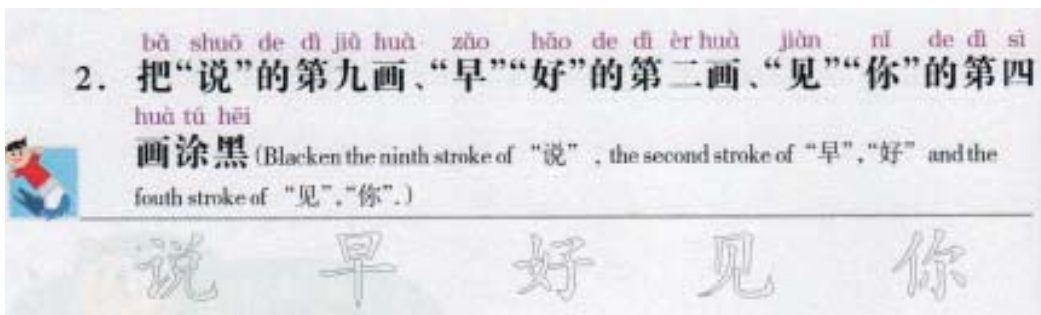
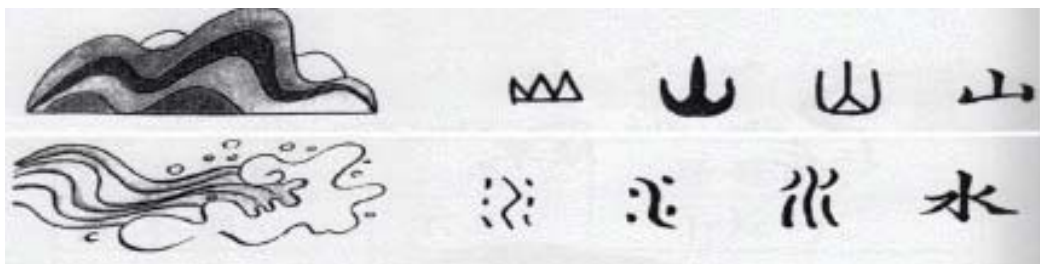


Figure 3. A first-year writing exercise from Khunathaam Wittaya’s textbook teaches attention to detail in writing characters. (Chinese Exercise 1st Book, Volume B, 2010)

This exercise also demonstrates that there is a strong connection between Chinese writing and drawing. When students start learning to write Chinese, they learn as if using a brush (even if the instrument is a pen or pencil). In order for the characters to look standard, one needs to learn to lead the writing instrument across the paper in the correct way, such as left to right, top to bottom, sometimes with a certain flourish at the end as if

pressing and lifting a brush from a canvas. Textbooks reinforce this connection between pictures and characters as they provide memory aids by giving the historical origin of the characters. The examples here from second and seventh-year Chinese textbooks used at Srinakorn show this method. Chinese characters evolved from pictographs chiseled into tortoise shells or bones, often used for divination, through characters inscribed into metals, and through various periods of standardization, most famously the standardization that occurred under the first unifying Emperor of China. Thus, the characters embody a cultural history of the Chinese civilization, and Thai-Chinese students may find a connection with their cultural ancestral roots as they continue in the language, even if only subliminally.



[Figure 4. Srinakorn’s second-year textbook helps children remember how to write characters by showing their origin. From Srinakorn’s second-year textbook. (Hanyu 2, n.d.)

2. วิวัฒนาการของตัวอักษรจีน

甲骨文 ^① jǐ gǔ wén	金文 ^② jīn wén	籀文 ^③ zhòu wén	小篆 ^④ xiǎo zhuàn	楷书 ^⑤ kǎi shū	
				繁体字 ^⑥ fán tǐ zì	简体字 ^⑦ jiǎn tǐ zì
亻	亻	亻	亻	人	人
魚	魚	魚	魚	魚	鱼
林	林	林	林	林	林
	國	國	國	國	国

Figure 5. The middle school texts at Srinakorn feature tables like this that link characters to their evolution through Chinese history. Srinakorn seventh-grade textbook. (Radab Mathayomton Nangseu Rian Pasa Jin Lem 1, n.d.)

