

Everyday Chinese Literacy: the Case Study of a Chinese Family in Bangkok

Pranee Chokkajitsumpun

University of Hawaii at Manoa

0. Introduction

Chinese literacy in Bangkok has been thriving in the last decade despite the continuing decline of local varieties of Chinese.¹ I attempt to provide ethnographic insights into the roles and functions of reading and writing in Chinese in the everyday context of a Chinese family in Bangkok.² I also intend to discuss the maintenance of Chinese literacy by transmission from one member to another in the family studied. This essay comprises seven sections: conceptual framework, entry into the family studied, research methodology, ethnography of the family, functions of reading and writing in Chinese in the family, further discussions, and concluding remarks.

1. Conceptual Framework

To capture the unique cultural organization of literacy in everyday family context I adopt Szwed's broad framework (1981:20) which he describes as:

There is in this sort of study a need to keep literacy within the logic of the everyday lives of people; to avoid cutting these skills off from the conditions which affect them in direct and indirect ways; to shun needless abstraction and reductionist models; in short to stay as close as possible to real cases, individual examples, in order to gain the strength of evidence that comes with being able to examine specific cases in great depth and complexity.

¹ This study currently serves as part of my doctoral degree's field research entitled "Chinese Literacy Maintenance and Shift: Individual and Family Cases in Bangkok", funded by the East-West Center, Honolulu, the United States. It is supervised by Dr. Li Ying-che, a professor of Chinese at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu. I am grateful to Mr. Gwyn Williams for comments and critique.

² In this study "(ethnic) Chinese" refers to Chinese-born immigrants and their descendants in Thailand. "China" denotes the People's Republic of China. "Literacy" means the ability to read and write at all levels; from reading and jotting notes to reading and writing essays.

For a review on the generational shift and decline of ethnic mother tongues, see Malinowski's "Judeo-Spanish language-maintenance and efforts in the United States" (1983), Li's "The language shift of Chinese-Americans" (1983), and Srinarawat et al's การใช้ภาษาไทยของคนจีนในกรุงเทพมหานคร (Language use of the Chinese in Bangkok) (1994).

I also focus on the interrelationship of the components in the communicative events as central to the ethnography of speaking (Gumperz and Hymes 1964). The components include: setting, participants, purposes, textual organization in terms of constituent acts, manner of delivery, the linguistic varieties used, genres, and norms of interactions. The following research questions are set up to allow the exploration of the interrelationship of the components in the literacy events within the family studied.

Chinese Literacy Acquisition

- What variety of Chinese has one learned?
- Where, why, when, how, and how long has one learned?

Ability to Read and Write Chinese

- How is the ability to read and write Chinese distributed in the families?
- How do these abilities vary with factors such as age, sex, occupation, length of time in China and Thailand, contacts with others who are literate in Chinese, etc.?

Communicative Events

- Where does a literacy event take place in the home?
- Who participates in the event?
- What is the event's purpose for participation?
- What languages are used in printed material? What is the type of Chinese written?
- What are the rules of interactions among participants?
- With what activities are reading and writing Chinese associated?

Attitudes

- What can be observed that indicates how a literate individual evaluates his/her own Chinese literacy?
- How do family members express their attitudes toward others' Chinese literacy?

2. Entry into the Family

I based my choice of the family to study on one criterion: at least two family members of different generations read and wrote Chinese at home. This criterion would help me examine the transmission of Chinese literacy from the literate members to others. It would also allow investigation of the generational maintenance of Chinese literacy. During two months of family selection I met Fifth, a twenty-year-

old college sophomore, in a Chinese language class in February 1995.³ I announced in the class that I was looking for a Chinese family who would allow me to visit overnight once a week for at least six months in order to study their reading and writing in Chinese in the home. Later she expressed an interest in my research project. (She told me during my fifth visit to her family about her reaction to my announcement. "I'm interested in your research method; collecting data while staying with the family," she said.) After my first visit of three days to her family in March, I decided to study her family for two reasons; they were qualified and cooperative.

3. Research Methodology

In twenty overnight visits over six months to the X Family I employed a wide variety of methods to build an ethnographic record of the family. The methods included participant-observation, various types of interviews, life history gathering, and investigation of printed materials in the home. I later indexed and outlined the notes taken during the day and formed questions or areas to focus on the following day.

In my analysis of the roles and functions of reading and writing in Chinese in the family studied, I apply reading and writing categories in Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983), Taylor's *Family Literacy* (1983), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines's *Growing up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families* (1988). It should be noted these researchers base their categories upon mixed criteria. Several types and uses of reading are classified by their purposes of use, for example, instrumental, social-interactional, recreational, and confirmational categories. Others derive from the kind of content in the material read, for example, news-related, financial, sociohistorical, and educational categories. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines add environmental reading and writing to their list which was developed from Heath.⁴ This category derives from the presence of printed material outside the home. Concerning each category's functions, those of instrumental reading and writing are broad and appear in other categories. In her dissertation entitled *Chinese Written Language in Hawai'i: the*

³ I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all individuals in the X Family. Their cooperation has contributed to our first and profound understanding of the significance of Chinese script in the lives of ethnic Chinese in Thailand. To protect their anonymity the names of the individuals have been changed and the place names have been obscured.

⁴ Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988:180) define environmental types and uses of reading as "reading the print in the environment," for instance, store signs, road signs, T-shirts, graffiti, etc. They (1988:189) also mean environmental types and uses of writing to be "writing in public places for others to read." The examples are signs designed and painted for storefronts.

Linguistic, Social, and Cultural Significance for Immigrant Families, Scott (1994:179) comments on Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines's (1988) addition of the instrumental writing category. She writes:

It does not seem a very useful addition, since most of the common types of writing discussed above incorporate this function. In fact, it could be said that all types of writing, except for creative writing, recreational writing, and autobiographical writing (none of which are very common), are instrumental.

4. The Ethnography of the X Family

My visits to the family lasted from March to November in 1995. Eight family members lived in the home: the parents; the third (Third), fourth (Fourth), fifth (Fifth) daughters; the only son (Brother) ranking between Third and Fourth; Pong (the first daughter's son); and Duan (the first daughter's daughter).

