

## Teaching History, Fostering Emotions – Conveying History in German Cultural Studies in Thailand by Using the Medium Film

การสอนประวัติศาสตร์ การกระตุ้นอารมณ์ – การถ่ายทอดความรู้ด้านประวัติศาสตร์ในแขนงวิชาวัฒนธรรมเยอรมันศึกษาในประเทศไทยโดยใช้สื่อภาพยนตร์

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### Abstract

History constitutes a learning topic frequently included in the repertoire of German cultural studies, so-called *Landeskunde*, with the Thai Higher education sector making no exception whatsoever. This paper first shows that in German Studies programmes at Thai universities, when teaching history, mostly the *Kognitiver Ansatz* (Cognitive or Fact-based Approach), providing a chronological overview and aiming at the acquisition of declarative knowledge, is applied. I then show how history can be taught in a way more in line with current didactical findings, building upon the *ABCD-Thesen*. First, I argue in favour of the focus on singular events rather than a general walk-through. In this context, I present criteria to take into consideration for a justified choice of such events and come up with an example, the Holocaust, that matches these criteria. Second, I argue for the creation of learning arrangements that foster emotions rather than mediating merely facts and information. I present media suitable to achieve that goal, specifically elaborating on the potential of movies to allow a subjective-emotional approach to history. Lastly, a way these suggestions can be put into practice is presented. In my teaching example, the short film “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” serves as a medium to teach about the Holocaust. I suggest activities for the pre-viewing, while-viewing and post-viewing phase.

**Keywords:** Cultural Studies, German As a Foreign Language, Film, Foreign Language Teaching Methods, Higher Education in Thailand

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## บทคัดย่อ

ประวัติศาสตร์เป็นรายวิชาที่มีการสอนบ่อยครั้งในแขนงวัฒนธรรมเยอรมันศึกษาหรือที่เรียกกันว่า *Landeskunde* ซึ่งปรากฏการณ์ดังกล่าวเกิดขึ้นในการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทยด้วยเช่นกัน บทความนี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการสอนประวัติศาสตร์ในแขนงวิชาวัฒนธรรมเยอรมันศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทยนั้นส่วนใหญ่เป็นการสอนแบบทฤษฎีปัญญานิยม (*Cognitive Approach*) ซึ่งเป็นการให้ข้อมูลทางประวัติศาสตร์ในภาพรวมโดยเรียงตามลำดับเวลาของเหตุการณ์และมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อให้ความรู้เชิงประจักษ์แก่ผู้เรียน ซึ่งผู้เขียนจะขอนำเสนอวิธีการสอนประวัติศาสตร์ในอีกรูปแบบหนึ่งที่สอดคล้องกับผลการวิจัยด้านการสอนในปัจจุบัน รูปแบบวิธีการสอนดังกล่าวนี้พัฒนามาจากแนวคิดที่เรียกว่า *ABCD Thesen* ในขั้นตอนแรก ผู้เขียนขอเสนอวิธีการสอนโดยมุ่งเน้นที่เหตุการณ์เฉพาะทางประวัติศาสตร์ เหตุการณ์หนึ่งแทนการให้ข้อมูลแบบปริทัศน์ โดยผู้เขียนจะนำเสนอว่าควรใช้เกณฑ์ใดในการคัดเลือกเหตุการณ์เฉพาะทางประวัติศาสตร์ให้เหมาะสม ซึ่งในกรณีนี้ ผู้เขียนขอยกตัวอย่างเหตุการณ์การฆ่าล้างเผ่าพันธุ์ (*Holocaust*) ในขั้นตอนที่สอง ผู้เขียนขอนำเสนอวิธีการจัดการเรียนการสอนที่กระตุ้นอารมณ์และความรู้สึกของผู้เรียนมากกว่าการถ่ายทอดข้อมูลและข้อเท็จจริงแต่เพียงอย่างเดียว ทั้งนี้ ผู้เขียนขอเสนอแนะสื่อในการสอนที่เหมาะสมสำหรับการจัดการเรียนการสอนแบบดังกล่าวอันได้แก่สื่อภาพยนตร์ซึ่งมีศักยภาพในการกระตุ้นอารมณ์และความรู้สึกของผู้เรียน และในขั้นตอนสุดท้าย ผู้เขียนจะยกตัวอย่างการประยุกต์ใช้แนวคิดดังกล่าวอย่างเป็นรูปธรรม โดยขอยกตัวอย่างการสอนประวัติศาสตร์ผ่านสื่อภาพยนตร์เรื่อง “*Sie heit jetzt Lotte*” ในการสอนเรื่องการฆ่าล้างเผ่าพันธุ์ ซึ่งผู้เขียนจะนำเสนอกิจกรรมที่สามารถทำในชั่วโมงเรียน ทั้งช่วงก่อนชมภาพยนตร์ ระหว่างชมภาพยนตร์ และหลังชมภาพยนตร์

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## 1 Introduction: *Landeskunde* as an integral aspect of German as a foreign language

Studying a foreign language is not just about language acquisition itself. Additionally, studying a foreign language also presents a cultural dimension. Said connection between language and culture learning is for instance stressed by Altmayer (2005), according to whom “studying a foreign language cannot be reduced to the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and skills in the narrow sense but is closely linked to the acquisition of the foreign culture’s contents and meanings“ (p. 154, transl.).<sup>1</sup>

The way German Studies curricula abroad are set up, reflects this perception. In Thailand, German can be studied as a major and/or minor subject at ten universities: Chiang Mai University, Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Khon Kaen University, Mahidol University, Prince of Songkla University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Silpakorn University, Srinakarinwirot University and Thammasat University (alphabetically listed).<sup>2</sup> Where German language instruction is accompanied by a more extensive German Studies offer or even part of a German Studies degree programme, cultural education courses complement the language courses and special courses in German literature and linguistics. While the course titles may vary – “German Culture” (Silpakorn University), “Present Day Germany” (Chulalongkorn University), “German Culture” (Thammasat University) and “German Studies” (Kasetsart University), just to name a few – they all aim at equipping students with an understanding of the culture of the German-speaking countries.