Another feature of the Chinese language, which it shares with the Thai language, is that exact family relations are embedded in the vocabulary. One cannot just say “uncle” in Chinese or Thai—one is forced to choose a word that will show the direct relationship to either the father or mother. The textbooks used in the Hat Yai schools all emphasize family, as well as respect for teachers and community. The textbooks accomplish this transmission of cultural values through vocabulary and stories. A lesson

from Khunathaam Wittaya’s first-year textbook provides several interesting examples. In the first example, children are taught that “Chinese school is my home,” and that the teacher should have the same love (and implied authority) of one’s mother and father. The lesson, pictured below, can be translated as follows:



“Chinese school is my home
 Chinese school is my home,
 Teacher loves me, I love her (him).
 Your home, my home,
 Teacher is just like my mother (father).”

Figure 6. This first-year lesson emphasizes love for the Chinese school, teacher, and family. From Khunathaam Wittaya’s first-year Chinese textbook. (Chinese First Book, 2010)

The second example from the same textbook provides a more subtle illustration of how cultural expectations are transmitted. In this lesson, a student goes home after school to sing a song for the grandparents, followed by a traditional Chinese bow, called a *ju gong*. The family picture shows the grandparents and father in Chinese-style clothing, happily listening as the child performs a song, backed by his mother, who is wearing an apron, such as a type used for either cleaning or cooking. The scene reinforces

the traditional concept of the extended family and their roles and relationships, as the mother performs her role of taking care of the household and executing responsibility for the child’s achievements. The child’s role is to perform for the ancestors, showing them respect afterwards by performing the *ju gong* bow. The lesson and translation are as follows:



“After School Song: School’s out, go back home, I sing a song for everyone. After singing, I give a *ju gong* bow, Grandpa and Grandma laugh ha ha, Father and Mother boast about me.”

Figure 7. Family receives great emphasis in the Chinese textbooks. This lesson in the first-year textbook at Khunathaam Wittaya shows the student, apron-clad mother behind him, singing to his father and grandparents, whose dress appears to be in Chinese style. (Chinese First Book, 2010)

The textbooks used by Kobkanseuksa, which are photocopied from Malaysian textbooks, instill values by using morality stories, of both Western and Asian origin. The Western stories are ones that teach values also honored in the Chinese tradition. “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” tale, for example, is used to teach the

value of honesty. The fifth-grade textbook used at Srinakorn, in a similar vein, uses the story of young Albert Einstein, as a struggling student, to promote the idea of hard work and persistence. A Chinese morality tale in the Kobkanseuksa fifth-grade text teaches, by negative example, the very important cultural value of hard work and perseverance. The story, shown below, is about a lazy husband who lies in bed all day and waits for his wife to feed him. When she goes on a trip to her home, he is too lazy to eat the ring of bread his wife leaves around his neck, and he starves to death.



Figure 8. A Chinese morality story in Kobkanseuksa's fifth-grade Chinese textbook about a lazy husband. (Taohua, n.d.)

songs and poems in nearly every lesson. For example, the texts provide reading exercises that include Tang dynasty poetry. Such poetry can be quite difficult to comprehend for students studying Chinese as a second language; in fact, the images that accompany the poems, or the distinctly Chinese rhythm of the poetry, may have a larger impact on impressing any Thai-Chinese students' memories and emotional attachment to Chinese heritage. The poetry contains ideograms with ancient and sometimes enigmatic usage and geo-cultural references, such as a well-known ancient pagoda on the Yellow River; it is unlikely that the Hat Yai seventh-grade students will fully understand or appreciate these cultural references. Nonetheless,

Srinakorn's textbooks are modified from PRC texts, edited by the Beijing China Language and Culture Institute and Jinan University Chinese Language Institute, and published by Jinan University Publishing Society. The modifications include instructions and vocabulary glossaries in Thai language (which is not provided in the books used by the other two schools), as well as local pictures and illustrations. They maintain a strong emphasis on teaching Chinese culture, however, by including traditional Chinese

songs and poems in nearly every lesson. For example, the texts provide reading exercises that include Tang dynasty poetry. Such poetry can be quite difficult to comprehend for students studying Chinese as a second language; in fact, the images that accompany the poems, or the distinctly Chinese rhythm of the poetry, may have a larger impact on impressing any Thai-Chinese students' memories and emotional attachment to Chinese heritage. The poetry contains ideograms with ancient and sometimes enigmatic usage and geo-cultural references, such as a well-known ancient pagoda on the Yellow River; it is unlikely that the Hat Yai seventh-grade students will fully understand or appreciate these cultural references. Nonetheless, they may be effective in sending a subtle message of the depth of Chinese culture, which is important for some Thai-Chinese students. Two of the Tang poems and accompanying illustrations are shown below.