Family Members in the Home during My Visits

Chinese-born parents	Father		Mother	
Age	67		60	
<hr/>				
Thai-born children	Third	Brother	Fourth	Fifth
Age	31	30	28	20
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Thai-born grandchildren	Pong		Duan	
Age	13		10	

Additionally two non-family members were present in the home, Rin and Chen. The former was a sixteen-year-old girl from a province in the central region of Thailand. She worked for Third in the day and returned to her relative's house near the family's. The latter was an alien of forty-two years of age from China. He made four trips to Bangkok to make money by selling products of China. During his last trip he stayed with the family between September and November in 1995.

The X Family's home was a four-storey building house behind a market. It was situated in one of the rapidly growing districts in the north of Bangkok. The total enumerated population in this district was 259,748 persons as of February 1996,

which took up approximately 4.65% of the population in Bangkok (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, February 1996).

4.1 Before My Visits

The family studied shared typical characteristics of middle class overseas Chinese families who lived and ran their small business in shop houses in urban Bangkok (Pitipat 1982, Chantavanich 1989, Siriphong's unpublished report quoted by Koanantakool 1993). Both parents immigrated from villages in Shantou (Swatow), Guangdong (Canton) Province in the south of China in 1947. At that time Mother was twelve. She had no formal education. Father was a nineteen-year-old orphan. Several years after his arrival in Thailand, he attended the first-grade class in a Thai school for adult learners. He studied in the class for eight days before moving to the fourth-grade class because of his ability in using an abacus, reading and writing Thai. He completed the fourth grade. In the late 1950s he married Mother. They struggled to raise six children. Father changed from job to job such as selling herbs and Thai coffee bags. Mother made and sold food. All children received mainstream education in which classroom instruction was in Thai and English was learned as a foreign language. Their educational backgrounds ranged from seventh grade to a Bachelor's degree. Younger children attended school for longer as a result of the parents' better finance and realization of the importance of education in the modern world. The first three daughters completed seventh grade. Brother obtained a Bachelor's degree in general administration. Fourth completed ninth grade whereas Fifth was attending the second year of college. She majored in English literature and minored in Mandarin, the standard variety of Chinese. No matter what educational level they reached, all children, while attending school, assisted their parents in running the small business at home. Thus the home served as a place to live, to conduct business, and to train the children for basic management in business.

The family's abilities in Chinese were also varied. Parents were Chaozhou (Teochiew) native speakers who also used Thai fluently.⁵ They spoke Chaozhou to each other, to friends, acquaintances, and relatives. When interacting with their children, they spoke Thai much more than Chaozhou. Therefore the children were

⁵ Norman (1988) categorized Chaozhou as one of the three Southern Min dialects spoken widely in the Chaozhou region in Guangdong. Among Chinese in Thailand Chaozhou speakers form the majority. Norman (1988:187) makes an impressionistic remark of how different among speech varieties in China are. He states, "To take an extreme example, there is probably as much difference between the dialects of Peking and Chaozhou as there is between Italian and French;

passive bilinguals (Penalosa 1981); speaking Thai rather than speaking the parents' *first language*. *Mother could read Chinese numerals but could not write at all*. Father read short strings of Chinese characters with Chaozhou pronunciation, for instance, *names of persons, stores, and places*. He could write very little, for example, writing his name. All children except First and Brother studied Mandarin. They learned to speak it, read and write Chinese script from teachers. In 1985, Father hired a private Chinese tutor from the neighborhood to teach his children Mandarin. Second, Third, and Fifth took the class for one year. Second was twenty-three; Third, twenty-two, and Fifth, ten. Later only Third continued her study at an evening school for several years. Her level of Mandarin was between beginning and intermediate. She could read more than speak and write. Fourth was a beginning student who had been studying Mandarin for six months. She could respond to simple questions pertaining to everyday life. She could read more than write. Fifth, an intermediate student, had been taking Mandarin as a minor subject for two and a half years in college. She could understand and respond in daily conversation and simple discussion. She could read vernacular writings and learned to write six hundred-word essays for five months.

The last person to be mentioned in the ethnography of the X Family is Chen, whose literacy practices had great impact on the family's reading and writing in Chinese. Chen was forty-two years of age. He came from a poor peasant family in a village in Shantou, Guangdong in the south of China. He spoke Chaozhou as a native tongue and went to school where the teachers taught him Mandarin. He completed sixth grade. He spoke Mandarin fluently with a lot of influence from Chaozhou pronunciation. He also read and wrote Mandarin fluently but with quite a few wrongly written and mispronounced characters. Chen married a woman also from a peasant family when he was twenty-five. Their fifteen-year-old son and fourteen-year-old daughter attended school. Once in 1993 Father and Mother visited Shantou and met Chen. He recommended Mother a Chinese traditional medicine doctor in his hometown. Mother's leg ache disappeared after taking this doctor's medicine.

Before 1994 the siblings of Chen's wife came to Thailand to make money by selling items from China, for instance, medicine, glasses, and Chinese dolls. Chen followed their path and came to Bangkok in the beginning of 1994. He sold things for two or three months and left things at the X Family before returning to China. When in Bangkok, his daily life began early. He left the hotel where he stayed to take a bus about five-thirty and arrived around seven at the market located in front of the X Family's home. Some stalls in the market were vacant in the morning because the

ones who rented them used them in the afternoon. Thus Chen displayed his items at one of these stalls available without charge. He sold his goods until two in the afternoon. After selling he left the rest of things in the X Family's home, went shopping at a wholesale market of products from China, and returned to the hotel where he shared a room with his younger brother and fellows from his hometown.

Chen's second trip to Bangkok was in the middle of 1994. One afternoon while he was chatting with Father in the home, Father encouraged him to speak Mandarin to Fifth, who was a college sophomore and had taken Mandarin for almost one year. He began asking, "Zhōngwǔ chī hǎo le ma? (Did you have lunch?)" Fifth could not answer him in Mandarin but turned to Father in Thai. He asked her a few more questions and she could not answer him. Since then Father had him tutor her in Mandarin for several afternoon hours in the living area of the home. Fifth sold desserts at the stall in the morning. Father walked to the stall to remind her when the tutorial hours came.