For the role of culture in the context of German As a Foreign Language, the term *Landeskunde*, which can roughly be translated as “knowledge of the country”, was coined in the 1960s. Since then – although often subject to dispute – it has established itself as the familiar term both in research and teaching (Koreik, 2012, p. 1). The publication of the so-called *ABCD-Thesen* (1990) constitutes a major step in the *Landeskunde* discussion, which was intensified in the 1980s. They hark back to a gathering of German language experts from the back then four German-speaking countries Austria (A = Austria (Latin name)),

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation “transl.” after statements in quotation marks indicates that I have translated these statements from German into English whereas the original quote is placed in the footnotes: „Das Erlernen einer fremden Sprache lässt sich nicht auf die Aneignung sprachlicher Kenntnisse und Teilfertigkeiten im engeren Sinn reduzieren, sondern ist mit der Aneignung fremdkultureller Inhalte und Bedeutungen aufs Engste verbunden.“

<sup>2</sup> In the academic year 2020/21, all of these universities offered undergraduate programmes with German as a major and/or minor. On graduate level, only Chulalongkorn University and Ramkhamhaeng University offered German Studies programmes. For this article, I have interviewed (former) teaching professionals from four universities with comparably large numbers of undergraduate students majoring in German in 2020/21 to inquire about the *Landeskunde* teaching at said universities: Silpakorn University (126 students), Thammasat University (approx. 90 students), Kasetsart University (45 students) and Chulalongkorn University (approx. 45 students).

the Federal Republic of Germany (B = Bundesrepublik Deutschland (German name)), the German Democratic Republic (D = Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Name)) and Switzerland (C = Confoederatio Helvetica (Latin name)) in October 1988. With the *ABCD-Thesen*, 22 altogether, the language experts assembled made an attempt to summarize the new findings of the *Landeskunde* discussion of the 1980s and, taking into account all four countries, to come up with shared principles for *Landeskunde* education. While the *ABCD-Thesen* stress the dynamic and process-related nature of *Landeskunde*, they also provide an orientation which aspects to include. Accordingly, *Landeskunde* does not merely imply the acquisition of knowledge about everyday life in the German-speaking countries but also the exploration of the countries' history. Therefore, the *ABCD-Thesen* call for the inclusion of historical topics in the repertoire of *Landeskunde*. Said inclusion had long been demanded by German teacher associations and policy makers of the German-speaking countries. For instance, in the federal government report of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1985, history is mentioned first when it comes to aspects that need to be part of the curriculum of German Studies abroad. In the report, it says “when teaching German abroad, knowledge of the history, geography, politics and culture of Germany (but also of the other German-speaking countries) and everyday life in Germany must be conveyed” (Auswärtiges Amt, 1985, p. 34, transl.).<sup>3</sup>

In 2020, the release of the *ABCD-Thesen* marked its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. During those 30 years, there have been significant changes in the geopolitical landscape. As a consequence of the 1990 German reunification, in which the German Democratic Republic (D) became part of the Federal Republic of Germany (B), the term *ABCD* is not heard widely anymore. However, the *ABCD-Thesen* themselves are largely still considered valid, even attributed with the term “zukunftsweisend” (Badstüber-Kizik et al., n.d., p. 1) which translates to forward-thinking or future-oriented. Hence, more recent *Landeskunde* concepts build upon it, especially the *DACH-Prinzip* (DACH Principle). Equally acknowledging the plurality of the German-speaking countries, the abbreviation DACH includes Germany (D = Deutschland (German name)), Austria (A = Austria (Latin name)) and Switzerland (CH = Confoederatio Helvetica (Latin Name)). Occasionally the term DACH-L is used to include Liechtenstein where German is spoken as a minority language (Shafer et al., 2020, p. IV).

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<sup>3</sup> “Beim Deutschunterricht im Ausland müssen vornehmlich Kenntnisse über Geschichte, Geographie, Politik und Kultur Deutschlands (aber auch der anderen deutschsprachigen Länder) und das Alltagsleben in Deutschland vermittelt werden.“

In this article, I show how historical topics can be taught to Thai university students within German Studies programmes in an emotionally engaging way in line with current didactical research. In point 2, I provide a quick introduction on how the history of the German-speaking countries is usually taught within the German Studies programmes at Thai universities, both in specific *Landeskunde* seminars as well as in the language teaching books used. Following the principles laid out in the *ABCD-Thesen* and later revised in the *DACH-Prinzip*, in point 3 I make suggestions on how to make a more justified choice of historical topics and materials. Having identified the Holocaust as a suitable historical topic and film as a suitable medium, in point 4 I make suggestions on how to provide an emotionally engaging access to the topic of the Holocaust using the short film “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” (Wenzel, 2014).