Figure 9. A well-known Chinese poem by the 8th century Tang poet Li Bai. It describes a scholar being on assignment far away from home, looking at the moonlight on the floor and mistaking it for frost, which makes him think of his hometown. From Srinakorn's seventh-grade Chinese textbook. (Radab Mathayomton Nangseu Rian Pasa Jin Lem 1, n.d.)

The textbooks at all three schools perform an important role in explaining and promoting Chinese (and some Western) festivals. The second-grade book at Srinakorn has lessons about the Chinese New Year, Autumn Festival, and Christmas. The fifth-grade Srinakorn text discusses the Tomb Sweeping Festival, which includes vocabulary lessons on



Figure 10. Another Tang poet, Wang Zhi Huan, wrote the poem, “Climbing Crane Tower,” about watching a friend sail away down the Yellow River. Srinakorn seventh-grade textbook. (Radab Mathayomton Nangseu Rian Pasa Jin Lem 1, n.d.)

family relationships, followed by lessons on the Dragon Boat Festival and the Autumn Moon Festival. The table from the Srinakorn seventh-grade text below shows a comparison of American and other Western festivals (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Valentine’s Day) with Chinese festivals (New Year, Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat, Autumn Festival).

Not all lessons in the teaching of Chinese language, of course, are related to Chinese culture. Other lessons are about daily life, such as transportation, occupations, school, sports, or community. The Srinakorn seventh-grade text features lessons with vocabulary about CD ROMs, and ordering food by phone from Pizza Hut. In the modified Srinakorn textbooks, the school has tried to make images and subject matter relevant to the modern Hat Yai student. The subject matter of the text presents Thai, Chinese and Western elements in a syncretic mix. It is difficult to know the actual effectiveness of the transmission of culture via these school materials; as indicated in the interviews with Chinese teachers at Kobkanseuksa, Srinakorn, and Khunathaam Wittaya, the ability of the students to become fluent in the language depends largely on the home environment. The results of the survey, however, indicate that Thai-Chinese children see the importance of education in defining their identity as Thai-Chinese.

เทศกาลของตะวันตก	เทศกาลจีน
Shèngdàn Jié	Chūn Jié
Gān'ān Jié	Yuánxiāo Jié
Fúhuó Jié	Duānwǔ Jié
Qīngmín Jié	Zhōngqiū Jié

Figure 11. Table comparing Western holidays and Chinese festivals. Srinakorn seventh-grade textbook. (Radab Mathayomton Nangseu Rian Pasa Jin Lem 1, n.d.)

The role of Chinese-sponsored schools in connecting the community in an ethnic Chinese network

In addition to serving as a centering point for the local Chinese community, and a vehicle to transmit Chinese culture to the younger generation, the Chinese-sponsored schools in Hat Yai also serve as nodes in a domestic and international network of other



Figure 12. Volunteer Chinese language teacher training at Srinakorn, July 2012. The Chinese consul in Songkhla, Xu Mingliang (许明亮), is seated in the middle in the white shirt and tie. To his right is the President of the Srinakorn School Charity Foundation.

Chinese communities via contacts with Chinese teachers in the classroom, exchanges and trips to Malaysian-Chinese schools and China, a Thai-Chinese cultural center, and a Confucian Classroom sponsored by a PRC government program. All schools employ native Chinese speakers, all of whose salaries are subsidized for a three-year contract period by the PRC government. The PRC consulate in Songkhla aids in coordinating with the Chinese government to supply teachers. Aside from the PRC teachers, Srinakorn and Kobkanseuksa schools employ either local Thai-Chinese or Malaysian-Chinese for language instruction. These teachers not only provide quality standardized Mandarin instruction in the classroom—they also share their cultural backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs with the students, connecting them to a world beyond their local community.