Chen and Fifth had no textbooks to use at the tutorials. He let her ask what she wanted to know. Then he answered her in Mandarin. In the beginning Father served as an interpreter between Chen and Fifth. Father translated her questions in Thai to Chaozhou for Chen. Chen answered in Mandarin and Chaozhou. He also wrote down the answers in Chinese script and transcribed them in Pinyin, China's Phonetic Alphabet. Father then translated Chen's answers in Chaozhou to Thai for Fifth. As Third worked at her table next to the one used for the tutorials, she heard the tutorials and sometimes polished Father's Thai translation. This complex tutorial process ran for ten days as Fifth could understand Chen's explanation in Mandarin better later. Chen tutored Fifth over a month (the tutorial was not on every day). One day Father handed him eight thousand baht (approximately three hundred twenty US dollars). He felt embarrassed to take money from an elderly person. Father's resolution was to give him the money, however, and made him take it. At that time Father knew he needed some money to build a house at home.

4.2 During My Visits

During my visits between March and November in 1995, the X Family lived in a four-storey shop house. The first floor was extremely functional. Its front part contained book shelves full of books for rent: novels, Japanese comics, and western fictions. All books were printed in Thai. On the left next to the book shelves was a living area with a Chinese calendar above Father's long marble chair. He kept a Chinese geomancy measuring tape, letters from relatives in China, fortune telling

lotteries in Chinese, etc. in a filing cabinet next to the chair. The right side contained Third's two dressmaking tables, one of which located a Chinese-Thai dictionary. A compact disk and cassette player was at the back of the other table. Next to the player was a shelf where a TV was on the middle. A sign of the family's store name in Chinese was placed above the shelf. Next to the living area was a dining table and a sewing machine where Rin, Third's helper, worked. The kitchen was at the rear part of the first floor.

One end of the second floor contained rows of Buddha images and Chinese dolls. A tape recorder and a box of cassettes of Buddhist and Guanyin's sermons were near these rows. At the other end was Father's cupboard which contained things bought in China, for instance, vases, dolls, and sets of tea cups. There were two bedrooms on the third floor. The larger one was shared by Third, Fourth, Fifth, Pong, and Duan. Inside the room was a table with Fourth's and Fifth's textbooks and workbooks of Chinese. The parents used a smaller bedroom. Like the third floor, the fourth had two bedrooms. A larger one belonged to Brother and a small one was occupied by Chen when he stayed with the family in September 1995.

Father was sixty-seven. He had been retired for ten years. He liked watching *Judge Pao*, a Chinese TV series, at eight-thirty in the evening. He sometimes played cassettes of Chaozhou operas, watched their videos, or chatted with elderly relatives who stopped by to visit the family. Father practiced geomancy or lead others to perform Chinese rituals in the community as requested by friends and acquaintances. Mother was sixty and still worked seven days a week. She made and sold Thai desserts at a stall near the market entrance. She also made and sold Chinese food during Chinese festivals such as the Chinese Mid-Year Festival and the Chinese Vegetarian Festival.

Third was thirty-one years of age. Since Second's marriage five years ago, Third took all the family's responsibilities transferred from Second. (First and Second moved out to patrilocal residence after marriage.) She was a dressmaker and conducted book-renting business. Every day she made paper patterns of the customers' clothes and supervised Rin, her helper, to sew pieces of cloth she had prepared. Her dressmaking table faced Father. While working, therefore, she talked or watched TV with him. Many times she played cassettes or compact disks of Mandarin songs and sang along. Third was addicted to two Chinese TV soap operas from Taiwan which were broadcast in the afternoon. So was Rin. Sometimes Third went out to run errands for the family and herself.

During the first three months of my visits, thirty-year-old Brother worked for Mother. He sold pig trotters in the market. There was a time when he drank heavily and stopped selling food. Like Mother, Fourth, who was twenty-eight, made and sold Thai desserts at the stall every day. She also made and sold Chinese food during Chinese festivals. Sometimes she brought a small TV to accompany her while working. Some of the programs she watched regularly were films and soap operas from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Her busy hours were during lunch time and after office hours. After visiting Kunming in China with Father and Third during the Thai New Year Festival in April, she enrolled herself in a beginning level of Mandarin class at a private language center near the home. The class was on Sunday morning. Later in June she changed to another beginning Mandarin course offered in the evening at the university where Fifth was attending daytime courses. Fourth's class hours ran between six and eight in three weekday evenings.

Fifth, the twenty-year-old youngest child, finished her finals in her sophomore year and returned to live with the family throughout a vacation from March to the middle of June 1995. She sold desserts at the stall during the day. Some nights in the bedroom she reviewed the Mandarin lessons learned in the previous semesters or translated Mandarin songs for Third. When the school began in the middle of June, Fifth stayed at her dorm in the school's vicinity. Father and Third allowed her to stay there as it was impractical to have her spend six hours commuting between home and school every day. Fifth lived with the family from Friday night to Sunday noon. She sold desserts throughout Saturday and on Sunday morning. In the first semester of her junior year, she took six courses of eighteen credits. Two of them were Chinese V and Chinese Writing I. Usually she did homework of the former course over weekend nights at home.

Pong, First's thirteen-year-old son, and Duan, First's ten-year-old daughter, went to school near the home during weekdays. After the school was over they returned home and helped out the family. Duan stayed with Fourth at the dessert stall. Pong made coconut jelly for the next day sale. Both children worked longer hours during weekends.

The last but not least event in the family during my visits is Chen's presence in the home. Chen made his third trip to Bangkok in June 1995. A few days after his arrival he was arrested by a policeman while he was walking near the market. Father and Fourth went to the police station and put up bail for him. At the end of August he made his fourth trip to Bangkok after Father and Mother had been to his village. They attended a celebration of the village's new pavilion built by Father's fund-raising

campaign. In this fourth trip Chen could not stay at the hotel he used to do because its owner had sold it to someone else. Father invited him to stay with the family. Chen moved in and continued selling things in the market while helping the family as much as he could. For instance, he helped Mother and Fourth set up the dessert stall early in the morning. He also transferred his knowledge of Mandarin and Chinese script to the family's daughters while interacting with them.

5. Functions of Reading and Writing in Chinese in the Family

Despite their diverse backgrounds Father, Third, Fourth, and Fifth actively engaged themselves in reading and writing Chinese in their everyday life. My analysis in this section consists of two parts: the family's reading and writing functions of materials in Chinese in the home; and the ones of materials in the environment.

5.1 Printed Materials in Chinese in the Home

I classify the Chinese prints written and read in the home in accordance with the kind of their content. They are names, school-related materials, songs, dictionary, Chen's written Chinese to Fifth, letters, a geomancy measuring tape, and fortune telling tickets. The materials read only are categorized as: Chinese script in TV and videos, calendar, and Chinese checkers. The materials read and written are analyzed before the ones read only. The materials used by many members are discussed before the ones used by fewer members. I also examine some of Chen's practices of Chinese literacy which influenced the family's practices.

