A Study of Chinese Reading Strategies Used by Thai Undergraduates

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to identify the effective Chinese reading strategies utilized by Thai undergraduates. The participants of this study were 212 Thai students who are studying Chinese course at Business Chinese Department of Assumption University in Thailand in the academic year 2013. The reliability statistic of Cronbach's Alpha is .907. The Means and Standard Deviations, Independent Samples T-Test, One-Way ANOVA, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis were computed to investigate whether gender, grade, major, and proficiency level play an important role in Chinese reading strategy use. The study findings indicated that most of the students prefer to use basic reading strategies to decode the meaning of Chinese reading materials. Skilled readers can read positively and initiatively by using different reading strategies simultaneously and effectively. It is recommended that teachers should train students to practice more on reviewing titles and subtitles, introduction and conclusion, finding organizational patterns, retrieving the relevant information, and picking the main idea.

Keywords: Chinese Reading Strategies, Support Reading Strategy, Monitoring Strategy, Testing Strategy, Previewing Strategy

1. Introduction

Reading is an important channel of information input and new knowledge acquisition. In order to fulfill the reading task, students will use multiple reading strategies. There are a large number of studies on English reading strategies implemented by foreign students. However, studies on Chinese reading strategies are not fruitful. Kang (2006) compared reading strategies of advanced CFL (Chinese as a Foreign Language) learners on different genres and media of text. Assistant Professor Chun (2008) identified reading strategies applied by American university learners of Chinese as a foreign language. USA Allegheny College teacher Wang (2009) explored electronic strategies to improve students' Chinese reading skills. Tsai and Chen (2009) investigated the Chinese reading strategies used by competent high school readers. Jiang and Cohen (2012) reviewed research on strategies in learning Chinese as both a second and foreign language. Specifically, there are quite a few studies on Chinese reading strategies used by Thai undergraduates.

To strengthen Sino-Thai bilateral relations, Thai government has been trying to promote the study of Chinese language all over the country. Also, many Thai students are the second generation or third generation of Chinese descendants. Within Chinese language friendly environment, the most popular foreign language after English in Thai schools is Chinese. No wonder, Chinese language has become the fashionable foreign language among Thai students. It is essential to explore what kind of Chinese reading strategies do Thai undergraduates frequently use when they are reading Chinese textbook or extracurricular reading materials.

Some Thai students who have studied Chinese at university still very often have difficulties in reading authentic Chinese academic articles. It is significant to determine what factors affect Thai students' Chinese reading proficiency. Some skilled Thai students can use different kinds of Chinese reading strategies simultaneously and effectively. It is crucial to identify the effective Chinese reading comprehension strategies utilized by Thai undergraduates. Based on a questionnaire, this study made a quantitative study on the Chinese reading strategies utilized by Thai undergraduates. The results of this study will provide some constructive enlightenment to the Chinese reading class.

2. Literature Review

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Comprehension is a complicated process including previewing, browsing, fact-finding, visualizing, interpreting, inferring, synthesizing, questioning, monitoring, analyzing, summarizing, and evaluating texts. Readers will decide what is read, make connections between what is read and what is known, and draw conclusions what is read. According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), "*Comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language*." Good comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading class. Some students can read accurately but have reading comprehension impairments. Alder (2013) insisted that "*Comprehension strategy instruction helps students become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension.*" Reading comprehension involves

When students comprehend, they deliberately apply specific strategies such as: interpret, integrate, infer, analyze, summarize, connect, and evaluate ideas in texts to support their comprehension. Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) explained three typical reading comprehension strategies as follows: (1) "*Global Reading Strategies are intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading.*" (2) "*Problem Solving Strategies are the actions and procedures that readers use while working directly with the text.*" (3) "*Support Reading Strategies are the basic support mechanisms intended to aid the reader in comprehending the text.*" Stephanie and Anne (2007) suggested the specific strategies as follows: metacognition, making connections, visualizing, questioning, inferring, determining important information, synthesizing, and summarizing. Taiwan I-Shou University professor Hui-Fang Shang (2011) investigated the relationship and differences of four reading strategies: cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, compensatory strategy, and testing strategies.

Kang (2006) investigated the Chinese reading strategies of English speaking learners. Participants had a tendency to use bottom-up reading strategy when reading textbook. When reading online advertisement and personal essays in blogs, students were inclined to use the top-down and interactive models. Nan Kai University of Technology professor Tsai and Chen (2009) explored the successful senior high school students' reading strategies when reading the Chinese text. A total of twelve kinds of the Chinese reading comprehension strategy were found namely: monitoring comprehension, inferring, evaluating the text information, predicting, summarizing, recognizing the text structure, rereading, underlining a certain part of the text, looking for the key word, intuiting, connecting prior knowledge, and looking for the main idea. The strategy of "monitoring comprehension" had the highest frequency among the Chinese reading strategies used.

