

## **Yunnan Chinese for Thai people of Chinese Descent on Doi Mae Salong Nok in Chiang Rai, Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to explore the mother tongue of Yunnan Chinese at Mae Salong Nok Subdistrict, in Chiang Rai, and to study the mechanisms of language development of overseas Chinese to use the information as a guideline for planning the language and education policies for the Thai government, and to continue to preserve the mother tongue of the Yunnan Chinese in the future. The population used was 112 Yunnan Chinese. Applying linguistic theories was used, and the data were collected from questionnaires, observations, and formal and informal interviews. The results showed that families, communities, and schools of the Chinese on Doi Mae Salong Nok used their mother tongue as the main language, and their utilitarian identity and sentimental identity towards the Chinese language were very high. This is mainly due to the high clustering rate and intermarriage between ethnic groups, and the acceptance of ethnic identity was excellent.

**Keywords:** mother tongue, Yunnan Chinese, Mae Salong Nok, attitude

## Introduction

The Yunnan Chinese Thai community uses many dialects of local Chinese with a Linchang accent as the mother tongue, which is one of the main dialects of the Yunnan-Chinese language of communication. Other accents exist, such as Tengchong and Guokan dialects (also known as the “Malipa Language”). Mandarin Chinese and Thai are also used today. In some age groups, for example, some elderly people still use the language of minorities living in the neighborhood as the main language in the community because their community location, ethnic groups, lifestyles, and divergent cultures have a long history.

The location of community is a famous large Chinese community. It is located on Doi Mae Salong in Nok Mae Salong Nok Subdistrict, Mae Fah Luang District in Chiang Rai in northern Thailand. It is close to the borders of Thailand, Burma, and Laos. The east of Mae Salong Nok border is close to Pa Tueng Sub-district in Mae Chan District, the west border is close to Burma, the south is also close to Pa Tueng Sub-district in Mae Chan District, and the north is close to Mae Salong Nai. It covers a total area of 115.26 square kilometers. Doi Mae Salong Nok is located on a high mountain with an average height of about 1,200 meters above sea level. The mountain roads are rugged, and traffic routes are inconvenient. In the past few years, the Thai government has built two paved roads connecting the mountain and the lower part of the mountain, and traffic conditions have been significantly improved. Since the Chinese community of Mae Salong Nok is located on a high mountain, the weather is cool all year round, and this is suitable for the dwellers to live on cultivation as their main occupation.

As for the history of the community, in 1949, there was a conflict between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang Party. The Chinese Communist Party gained victory over the Kuomintang, bringing China under the communist regime. In this situation, some of the Kuomintang armies had to retreat to Formosa Island, Taiwan, and one part of the Kuomintang army in the amount of 2 armies was placed in Yunnan Province, China. Later, both armies were defeated again by the Communist Party and retreated to Laos and Vietnam. Some parts retreated to Burma's Shan State in 1950. When the Burmese authorities pushed the Kuomintang army out of the country, some of the Chinese nationalist Kuomintang troops began to migrate to Thailand between 1950 and 1956, and the Thai government later allowed immigrants to live in the northern region of Thailand like Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, and Chiang Rai. In Chiang Rai, their main location is on Doi Mae Salong in Mae Salong Nok Subdistrict, Mae Fah Luang District. At present, it is an area where a large number of Yunnan Chinese people live. Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang troops have many honors and feats due to many deaths and disabilities. They had made great contributions to Thailand. The Thai government, therefore, allowed them and their families to convert their nationality to Thais fully. Most of their families were descendants of the former Kuomintang Fifth Army, as well as minorities and some refugees fleeing. At present, Doi Mae Salong has more ethnic groups. Han Chinese, Akha, Tai, Lahu, and Lisu people live there.