All three Chinese-sponsored schools try to supplement the language training with Chinese culture-related activities to generate interest and increase learning opportunities. The schools sponsor activities associated with the various Chinese festivals, especially the Chinese New Year. Martial arts, music and language clubs also promote Chinese culture. The president of the Khunathaam Wittaya School is a former president of the alumni association of a Penang Chinese school, Hang Jiang. Combined with the fact that the Chee Nam Kok Charity Foundation associated with the school has its mother organization in Malaysia, it is not surprising that the school has contracted for regular exchanges with the Hang Jiang School. The first exchange occurred for a one-week period in October 2011. Srinakorn and Khunathaam Wittaya both have active exchanges to China for a small number of students. The Srinakorn School Foundation is active in raising funds for scholarships, some of which are used to sponsor student language learning excursions to the PRC. These trips include one to two-week trips into southern China, as well as high school level exchange opportunities with Guangxi province.

Another indication of the strength of the Thai-Chinese community in Hat Yai is



Figure 13. Opening ceremony of the Thai-Chinese Cultural Center at Srinakorn Foundation School, April 2015.

the opening of a new Thai-Chinese Cultural Center in Srinakorn, completed in April 2015. According to Somchat Pimthanapoonporn, president of the Hat Yai Songkhla Hoteliers Association, the idea originated from the Hat Yai Federation of Associations and Foundations. The former president of the Kwong Siew Association, the late Kampol Yenjaichon, donated approximately thirty million of the thirty-five million Baht budget, on the condition that the building be named after him. (Somchat, 2013) The Hat Yai Hakka Association president oversaw the construction of the five-story building; the spacious 2,765 square meter floor plan houses twelve classrooms, a large meeting room, and an exhibition room. (Kriangkrai, 2013) According to Somchat, the PRC consulate in Songkhla has taken an active role in planning meetings for the center, and will provide a small budget and personnel. Somchat explains that the center is meant to be a connecting point with China, and will sponsor different intercultural activities, such as shows during New Year and performances from China. He expects the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to help promote the center. He estimates that the center will need about one to two million Baht to bring in Chinese shows, and that the government may help with these activities via the TAT. (Somchat, 2013)

A significant component of China's efforts to maintain good relations with foreign peoples, including Overseas Chinese communities, has been the Chinese Ministry of Education's Confucius Institute Headquarters (汉办, *Hanban*), which manages a global structure of 443 Confucius Institutes and 648 Confucius Classrooms. (Hanban, 2014) In Srinakorn, several PRC-sponsored Chinese staff run one of these Confucius Classrooms,

which provides Chinese musical instrument tuition, supplemental Chinese reading material, and promotion of Chinese cultural activities. *Hanban*'s program director has described the three main objectives of the Confucius Institutes and classrooms as "to teach Chinese, to promote cultural exchange, and to facilitate business activity," (Paradise, 2009) which the Classroom at Srinakorn has actively supported. For example, in July 2012, Srinakorn held the second regional Chinese language volunteer teacher training. At this gathering of eighty teachers from forty-seven regional schools, the Srinakorn Foundation president credited the leadership of the PRC consulate, and support of the *Hanban* and Thai education ministry in making Srinakorn a Chinese language development center, as well as making the closely connected Confucius Institute at Prince of Songkhla University a "Chinese Cultural Window" and "Southern Thailand Chinese Volunteer Language Teacher Family." (Chinanews, 2015) Indeed, the Chinese staff serving in Hat Yai's Chinese-sponsored schools, the student trips and exchanges to Malaysia and China, the Thai-Chinese Cultural Center and *Hanban* institutional support all combine to keep students and the community connected to a wider world of Chinese, making the ancestral origins more real and meaningful to the younger generation.