Babbitt (2013) explained the eight most effective strategies are as follows: (1) *comprehension monitoring*: pre-reading, reading, post-reading; (2) *cooperative learning*; (3) *graphic organizers*: comparison/contrast, hierarchy diagram, matrix diagram; (4) *story structure*; (5) *question answering*; (6) *question generating*; (7) *summarization*; and (8) *multiple strategy*. Alder (2013) introduced seven strategies to teach students text comprehension: (1) *monitoring comprehension*; (2) *metacognition*; (3) *graphic and semantic organizers*: venn-diagrams, storyboard/chain of events, story map, cause/effect; (4) *answering questions*; (5) *generating questions* ; (6) *recognizing story structure*; and (7) *summarizing*. Laura (2013) suggested instructors teach decoding skills, help students build fluency, build and activate background knowledge, teach vocabulary words, motivate students, and engage them in personal responses to text.

3. Research Objectives

- To identify the effective Chinese reading strategies used by Thai undergraduates.
- To determine the difference of Chinese reading strategies classified by gender, major, and different proficiency levels.
- To investigate the relationship between Chinese reading strategies and gender, grade, major, different proficiency levels.

4. Significance of the Research

This study investigates the difference and relationship of four Chinese reading strategies: support reading strategy, monitoring strategy, testing strategy, and previewing strategy in terms of gender, major, and Chinese proficiency level. It is hoped that the findings of this study could offer some useful information

about effective Chinese reading strategies which help the teachers to plan appropriate and effective Chinese reading instruction. Also, the results of this research could offer some empirical information for Chinese language instructors who can further develop effective teaching methods to enhance Thai undergraduates' Chinese reading proficiency. It is also hoped that the results of this research could provide some pedagogical implications for Chinese reading curriculum, instruction, and evaluation in Thai higher education institution.

5. Limitations of the Research

Although the study has preliminarily investigated how Chinese reading strategy use affects the development of Thai undergraduates' Chinese reading proficiency, there are several limitations in the research design. First, the subjects of the study were 212 Thai undergraduates from business Chinese department. Thus, the sample size of this study is small. Consequently, it is hard to generalize the study findings to other populations with different native languages, educational backgrounds, or cultural backgrounds. Also, due to the limited time for answering the questionnaire, the format of the questionnaires consists of only 25 questions. Therefore, the study may be not able to comprise all the questions in terms of Chinese reading strategies.

6. Research Methodology

What kind of Chinese reading strategies do Thai undergraduates commonly use when they read the Chinese text? What are the effective learning strategies in Chinese reading comprehension? Is there any significant relationship between students' reading strategy use and gender, grade, major, language proficiency level? To address the above questions, a questionnaire was conducted among 212 Thai undergraduates. To ensure the best validity, the questionnaire was adapted from the existing "Survey of Reading Strategies" by two researchers Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). The survey contains altogether 25 items, including four major categories of Chinese reading strategies: support reading strategy, monitoring strategy, testing strategy, and previewing strategy. The purpose of survey is to collect information about the various strategies Thai Undergraduate student use. The respondents were asked to rate certain statements on a 5-point Likert scale. 1 means that "*I never or almost never do this*". 2 means that "*I do this only occasionally*". 3 means that "*I sometimes do this*". 4 means that "*I usually do this*". 5 means that "*I always or almost always do this*." Participants were asked to read each statement carefully and circle the number that applies to their use of the Chinese reading strategy.

7. Research Subjects

A total of 212 Thai undergraduates who are studying at Business Chinese Department of Assumption University participated in this study. A demographic questionnaire was used to gather information about the subjects' backgrounds. Classified by gender, the participants include 37 male students who represent 17.5% and 175 female students who represent 82.5%. Classified by Chinese major, the respondents are 175 major students (82.5%) and 37 minor students (17.5%). Among the 212 respondents, there are only 77 students who pass Chinese proficiency test (HSK). There are 13 students pass HSK Level I (6.1%), 15 students pass HSK Level II (7.1%), 28 students pass HSK Level III (13.2%), 17 students pass HSK Level IV (8.0%), and 4 students pass HSK Level V (1.9%).