5.1.1 Materials Read and Written in the Home

5.1.1.1 Names

Store Names

All members in the X Family with or without knowledge of Chinese could identify the Chinese script on a red sign in the living area. It was the sign of Father's old store name. He created it from three Chinese characters sequenced horizontally from right to left. The first character was the family's surname and the other two had the water radical compatible with his fire element.⁶ Fourth looked at the character of the surname in the sign to gain information of how she should write it. Then she

⁶ Many Chinese believe that individuals possess an element: gold, wood, soil, water, or fire. When making a name, one should select Chinese characters made up of radicals conveying a meaning which gets along with one's element.

copied it down in her workbook. The character had been written artistically but deviated from the standard. Som, her Chinese language teacher at the university, taught her that the horizontal stroke should have not gone beyond the top vertical stroke.

Father read a gold store's name carved in the inner side of each ring which Mother's siblings gave to her and her children at the seventh gathering after her mother's funeral. The Chinese name in the ring was so small that he had to depend on a magnified glass when reading it. He read it for curiosity as the store's name signified the ring's quality.

Personal Names

Father read his Chinese name in pictures taken at the pavilion in Chen's village. The villagers hosted a party to celebrate the pavilion built from his fund raising among his family members, neighbors, and relatives. They placed a sign of his name in large script above the pavilion. Father read and reread his name in the pictures to enhance his pride and happiness of being a successful overseas Chinese in Thailand despite being an orphan. Moreover he could contribute to China. He realized his name was seen in public and people who passed by the pavilion would bless him.

Father chose to sign his Chinese name in checks although he could write his Thai name. There were two possible reasons for his choice of signature. One was to signify a good financial credit. Once Third told me checks with a Chinese signature had a better credit than with a Thai signature. Her comment was understandable. Many Chinese in Thailand had a good reputation of succeeding in business. Of course one of the important factors to their success was a consistent maintenance of financial accountability, being able to pay loans to the bank on time and never letting their checks bounced, etc.

The second reason was to express his ethnic Chinese identity. In the nongovernmental context where many people who received his checks were Chinese and some could read and write Chinese, Father probably felt comfortable to express his Chinese identity through the use of a Chinese signature in his checks.

Additionally Father wrote down his Chinese name on a Chinese-style painting which he had done. This was a creative writing simultaneously indicating Father's possession of the painting. Seeing him writing his name in the painting that time made Fourth like Chinese script.

In one evening after her trip to Kunming, Third showed me a Chinese guide's business card written in simplified form. She read his name to me to check her

pronunciation. She also noticed his address began with the country and the province rather than the house number and the street name.

Third taught Fourth to write her Chinese name long time ago. When she began studying Chinese in May 1995, Fourth asked Fifth to teach her how to write her Chinese name. Fifth pretended not knowing how to do it. Then she suggested Fourth ask Third. Her pretense was to allow the two elder sisters who shared different interests and life styles to have common things to talk about: the Chinese language. She was successful at the time. Fourth followed her advice. Fifth saw Third write Fourth's name. She pointed out Third did not follow the characters' proper stroke order. Third argued writing a character with or without a proper stroke order resulted in the same character. Fifth's diplomatic use of Fourth's problem of writing her Chinese name allowed good relations to occur in the family. Third's writing was in response to Fourth's request which in turn educated Fourth in Chinese script.

Fourth bought Fifth a name stamp from Kunming. She hired a Chinese to carve Fifth's name on the stamp. Fifth tried several times to make the name stamped clearly enough so that she could identify the strokes of the character of her surname. They looked different from the normal way of writing. Fifth tried the stamp to see how her name looked rather than to really read it.

5.1.1.2 School-related Materials

Fourth and Fifth were the family members who actively read and wrote Chinese in school-related materials to fulfill course requirements and/or to educate themselves in Chinese. Their reading and writing was also social-interactional since it involved others to help them with Chinese. Fifth's writing in Chinese influenced Pol's and Thep's acquisition of Chinese script.

Fourth read and wrote Chinese when she began taking Mandarin in May 1995. After finishing her work at the stall, she practiced reading and writing vocabulary at the dining table in the evening. She wrote and read her transcription of the words in Taiwan's National Phonetic Alphabet and China's Phonetic Alphabet. She needed to know both systems despite having studied Mandarin for only two weeks. Her Teacher who came from China preferred to teach the latter system whereas the textbook published in Hong Kong used the former system. Additionally the teacher could not communicate with the beginning class in Thai or in simple Mandarin. Fourth did not understand his instructions and was frustrated. She read parts of the lessons to Fifth and me and asked for explanation.

Later Fourth changed to enrol herself in another Mandarin course at the university where Fifth was studying in the daytime. The class was conducted by Som, an experienced Thai-born teacher of ethnic Chinese who obtained a Master's degree in the Chinese language at a university in the United States. Fourth was satisfied by his teaching and continued studying hard. She read and wrote some characters at the stall and in the home. At the stall, after finishing packing desserts, she spent time writing the characters introduced in class. She practiced any characters she could think of at the moment. She wrote them down in a mini pad which she also used for taking her customers' orders of desserts. She repeated writing several characters such as 陳 Chén (a surname) to confirm her belief of how they should be written. Some characters such as 師 shī (teacher) were incomplete because she wanted to practice only part of them to which she paid special attention. In the home she sometimes sat at Third's table in front of the TV which was on. Rather than watching TV, she used her fingers to write simple Chinese characters on the table, for instance, 他 tā (he), 她 tā (she), and 不 bù (not). She followed Som's method; counting while writing each stroke of a character.

Fourth preferred doing homework in the home. It had a clean table whereas the desk at the stall was greasy and her hands were often sticky when touching the dessert. During her normal workload, she could allocate some time to her study. Then she wrote one Chinese character a page and submitted it to Som although it was not mandatory. When she worked during a Chinese festival, however, she was too busy to attend class and study by herself. Fourth assessed that she could identify more than write Chinese script. She also remembered the characters with many strokes better than the ones with a few strokes. She felt the former ones such as 學 xué (to study) were beautiful.

