



The Role of Business Chinese Expertise in Cross-Cultural Communication, Corporate Image Building, and Communication Challenges

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the role of Business Chinese expertise in cross-cultural communication, corporate image building, and communication challenges, particularly in the context of Thai-Chinese business interactions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five Thai business professionals who have ongoing business relationships with Chinese counterparts, along with an analysis of relevant literature and documents.

The study has three key objectives: (1) to examine the significance and expertise of Business Chinese in cross-cultural communication; (2) to investigate how Business Chinese proficiency contributes to corporate image building; and (3) to identify communication challenges in culturally diverse business environments.

Findings reveal that Business Chinese proficiency significantly enhances career opportunities, supports effective communication across cultures, and fosters a deeper understanding of Chinese business culture. It also plays a critical role in marketing, negotiation, and business expansion in China. In terms of corporate image, proper use of language, cultural etiquette, and respectful communication styles help build trust and long-term business relationships. Additionally, challenges such as language barriers, differing cultural norms, and variations in non-verbal communication were identified as major obstacles in multicultural business contexts.

The study highlights the value of Business Chinese not only as a linguistic skill but also as a strategic asset in international business communication, particularly in fostering mutual understanding and professionalism in intercultural settings.

Keyword: Business Chinese, Cross-Cultural Communication, Business Relations Between China and Thailand

Introduction

China and Thailand have shared a long history of connections and interactions dating back to ancient times, with established diplomatic relations and trade between the two nations. Chinese individuals have chosen to migrate to Thailand, establishing careers and settling in the country, while also preserving their cultural heritage, food, and traditions. As a result, Chinese culture has integrated with Thai culture. During the World Wars and the Chinese Civil War, a large number of Chinese people fled from various provinces to escape the wars, and many rebuilt their lives in Thailand. Over time, Thailand became a second home for Chinese refugees. Since then, the relationship between Thailand and China has evolved smoothly, based on equality and mutual respect, with close and continuous cooperation. The demand for Chinese people to travel to Thailand has increased, and Thai citizens have also moved to China, further facilitating the blending of the two cultures, a trend that continues today (Embassy of Thailand in Beijing, 2023).

Communication and business cooperation between China and Thailand have naturally led to the use of different languages. Language has thus become a tool for communication, exchanging ideas, emotions, and fostering understanding between individuals. It allows both Chinese and Thai people to live harmoniously, acting as a bridge linking the two nations and leading to various forms of international cooperation. In 2013, the Chinese government proposed the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), with the aim of promoting policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade and investment, financial cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges between China, Thailand, and 65 other countries in the 21st century (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2020). Simultaneously, the Thai government launched the “Thailand 4.0” strategy and the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) development project, aiming to promote trade, investment, and facilitate business operations to enhance Thailand’s competitiveness. The connection between China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” and Thailand’s “Thailand 4.0” strategy suggests that economic cooperation, trade, and investment, along with mutual benefits, between China and Thailand are likely to increase in the future. Consequently, the role of language in communication between Thai and Chinese people in business will become even more critical (Eastern Economic Corridor Policy Committee, 2020).

Business language proficiency requires knowledge and understanding of the business context, such as economics, finance, accounting, statistics, business law, and the background of specific industries. Effective business language should be concise, clear, and elegant, with precise language use in accordance with grammatical rules. Spoken and written language must maintain politeness and consider the feelings of the listener or reader. Therefore, the use of business language differs significantly from everyday conversational language (Jarumethi, 2006).

In the modern business world, the application of Chinese in business is undeniable. China, as a global economic power, continues to experience steady economic growth, and Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world. The expansion of Chinese investments into Thailand has contributed to a linguistic revolution. Furthermore, global business trends highlight the necessity of language skills for international business communication. Learning the language of the business environment, or conducting business with foreign nationals, requires proficiency in a language that facilitates communication with foreign business partners. As such, “business Chinese” is a language that can enhance competitiveness in the current globalized era (Saeko, 2018).

Given the importance of business Chinese, and considering the growth of business relations between China and Thailand, which enhances cross-cultural communication between the two peoples, the researcher is interested in studying how proficiency in business Chinese influences negotiation strategies, corporate image building, and overcoming communication barriers in a multicultural business environment. This research aims to contribute to the field of business Chinese and communication studies by demonstrating the influence of language in effective cross-cultural communication and its role in business success.