As for community life, the area's ethnic population is approximately 15,000, with the Han Chinese as the largest nationality, accounting for about 40%. The majority of them get married within their ethnic group, and a minority of them get married between ethnic groups. Most people celebrate Thai festivals such as Songkran and Loy Krathong and traditional Chinese festivals such as the Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Festival (paying homage to the Zongzi), and Mid-Autumn Festival (paying respect to the moon). Compared to Doi Mae Salong

Nai, the economic development and education in Doi Mae Salong Nok schools are quite better. The tourism economy has received cooperation from many agencies in the past few years. There has been serious development among people from different ethnic groups together. The villagers practice different religions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam which is world-famous, and some still believe in nature and ancestor worship. The villagers are basically Chinese.

The main population in the area around Doi Mae Salong Nok is Chinese Yunnan. They use the local Chinese dialect of Linchang as the main language. In today's society, they contact more and more people outside their community. There is unlimited exposure to language and culture. Therefore, the Yunnan Chinese people in Doi Mae Salong Nok use not only their mother tongue to communicate but also Mandarin and Thai. As a result, the languages are forged to create a variety of languages and form a multilingual environment. The local people there can communicate in many languages or dialects. In other words, the status of the Chinese mother tongue of the local people in Doi Mae Salong Nok has been affected by various factors. Therefore, the researchers are interested in studying the usage of the Yunnan-Chinese language in Linchang's accent of Thai people of Yunnan-Chinese descent in Mae Salong Nok Subdistrict, Mae Fah Luang District in Chiang Rai. It is expected that the findings can be useful in studying the language of ethnic groups, including the inheritance of the language of Thai people of Chinese descent in this and nearby areas. They can also be a guideline for planning the country's language policy in the future.

## **Mother Tongue Concepts**

Li Yuming (2003) conceptualizes "native language" as an ethnic concept that reflects the individual or the perception of the members of the ethnic group in that ethnic language and ethnic culture. It includes ethnic loyalty. The mother tongue indicates a person directly but does not indicate regional variables. The dialect is considered the primary language, and it should not be regarded as the mother tongue, both personal and ethnic. Rights in the mother tongue are indivisible. The mother tongue does not depend on the sequence of language acquisition or the acquisition of that language. However, Wang Ning and Sun Wei (2005) proposed the differences between natural and social mother tongues. They said a distinction must be made between the two kinds of mother tongues. The mother tongue generally refers to the national language. The acquired language for personal speech learned through a natural learning process in childhood is called the natural mother tongue. This natural mother tongue is inseparable from the environment and state of each language because the spoken language that a person learns for the first time is usually a dialect. Therefore, the natural mother tongue is the dialect of most national languages. The second concept is the social mother tongue. The social mother tongue corresponds to a foreign language. It is the language that the whole society uses to communicate with foreign countries. Therefore, it must be the standard language of a country only. Each person enters the process of learning written language, and it will enter the standard language category.

In addition, Dai Qingsha and He Junfang (1997) proposed that the "Mother tongue" is what human beings learn their first language from childhood regardless of whether the first language is the original ethnic language or not. If a person learns two languages simultaneously from a young age, both are his mother tongues. Psychological standards start from a personality point of view where an individual emotionally asserts which language is their mother tongue. It not only reflects a person's actual level of language proficiency and behavior, but It also reflects, to some extent, one's ethnic consciousness. It can be found that the mother tongue is

something that humans begin to learn as a person and ethnic group in nature and a social context and learning other languages at the same time. Family is a very important area of language use, and most people naturally acquire a language from their family. People generally use their native language most easily, naturally, informally, and regularly. To understand the use of the mother tongue in the local Chinese in Doi Mae Salong Nok, the researchers analyzed their use of their mother tongue when communicating with different family members.

## **Language Attitude Concepts**

Language attitude is one of the major influences on language behavior. Dai Qingxia (1993) states that "Language concept or language attitude refers to people's attitudes about the value of language use as well as attitudes about the position, status, and roles in the development of language" Attitudes toward language can be divided into two categories, namely, cognitive attitudes and emotional attitudes. Cognitive attitudes are largely determined by the functioning of a particular language or in the process of using its polymorphisms, i.e., "the speaker's or listener's rational assessment of the linguistic values in practice and social status of that language" (Chen Songcen, 1999: 81). Besides, Amara (1989) stated that attitude towards language means values or opinions about status, social status and the correctness of any particular language and also include attitudes or opinions towards the speakers of that language.