During the weekdays when Fifth stayed at her dormitory, Fourth sometimes asked Chen for meanings of words in her textbook. She had dared not ask him because of being afraid that both sides would not understand each other. He did not understand Thai while she did not understand Chaozhou and Mandarin. After being encouraged by a relative who also sold dessert near her stall, she overcame her fear and asked him for the meaning of 要 yào (will, to want). Chen read the character in Mandarin and Chaozhou and gave an example in Chaozhou. He said, "yao (will), [ʔ] (will), [ʔ] [ʔ] (will come)." ⁷ Fortunately the Chaozhou example was a simple one commonly spoken in daily life. Thus she understood the word meaning. Later there

⁷ The International Phonetic Alphabet transcription is given to the words pronounced in Chaozhou. ʔ represents a falling tone. ʔ represents a high tone.

was a time when Chen showed her to write 不知道 bù zhīdao (not know) stroke-by-stroke. While writing, he said out-loud the name of each stroke making up a character. For instance in 不 bù (not) he said, "héng 一 (horizontal stroke), 丿 gōu (hook stroke), ㇏ piě (left-falling stroke), and 丶 diǎn (dot stroke). Fourth mistook his saying to be the way Chinese people spelt a word.

During summer vacation, at night in the bedroom, Fifth reviewed her lecture notes taken in Mandarin classes in the previous semesters. She expanded the notes by adding words and their usage. After her junior year began in June 1995, she did homework assigned in the Chinese V course over weekend nights in the bedroom. She copied a lesson, translated it into Thai, and did an exercise. Pol, Second's five-year-old son, and Thep, her four-year-old-son, often watched her write Chinese when they spent their weekends with the family. In one afternoon when the parents, Third, Fifth, and Pol gathered in the living area, Pol, who loved stationery more than toys, asked Third and Fifth to dictate him some English words. After that he drew a tree and wrote down 木 mù (tree) near the tree without any previous instruction.

Once Fifth told Chen she would have to submit an essay in Chinese about her campus. He wrote it for her. He described her campus, student life, feelings towards the school's President, the teachers, and the family members who supported her. She read his writing critically to make a sound judgement if it could be applied in her work. After reading, she felt it was uninterestingly broad. She intended to write elaborately about one aspect of her campus life.

5.1.1.3 Songs

Third's choice of relaxation by singing Mandarin songs involved her much in reading and understanding Chinese. It was reading for pleasure during leisure time, bedtime, and even at work and for memorization which in turn increased her ability in Chinese. Her singing of Mandarin songs also caused Fifth to read and write Chinese and Rin, her helper, to sing them too.

Third liked singing Mandarin songs since studying Mandarin. One of her teachers at a Chinese evening school impressed her by translation of 《梅花》 Méihuā (the plump blossoms), a song describing the plump blossoms which are Taiwan's national flowers. The song made her feel great to be a Chinese who worked hard and survived hardship. Third bought several cassettes of present-day pop songs while visiting Kunming in China in April 1995. She practiced singing actively after the trip. While working at her table, she played the cassettes and sang along. Sometimes she sang happily while Father was talking with an old relative in the living area opposite

to her table. She also sang during the bedtime which disturbed Fourth who was reading a book. One of Third's favorite Chinese singers was Deng Lijun⁸. She sang Deng's songs by heart, for example, 《甜蜜蜜》 *Tián Mì mǐ* (sweet, happy) and 《小城故事》 *Xiǎochéng Gùshi* (a tale of a small town). Since he often saw her sing Chinese songs, once Chen brought her cassettes and compact disks of Chinese songs from China. She absolutely had no interest in these songs of patriotism, revolution, and admiration to the Chairman Mao. For the songs she just learned she sang along while looking at their lyrics printed in tiny Chinese script on the cassette's back cover. Third had a hard time seeing the script.

"I have to sing for relaxation," she told me once. She further said to sing Mandarin songs well she needed to understand their meaning so as to capture the feeling expressed in the songs. However she did not know Chinese script well enough to understand the whole songs. Accordingly she asked Fifth for help. Fifth copied the songs she assigned and wrote down their transcription and translation in Thai. When Third, the most powerful family member in terms of finance and important decision-making, asked her to do something, Fifth needed to fulfill Third's request. Otherwise she would receive no support when she asked. During her stay with the family in summer, Fifth sacrificed some of her study hours at night to copy, transcribe, and translate Mandarin songs. Some night she worked on them until one in the next morning. Although Third made no comments about her translation, Third continued to have her translate other songs. For convenience Third separated Fifth's transcription from the lyrics in Chinese script. She copied Fifth's transcription in one place so that she could sing smoothly while her eyes concentrated on the Thai transcription without the interference of Chinese script.

After the trip to Kunming Third sang Mandarin songs so much that Rin, her helper, could sing them as well. She sometimes practiced singing with the help of Fifth's transcription sheet. Hearing Third's frequent singing made it easy for Rin to be able to sing without knowledge of written Chinese once seeing the lyrics in Thai.

⁸ Deng Lijun or Tereza Teng was a well-known Chinese singer. She was born in 1953 in Yunlin County, Taiwan (*Sin Sian Yit Pao*, May 10 1995:12). Her ancestral home was in Hebei, China. In 1964 she won the first award of the national TV's singing contest. Since then she sang songs inside and outside Taiwan, for example, in Hong Kong, China, Japan, and South East Asian countries. Her voice sounded sad and sweet and some of her songs conveyed profound meanings. All these factors have contributed to her popularity among Chinese in Thailand over twenty years. She died of an asthma on May 8, 1995 at forty-two years of age in a hotel in Chiangmai, a province in the north of Thailand. After her death many stores in Bangkok became busy selling her cassettes and videos.

In one afternoon she stopped by the dessert stall where Fifth was working. Fifth heard her sing the first two lines of a song which Fifth had transcribed.

5.1.1.4 Dictionary

Fifth was the one who used a Chinese dictionary most in the home when reviewing lessons and doing homework. She read and copied what it presented to increase her knowledge of Chinese and to fulfill course requirements. She also used it when interacting with Third and Fifth to help them understand Chinese, for example, doing Third's task of Mandarin songs, teaching her to use the dictionary, and to check the pronunciation of Fourth's name.

In one of Fifth's Mandarin courses in her second year, a teacher taught the class three ways of looking up Chinese characters in dictionaries; their sound, radical, and four-corner structure. Her classmate used to pay her twenty baht (approximately eighty cents) for completing an assignment. Fifth looked up seventy Chinese characters in a dictionary based on their four-corner structure for her classmate. Later she liked this method better than when it was first introduced in class.