8. Data Analysis

The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients were employed to examine the instrument's reliability. The overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability is .907 (>.70), which means this survey has a good internal consistency to evaluate Thai students' Chinese reading strategy. The Means and Standard Deviations were computed to identify the effective Chinese reading strategies used by Thai undergraduate students. Also, Independent Samples T-Test and One-Way ANOVA were employed to determine the difference of Chinese reading strategies classified by gender, major, and different Chinese proficiency levels. Moreover, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed to investigate the relationship between Chinese reading strategies and gender, major, different Chinese proficiency levels.

9. Discussion and Suggestion

Research Question One "*What kind of Chinese reading strategies do Thai undergraduates frequently use in Chinese reading process?*"

Table 1: Most and least frequently used reading strategies

	Strategy	Mean
Most	I highlight, underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	4.24
	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	4.04
	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	4.01
Least	I read the introduction and conclusion, then go back and read the whole text.	3.08
	I read each paragraph carefully and then write the main idea of the paragraph in one sentence.	3.31
	I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	3.36

Table 1 showed the frequency of most and least reading strategies used by respondents. The findings indicated that the students prefer to use basic reading strategies to decode the meaning of reading materials. The students more frequently use highlighting, underlining, or circling the key words or sentences to help them understand articles. Also, the descriptive statistics showed that the students rarely use advanced reading strategies such as previewing strategy, monitoring strategy, and testing strategy. Advanced reading strategies require extensive and intensive reading practices. Therefore, the instructors should help students learn when and how to use advanced reading strategies.

Table 2: Frequency of support reading strategy

Item	Statement	Mean
1	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	3.88
2	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	3.61
3	I highlight, underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	4.24
4	I use dictionary to help me understand what I read.	3.86
5	When reading, I translate from Chinese into my native language.	3.87
6	I use tables, figures, or pictures in text to increase my understanding.	3.36
18	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	3.63
19	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	4.04

Through the whole reading comprehension process, students prefer to use a variety of support reading strategies such as selective highlighting, notetaking, translating, and visualizing. Jones (2006) pointed out that "*Students should be taught selective underlining explicitly, given time and means to practice, and reinforced for successful performance.*" The selective highlighting strategy helps students focus on the key words, the main ideas or the supporting details. It is an active reading strategy to highlight important information within the text.

Table 3: Frequency of monitoring strategy

Item	Statement	Mean
8	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	3.75
12	I check my understanding when I come across new information.	3.64
16	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	4.01
17	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	3.77

According to Dr. Johnson (2011) "*Notetaking has been proven to improve reading comprehension and increase retention of the information from 5% (without notes) to 34% (with notes) because it's an active form of learning.*" The students can use mapping notetaking method, charting notetaking method, sentence notetaking strategy, and outline notetaking method to write, sort, process, and retrieve the information

efficiently. Janelle (2013) concluded students can develop reading fluency and comprehension with repeated reading. Students can reread the Chinese article as many time as needed and use a stopwatch to keep track of their reading progress. Maybe translation and dictionary provide the students immediate assistance in reading. However, relying too much on translation and dictionary is not a good reading habit.

The findings indicated that careful reading or reading for detail is the most commonly used strategy by students. Self-monitoring strategy allows students to be aware and make sure of their understanding during reading. As soon as coming across new information, the students will self-assess their own understanding.

Table 4: Frequency of testing strategy

Item	Statement	Mean
11	I read one paragraph, and then answer questions. Later, read the next paragraph and so on.	3.42
14	I read each paragraph carefully and then write the main idea of the paragraph in one sentence.	3.31
15	I write a summary of the text in my own words.	3.47
20	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	3.88
21	I use radicals to guess the meaning of unknown words.	3.46
22	I use synonym and antonym to guess the meaning of unknown words.	3.38
23	I simply skip unfamiliar vocabularies and continue reading.	3.50
24	When I read complex sentence, I try to analyze sentence structure and identify the key words or phrases.	3.67
25	When I read complex sentence, I try to change into simple sentence.	3.66

The findings indicated that the students sometimes use testing strategies such as: guess the meaning of unknown words, analyze complex sentence structure, divide complex sentence into simple sentence, and skip unfamiliar vocabularies, etc.