Objectives of Study

1. To examine the importance of proficiency in Business Chinese for facilitating effective cross-cultural communication between Thai and Chinese business professionals.
2. To investigate how proficiency in Business Chinese contributes to the development of a corporate image through appropriate language use, cultural etiquette, and relationship-building.

Expected Benefits

This study is expected to yield several significant benefits for both academic and professional fields. First, it will provide a clearer understanding of how proficiency in Business Chinese can enhance cross-cultural communication between Thai and Chinese professionals, thereby minimizing misunderstandings and improving negotiation outcomes. This insight can be particularly useful for business executives, educators, and policymakers who aim to strengthen Thai-Chinese business relations.

Second, the study will highlight how linguistic and cultural competence contributes to building a positive corporate image. By understanding the role of appropriate language usage, cultural etiquette, and relationship-building practices, organizations can develop more effective communication strategies that foster trust and credibility among Chinese stakeholders and business partners.

Furthermore, the findings can guide curriculum development for Business Chinese language programs in Thailand, ensuring that they are aligned with real-world business needs. Training programs that integrate language, cultural awareness, and professional etiquette can be developed or enhanced to better prepare students and professionals for success in international business environments.

Finally, the results of this research can be used as a practical reference for companies and government agencies formulating policies or initiatives related to international business communication, particularly those involving China. By promoting the development of Business Chinese expertise, Thailand can better position itself in the competitive landscape of Asian trade and investment.

Literature Review

This research involves a review of relevant concepts and theories to study the role of proficiency in business Chinese in cross-cultural communication, with a case study on the business relationship between China and Thailand, as follows.:

1) Chinese is a foreign language that has a close connection with Thai society. Thai people have been exposed to Chinese since the early days of trade with China during the Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Rattanakosin periods. The Chinese were regarded as experts in trade, and when Chinese migrants moved to Thailand, they played a significant role in the continuous growth of commerce. Areas with a large population of Chinese immigrants became key commercial centers. The area with the largest Chinese community, which eventually became the most significant trading hub in Thailand, is Bangkok. It can be seen that Chinese language has a deep connection with business in Thailand, and it is inextricably linked to business operations in the country. Today, the role of Chinese is essential for the survival and economic development of the nation.

2) Cross-cultural communication refers to the interaction between a sender and a receiver from different cultural backgrounds. It involves ensuring that people from different cultures understand what one is saying, thinking, feeling, and expressing. Cross-cultural communication primarily occurs between people from different countries, who often have distinct spoken languages, writing systems, thought processes, and gestures. Building understanding and making a positive impression on foreigners does not solely depend on language proficiency, but also on the ability to comprehend social behaviors, perspectives, and thoughts of people from other cultures. Through these interactions, individuals become more aware of other cultures, which leads to successful communication.

3) Image building is crucial and directly impacts the credibility and trustworthiness of customers or service recipients. It also creates a positive and unique identity for the organization, benefiting the business or organization significantly. Organizational leaders must be mindful of and strive to maintain a positive image. A good image creates value and adds worth in the minds of the public. Image is a perception that individuals form based on their awareness, experiences, and interactions with an organization or business, which occur through communication processes and organizational behavior. If the target audience is impressed, a positive image will be created, leading to success in the organization's operations and enhanced reputation, along with efficient services that foster trust and credibility.

Research Methodology

This study investigates the role of proficiency in Business Chinese in facilitating cross-cultural communication, corporate image building, and communication between Thai and Chinese business professionals. The research adopts a qualitative approach, using documentary research and in-depth interviews to gather data.

To understand the role of Business Chinese in Sino-Thai business relations, the researcher first conducted a thorough review of existing literature, academic papers, and industry documents related to the communication strategies of Chinese companies operating in Thailand. This documentary research was crucial in building the theoretical framework of the study, providing insights into the use of language and cultural etiquette in fostering successful cross-cultural communication. It also highlighted the impact of effective communication on the corporate image of Chinese businesses in Thailand, offering a contextual background for the study.

In addition to documentary research, in-depth interviews were conducted with five Thai business experts who have significant business relationships with Chinese counterparts. These informants were selected through purposive sampling, which targeted professionals with substantial experience and knowledge relevant to the study. The five participants were chosen based on their senior roles in sectors such as international trade, finance, and consulting, where they regularly engage with Chinese businesses. Their qualifications for participation were grounded in their experience using Business Chinese in professional settings, their direct involvement in Sino-Thai business relations, and their familiarity with the communication challenges that arise in such cross-cultural contexts. This selection ensured that the informants could provide valuable insights into the significance of Business Chinese for fostering effective communication and enhancing corporate image.