Teaching Third to look up Chinese script in a dictionary did not have a satisfactory result. There was a time when Third wanted to be able to use a Chinese dictionary so that she could depend on herself when not knowing any words in Mandarin songs. Fifth taught her three methods of how to find characters in a dictionary. After Fifth's oral instruction along with demonstration, Third preferred the radical method. She tried it by herself and still could not find the character she was looking for.

5.1.1.5 Chen's written Chinese to Fifth

There were many examples of Chen's writings used as materials for teaching Fifth Chinese. He did this type of writing before and during interaction with Fifth. Fifth read Chen's materials written for her when and after interacting with him in the living area and at the dessert stall. Her reading performed various functions in literacy events. One was to gain information in her curiosity of what he was writing. One evening Father, Chen, and Fifth gathered in the living area. Other members attended the maternal grandmother's funeral service. Fifth saw Chen writing at a table. She watched his writing for a while. She read it silently and found it was an obituary prose to her maternal grandmother.

The second purpose was to reinforce her understanding of Chen's verbal message. This often occurred when she did not follow his oral explanation. Then she

read the characters he wrote immediately for her. From the writing's point of view, Chen wrote to enhance his oral message. Once he asked her what she was looking for in the living area. She did not know how to call cotton wool in Mandarin. Later she found it, showed it to him, and asked for its word. "yàomián," he said. She did not get it. Accordingly he wrote down the word and its transcription in Pinyin to her, 药棉 yàomián.

The third type of reading happened when Chen intentionally wrote something for her without explanation in advance. For instance, two weeks before his return to China in November, he handed her a note written one evening in the living area and asked if she understood completely. Her reading was to maintain social relationship while interacting with him.

The fourth function of Fifth's reading occurred after interacting with Chen. After listening to his explanation of his obituary prose, she asked him to copy it for her. She brought the copy to the bedroom, read and reread it to cherish the family's life history and to increase her ability to consider the aesthetic value of his work. She kept the copy for future use in her Chinese-writing homework.

5.1.1.6 Letters

Father still kept in touch with his relatives in China. Since none of the family members could read and write Chinese letters for father, he asked his neighbor, friends, or Chen for help when he needed correspondence. Fifth's ability in written Chinese should be noted here. She had taken Mandarin as a foreign language for almost two years at college and she could read vernacular writings and write essays in Chinese script. Despite all these facts, it was difficult for her to identify Chinese script in the letters written by literate native speakers of Chinese who learned written Chinese since childhood and used it regularly. Their handwriting was illegible to Fifth. Also, some of the lexical items and sentence structures in the Chinese letters to Father may have been unfamiliar to her since they derived from Chaozhou, her *Father's first language which she understood very little*.


Chen's reading and writing the letters for Father was in response to his request so that Chen could maintain a good relationship with him, especially as Father helped him so much while he was in Bangkok. He read a letter after writing. His reading this time was to confirm with Father that what he wrote was what Father wanted. Then he rewrote the letter to make its final draft. He left the first draft to Father. During his stay in Bangkok in 1995, Chen wrote three letters for Father. Two of them were addressed to his relative in a village near Chen's. Another one was to

invite a Chinese traditional medicine man who treated Mother's leg ache to visit Father. Father expected this letter to be a good supporting document for the man's application for a visa to enter Thailand.

After returning from Kunming, Third asked Fifth to write to a Chinese guide who lead the tour group she had joined. She suggested Fifth write in Chinese and the guide would write back in Thai so that it would be a win win situation. Fifth did not comply with her suggestion because Fifth felt awkward to write to someone whom she had never met. Before Chen's third arrival in Bangkok in 1995, he mailed Fifth Chinese books. Fifth failed to write to him. For her, perhaps writing a Chinese letter was time-consuming and was not the best way to express her appreciation to him.

5.1.1.7 Geomancy Measuring Tape and Fortune Telling Tickets

Father was the only one in the family who practiced geomancy. He owned a geomancy measuring tape consisting of Arabic numerals, some Chinese script printed in red, and some in black. If something when measured fell into a character in red, it would mean a good location which would bring good luck and profits to its owner. If it were a character in black, in contrast, the location would bring bad luck. Father read the tape when practicing geomancy. For instance, he measured the location and size of Third's working table and the desk at the dessert stall. He read the scale to gain information about how the size and location should be before locating the items. After measuring the location of his mother-in-law's tomb which would be used after her death, Father recommended Mother and her siblings find another location.

Father was also the only one in the family who told others their fortune based on observation of their face. When he was in the market, people who knew his fortune telling ability would surround him and request him to tell them their fortune. Once Father described a young woman's face which looked rectangular like the character  guó (country). When he drew fortune telling tickets printed in Chinese, however, he needed one to read their description for him

I have discussed the functions of reading and writing materials in Chinese in the X Family's home. Now I turn to the materials in the home which were read only. They are: Chinese script in TV and videos, calendar, and Chinese checkers.

5.1.2 Materials only Read in the Home

5.1.2.1 Chinese Script in TV and Videos

Although he understood the literary Chaozhou well, Father still read the Chinese subtitles in Chaozhou opera videos. He read them aloud in Chaozhou

pronunciation. His reading was to educate himself in written Chinese. He also read the palace names in the Forbidden City video spoken in Mandarin. Since he did not understand Mandarin, his reading was to help him follow the happenings in the scenes.

Third usually watched two Taiwanese soap operas on weekday afternoons. They were dubbed in Thai and provided with Chinese subtitles. Despite understanding the stories from the Thai dubbing, she read the Chinese script. Many times she could not complete the whole line of subtitle. Once she read 六個夢 liùge mèng (six dreams), part of a soap opera's title, and interpreted it as six stories in the soap opera. She also read and translated the lyrics of a theme out-loud, for example, 心上人 xīn shàng rén (one in my heart) as "I have someone in my heart." Father praised her for the translation. Reading the Chinese seen in the soap operas increased Third's knowledge of Chinese and profound understanding of the story which she could not gain from the Thai dubbing.

