

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

Due to the rapid economic growth and increasing political power in international context, the People's Republic of China has become a new world power which has lots of influence on other regions around the world, especially in the economic sphere. Consequently, Chinese has been gaining in popularity in many countries and has been used for communication worldwide.

Chinese is one of the world's official languages as well as English and French. Especially after China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and its success in the establishment of Free Trade Agreements (FTA's) with many countries, the People's Republic of China has played a crucial role in international trade and the political sphere, and Chinese has been used widely for global communication, particularly in terms of trade and investment.

Up to now, Chinese has been spoken by nearly one-fourth of the world's population (Liang, 2001), and the teaching of Chinese is growing worldwide. Chinese as a foreign language has become a popular elective course for students around the world. Additionally, the governments of many countries have paid more attention to Chinese language teaching and have established Chinese language courses at secondary schools and higher educational institutions (Cui, 2006).

In Thailand, the popularity of the Chinese language is rapidly increasing as well. People, nowadays, especially students and those of working age came to realize the importance of the Chinese language. They are more interested in learning the Chinese language as it can benefit their future careers and offer them better job opportunities. Besides, as the People's Republic of China steps into a new era in the world economy, Thailand and other countries will gain lots of benefits and opportunities to increase exports as well as foreign investment (Kavi Chongkittavorn, 2003, p. 15).

In fact, Thai-Chinese relations can be traced back to the ancient times. Historically, Thailand, known as Siam at that time, was in contact with the Chinese for thousands of years since the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods (between 1257 and

1767). Then after the sack of the Ayutthaya in 1782, a large number of Chinese streamed into the country during the early Bangkok dynasty. By the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the Chinese began to set up businesses. Their wealth improved and they became a new class in Thai society (Pathan & Dorsey, 2005, p. 42). Since then, the Chinese language has been used for trade or business in Thailand, and there have been many Chinese schools established across the country. However, in the 1950s, the Chinese language teaching had been restricted due to the revolution in China and the invasion of communism to Thailand. Thai-born Chinese were cut off from their own culture and language in many ways, and one of them was the restriction of Chinese classes at schools (Pathan & Dorsey, 2005, p.44). Therefore, Chinese language teaching during that time was at a very quiet and slow pace. When Thailand and the People's Republic of China established official diplomatic relations in 1975 (The Nation, 2003, p.16), trade and investment between the two countries strengthened, and the teaching of Chinese language in Thailand has become popular again.

Chinese language teaching has been widely practiced in the country for nearly a century. In the past, however, it had been popular in private Chinese schools only. There were fewer public schools across the country which offered Chinese language courses. Also, most public schools had problems of a lack of standard curriculums, learning aids, including experienced teachers to support Chinese language teaching and learning (สำนักงานคณะกรรมการการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน, 2548).

The government, therefore, has seen the importance of improving student proficiency in the Chinese language. In 2005, with the co-operation of the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), a non-governmental and non-profit organization affiliated to the Ministry of Education of the People Republic's of China (Office of Chinese Language Council International, n.d.), Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), the Ministry of Education of Thailand, has developed a framework with the aim of supporting teaching the Chinese language in primary, secondary schools, and higher educational institutions throughout the country. Also, a framework has been developed to enhance the Chinese proficiency of students in order that they can use Chinese for global communication effectively

especially in the international trading sphere, and compete in both the domestic and international labour markets in the future (สำนักงานคณะกรรมการการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน, 2548). As a result, this framework will also help increase the country's competency in the international commercial market.

The Chinese course at Datdaruni School has been offered since the academic year 2003. During the first three years, Mathayom 1 students had not been required to study Chinese as a compulsory course. In 2006, the Chinese course became compulsory for Mathayom 1 students. A Thai teacher who is fluent in Chinese was in charge of teaching all the compulsory Chinese classes for Mathayom 1. The course content covered basic conversation, numbers, pronunciation symbols (or Pin-Yin), and basic vocabularies. However, it turned out that only 90 of the students in Mathayom 2 in the academic year 2007 chose to take the Chinese course as an elective one while the other 410 did not.

This study revealed the opinions of Mathayom 2 students on the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1 and also the problems they faced throughout the course as well as their suggestions on the course content, teaching materials and teaching aids, teaching style, and usefulness of the knowledge. The results derived from this study can be used as a guideline for Datdaruni School to ascertain the causes of the low enrollment rate in the elective Chinese course of Mathayom 2 students as well as to find the methods for improving the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 in order to encourage more students to enroll in the elective Chinese course in the following academic years.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

### **1.2.1 Main Problem**

What are the opinions of Mathayom 2 students at Datdaruni School on the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1?

### **1.2.2 Sub-Problems**

1. What are the attitudes of Mathayom 2 students at Datdaruni School towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1?

2. To what degree is the low enrollment rate in the elective Chinese course of Mathayom 2 students related to their attitudes towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1?

3. What are the factors that affect attitudes of Mathayom 2 students towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1?

4. What are the problems that Mathayom 2 students faced and their suggestions on the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1?

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.3.1 Main Objective**

To reveal the opinions of Mathayom 2 students at Datdaruni School on the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1.

#### **1.3.2 Sub-Objectives**

1. To investigate the attitudes of Mathayom 2 students towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1?

2. To investigate the factors – course content, teaching materials and teaching aids, teaching style, and usefulness of the knowledge that affect attitudes of Mathayom 2 students towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1.