The role of Chinese-sponsored schools in Malaysia and Southern Thailand

How does Hat Yai's experience of Chinese-sponsored education compare with other regional ethnic Chinese communities, both in Malaysia and in Southern Thailand? Do the Chinese-sponsored schools share the same functions of pulling ethnic communities together, teaching Chinese traditions to succeeding generations, and networking with other ethnic Chinese communities? Author Lee Ting Hui, in *Chinese Schools in Peninsular Malay: The Struggle for Survival*, focuses on how the attempt to keep Chinese education has been a decades-long political struggle of the Malaysian-Chinese trying to preserve their strong Chinese identity. Malaysian Islamic government policies have attempted to enforce a universal Malay language curriculum to build a unified, independent Malaysia since the end of British rule, and as in Thailand, the government saw the Chinese community as too insular, too connected to Chinese influence, and too liable to cause social disruption against the government. Indeed, Malaysian-Chinese had historically shown a close connection to developments in China, and students at Chinese schools could show a propensity to become embroiled in protests or revolutionary movements. For example, when the board of a well-known Chinese school in Penang, Zhong Ling, succumbed to government pressure to abandon its Chinese language-based curriculum in 1956, students started a series of protests, unfurling "Love Our Chinese Language" banners written in their own blood, demanding the school authorities maintain the Chinese curriculum. Supporters of Chinese schools see them as essential to maintaining identity, insisting on a full Chinese curriculum, including the teaching of Chinese geography, history, literature and philosophy. They have been politically active, forming organizations such as the Malaysian Chinese Association, Chinese Education Central Committee and the United Chinese School Committees' Association in the early

1950s that linked Chinese communities across the country in order to protect Chinese community interests.

Scholar Michael Montesano's study of Chinese-sponsored education in the Southern Thailand city of Trang echoes similar themes of the unifying nature and networking function of Chinese schools. The Chinese-affiliated Trang Association for the Promotion of Education became perhaps the most influential collaborative Chinese organization in Trang as the community strove to provide Chinese language and cultural education for the younger generation. Montesano notes that Chinese-sponsored education was a unifying effort for the community, that "deepened the contact" of Trang Chinese "with Chinese populations elsewhere in Thailand and Southeast Asia, their engagement with trends among those populations, and their exposure to and even unwitting participation in developments in China." (Montesano, 2008) As with the Hat Yai schools, the Trang Chinese-sponsored schools followed the Thai national curriculum, providing only a limited amount of instruction in Chinese language. Montesano notes that the schools eventually evolved from a heavy Penang orientation, which reinforced Chinese characteristics, to becoming more aligned with Bangkok, in which the emphasis became to prepare students academically to enter into the higher education system in Thai or English medium education. One might infer from this evolution that the Chinese cultural influence may have been diluted, although the Trang Chinese community still retains many Chinese cultural characteristics. Overall, the story of Chinese-sponsored education in Malaysia and Trang reinforces the key roles it has played in serving as glue holding an ethnic Chinese community together, reinforcing ethnic identity, and connecting Chinese communities.

The impact of Hat Yai's Chinese-sponsored schools on the younger generation

How successful has Chinese-sponsored education in Hat Yai been in influencing the ethnic identity of Thai-Chinese youth? Results of interviews and surveys indicate that the efforts of the older generation to pass on an appreciation of Chinese heritage are bearing some fruit. The venerated community leader, Mr. Nikhom, identified the maintenance of cultural identity as a main objective of the Chinese-sponsored schools. Judging by the popularity of the schools and their language and cultural activities, along with survey responses, they appear to be successfully maintaining awareness and respect for the community's Chinese legacy, while simultaneously forces of modernization and assimilation produce a distinct Thai-Chinese blended culture. Teacher interviews reveal that students, especially the Thai-Chinese, are eager to learn the language and heritage. Administrators at both Khunathaam Wittaya and Srinakorn indicated that demand to get into the Chinese-language programs is greater than supply. Participation in culture-related activities is enthusiastic and they are well attended. The importance of the schools to those students identifying themselves as Thai-Chinese can be seen in the survey results.

In response to the question "How important are the following items (education,

language, friends, ancestors, art and music, food, religion and associations) in making you feel that you are a part of the Thai-Chinese cultural group?” education ranked number one, followed by language and friends, all of which the students experience at the schools. As an interesting contrast, a separate survey of ethnic Chinese-associated organization members in Hat Yai showed that the older generation of Thai-Chinese strongly identified ancestors as being important to their identification, followed by language, organization membership and religion. This may indicate that younger people do not feel as connected to their ancestral heritage, or it may just result from their attention being focused on those areas most immediate to their daily lives. The process of internalizing vital aspects of Chinese cultural identity would necessarily take time and effort via the external influences that help teach these values—education and formal Chinese language training.