## **Objectives**

1. To explore the use of the Linchang mother tongue of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Mae Salong Nok Subdistrict, Mae Fah Luang District in Chiang Rai.
2. To analyze the ability to use the Linchang mother tongue of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent.
3. To analyze the linguistic attitudes of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent.

## **Research Methodology**

This study is qualitative research. The sample consisted of 120 persons divided into 4 age groups: 1). Elderly group of 30 persons aged 56 years and over, 2). Middle-aged group of 30 persons, aged 36-55, 3). Youth group of 30 persons aged 18-35 years, and 4). Children group of 30 persons aged under 17 years old.

Three kinds of research tools were utilized: they are 1) A set of questionnaires on language used 2) Interview forms 3) A set of questionnaires on language attitudes as following:

### ***1) A set of questionnaires on language used***

Section 1 is about general data of the respondents and section 2; there are 51 questions constructed to collect data on language used as mother tongue, second language and third language. The IOC value is 0.98.

### ***2) Interview forms on conversational ability assessment.***

There are 18 questions. It was divided into four levels of language proficiency namely, "Proficient," "General," "Little comprehension," and "No comprehension" according to the following criteria: 1) "Proficient" means the speaker can use a particular language or variations of a language to communicate in everyday life and have correct listening and speaking skills.

2) "General" means the speaker can normally use the language for basic communication, but sometimes the communication is not expressed correctly. 3) "Little comprehension" means the speaker can generally understand but cannot speak fluently, and they can use simple expressions in everyday life. 4) "No comprehension" means the speaker does not understand the language used, therefore, is unable to communicate. The IOC value is 0.98. It is to self-assess their language proficiency from the real environment context; therefore, the data were regarded as reliable and fair, believable and impartial. The IOC value is 0.89.

### 3) *A set of questionnaires on language attitudes*

There are 16 questions asking on attitudes of the speakers in that area. The IOC value is 0.94.

## Research Results

### *1. The Use of Yunnan Chinese in the Linchang Accent of Thai People of Yunnan Chinese Descent in Mae Salong Nok Subdistrict, Mae Fah Luang District in Chiang Rai*

The use of the Linchang mother tongue of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent can be classified into 3 characteristics: the use of the mother tongue in families, communities, and schools. Details are as follows:

#### *1.1 Linchang Yunnan Chinese accent usage in the family*

Based on the study of the use of Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent of Thai Yunnan Chinese in the family, it was found that the family used the Yunnan mother tongue with a Linsang accent for communication at a high level. All elderly age group persons aged 56 years and over or 100% used such an accent when communicating with family members such as siblings, spouses, and children. All middle-aged persons aged 36-55 years, or 100%, also used such an accent when communicating with family members such as grandparents, parents, and siblings. However, only 96.3% of them used it to communicate with spouses and children. As for the youth group persons aged 18-35 years, 90.0% of them used it to communicate with grandparents, 96.7% with their parents, 93.3% with siblings, 85.0% with their spouses, and 90.0% with their children. For the children aged under 17 years, 86.7% of them used such an accent when communicating with grandparents, 80% with parents, and 73.3% with siblings. Details are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** *Linchang Chinese mother tongue accent usage of Yunnan Chinese Thais in the family*

interlocutor Groups (n)		Grandparents	Parents	Siblings	Spouses	Children
Elderly Group (25)	n	-	-	25/25	25/25	25/25
	Average	-	-	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Middle-aged Group (27)	Numbers	27/27	27/27	27/27	26/27	26/27
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	96.3%	96.3%
Youth Group (30)	Numbers	27/30	29/30	28/30	17/20	18/20
	Percentage	90.0%	96.7%	93.3%	85.0%	90.0%
Children Group (30)	Numbers	26/30	24/30	22/30	-	-
	Percentage	86.7%	80.0%	73.3%	-	-