## 2 Current approaches to history in German Studies programmes at Thai universities

Schmenk and Hamann (2007) stress that *Landeskunde* in teaching practice generally focuses on learning facts about a given community. According to them, “a characteristic feature of *Landeskunde* is that it is based on a view of culture as a set of knowledge items about a country or a region” (2007, p. 375). They list the German school system, the Basic Law, Berlin and the Wall, the Swiss immigration laws, life in the Alps, and environmentalism in Germany as examples for *Landeskunde* topics often covered (2007, p. 375). Putting facts and figures paramount is characteristic for the so-called *Kognitiver Ansatz* (Cognitive or Fact-based Approach) in *Landeskunde*. The overarching goal of the Cognitive Approach is to build systematic knowledge, i.e., the acquisition of declarative knowledge. As Maijala (2007, p. 174) explains, the image of the culture of the target language is therefore composed of the individual learning contents that are taught systematically.<sup>4</sup>

The *Landeskunde* teaching at Thai universities can largely be attributed to the Cognitive Approach. In the past, German language instructors at Thai universities used the book “Tatsachen über Deutschland” as a primary source for their *Landeskunde* classes. Said book, available in 19 languages, was handed out by the German Embassy to German language departments until the 2010s. Advertised with the words “Alle Fakten auf einen Blick” (All facts at a glance), it assembles – very much as described by Schmenk and Hamann – factual knowledge about Germany in different areas. While nowadays many language instructors in Thailand use their own material, Kaewwipat (2020, p. 106) points out that *Landeskunde* in

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<sup>4</sup> Maijala (2007, pp. 174–175) also provides an overview of the other *Landeskunde* approaches, namely the *Kommunikativer Ansatz* (Communicative approach) and the *Interkultureller Ansatz* (Intercultural approach).

Thailand still puts prime emphasis on conveying facts and information. The initially mentioned *Landeskunde* seminars at Thai universities aim at equipping students with a certain set of knowledge items about the German-speaking countries. Hence, they are rather input-oriented. In regard to German history, most *Landeskunde* seminars aim at giving students a quick chronological walk-through of German history, often focussing on more recent German history, i. e., from 1945, the end of the Second World War, onwards. In this context, the focus mostly lies on a history of events. Koreik (2012, p. 5) considers this focus typical for most *Landeskunde* seminars on German history abroad. In line with the seminars' attention to facts and figures, end of term exams concentrate mostly on the reproduction and allocation of memorized factual knowledge. Tasks in regard to German history for instance require students to complete sentences with the correct dates and information.<sup>5</sup>

The specifically designed *Landeskunde* classes are not the only setting in which Thai students majoring or minoring in German Studies learn about the culture of the German-speaking countries. Additionally, *Landeskunde* topics are covered in language learning books. Historical information is rarely included in language learning books aimed at beginners as a certain language proficiency is required, but can be frequently encountered in books for intermediate and advanced learners. Some of the textbooks frequently used at Thai universities from an intermediate level (CEFR level B1) onwards are *Sicher, Aspekte neu* (both covering B1+, B2 and C1) and *Menschen* (ranging up to B1). Unlike *Sicher*, both *Aspekte neu* and *Menschen* include historical information, mostly on more recent historical events. For instance, the German division is included in Chapter 8 of *Aspekte neu B2* and Chapter 22 of *Menschen B1*. However, what Koreik (2010, p. 1479) states about the role of history in German language learning books in general also applies to the textbooks mentioned: while history is included, this mostly happens as a quick fact-based walk-through of selected events of German history. In line with the Cognitive Approach and its emphasis on facts and figures, tasks frequently encountered in both textbooks require students to put events in order. Often students are also asked to correct wrong sentences such as “On October 3, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell” (Braun-Podeschwa et al., 2015, p. 139) in *Menschen B1*. Just like in the *Landeskunde* seminars, it is mostly a history of events, including politics, diplomacy and military history that is

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<sup>5</sup> In 2020, the end of term exam for the seminar “Present Day Germany” at Chulalongkorn University asked students to complete sentences such as the following ones: “The Berlin Wall existed from   (1961)   to   (1989)  .”, “The GDR joined the FRG on   (3 October 1990)  .” and “During the   (Berlin Blockade)  , West Berlin was supplied via an airbridge.” (transl.) (“Die Berliner Mauer existierte von   (1961)   bis   (1989)  .”, “Die DDR trat der BRD am   (3. Oktober 1990)   bei.”, „Während der   (Berlin-Blockade)   wurde Westberlin über eine Luftbrücke versorgt.“)

paramount whereas people's history or social and economic history play a tangential role (Koreik, 2015, p. 21).<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Suggestions for new approaches to history in German Studies programmes at Thai universities

As stated above, *Landeskunde* seminars at Thai universities often provide a chronological run-through of historical events. While such an approach seems beneficial to get students a first basic understanding, such seminars most likely do not provide any deep insights into German history nor do they contribute to the “sensitization and development of skills, strategies and abilities in dealing with foreign cultures” which, rather than “information”, are considered the most important tasks of *Landeskunde* according to the *ABCD Thesen* (1990, p. 16, transl.).<sup>7</sup> Ever since the publication of the *ABCD-Thesen* it has therefore been a demand for teachers to work more theme-oriented and exemplarily. Instead of on linear historiography, *Landeskunde* should concentrate on single historical topics and events (Koreik, 2012, p. 5). Secondly, productive learning stems from personal engagement. Hence, it is claimed that students should not merely study facts and figures. Instead, instructors should find ways to also get students emotionally involved in the learning process (Chudak, 2015, p. 149). In the following, I will make suggestions on how to select suitable historical topics as well as which media can be used to create learning arrangements that leave room for emotions. Both points will be illustrated by an example.

#### 3.1. Choice of singular topics instead of broad general knowledge

Regarding *Landeskunde* in general, the *ABCD Thesen* (1990) explicitly state that there is no need to strive for “completeness of information with regard to a hypothetical country picture” (p. 16, transl.).<sup>8</sup> “Completeness of information” is also barely a redeemable goal when history is taught as part of German Studies curricula abroad: in language classes and even in specific *Landeskunde* seminars on German history, it is impossible to get the complete German history across. Even for the teaching of history at school in Germany, Sauer (2009, p. 19) states that it is neither possible nor desirable to cover the entire German history. Since the number of topics is countless, instead, a justified choice of relevant topics is required.