Table 5: Frequency of previewing strategy

Item	Statement	Mean
7	I read the introduction and conclusion, then go back and read the whole text.	3.08
9	I read the first line in every paragraph to get an idea of how the ideas progress, then go back and read from the beginning.	3.58
10	I scan the entire text, and then focus on the most interesting or relevant parts to read in detail.	3.64
13	I take an overview of the text to see what it is about before reading it.	3.58

The findings indicated that the students sometimes use previewing strategies such as: overview the entire text, read the first line in every paragraph, read the introduction and conclusion, and then focus on the most relevant parts, etc. Previewing strategy requires students to scan the whole reading text first and then find who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of Chinese reading strategy categories

Strategy Category	No.	Mean	Std.	Ranking
Support Reading Strategy (SRS)	212	3.81	.56	1
Monitoring Strategy (MS)	212	3.80	.64	2
Testing Strategy (TS)	209	3.53	.63	3
Previewing Strategy (PS)	212	3.47	.71	4

Table 6 shows means and standard deviations of the application of various Chinese reading strategy categories. The most frequent Chinese reading strategy use was support reading strategy (3.81), followed by monitoring strategy (3.80), testing strategy (3.53), and previewing strategy (3.47). These findings indicated that all the students in this study tend to more frequently use fundamental reading strategies such as: support reading strategy and monitoring strategy. On the contrast, the students less frequently use advanced reading strategies such as: previewing strategy and testing strategy. To enhance students' reading proficiency level, it should be the priority to provide students more opportunities to learn, practice, and implement advanced reading strategies in Chinese reading class.

Research Question Two "*What is the difference between male students and female students in Chinese reading strategy use?*"

Table 7: Independent samples t-test of strategy use difference between different genders

Variable	Gender	No.	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.
Support Reading Strategy	M	37	3.64	.69	4.11	.044*
	F	175	3.85	.53		
Monitoring Strategy	M	37	3.67	.68	.21	.647
	F	175	3.82	.63		
Testing Strategy	M	37	3.44	.80	3.66	.057
	F	172	3.55	.59		
Previewing Strategy	M	37	3.47	.79	1.92.	.167
	F	175	3.47	.70		

To identify gender differences in reading strategies, Independent Samples T-test were computed. Classified by gender, the respondents include 37 male students and 175 female students. The findings indicated that there is a contrast of the strategy usage condition between male and female students, which demonstrated that female students had a significantly higher frequency in support reading strategy, monitoring strategy, and testing strategy comparing with male students. Apparently, female students have superior reading skills than male students. There is significant difference between male students and female students in support reading strategy. No significant difference was identified between the other three reading strategies and gender.

Research Question Three "*What is the difference among freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior students in Chinese reading strategy use?*"

Classified by grade, the subjects are 32 freshmen (15.1%), 89 sophomores (42.0%), 49 juniors (23.1%), and 42 seniors (19.8%). The descriptive statistics regarding the means and standard deviations of the four strategies used by freshmen show that the most frequent Chinese reading comprehension strategy was monitoring strategy (3.68), followed by support reading strategy (3.64), testing strategy (3.44), and previewing strategy (3.37). The most frequent Chinese reading strategy used by sophomore was support reading strategy (4.03), followed by monitoring strategy (3.98), previewing strategy (3.77), and testing strategy (3.74).

The most frequent Chinese reading strategy used by junior was support reading strategy and monitoring strategy (3.74), followed by testing strategy (3.48), and previewing strategy (3.30). The most frequent Chinese reading comprehension strategy used by senior was support reading strategy (3.57), followed by monitoring strategy (3.55), testing strategy (3.20), and previewing strategy (3.11). The findings indicated that there is significant difference among freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior students in Chinese reading strategy use.

Research Question Four "*What is the difference between major students and minor students in Chinese reading strategy use?*"

Table 8: Independent samples t-test of strategy use difference between different majors

Variable	Major / Minor	No.	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.
Support Reading Strategy	Minor	37	3.58	.77	13.55	.000*
	Major	175	3.86	.50		
Monitoring Strategy	Minor	37	3.67	.84	7.38	.007*
	Major	175	3.82	.59		
Testing Strategy	Minor	36	3.35	.80	1.01	.316
	Major	173	3.57	.59		
Previewing Strategy	Minor	37	3.32	.82	.74	.390
	Major	175	3.50	.68		

The findings indicated that there is a contrast of the strategy usage condition between major and minor students, which demonstrated that major students use strategies more frequently than minor students. There is significant difference between major students and minor students in support reading strategy use. No significant difference was identified between the other three reading strategies and gender.

Research Question Five "*What is the difference between different Chinese proficiency level students in Chinese reading strategy use?*"

Among the 212 respondents, there are only 77 students who pass Chinese proficiency test. The descriptive statistics regarding the means and standard deviations of the four strategies used by HSK Level 1 students show that the most frequent Chinese reading comprehension strategy was support reading strategy (3.59), followed by monitoring strategy (3.54), testing strategy (3.40), and previewing strategy (3.38). The most frequent Chinese reading comprehension strategy used by HSK Level 2 students was support reading strategy (3.87), followed by monitoring strategy (3.80), testing strategy (3.67), and previewing strategy (3.65).