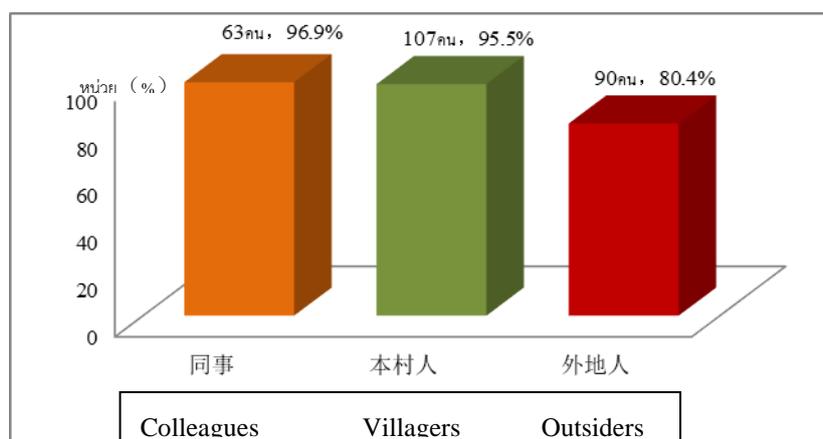
Note: 20 out of 30 persons in the Youth Group were married and had children.

It can be seen that most of the grandparents, Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent are second-generation Chinese and only a handful of them were first generation Chinese. Very

few Chinese people can speak only their native language. These people respect their ancestral country and homeland and they sincerely hope that others will also use their mother tongue. Therefore, using mother tongue to communicate with grandparents is not only a sign of respect for grandparents but also make communications run smoothly. Mother tongue is the language that parents use the most in everyday life and the group of young children who communicated with their parents also communicated in their mother tongue. Brothers and sisters come from the same family and belong to the same generation, they grow up in the same environment and use the same language, when communicating they naturally speak their mother tongue. The proportion of couples who speak their native language is high. The main reason is from Marriage of Chinese Doi Mae Salong Nok is a marriage within the Yunnan ethnic group.

### 1.2 The Use of Linchang Yunnan Chinese Accent in the Community

Based on the study of the use of Yunnan Chinese with Linchang accent of Thai Yunnan Chinese in the community, it was found that when communicating with colleagues, it was used in a high ratio of 96.9% because many Yunnan Chinese Thais in Doi Mae Salong Nok worked in tea shops, restaurants, hotels, monument areas, coffee shops and other places in the community. Most of their colleagues were Chinese in the same community. Everyone used Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent to communicate with each other at work. When communicating with villagers in the community, 95.5% of them used such an accent, and 80.4% used it with outsiders. Details of the accent used in the 3 groups are shown in Chart 1 below:



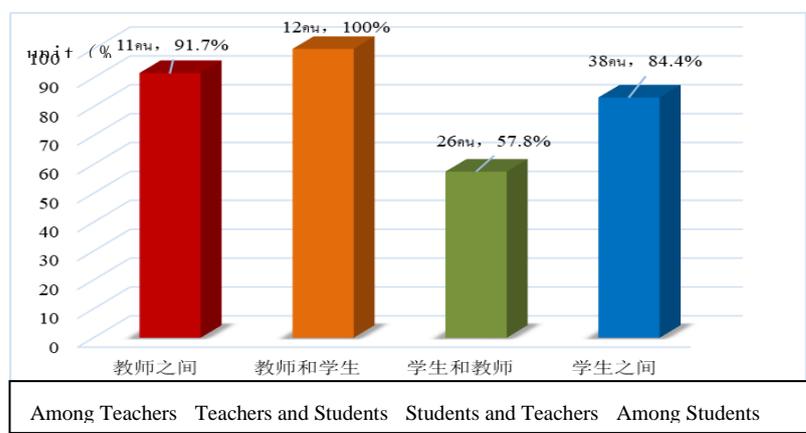
**Chart 1** Linchang Yunnan Chinese Accent Usage in the Community

It can be concluded that the community is an important place for the activities of villagers. Villagers often participate in activities, so there are quite a lot of linguistic communication phenomena. Thais of Yunnan Chinese descent will choose to use Yunnan Chinese to communicate with their colleagues and in the same ethnic group because of familiarity ease of communication and will choose to use Thai and Mandarin to communicate with outsiders for the following reasons: Community development as a tourist attraction and the results of promoting the teaching of Thai and Mandarin language to youth in the community. It is an important reason for the adaptation in the use of language, as a result, the use of the Yunnan Chinese community decreased.