<sup>6</sup> The film included in Chapter 8 of *Aspekte B2*, which shows the reactions of people on both sides of the Wall on the night the Wall fell, can be considered one of the rare contents that actually focuses on individual people.

<sup>7</sup> “Primäre Aufgabe der *Landeskunde* ist nicht die Information, sondern Sensibilisierung sowie die Entwicklung von Fähigkeiten, Strategien und Fertigkeiten im Umgang mit fremden Kulturen.“

<sup>8</sup> „Auf Vollständigkeit der Informationen im Hinblick auf ein hypothetisches. Landesbild wird bewußt verzichtet.“

Such a justified choice is also necessary when historical topics are covered as part of the *Landeskunde* education at universities abroad. But what criteria should be used to make this choice? It is a widely heard claim that *Landeskunde* must take the present as the reference point (Pauldrach, 1992, p. 14). This also has implications for teaching history as part of *Landeskunde*. Following this claim, historical topics need to have a certain relevance for the present. To be precise, learning about German history should provide students with a framework that helps them understand current events better (Koreik, 1995, p. 63). Referring to its epistemological value, Koreik (1995) speaks of history's "explanatory power" (p. 54, transl.; see also Koreik, 2012, p. 4).<sup>9</sup> The *ABCD-Thesen* (1990), although less explicit, voice the same concept, stating that "to a large extent, *Landeskunde* is also history in the present" (p. 17, transl.).<sup>10</sup> Inversely, this implies that where no connections from a historical event to the present can be drawn, teaching history as part of *Landeskunde* is almost an end in itself: it is merely included for the sake of historical knowledge.

Apart from its epistemological value, it is also recommendable to take into consideration the relevance of the specific historical event for the target group. Last but not least, practical aspects such as the students' language level and the curriculum should also play a role when choosing suitable contents.

When looking at historical events that possess the above-mentioned epistemological value, some of these date back centuries, such as the Reformation (Koreik, 2015, p. 23). But in general, topics from recent history have the most substantial influence on present-day Germany. This is especially the case with the Second World War and the Nazi crimes. In this context, Ghobeyshi (2000) declares that "there is no doubt that the events of the years 1933–1945 shape our [= the Germans'] present more than any other period of recent German and European history" (p. 634, transl.).<sup>11</sup> This period with its atrocities is deeply anchored in the German collective memory. Said collective memory is – following Assmann's (2008) elaborations – comprised of communicative and cultural memory. Whereas the former is formed by everyday communication within a social group and is hence socially conveyed, the latter is tied to material carriers, i.e., media. Eyewitness records by older family members – attributable to the communicative memory – and representations in schoolbooks and films – attributable to the cultural memory – shape many

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<sup>9</sup> "Erklärungsleistung"

<sup>10</sup> "Landeskunde ist in hohem Maße auch Geschichte im Gegenwärtigen."

<sup>11</sup> "Zweifellos prägen die Geschehnisse der Jahre 1933–1945 unsere Gegenwart stärker als jede andere Periode der neueren deutschen und auch der europäischen Geschichte."



Germans' relationship to the Second World War and the Nazi crimes and have an impact on their self-image (Vatter, 2009, pp. 30–32). In the past decades, the Germans' relationship to the Nazi crimes, in particular the Holocaust, has often been the subject of discourse and controversy. Referring to the heated discussions about the Goldhagen Thesis, the controversy on the first Wehrmacht Exhibition, an exhibition focussing on the war crimes of the German armed forces during the Second World War, the intense debates about the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Walser-Bubis Debate, Ghobeyshi (2000, p. 634) points out that the subject remained very prominent throughout the 1990s. Even nowadays, the Nazi crimes, in particular the Holocaust, and certain individuals' self-positioning towards them give rise to heated disputes. 2020 saw intensified debates on the relationship between the Bundeswehr, the current unified armed forces of Germany, and the Wehrmacht, the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1945. The case of right-wing Bundeswehr soldiers invoking the soldierly virtues of the Wehrmacht prompted the German minister of defence Kramp-Karrenbauer to draw a line between these two institutions on the occasion of the anniversary of the failed attack on Adolf Hitler (dpa, 2020, July 20). Considering how the Nazi crimes, particularly the Holocaust, even 75 years after the end of the Second World War continue to have a formative and identity shaping relevance on the Germans, it is certainly a historical topic students enrolled in German Studies programmes abroad should be familiar with.

Another criterium for selecting suitable historical topics is the relevance of the respective topic for the target group. In Thailand, neither in media, public discourse, nor education does the Holocaust receive much attention. Pülm (2020, p. 92), who also discusses the coverage of the Holocaust in high school (Mattayom) and at university, hence attests Thailand a lack of sensitivity for this topic. In this context, he refers to a series of recent incidents and scandals where high school and/or university students displayed Nazi symbols and/or showed the Nazi salute (Pülm, 2020, pp. 91, 94–95). Exemplarily, one of the scandals mentioned in his paper will be summarized here: during the freshmen-welcoming events at Silpakorn University in September 2016, students were photographed performing a cosplay depicting Adolf Hitler. The photographs show students performing the Nazi salute with one student dressed as Hitler while others are wearing uniforms worn by the Red Guards during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. The publication of the photographs was followed by a wave of indignation and apologies (Mala, 2016, September 21). Such events reveal both a lack of knowledge about the Nazi crimes as well

as the already mentioned lack of sensitivity among Thai students. This might be an additional reason for choosing the Holocaust as a topic covered as part of *Landeskunde* education at Thai universities.