After Fourth had studied Mandarin for three months, she began reading the Chinese subtitles and felt she could read only 我們 women (we) and 你們 nimen (plural you). Since she paid much attention to the subtitles, she ended up not understanding the stories. Sometimes she read and translated some Chinese words flashed on the screen, for example, 小雨點兒 xiǎo yǔdiǎnr (small raindrop), the name of a cute girl in a soap opera. She read 想要 xiǎng yào (want to) which she had learned in class. Once she saw 走 zou translated into Thai as "to go" in a Chinese series. She wondered about the difference between it and 去 qù which Som, her second Chinese language teacher, told the class meant "to go". Some simplified characters such as 只 zhǐ (only) and 才 cái (indicating an event just happening) in the subtitle reminded her of Som's explanation that they were used in the texts of complex characters so much that they became more common than their complex form. Once she initiated a talk about the use of two forms of script with Third and Fifth while 才 appeared on the screen. To my surprise, she concentrated better when watching Chinese TV series at the stall and learned more about Chinese script than watching them in the living area in the home. This was because the talk of other family members and the ice-grinding noise from the next door shop disturbed her. Once she lay down watching the series, on the other hand, she would sleep soon.

Fourth traded her enjoyment of the Chinese TV series for the ability to read Chinese. She was capable of integrating what she learned inside and outside the classroom. She also passed down her knowledge of Chinese to others through talks on the Chinese script seen on TV.

Chen read the subtitles too. Nonetheless he read them because he could not understand the Thai dubbing. He felt the subtitles in Chinese movies and TV series from Taiwan and Hong Kong ran so fast that he could not finish the whole line sometimes.

Third called Fifth on one weekday to encourage her to watch the Chinese soap operas so as to practice reading their subtitles. Fifth, however, rarely watched them because she spent most of her weekdays preparing for classes. When she was home during weekends, she worked at the stall and the series were not on air. She watched them together with other members in the living area during a break after selling food days and nights in the Chinese Vegetarian Festival.

5.1.2.2 Calendar

Father read the calendar above his regular seat in the living area most. Each of its page had the Arabic numerals showing the date in the western calendar, the Chinese numerals designating the date in the Chinese traditional calendar, and the description printed in Chinese and Thai about the date.⁹ Father usually updated the calendar by tearing off the page of the day before. When he forgot this routine, other members such as Duan, his seven-year-old granddaughter, would remind him. He read the calendar for several purposes. One was to gain information for spiritual security in daily scheduling. For instance, he read the description before setting up a date to go out with three siblings to find a good location for their grandparents' tomb. He selected the date which, according to its description, was a lucky day to practice geomancy. Once Mother was talking on the phone about attending her relative's funeral. Father heard the conversation. Immediately he took down the calendar on the wall, read the description, and confirmed to Mother that the ones who were born in the years of the monkey and the tiger should have not attended the funeral.

The second purpose was to gain information about the fortune of a new-born child. Once he handed Third a page in the calendar of the date when one of her helpers delivered a child. He wanted Fourth to pass it to her helper. He said the date was a good day.

The third purpose was to check or confirm the upcoming events. The calendar reminded him of Guanyin's holy days when he would play sermon tapes to worship

⁹ Konanthakiat (1995:47) stated in *พี่น้องน้อย* (Chinese children) that no western calendar in Thailand has the dates in Chinese traditional calendar printed in Thai. I have also found they are printed in Chinese only.

her. The calendar also reminded him of Chen's coming arrival to Bangkok and Guanyin's birthday which would be celebrated at her pavilion in Chen's village.

Mother read the Chinese dates in the calendar to gain information about the schedule of Chinese festivals so that she could prepare things to be used for making and selling food during the festivals. She was a perfect reminder of other members' birthday according to the Chinese calendar. Father's habit of reading the Chinese calendar influenced Chen. He read the date's description before attending the funeral service of Mother's mother. However he ignored its warning: the ones born in the years of the pig and the snake should not attend a funeral service on the day.

5.1.2.3 Chinese Checkers

Father and Fifth were only family members who could play Chinese checkers. He had taught Fourth but she had no interest. On one evening in summer of 1995, Duan was watching *Judge Pao*, a Chinese TV series from Taiwan, in the living area. Third was talking to the husband of one of her helpers. Father and Fifth were playing several games of Chinese checkers. They read the Chinese script on their checker before taking pieces or escaping from the other side. Once the helper's husband asked Father for the script meaning. Father read them in Chaozhou and continued playing the game. He was so engrossed in the checkers that he forgot the helper's question. Father's and Fifth's reading happened in recreation during leisure time.

I have discussed the X Family's reading and writing of the Chinese printed materials in the home. The following section investigates their reading and writing of the environmental prints in Chinese.

5.2 Environmental Print

Among those in the family who knew Chinese script, Father was the one who actively read Chinese in the environmental print. He read signs of stores, many of which were written in Chinese and Thai. Most of the Thai names designated the sound of store names in Chaozhou. Father matched the Thai names with the Chinese script in the Chinese names. As a result he learned to read Chinese script. Furthermore his excellent knowledge of Chaozhou helped him understand the script meaning. Father read the signs to educate himself in written Chinese. He was also the one in the family who created the environmental print in Chinese. Before the Chinese New Year in 1995, he filled the glass door with Chinese New Year posters which had blessings printed in Chinese. He bought the posters from Bangkok's China Town. After the festival Third took down several posters to make the door look

clean. Despite the fact that many people who saw the posters could not understand the script, Father still showed them in public to express his pride in Chinese ethnicity and culture.

Mother read the Chinese numerals printed on a lantern of her dead relative at his funeral. Mother complained it was a pity she did not buy a lottery with numerals in accordance with the ones seen at the lantern. Otherwise she would have won it.¹⁰

During the day Third sometimes took a break by stopping by the dessert stall where Fifth was working. They moved to the cassette stall opposite to the dessert stall to read the lyrics of Mandarin songs printed at the cassette's back cover. They were reading for temporary entertainment during their break from work which, many times, was a boring routine.

Fifth appreciated the beauty of Chinese script. Once in a department store near her house she was drawn by 葵 guí (the last of the ten Heavenly Stem), one of the Chinese characters printed on a T-shirt imported from Japan. She could not help watching it for a while despite no intention of buying it. In another incident two Taiwanese came to buy her dessert. They wore T-shirts with Chinese script printed in the cursive style. Fifth could not identify it.

During the Chinese Vegetarian Festival, the family decorated their food stall with a string of pieces of yellow paper above it. Each piece of paper had 齋 zhāi (vegetarian food) printed in red. A retailer of one brand of vegetarian oil gave it to Fourth when he sold her oil. The family put up the signs to signify their selling of vegetarian food during the ten-day festival. The family members were too busy to read the print.