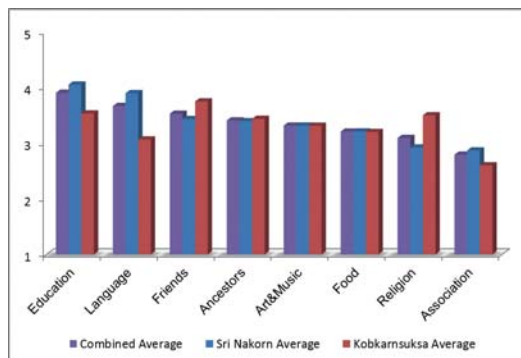


Chart 3. Students identifying as Chinese: factors making them feel part of Thai-Chinese cultural group; scale from 1=not important, to 5=very important (45 responses)

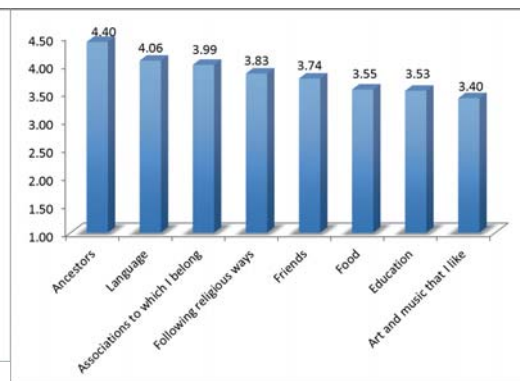


Chart 4. Organization members importance of various elements to feeling part of Thai-Chinese culture (100 responses)

Although Thai-Chinese students show interest in the Chinese background of their community, ethnicity does not appear to figure very prominently in their self-identity. When asked, “If you were to explain to others who you are, which items are most important?”, the general population of students did not rate ethnic identity as high as family (which came in a strong first), personal interests or language. However, the combined average student rating of the importance of ethnicity in identifying themselves of 3.55 on a one-to-five scale indicates that students do not completely discount the importance of ethnic identity. Students identifying themselves as Thai-Chinese did not differ significantly from the overall average, in fact rating importance of ethnicity at a slightly lower average of 3.38. Answers to a question about the daily associations of students, another way of measuring identity, indicate that ethnicity does not factor relatively much into socializing with others. Selecting categories in reply to the question, “How much do you tend to spend time socializing with people from the following groups?”, student respondents indicated that they saw a schoolmate relationship as more important than ethnic associations, which students from both schools rated as just under three out of five.

The success so far of the Chinese-sponsored schools and other ethnic Chinese-affiliated organizations in nurturing a sense of a Chinese heritage community in Hat Yai is

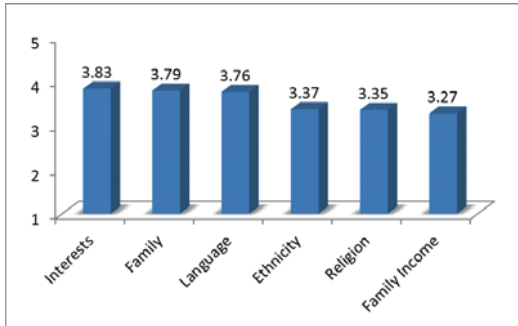


Chart 5. Srinakorn student identity: factors important in explaining who you are; scale from 1=not important to 5=important (70 responses)

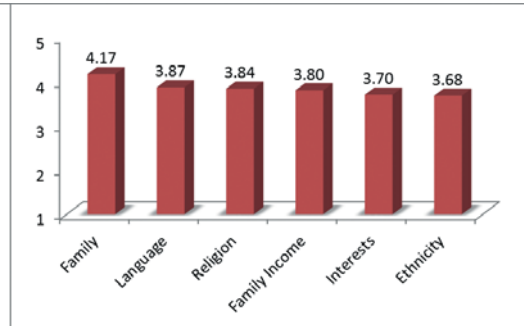


Chart 6. Kobkarnsuksa student identity: factors important in explaining who you are; scale from 1=not important to 5=important (70 responses)