### 3.2 Learning accompanied by emotions instead of communicating facts

What is a suitable historical topic? This is just one aspect that needs to be considered when dealing with history as part of *Landeskunde*. The “how” is just as important as the “what”: how should the historical topics be mediated? Materials frequently used in *Landeskunde* seminars and language learning books are pictures, informational texts, diagrams, statistics, and maps (Koreik, 2010, p. 1482). At least the four last-mentioned types of materials address the intellect rather than fostering emotional engagement with the subject. Emotional engagement is, however, considered crucial by foreign language didactics. Number 17 of the *ABCD-Thesen* (1990) states that “a foreign culture is often experienced by learners more emotionally and subjectively. Therefore, *Landeskunde* lessons must give room to the processing of experiences, subjective opinions and emotional access” (p. 16, transl.).<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, history didactics also stress the importance of finding a subjective, emotional access to the respective topic. For instance, according to von Borries (1995, p. 388), the students’ ability to put themselves into historical situations, conflicts and crises and their ability to feel empathy are vital for the development of historical awareness.

“What people are concerned about are not facts and data, but feelings, stories and, above all, other people” (Spitzer, 2002, p. 160). Following a similar conviction, history didactics recommend to – in addition to the traditional types of media – convey history based on concrete individual cases. They suggest that students can access personal accounts for instance by listening to witnesses of the respective time period and by reading biographies, diaries etc. (Chudak, 2015, pp. 137–138). Similar approaches can also be fruitful in *Landeskunde* education. By throwing light on the fate of individual people, a new dimension is added to the sometimes one-sided approach of *Landeskunde*, concentrating on history of events.

Just like the eyewitness reports and reading texts mentioned above, films highlight individual fates in a way that addresses first and foremost our feelings. Consequently, films have the potential to provide students with a subjective and emotional access to the respective topic. In the context of history, films have often proven their potential to provoke emotions that then led to a further engagement with the topic. Schwarnowski (2015, p. 91) states about feature films that they – although usually not adhering to all the

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<sup>12</sup> “Eine fremde Kultur wird von den Lernenden oft eher emotional und subjektiv erfahren. Landeskunde-Unterricht muß daher der Verarbeitung von Erlebnissen, subjektiven Meinungen und dem emotionalen Zugang Raum geben.“

facts – are the first and often the most important source of historical images for young learners of German. Thanks to these films, learners develop an interest in German history. In fact, it has been argued that fictional films can give rise to an historical interest more effectively than a documentary: Schmenk and Hamann (2007) comment on the film *Good Bye Lenin* (Becker, 2003) that it “enables viewers to think more deeply about history, memory, and truth than perhaps one normally would precisely because it is not a historical documentary full of seemingly objective, sequential, and distant facts, but rather a self-conscious construct with engaging fictional characters, numerous visual ambiguities, and entertaining and perhaps ever more absurd scenarios” (pp. 387–388).

Similarly, films about the Holocaust can serve as medium, chance, and possibility to provide students with an individual absorption of the horrors of the Holocaust, possibly a much better one than documentaries. While documentaries in general focus on the mass extermination, fictional films make individual threats and dilemmas tangible (Corell, 2009, p. 454). Hence, they fulfil the demand of film maker Ophüls:

The corpses in Bergen-Belsen, they are always just the same archive footage. We have seen them. Even with poetic commentary, even with naturalistic commentary, even without commentary, even only with music, but we have seen it. They don't work anymore when you also see the Ethiopian children at dinner – between cheese and coffee, so to speak. [...] You have to individualize it. You have to see the individual fate. (Köppen, 1993, p. 112, transl.)<sup>13</sup>

Such individualization may stimulate further engagement with the Holocaust. The American TV series *Holocaust* (Chomsky, 1978) had this effect, giving the initial spark to the Germans' confrontation with the Nazi crimes. The series recounts the Holocaust from two perspectives: the perspective of the German-Jewish Weiss family and the perspective of Erik Dorf, a rising member of the SS who gradually turns into a merciless war criminal. The series evoked interest in the individual biographies during the Holocaust and led many Germans to question the role of their own family in Nazi Germany (Vatter, 2009, pp. 54–55).

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<sup>13</sup> “Die Leichen in Bergen-Belsen, das sind immer nur dieselben Archivaufnahmen. Die haben wir gesehen. Auch mit poetischem Kommentar, auch mit naturalistischem Kommentar, auch ohne Kommentar, auch nur mit Musik, aber gesehen haben wir es. Sie wirken nicht mehr, wenn man auch noch beim Abendessen – sozusagen zwischen Käse und Kaffee – die äthiopischen Kinder sieht. [...] Man muß es individualisieren. Man muß das Einzelschicksal sehen.“

#### 4. The short film “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” as an example

Taking into account the didactical findings stemming from the *ABCD-Thesen*, I have previously argued that the Holocaust is a historical topic worth exploring as part of *Landeskunde* education, especially in the Thai context. Next, I have identified films as a suitable medium to allow students an emotional access to historical topics which can result in further engagement with the topic. Since the videotape took over the classroom in late 1970s/early 1980s, much research has been done on films in the context of foreign language education. However, considering that films are still not widely and frequently used in foreign language classes, researchers believe there are certain “fears of contact” (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2009, p. 11, transl.).<sup>14</sup> In those cases in which films are used, their presentation usually does not follow a didactical concept. Rather, the film is shown as a whole and as a form of reward at the end of a class (Bakalarz-Zákos, 2015, p. 192; Biechele, 2006, p. 310). Specifically on films addressing National Socialism and the Holocaust, Ghobeyeshi (2000, p. 641) states that, despite their potential to include the affective sphere and achieve a personal involvement, they are rarely used in German language classes. She concludes that teachers are not provided with the didactic-methodological assistance they require. Therefore, I hope that the didactic suggestions for the use of the short film “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” may serve as a valuable source of inspiration for colleagues in Thailand and elsewhere.