The most frequent Chinese reading comprehension strategy used by HSK Level 3 students was support reading strategy (3.86), followed by monitoring strategy (3.77), testing strategy (3.65), and previewing strategy (3.63). The most frequent reading strategy used by HSK Level 4 students was monitoring strategy (3.93), followed by support reading strategy (3.73), previewing strategy (3.65), and testing strategy (3.48). The most frequent reading strategy used by HSK Level 5 students was previewing strategy (4.31), followed by monitoring strategy (4.00), support reading strategy (4.00), and testing strategy (3.61). The findings indicated that there is a contrast of the strategy usage condition between different proficiency level students, which demonstrated that high Chinese proficiency level students more frequently use previewing strategy, support reading strategy, and monitoring strategy comparing with low Chinese proficiency level students.

Research Question Six "*Is there any relationship between Chinese reading strategy use and gender?*"

To examine the relationship between Chinese reading strategy and gender, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed in the study. Results showed that there is significant relationship between support reading strategy and gender. No significant correlation was found between the other three reading strategies and gender.

Research Question Seven "*Is there any relationship between Chinese reading strategy use and grade?*"

To examine the relationship between Chinese reading strategy and grade, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed in the study. Results showed that there is significant relationship between reading strategy and grade.

Research Question Eight "*Is there any relationship between Chinese reading strategy use and major?*"

To examine the relationship between Chinese reading strategy and major, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed in the study. Results showed that there is significant relationship between support reading strategy and Chinese major. No significant correlation was found between the other three reading strategies and major.

Research Question Nine "*Is there any relationship between Chinese reading strategy use and Chinese proficiency level?*"

To examine the relationship between Chinese reading strategy and Chinese proficiency level, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed in the study. Results show that there is no significant relationship between reading strategy and Chinese proficiency level.

10. Conclusion

The survey conducted among 212 Thai undergraduates gave a clear picture of their perceptions of Chinese reading strategies. All the students in this study demonstrated that they are able to use some Chinese reading strategies. In the overall 25 reading strategies, the most frequent used reading strategy is "*I highlight, underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it*". Students like to use different colors of highlighters to underline or circle key vocabulary, main ideas, supporting details when they are reading Chinese articles. By using selective highlighting strategy, students can pay attention to the key information

easily. The second strategy with high frequency of usage is *"When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding"*. The third often used strategy is *"I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading"*. The least frequent used reading strategy is *"I read the introduction and conclusion, then go back and read the whole text"*, followed by *"I read each paragraph carefully and then write the main idea of the paragraph in one sentence"* and *"I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding"*.

This study aimed to investigate the Chinese reading strategies use while reading Chinese academic materials, to examine to what extent they used these strategies. The finding indicated that to reach a higher level of reading performance, students generally use more supporting reading strategy in Chinese reading task. Most of the students prefer to use selective highlighting, notetaking, translating, and visualizing these kinds of support reading strategy. During reading, the students sometimes use self-monitoring strategy to check their comprehension. On the contrary, the students seldom use previewing strategies and testing strategies.

In summary, as an answer to the research questions, the investigation indicated that the students tend to use fundamental reading strategies more frequently than advanced reading strategies. The Chinese teacher should try to raise the students' awareness about the previewing strategies and testing strategies. In order to effectively improve students' Chinese reading proficiency, the instructor should train students to practice more on reviewing titles and subtitles, introduction and conclusion, finding organizational patterns, and picking the main idea before reading. Since testing strategies play a key role in getting a good reading score, the lecturer should teach students how to retrieve the relevant information and then go back to answer the reading questions accordingly.

In terms of gender differences in reading strategies, female students more frequently use support reading strategy, monitoring strategy, and testing strategy than male students. Female students are more aware of their reading process and monitor their reading strategies. Apparently, female students have superior language skills than male students when it comes to the Chinese reading strategy use.

In terms of Chinese proficiency differences in reading strategies, proficient students tend to use different kinds of reading strategies more frequently than less proficient students. Just as researcher Li (2010) found out *"successful readers appear to use more strategies than less successful readers and also appear to use them more frequently."* Skilled readers can read positively and initiatively by using different reading strategies simultaneously and effectively. Proficient students usually preview the article before read, monitor their reading process during read, and assess their comprehension after read. However, less proficient students are still struggling with Chinese reading comprehension. In order to become a proficient reader, the students needs to master and integrate a variety of reading strategies. In this regard, teachers should intentionally plan appropriate and effective reading exercises to improve Thai students' Chinese reading efficiency.

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