3. To compare the attitudes towards the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 of the two groups of Mathayom 2 students – the students who took the elective Chinese course in the academic year 2007 and those who did not in order to learn the causes of the low enrollment rate in the elective Chinese course of Mathayom 2 students.

4. To find out the problems Mathayom 2 students faced and their suggestions towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1.

### **1.4 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

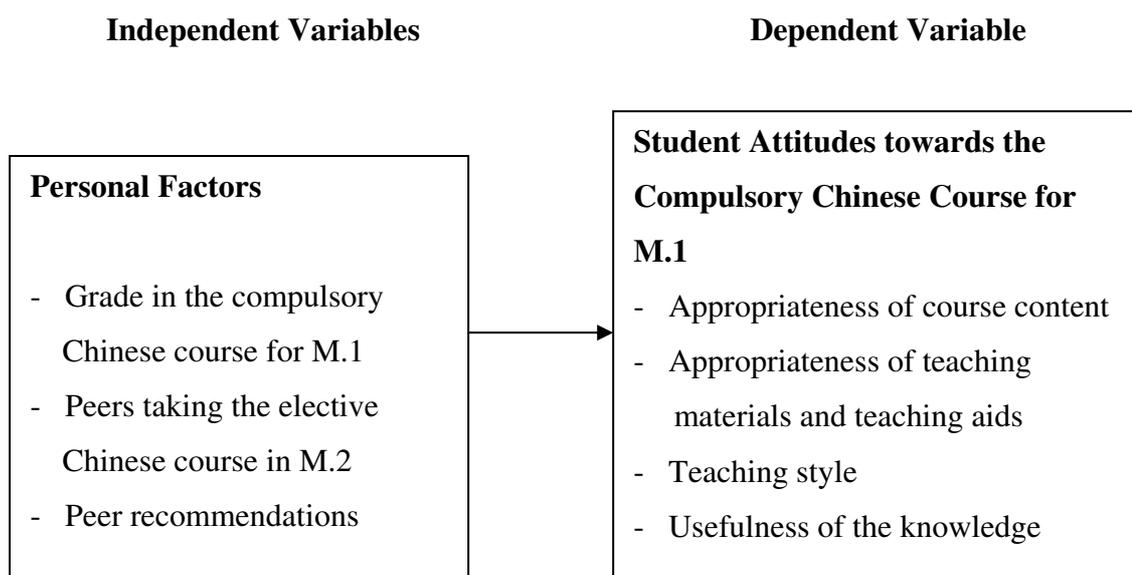
The study covered the factors that affect the attitudes of Mathayom 2 students towards the compulsory Chinese course they had attended in Mathayom 1.

The independent variables consisted of personal factors – grade in the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 and peer influence, and the dependent

variable was student attitudes towards the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom

1. See the diagram below.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of the study showing the relationship between independent and dependent variables



#### 1.4.1 Hypotheses

1. Grades that the respondents got from the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 influenced the respondents' decision to take the elective Chinese course in Mathayom 2.

2. Peers taking the elective Chinese course in Mathayom 2 influenced the respondents' decision to take the course.

3. Peer recommendations influenced the respondents' decision to take the elective Chinese course in Mathayom 2.

#### 1.4.2 Definitions of Terms

Definitions of the terms of this study are as the following:

**Students** refer to Mathayom 2 students of Datdaruni School in the academic year 2007, divided into two groups – Mathayom 2 students who took the elective Chinese course in the academic year 2007 and those who did not. All of

them had attended the compulsory Chinese course when they were in Mathayom 1 according to school requirements.

**Grade** refers to an evaluated score that each student received in the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1.

**Peers taking the elective Chinese course in Mathayom 2** refer to the students' friend(s) who took the elective Chinese in Mathayom 2.

**Peer recommendations** refer to recommendations from the students' friend(s) on taking the elective Chinese course in Mathayom 2.

**Attitudes** refer to the students' opinions and feelings towards the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 in terms of the appropriateness of its course content, appropriateness of teaching materials and teaching aids, teaching style including usefulness of the knowledge.

**Compulsory Chinese course** refers to the Mandarin Chinese course which all Mathayom 1 students at Datdaruni School have been required to study since the academic 2006.

## **1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study focused on the students' opinions of the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 at Datdaruni School. The participants of this study were two groups of Mathayom 2 students – the students who took the elective Chinese course in the academic year 2007 and those who did not. All of the participants had already attended the compulsory Chinese course in Mathayom 1 according to the schools' requirements. The factors that affected their attitudes towards it as well as their suggestions on the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 were taken into consideration.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

1.6.1 This study showed the students' opinions of the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 at Datdaruni School, and also revealed their suggestions as well as the problems they faced throughout the course.

1.6.2 This study drew the school's attention to the factors that affect student attitudes towards the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 – course content, teaching materials and teaching aids, teaching style, and usefulness of the knowledge.

1.6.3 The results derived from this study could be used as a guideline for Datdaruni School to find methods for improving the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 in order to encourage more students to enroll in the elective Chinese course in the following academic years.

## **1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The study of student attitudes towards the compulsory Chinese course for Mathayom 1 at Datdaruni School, Chachoengsao province is divided into five chapters.

Chapter one consists of the background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, variables and definitions, scope of the study, significance of the study, and organization of the study.

Chapter two comprises the review of literature relevant to this study.

Chapter three describes the methodology of this study which includes a selection of the subjects, the materials, the procedures used in data collection, and the data analysis.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study derived from the survey.

Chapter five includes the discussions and conclusions of the findings, including recommendations.