The interviews, which were both structured and semi-structured, were audio-recorded to capture the full range of responses. Participant observation was also employed to complement the interview data, providing further context to the communication dynamics observed during interactions between Thai and Chinese professionals. The interview protocol was designed to explore three key areas: the importance of Business Chinese in cross-cultural communication, its role in corporate image building, and the communication challenges encountered in a multicultural business environment. The protocol was validated for content by three experts, and the Index of Congruence (IOC) method was used to assess its reliability. Items with an IOC score greater than 0.5 were retained, and the protocol was revised based on expert recommendations to ensure its relevance to the research objectives.

The data gathered from the documentary research and the interviews were then systematically organized and analyzed. The information was grouped into related categories and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework developed from the literature review.

The findings will be presented descriptively, focusing on how proficiency in Business Chinese influences cross-cultural communication and corporate image building in the context of Sino-Thai business relations. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that Business Chinese plays in overcoming communication barriers and enhancing business relations between Thailand and China.

Conclusion of Findings and Discussion

This research investigates the importance of proficiency in Business Chinese in facilitating effective cross-cultural communication and enhancing corporate image building within the context of Sino-Thai business relations. The findings highlight the key role that Business Chinese plays in fostering smoother interactions between Chinese and Thai business professionals, particularly in sectors such as international business, tourism, and hospitality. Business Chinese differs significantly from general Chinese language, as it incorporates specific linguistic and cultural nuances essential for formal and professional settings. Unlike general Chinese, which is typically conversational and may focus on casual interaction, Business Chinese requires knowledge of etiquette, formal expressions, and context-specific vocabulary. This distinction is crucial for understanding its impact on cross-cultural communication, as Business Chinese enables individuals to navigate business settings, where politeness, respect for hierarchy, and precision in language are paramount.

The research also underscores the importance of proficiency in Business Chinese for building strong corporate images. As companies increasingly seek to expand their networks in China and engage with Chinese-speaking partners, the ability to communicate effectively in Business Chinese is essential. This involves not only linguistic proficiency but also an understanding of cultural practices such as business etiquette, respect for elders, and the significance of formal greetings and introductions. For example, during the interviews with key Thai business experts, several informants emphasized the importance of using correct titles and forms of address when engaging with Chinese business partners. One participant recalled a specific instance where their company's ability to use formal language and follow Chinese business etiquette helped establish trust and credibility with a potential partner in China. The use of Business Chinese in such interactions goes beyond just language; it signals an understanding of the culture and demonstrates respect for the partner's values, which is vital in building long-lasting business relationships.

Further, the findings suggest that proficiency in Business Chinese positively influences corporate image. The research highlights how language choice and structure in business interactions affect the way companies are perceived. Proper use of formal, polite language not only enhances credibility but also strengthens the organization's reputation.

This aligns with studies by researchers such as Shen Shuyuan (2010) and Mao Fanling (2011), who argue that the language used in negotiations should be clear, precise, and based on reason, as well as culturally appropriate. The ability to communicate in Business Chinese thus plays a key role in shaping the perception of an organization, especially in terms of professionalism and cross-cultural competence.

The research also explores how Business Chinese can serve as a bridge in fostering cultural understanding. One of the informants highlighted that the understanding of Chinese culture—whether through language, customs, or festivals—greatly enhances business communication. For instance, the understanding of key cultural events like the Chinese New Year or the Mid-Autumn Festival allows businesses to engage with Chinese clients on a deeper, more personal level. This cultural linkage, as discussed in the interviews, enables professionals to build rapport and demonstrate a genuine interest in their business partners' traditions and values. Moreover, the interviews revealed that knowledge of Chinese communication practices, such as avoiding direct criticism and the importance of gift-giving, further strengthens business ties.

Lastly, the research acknowledges the growing significance of Business Chinese in the digital age. As Chinese companies expand their digital presence globally, understanding the nuances of digital communication in Business Chinese becomes increasingly important. The interviews revealed that digital platforms, including social media and business websites, require a nuanced approach to language use. The key informants noted that clear and respectful language on digital platforms helps establish a positive image and fosters successful online negotiations. This aspect of Business Chinese is especially relevant in today's digital era, where businesses engage with global audiences through various online channels.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that proficiency in Business Chinese is not only an essential skill for cross-cultural communication but also a powerful tool for building and maintaining a positive corporate image in international business. The findings highlight the role of Business Chinese in facilitating smooth communication, fostering strong business relationships, and enhancing cultural understanding between Chinese and Thai professionals. Through careful attention to language and cultural etiquette, organizations can improve their corporate image and increase their competitiveness in the global market. The research also demonstrates the importance of adapting to the evolving digital landscape, where proficiency in Business Chinese can lead to new business opportunities and more effective negotiations.