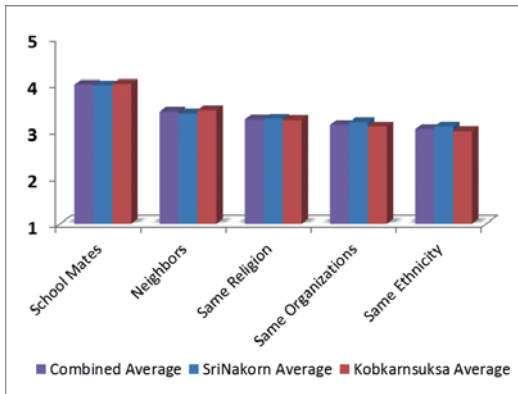


Chart 7. Student identity by association; how much time spent socializing with various groups; responses, Srinakorn=69, Kobkarnsuksa=95

evident in the responses to the following question: “How much do you feel there is a state of being a Chinese or Thai-Chinese community in Hat Yai?” Both Thai-Chinese students and organization members felt fairly strongly that there is still a sense of Thai-Chinese community in Hat Yai. Moreover, the Thai-Chinese students acknowledge the important role of the schools and other Chinese-affiliated organizations in preserving the sense of a Thai-Chinese community. When asked, “How important do you think the various

organizations are in maintaining values, culture, and traditions of Chinese ancestors?”, all categories of organizations received an average from three to above four on the scale of one-to-five, with the language and lineage associations receiving the highest rating. These results indicate that the students still see the schools and other ethnic Chinese organizations as playing a significant role in maintaining a Thai-Chinese community.

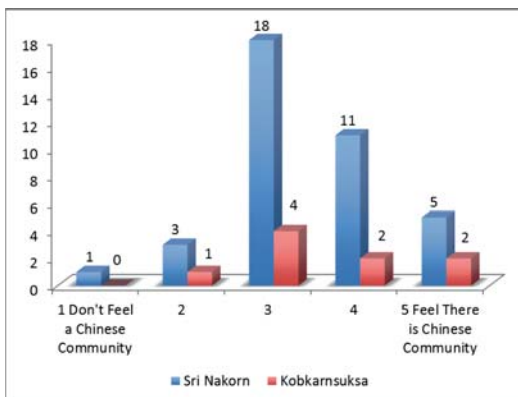


Chart 8. Ethnic Chinese students feeling of Thai-Chinese community; responses, Srinakorn=38, Kobkarnsuksa=9

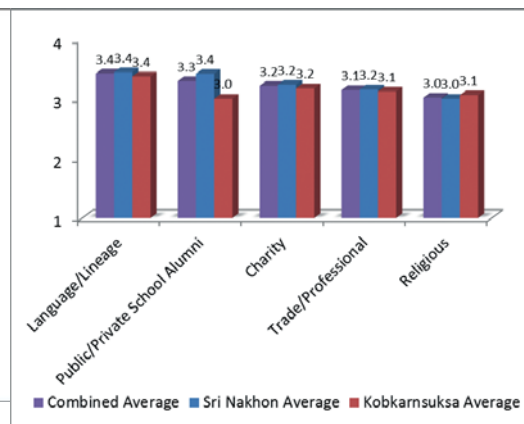


Chart 9. Importance of organizations to maintaining cultural identity (responses=50)

In addition to the survey results, interviews with Thai-Chinese members of the community reveal an enthusiasm of the younger generation for their Chinese identity. A third-generation Thai-Chinese female, aged in her late twenties, back in Hat Yai from her Master's degree studies in Wuhan, PRC, described the sense of a blended culture community this way: "The community is a mixture of Thai and Chinese identity. You can still see Chinese language, Chinese food, and various ceremonies of Chinese people in places with Thai people. Young people, including myself, grew up with training in both Chinese and Thai, so that we understand both cultures." Another second-generation Thai-Chinese female, in her mid-thirties, said that she felt it was "very important" to identify with her heritage "because in culture ethnic Thai-Chinese have customs passed on from the ancestors to the generation of the mother and father and succeeding generations. This is a beautiful thing, and should be preserved together into the future." As for what she sees as the characteristics the Thai-Chinese community, they are "hard-working and diligent, honest, patient. Chinese who are Thai-Chinese nationality are a people who have patience and diligence so much that it has made Thai-Chinese in Thailand and China be number one in Asia."