##### 4.1 Overview of the film

Shot in Munich, “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” (Wetzel, 2014) was inspired by the fate of the Jewish woman Charlotte Knobloch, who at the age of 9 was saved from deportation to the Theresienstadt ghetto by the family’s former housekeeper. The housekeeper took Charlotte in and claimed she was her own illegitimate child. The film celebrated its world premiere in Los Angeles and was later invited to the Cannes Film Festival and various other international film festivals. Furthermore, in 2015, it was part of the main commemoration event on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp (MirquidiFilm 2015).

The film deals with the friendship of two young women in their early 20s named Maria and Lea. The two inseparable friends are actresses at the Prinzregententheater in Munich. Lea shines as “Juliet”, whereas Maria is happily supporting her friend from the side-lines. Right at the beginning of the film the two

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<sup>14</sup> “Berührungängste”

women swear each other “eternal faithfulness” (01:19-01:22) However, their friendship is challenged when Hitler comes to power and Lea is dismissed for being Jewish. Following the demand to have an “Arian” actress play the part, the role of Juliet is given to Maria. Lea continues to support her friend despite the humiliations she has to endure. Finally, Maria’s formerly unemployed admirer Hans finds a job as a policeman and gets married to Maria. He uses the new political situation under Hitler’s leadership to have a career: he joins the National Socialist German Worker’s Party (NSDAP) and soon becomes *Sturmbannführer* in the SS, a paramilitary organization under Hitler and the NSDAP. As he deems it inappropriate for his wife Maria to be friends with the Jewish Lea, he forbids her to see Lea, let alone be in touch with her. Despite Hans’ threats, the two friends continue to write secret letters to each other. In November 1941, the first deportation of the Munich Jews is scheduled. Maria goes to the Jews’ House to which Lea and Charlotte, her new-born, have been brought and warns her about it. Knowing the fate that awaits her, Lea makes the decision to hand over Charlotte to Maria. Maria then brings Charlotte into her shared home with Hans. When Hans finds out about it, he goes berserk. The final sequence shows him shooting at Maria and the baby with a pistol and then collapsing in despair. Afterwards, Maria is shown leaving the house with the baby and only then does it become clear that Hans did not shoot her.

#### 4.2 Selection criteria of the film

With a length of 16 minutes, “*Sie heißt jetzt Lotte*” is a typical short film. There are several aspects which make short films suitable for foreign language classes. First, a constitutive characteristic of a short film is, as the name suggests, its brevity: most short films have a duration between 3 and 15 minutes. This duration is ideal for their use in class. In general, it is not recommended to present sequences much longer than 10 to 15 minutes (Sass, 2007, p. 10). This takes into account students’ receptive and retentive capacities. Köhler (1982, p. 120) refers to an experiment showing that whereas students remembered about 90 percent of the teaching points made in the first part of a 15-minute programme, they only kept 56 percent of the points from the successive part.

The short duration has an impact on the narrative structure. Usually, here the term “inner brevity” (Heinrich, 1997, p. 54, transl.)<sup>15</sup> comes into play. This term is used to refer to the effects that stem from the short film’s form-giving outer brevity, in particular the reduction in terms of the degree of complications, number of events and characters (Welke, 2017, p. 21). This makes the story easy to follow.

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<sup>15</sup> „innere Kürze“

Also, in terms of language, short films usually do not cause the audience much trouble. To be shown in international festivals and win prizes, short films do not use much language at all or use rather simple language (Abraham, 2013, p. 4).

Since short films have little time to develop and shape their theme, the presentation often remains fragmentary (Rössler, A., 2009, p. 310). Or as Abraham (2013) puts it, “the short fiction film relies on recess, insinuation and shortage” (p. 4, transl.).<sup>16</sup> An open end and empty spaces throughout the story, requiring the recipient to fill in the missing pieces of information, are characteristic for short films. It is precisely their fragmentary nature that stipulate the viewers’ imaginative and intellectual cooperation rather than allow them to just sit back (Heinrich, 1997, 54). Hence, short films are particularly suitable to stimulate an active-productive engagement in class.

All these characteristics apply to the film “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte”. With a duration of 16 minutes, it does not exceed the learners’ receptive and retentive capacities, even if shown en bloc. The external brevity is paired with an internal brevity: there is just a small ensemble of characters; the story is straightforward and not very complex. The language itself is mostly everyday language so that the film can be used from an intermediate level (B1) onwards. Hence, “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” is a short film easy to grasp – both in terms of content as well as language. Additionally, it can even be used with students who have limited previous knowledge about the Second World War, including the Holocaust, as the historical knowledge required is limited to a basic knowledge. Even if one or the other knowledge gap cannot be bridged, it is precisely the strength of the film to make the significance of this period tangible. From experience, especially young viewers tend to strongly identify with the two protagonists so that the film evokes a great emotional intensity. Thus, the film with its emotional intensity can serve as a starting point to stipulate learning on the Holocaust or – in case the students have previously learned about the Holocaust – approach it on a different level.

### **4.3 The three-phase approach**

When working with literary or listening texts in German as a foreign language, it generally follows a three-phase approach. Before, during and after reading the text or listening to it, students are presented with a mix of analytical and creative-productive tasks. The three-phase approach can also be applied to

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<sup>16</sup> “Der Kurzspielfilm lebt von Aussparung, Andeutung und Verknappung.“

films. Accordingly, the three phases when working with films consist of the pre-viewing, the while-viewing and post-viewing phase (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2009, p. 20).