### 1.3 The Use of Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang Accent in School

According to the study of the use of Linchang Yunnan Chinese among Thai Yunnan Chinese in schools, it was found that teachers in Doi Mae Salong Nok School used Linchang Yunnan Chinese to communicate between teachers and students at a high level. All teachers or

100% used it when communicating with their students; 97.7% of teachers used it to communicate with their colleagues, 84.4% of students used it with student friends, and 57.8% with their teachers. Details are shown in Chart 2.

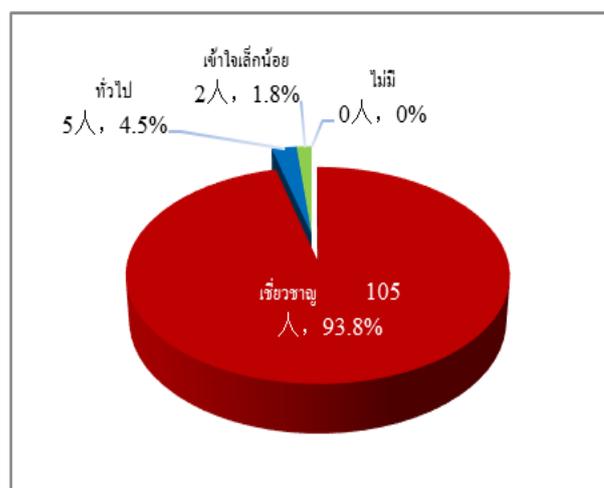


**Chart 2** *Linchang Yunnan Chinese Accent Usage in Schools*

In conclusion, school is another place where language is required because of historical reasons, geographical location, relevant rules and regulations of the Thai education system, including improving the teaching of Thai and Mandarin in schools. They choose to use Thai language to communicate and use Mandarin when attending Chinese evening schools. As a result, the proportion of the use of the mother tongue decreased.

## 2. Ability to Use Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang Accent

According to the study of Linchang Yunnan Chinese proficiency, it was found that the proportion of people with a "Proficient" level in Linchang Yunnan Chinese was high at 93.8%. The people with a "General" level used Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent was 4.5%, and the "Little comprehension" level people used it only 1.8%. In addition, it was found that no people with a "No comprehension" level could use such an accent. Details are shown in Chart 3.



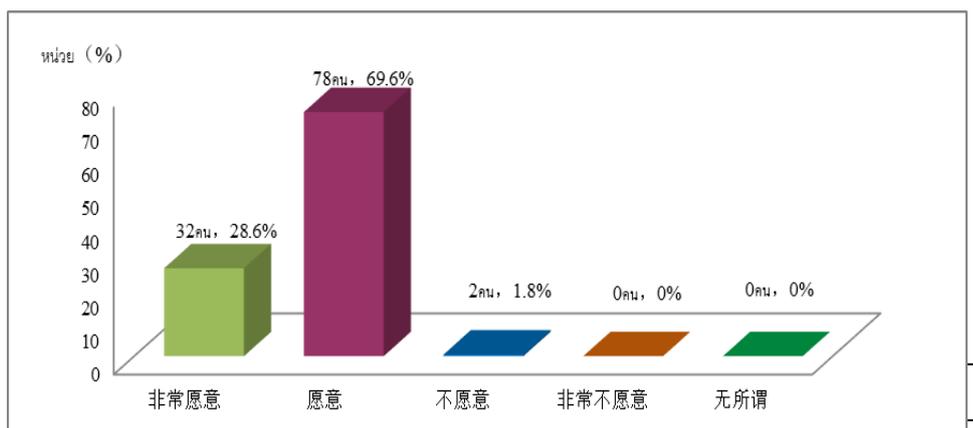
**Chart 3** *Ability to Use Yunnan Chinese with Linchang Accent*

It can be concluded that Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent are proficient in using their mother tongue because Yunnan Chinese is an important language used to communicate on a regular basis in every family and community.