Such enthusiastic remarks reflect the contribution of Chinese-sponsored schools, as well as other Chinese organizations, in passing on an essence of Chinese culture to the younger Thai-Chinese generation. Forces of modernization and pressure to assimilate, on the other hand, pose serious challenges to preserving ethnic identity. Modernization, for example, has spurred change to practices in and the structure of the family. As an official of the Srinakorn Foundation relates, first-generation Chinese would usually marry within the same Chinese language group. By the second generation, they might still seek out Chinese marriage partners, but language group was not important; and some would marry Thai spouses. By the third generation, he saw that choice of marriage partners for most people had nothing to do with ethnicity...a sentiment shared by the majority of interviewees. (Srinakorn School Alumni Association Thai Secretary, 2011)

The older generation of Thai-Chinese residents often expressed concern that key Chinese values were not being passed on to the younger generation. The president of the Hat Yai Hakka Association fretted that the younger generation was losing the entrepreneurial spirit, and the president of the Chinese-affiliated Tourist Business Federation observed a decreasing spirit of volunteerism among the younger generation. As family size has decreased, children of Thai-Chinese experience a family life that is

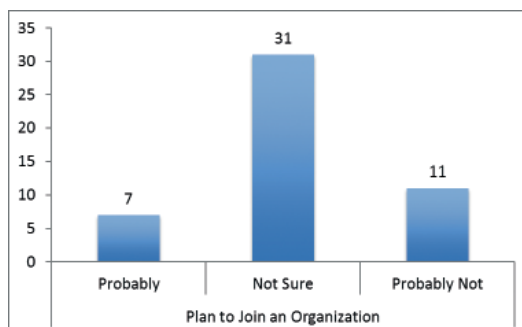


Chart 10. Students plan to join an organisation; 49 respondents

able to focus more on them personally—without a large number of siblings competing for family resources, these younger generation children are sent to private schools, given private tutoring lessons, and generally enjoy a greater wealth of attention and resources than was available to their parents' generation—perhaps a factor in producing a generation that is less interested in the communal activities of the Thai-Chinese volunteer

organizations, which are probably seen as old fashioned and irrelevant to many of them. Of the forty-nine Thai-Chinese students who responded to the question of whether they planned to join a Thai-Chinese related organization in the future, a mere 10 percent said that they probably would.

Indeed, ethnic Chinese organization leaders expressed their worries over the declining interest of the young generation in the voluntary associations. According to officers in the Hokkien Association, many age groups still participate in the Association and feel the importance of being ethnic Chinese, although the newly elected Association president is concerned that the younger generations may not find the Association relevant. The Hokkien Association manager also expressed that Chinese traditions have changed because older people with specialist knowledge pass away without passing on their knowledge. The Hat Yai Chinese-sponsored schools certainly face a tough challenge to answer these concerns of the older generation. In most aspects, education at the Chinese-sponsored schools does not differ greatly from other public or private schools in the Thai education system. Following a Thai-language curriculum in a modern milieu of Thai and Western media, the school leaders face an uphill battle to charge their Thai-Chinese students with enthusiasm for their ancestral origins.

Conclusion

Through decades of adversity, ethnic Chinese citizens in Hat Yai adapted to Thai culture, yet held to the vision of transmitting knowledge and respect of their ancestral heritage to their successors via formal educational institutions. Srinakorn Foundation School in particular continues to serve as a central gathering place to celebrate Chinese traditions, with its new Thai-Chinese cultural center only enhancing its role. Though only a portion of the curriculum, distinctive Chinese cultural values can still be transmitted via the unique nature of Chinese language. Just as importantly, the schools provide opportunities to experience external relationships with other ethnic Chinese communities. These connections broaden the students' worldview and contacts, while strengthening their sense of being connected to others through a common link of a Chinese cultural background. Born as a heavily Chinese-influenced town, Hat Yai maintains a distinctive characteristic as a community that recognizes and promotes its Thai and Chinese character, with Chinese-sponsored schools playing a significant role in binding, educating, and connecting Hat Yai's community.

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