6. Further Discussions

The flourishing of Chinese literacy co-occurred with the decline in spoken Chinese in the family under this study. Both phenomena increased generation by generation. Namely the family's Thai-born children read and wrote Chinese more and better than they spoke Chaozhou. I ascribe this to two factors, the availability of Chinese texts and the increasing number of Chinese literates in the home. The young Chinese possessed a higher level of literacy through the study and usage of Standard Chinese as compared to the parent who was partial literate in Chaozhou, a less prestigious speech variety. I shall summarize the Chinese literacy practices of the

¹⁰ Many Chinese in Thailand believe that the Chinese numerals printed on a dead person's lantern would appear in lotteries. Thus it is common to see a lottery seller in a Chinese funeral surrounded by people who are busy selecting some tickets.

members who actively read and wrote Chinese. I shall also highlight factors promoting their practices.

Father's uses of written Chinese were much related to Chinese culture and tradition. He practiced geomancy, did fortune telling, and used the Chinese calendar. Being an overseas Chinese orphan in Thailand who had a far better living today than his childhood in China and early days of his family life made him proud of himself as Chinese. This combined with a pride over the growth of China during the recent decade caused him to encourage his children to begin studying Mandarin and learn to read and write Chinese in 1985. He thought China would rule the world in the future. Accordingly his children would have a difficult life if they had no knowledge of Chinese.

Third's uses of written Chinese were much involved with relaxation and entertainment. She sang Mandarin songs and read Chinese subtitles in TV soap operas from Taiwan. Spending most of her time working and seeing Father in the home seven days a week caused her much boredom. When Father enjoyed drinking beer in the home and was drunk, she had to put with his talks which many times provoked her anger. Furthermore, being the person who had to be responsible for the family's finance and others' behavior, such as Brother's drinking habit, brought her anxiety, worry, and pressure. She needed to find a way out. Singing Mandarin songs and watching Chinese soap operas allowed her to escape from the reality in the home and enter an alien world where she heard and spoke Mandarin and saw Chinese script.

Other members in the family disagreed with Fourth's choice of spending three hours commuting between home and school to attend Mandarin class for two evening hours. They commented that her study caused Mother to look after the stall in the evening. Some members felt her study was unpractical as her chances to make use of her study outside the classroom were very rare. She should have studied English or received vocational skill training. No one was aware of her motive to devote herself to the study of Mandarin, the reading and writing in Chinese. She wanted to make up for her lack of educational support from the parents. While Brother and Fifth attended college, she had to quit school after the ninth grade and began working full-time for the family. Sometimes Fifth's classmates in high school stopped by the house. Fourth heard their talk with Fifth. She felt it was interesting and schooling widened one's thoughts. Whereas other siblings attended Mandarin class conducted in the home by a Chinese neighbor whom Father hired, she had to sell dessert at the stall. "While I was walking into the house to get things for work, I heard the sound from

the Chinese class on the second floor, 'yī, èr, sān, sì... (one, two, three, four...)' I kept wondering why I had to sell dessert. Why couldn't I myself study Chinese as the children of other families could?" To me it is not surprising that, once she was economically independent, she decided to study Chinese despite several constraints.

Fifth's reading and writing in Chinese was much involved with school-related materials. There was a time when she reduced her attention to the study of Chinese, which Chen noticed. She concentrated more on the study of English literature, a very difficult major. Nonetheless she continued reading and writing Chinese as part of her degree's requirements. It is worthwhile noting the X Family's children studied Chinese in the time when its status had improved for a decade due to changes in the international economy and polity. Normalization between the governments of Thailand and China in 1975, China's open door policy since 1980s, combined with the increase of joint ventures between the peoples of Thailand and Chinese-speaking countries made the Chinese language to be viewed as useful in economy rather than in politics. Chinese was no longer a language to be used for propagandizing Maoism and Communism to threaten the national security. It became one of the widely used languages in international business. The Thai government allowed schools to begin to offer Chinese courses in response to an increasing demand of Chinese fluency at work. Based on my observation of the vacancy advertisements in the *Bangkok Post*, one of the leading English daily papers in Bangkok, from 1993 to 1995, there was an average of twenty positions per month requiring Chinese fluency, either spoken written or both. Two decades ago employment requiring Chinese fluency was limited to secretaries and telephone operators; today it has expanded to sales, engineering, and factory management.

The changes in the international economy and polity which I have mentioned allowed much travel between Thailand and China. The X Family's parents had met Chen in China and later he stayed with the family in Bangkok. His presence in the home was certainly an asset to Chinese literacy practices in the family. This was due to his support to their reading and writing in Chinese. Firstly, despite speaking Mandarin with interference from Chaozhou and writing Chinese with wrongly written and mispronounced characters, Chen's six years of education along with regular and natural use of Chinese script throughout his life in China made him know Chinese well enough to transfer it to the family. Secondly, Chen had a positive attitude towards learning. Although he had left school twenty-five years ago, he continued studying Chinese by himself. While working at a stall in the market, he read and wrote words, phrases, and sentences on old newspaper and used cardboard

available. He read what had been written, transcribed it in Pinyin, and corrected himself. Thirdly, Chen felt thankful for the Family who offered enormous help especially when in trouble, for instance, putting up bail for him and letting him stay in the home without charge. One of the ways he employed to express his gratitude was to assist the Family with Chinese. He read and wrote letters in Chinese for Father. Whether being requested or not, he explained what related to Mandarin and Chinese script to the children in his daily interaction with them.

7. Concluding Remarks

Chinese is one of the major language groups of the world, spoken by more than one billion people. Chinese-speaking communities are found not only in China, Taiwan, but in many other parts of the world, especially in Southeast Asia and in the United States. Although Chinese literacy requires a greater effort for mastery than literacy in other languages, many groups of overseas Chinese, for example, the family under this study, strive to maintain Chinese literacy. This study reveals the roles and functions of Chinese literacy practices in the everyday context of a Chinese family in Bangkok. It also investigates the factors promoting the practices. These factors are examined on various perspectives: individual, family, and international. The results of this study have suggested topics for my upcoming research related to the literacy practices among Chinese families in Bangkok: the transference of Chinese literacy from the second generation who are Chinese literate to their offspring, the role of Chinese literacy toward the maintenance and shift of local varieties of Chinese, the role of Chinese and non-Chinese literacy practices toward the ethnic Chinese identity.

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