### 3. Language Attitudes of Thai People of Yunnan Chinese Descent

#### 3.1 Emotional limitations affecting the language usage of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent

Based on the study of language attitudes of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent on emotional limitations that affect their language use, it was found that 69.6% of them were "willing" to use such an accent. It shows that they value the mentioned language when communicating with family members because speaking in Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent makes them feel closer and more like a family. Besides, 28.6% of the people there were "very willing" to use such an accent, and only 1.8% were "unwilling" to use it. Details of the findings are shown in Chart 4.

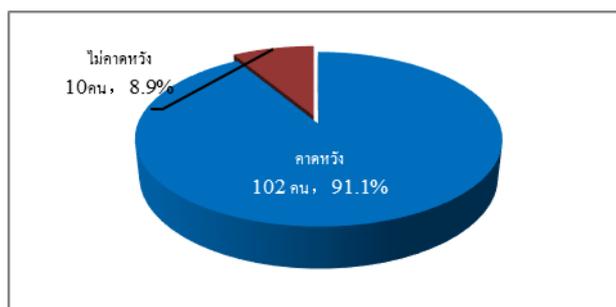


**Chart 4** Language attitudes of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent

It can be concluded they place importance on their mother tongue because the Linchang dialect of Yunnan Chinese is the language used to communicate among the ethnic groups. If you choose to use another language instead of your native language, it will make everyone feel weird and awkward, especially when communicating with family members. and if they use their own mother tongue to communicate, it will make you feel closer and more like a family.

#### 3.2 Emotional limitations affecting language use of Thai Yunnan Chinese children of Yunnan Chinese descent

From the study of language attitudes of Thai Yunnan Chinese people on emotional limitations affecting language use of Thai Yunnan Chinese children, it was found that 91.1% of Thai Yunnan Chinese people expect their children to speak Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent at a high level. It clearly reflects that Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent give a very high level of importance to children's language use in the hope that their children will learn and be able to continue inheriting the language of their ancestors. Only 8.9% of Thais of Yunnan Chinese descent did not expect their descendants to speak Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent. Details are shown in Chart 5

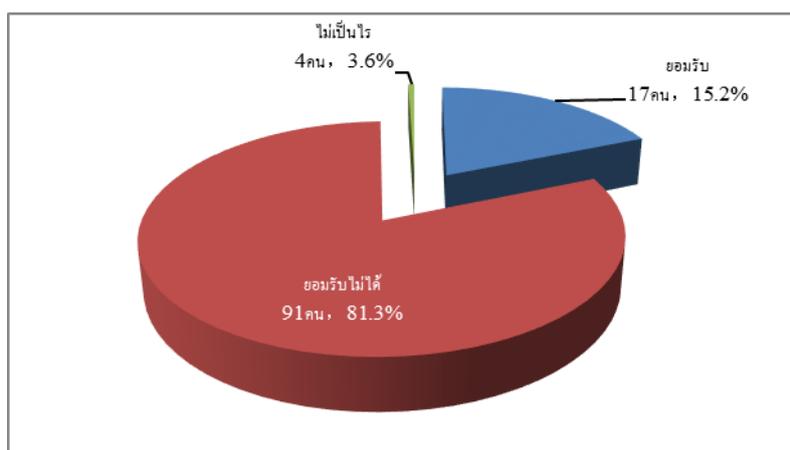


**Chart 5** Emotional limitations affecting Thai children of Yunnan Chinese descent mother tongue usage

From the results of the research, it shows that Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent place great importance on the use of their children's mother tongue at a very high level, by expecting that their children will learn and be able to inherit their mother tongue, as well. Traditional families expect their children to continue learning and inheriting their native language and also believes that one's native language should not be forgotten. At least it should be used in the mother tongue to communicate importantly in the family to avoid the loss of the ancestral language.