Recommendations

This study explores the critical role of Business Chinese expertise in facilitating cross-cultural communication and contributing to corporate image building, particularly in the context of Sino-Thai business interactions. The research emphasizes that proficiency in Business Chinese is essential for Thai business professionals engaged in trade, investment,

and other collaborative activities with Chinese counterparts. The research emphasizes that proficiency in Business Chinese is essential for Thai business professionals engaged in trade, investment, and other collaborative activities with Chinese counterparts. The findings underscore the distinction between general Chinese and Business Chinese. While general Chinese is more focused on everyday communication, Business Chinese requires knowledge of specific business-related vocabulary, cultural etiquette, and formalities that are crucial for successful professional interactions. This expertise is especially vital in the context of cross-cultural communication, where misunderstandings can easily arise due to differences in business practices, expectations, and communication styles. Business Chinese not only facilitates effective communication but also demonstrates respect for the cultural norms of Chinese business practices, which can help build trust and strengthen business relationships.

The research highlights the significant role that proficiency in Business Chinese plays in shaping corporate image. In today's competitive global market, organizations that demonstrate cultural sensitivity through the use of Business Chinese are more likely to establish a positive image and enhance their reputation with Chinese clients and partners. The study suggests that using appropriate formal language, recognizing business customs, and understanding cultural nuances, such as the importance of face, hierarchy, and the role of relationships in Chinese business culture, all contribute to an organization's perceived professionalism and trustworthiness. For businesses in Thailand, investing in training employees to master Business Chinese can therefore be seen as an investment in enhancing corporate reputation and increasing competitiveness in the Chinese market. Practical applications of this finding include developing training programs focused on business etiquette, negotiation tactics, and formal communication strategies in Chinese. Furthermore, companies could implement language proficiency requirements for employees engaging in international business, particularly in industries such as tourism, hospitality, and export, where the ability to speak Chinese is increasingly in demand.

One of the practical recommendations for Thai businesses is to integrate Business Chinese language training into their employee development programs. This could involve offering language courses that focus not only on linguistic skills but also on cultural competencies necessary for navigating the complexities of cross-cultural business negotiations. For instance, businesses could collaborate with language institutes to design specialized curricula that incorporate case studies, role-playing, and scenario-based learning to simulate real-world business interactions with Chinese counterparts. Additionally, companies could prioritize hiring bilingual staff who are proficient in Business Chinese to handle international communications and negotiations, thus ensuring smoother interactions and avoiding the potential pitfalls of language barriers.

Moreover, businesses should also take steps to align their corporate image with Chinese cultural expectations. This includes ensuring that formal communication, whether in meetings, emails, or presentations, adheres to Chinese norms of respect and politeness.

For example, the use of appropriate titles, formal greetings, and a respectful tone can go a long way in fostering goodwill and creating positive impressions. Organizations should also consider the role of Business Chinese in building relationships, which are highly valued in Chinese business culture. A focus on long-term partnerships rather than short-term gains can enhance a company's reputation and improve the sustainability of its business relationships in China.

In terms of policy, businesses should consider implementing a corporate communication strategy that incorporates the use of Business Chinese across all levels of interaction with Chinese partners. This policy could include guidelines for formal language use, cultural etiquette, and relationship management strategies that align with Chinese business values. Additionally, companies could establish partnerships with Chinese organizations to promote cross-cultural understanding and to provide their employees with first-hand experience of Chinese business practices. These collaborations could involve exchange programs, joint ventures, or internships that allow Thai professionals to immerse themselves in the Chinese business environment and gain practical insights into the application of Business Chinese in real business contexts.

In conclusion, while future research can further explore the nuances of Business Chinese and its role in intercultural communication, the immediate practical applications of these findings are clear. Thai businesses can enhance their cross-cultural communication and corporate image by prioritizing proficiency in Business Chinese, integrating language and cultural training into their operations, and ensuring that their corporate communication strategies are aligned with the expectations of Chinese partners. By doing so, they can create a competitive edge in the Chinese market, foster stronger relationships, and ultimately contribute to the long-term success of their international business endeavors.

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