#### 4.3.1 The pre-viewing phase

Learning always takes place based on what is known already. Therefore, the pre-viewing phase aims at activating students' prior knowledge and providing the information necessary for understanding the film. Especially in foreign language classes this step is important. That is because prior knowledge concepts of foreign language learners are not as comprehensive and elaborated nor as automatically available as those of native speakers (Biechele, 2006, p. 321). Preceding the film presentation, the knowledge activated can include language, *Landeskunde* and film-aesthetics (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2009, p. 29; Sass, 2007, 10). Since “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” shall be used to stipulate learning on the Holocaust, my suggestions here mostly aim at activating previous *Landeskunde* knowledge. To gradually prepare students for a film centred around the Holocaust, a conversation about the situation of the Jewish population in the Third Reich seems to suggest itself. Part of this rather free-form conversation can include the policies of exclusion and stigmatisation, the deportations, the life in the numerous ghettos etc. (Chudak, 2015, pp. 145–146).

Apart from activating previous knowledge, the previewing-phase also serves the purpose of building up expectations (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2009, p. 19). Rössler, L. (2007, pp. 18–19) reflects on human perceptual mechanisms that work in the way that we put known and unknown things into (new) contexts, form a coherent overall picture out of previously unrelated details, etc. She explains how these perceptual mechanisms can be set in motion by individual images. Hence, when showing films in class, she suggests the use of screenshots from the films, so-called still images, to prompt expectations. In my example, I use 11 numbered still images from “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte”: 1. the two friends after a theatre performance with Maria congratulating Lea (01:49), 2. the lovebirds Hans and Maria sitting on a bench (02:54), 3. The Prinzregententheater decorated with Nazi banners (03:41), 4. the two friends after a theatre performance with Lea congratulating Maria (03:43), 5. the “Kristallnacht”<sup>17</sup> (05:38), 6. Lea in fear during the Kristallnacht (05:43), 7. Lea begging Hans and Maria for help (06:05), 8. Maria reading Lea's letter

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<sup>17</sup> In the late 1970s and 1980s the term “(Reichs-)Kristallnacht”, euphemizing smashed glass as “crystal”, to refer to the pogrom against Jews carried out on 9-10 November 1938 sparked severe criticism in Germany which resulted in a shift in terminology: from “(Reichs-)Kristallnacht” to “Reichspogromnacht”. Nevertheless, the term “Kristallnacht” is still widely used on an international stage, for example frequently even by the World Jewish Congress (2020, November 11). As in the text overlays of the short film “Sie heißt jetzt Lotte” the term “Reichskristallnacht” (05:27) is used, I have opted for the use of the term throughout this paper as well.

(07:10), 9. Lea reading Maria's letter (08:08), 10. Lea with her baby on her lap (07:45), 11. Lea handing her baby to Maria (12:24). Based on the numbered still images, students are asked to come up with a small fictional story, write it down, and present it in class. This task prompts the students to reflect on the effect the previously discussed policies of exclusion and stigmatisation had on Jewish individuals. Moreover, it arouses the students' interest in the film since during the viewing they are eager to see whether their expectations are met or not. Other impulse givers used at this stage can be film titles, isolated mini dialogues and film posters (Sass, 2007, p. 11).

#### 4.3.2 The while-viewing phase

The short duration of the short film makes it possible to show it in one block. Another suitable approach, applied here, is the so-called sequential or interval method where the film is divided into several segments and activities such as discussions take place in between (Burger, 1995, p. 595; Leitzke-Ungerer, 2009, p. 20).<sup>18</sup> This approach stems from reading didactics. While reading, based on textual information that addresses different areas of knowledge (language, text, genre, and world knowledge), the reader constantly forms hypotheses about the further course of the story. During the reading process, these hypotheses are tested. This approach can be applied to films. It not only has a motivational function but also a didactic-hermeneutical function by bringing to the surface the viewers' expectations and assumptions and how their understanding of the film is gradually developing (Ehlers, 2007, p. 74).

When applying the sequential method, it is recommended to not break down the film into too many sequences to ensure viewers can still enjoy the film (Lütge, 2012, p. 12). Instead, the film should be paused just a few times, namely where it particularly prompts the formation of hypotheses and/or empathy with the characters. "Sie heißt jetzt Lotte" can first be paused at 06:20. Here, Lea stands in front of Maria's and Hans' apartment in the middle of the "Kristallnacht" and asks for help, revealing that her husband Aaron is gone, the synagogue is on fire and she has nowhere to go. Later, the film can be paused at 12:24. That is the scene that shows Lea handing her child Charlotte to Maria. The last pause can be made when Hans is pointing his pistol at Maria and Charlotte (15:12).

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<sup>18</sup> The third approach, although less suited for the usually single-stranded short film, is the so-called sandwich method. In this method, the film is shown only in excerpts. What is not shown but necessary to ensure proper understanding of the film is replaced by written texts, such as summaries, excerpts from the screenplay and, in the case of literary adaptations, excerpts from the book (Burger, 1995, p. 596; Leitzke-Ungerer, 2009, p. 20).



Instead of hypothesizing on the further course of the story and the decisions made by the characters (How will Maria and Hans react to Lea's plea for help?, Will Maria take Charlotte into her care?, Will Hans shoot at his wife and Charlotte?), it is also possible to ask students to put themselves in the characters' place by for example writing an internal monologue (Abraham, 2013, p. 8). This approach is particularly fruitful where the film depicts dilemmatic situations. For example, at 12:24, Lea, in the blink of a second, must decide on giving her child away. Students can ask themselves which thoughts are going through her head and put these thoughts down on paper. Alternatively, they can empathize with Maria who is forced to decide whether she will take Lea's child with her. Even relating to Hans in the form of an internal monologue is possible at 15:12. By writing an internal monologue, students reflect on the course of the film so far, relate to the characters and to make assumptions about the film's further development.