### ***3.3 Emotional limitations in language usage of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent***

From the study of language attitudes of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent on the emotional limitations affecting the use of their language, it was found that 81.3% of the original Yunnan Chinese Thais could not accept the Yunnan Chinese Thais in Doi Mae Salong Nok who could not speak Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent because most of the elderly and middle-aged people used it to communicate among themselves. Besides, it is the mother tongue of the Chinese in Doi Mae Salong Nok. No matter where they are, they cannot forget the Linchang accent of Yunnan Chinese. Only 15.2% of traditional Yunnan Chinese descent could accept their people not speaking Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent. In addition, 3.6% of people of traditional Yunnan Chinese descent feel okay if their people were not speaking Yunnan Chinese with such an accent. Details are shown in Chart 6.



**Chart 6** Emotional limitations in using Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent of Thai Yunnan Chinese people.

It can be seen that these Yunnan-Chinese Thais see that community members who study or work outside the community need to learn and use other languages. When returning to life in the community, some of them may not be accepted at first, If other languages are used to communicate. However, It is understood that learning and using languages other than their own mother tongue will be beneficial to the development of various aspects of Doi Mae Salong Nok in the long run.

## ***4. Reasons for using the language of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok***

### ***4.1 Living together in the domicile***

From the study of reasons for using the language of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok, it was found that since living together in their homeland within geographical limits and most of the people in this area were Thais of Yunnan Chinese descent, Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent has been used as the mother tongue in everyday life. Therefore, the area of residence has an important effect on the mother tongue. It is conducive

to promoting the maintenance, inheritance, and development of the Linchang accent of Yunnan Chinese to the Chinese in Doi Mae Salong Nok.

#### ***4.2 Marriages between ethnic groups***

The study of interethnic marriages found that many marriages among Thais of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok were between ethnic Chinese in Yunnan. Therefore, Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent has been used. This effectively promotes the preservation and inheritance of the Linchang accent of Yunnan Chinese. If a family is not married to someone within their ethnic group, that is, either husband or wife is not of Yunnan Chinese descent, children in the families can choose other languages more than the ones in families married between Yunnan ethnic groups. Besides other factors such as survival needs and language environment, the family decided to let the children use Linchang Yunnan Chinese as their mother tongue.

#### ***4.3 Ethnic identity security***

Based on the study of the stability of ethnic identity, it was found that the Linchang accent of Yunnan Chinese was the heart of Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok because ancestors are very important for them to respect and preserve until the present. Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent is the identity of the ethnic group. Ethnic language and ethnic culture are symbols of the ethnic group. These play an important role in promoting and maintaining, and they are important reasons for preserving and inheriting the Linchang accent of Yunnan Chinese.

## **Conclusion**

Based on social linguistics and other theories, this research study examines the use of Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent of Thai Yunnan Chinese people in Doi Mae Salong Nok, a famous place in Chiang Rai province in northern Thailand. Researchers used field study methods and can conclude the findings of the study on the following issues: 1) Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok can consistently use Yunnan Chinese with a Linchang accent for communication in different places such as family, community, and school. 2) Most Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok are proficient in using their Linchang accent of Yunnan Chinese. 3) Most Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in Doi Mae Salong Nok have a positive language attitude toward Thai people of Yunnan Chinese descent in terms of emotional limitations that affect the use of their language, emotional limitations affecting the use of the mother tongue of Thai Yunnan Chinese descendants, and emotional limitations in the language use of Yunnan Chinese Thais. 4) The main reason Thai Yunnan Chinese people in Doi Mae Salong Nok can firmly use their Linchang-accented Yunnan-Chinese language is their settlement, domicile, intermarriage within ethnic groups, and a sense of security in ethnic identity.

The authors hope this work will be a valuable reference for studying overseas Chinese communities' linguistic status and language development mechanisms. It also plays an important role in promoting the formulation and improvement of the Thai government's language and education policy.

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