#### 4.2.3 The post-viewing phase

Leitzke-Ungerer (2009) considers it important that students are offered a platform for voicing their impressions and emotions after the film presentation, stating "when something is experienced as intensely as a film [...], the need arises for them to write or talk about what has been seen or experienced" (p. 15, transl.)<sup>19</sup>. Hence, after the first viewing an exchange of impressions and emotions is recommended. Such film reception talks are most fruitful when they are recipient-oriented. Hence, questions at this stage should put the individual film experience in the foreground rather than asking questions about film language etc. Burger (1995, p. 598) comes up with a list of methods that can be applied at this stage, most of them borrowed from the cinema work of youth clubs etc., such as having viewers fill in questionnaires or putting prominent sentences up for discussion.

If the students are already sufficiently familiar with the Holocaust, they can then start right away with creative-productive activities. For example, using the still images from the pre-viewing phase, the plot can be summarized. This activity challenges students to reflect on what they have seen. As there is a high degree of indeterminacy and not all information is provided, they need to extract from the film what it does not show but merely indicates (Kloepfer, 1990, p. 139). Additionally, there is the need to make cross-connections to their historical knowledge. Only in doing so, can they fill in the film's empty spaces and

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<sup>19</sup> "Wenn etwas aber so intensiv erlebt wird wie ein Film [...], dann besteht bei ihnen auch das Bedürfnis, über das Erlebte und das Gesehene zu sprechen oder zu schreiben."

create a coherent and plausible narrative. Hence, this process is both a creative as well as a cognitive process.

Another option is to let the students watch the film a second time, asking them to concentrate on one specific character from whose point of view they will later need to retell the story. This task requires students to take over one character's perception and emphasise with that character. That way, they reflect on the impact the historical period had on individual fates. Additionally, it helps build their historical awareness. In Chapter 3.2, the ability to put oneself into different historical situation, conflicts and crises has been described as a basic operator for developing historical awareness. According to v. Borries (1995), "whoever – despite all evidence – cannot even theoretically imagine himself as a crusader, a witch hunter, a colonial expansionist or a Nazi supporter under given circumstances, can neither understand nor recognise his own endangerment" (p. 388, transl.).<sup>20</sup> Hence, while the film mostly invites viewers to identify with Lea and Maria, it also has great didactical value to ask students to retell the story from Hans' perspective.

Whereas long feature films usually require a reduction so that they can be used in foreign language classes, the use of short films offers the opportunity to work with a self-contained medium. Especially with their open end, short films stimulate productive reception. That is because such an end usually needs to be processed actively (Welke, 2017, p. 22). In the case of "Sie heißt jetzt Lotte", the end is rather clear for a short film. Still, it is merely indicated but not shown. Hence, an active extension by the students is possible. To come up with a plausible continuation of the story until, let us say, 1945, the end of the Second World War, students need to use historical information as a backdrop.

These three tasks I mentioned challenge students to reflect on the effects of history on regular people's lives. Hence, they are useful if these students are already quite familiar with the Second World War and the Holocaust. If the film serves as an introduction to the Second World War and the Holocaust, it can motivate students to find out more information about that period. In the film, several dates, occasionally together with further information, are given: "München 1932" (01:37), "München 1933" (03:38), "9. November 1938 ('Reichskristallnacht') (05:27), "November 1938" (06:56), "Juli 1939" (07:33) and "München: 7. November 1941" (08:58). Students can be asked to put down this information during a

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<sup>20</sup> "Wer sich – gegen alle Evidenz – nicht einmal theoretisch vorstellen kann, unter gegebenen Bedingungen selbst ein Kreuzritter, Hexenrichter, Kolonialexpansionist oder Nazi-Mitläufer gewesen zu sein, der kann weder andere begreifen noch seine eigene Gefährdung durchschauen."

second or third viewing of the film and independently research the historical events associated with these dates. In the next step, they should be asked to draw connections from the historical events to the fate of Lea and her family. For example, Adolf Hitler's rise to power culminated in his appointment as Chancellor on 30 January 1933. Immediately afterwards, the systematic exclusion of Jews from society began. The starting discrimination shows also on an individual level: Lea is no longer allowed to play her part at the Prinzregententheater. Hence, this task fulfils the historian Winkler's (2011) demand that students should not merely accumulate knowledge but also recognise links and place individual phenomena in a larger context.

As mentioned in Chapter 4.1, the film "Sie heißt jetzt Lotte" is based on Charlotte Knobloch's biography. From my experience, this fact – although Knobloch's biography is just used as an inspiration – is received with a lot of attention by Thai students. They ask to what degree the film is realistic and wish to know more about individual fates during the Second World War. In that case the film can serve as a motivation to do research on other individual fates during the Second World War, for example on so-called silent heroes, i.e., individuals and groups that helped Jews and others escape the Holocaust. Similarly, the film may serve as a starting point to discuss what the general population in Germany knew about the Holocaust. To adequately address such questions, it is, however, necessary to provide other non-fictional texts. Following Karagiannakis' (2009, p. 15) approach of the *Projektororientierte Landeskunde* (Project-oriented Landeskunde), which recommends the application of methods that allow learners to independently decide on a subject of interest and suitable activities, I would, however, recommend not to impose too many directives on the students. Instead, they should be encouraged to ask their own questions.

## 5 Conclusion

The positive didactical effects of learning accompanied by emotions cannot be underestimated. However, in teaching reality emotions play at best a tangential role. This also applies to conveying historical topics to students matriculated in German Studies programmes at Thai universities. A Cognitive Approach that gives a chronological overview of German history and focusses on the acquisition of knowledge items is often the norm. Hence, using the example of "Sie heißt jetzt Lotte", it was demonstrated how new approaches to teaching history in the Thai higher education sector can be applied, focussing on the Holocaust, a singular topic that has an identity-shaping relevance for the target culture, and using films, a medium addressing first and foremost our feelings. Such teaching arrangements can contribute to the

development of a sustainable interest in the historical subject. Even more importantly, they contribute to the development of historical awareness that does not just imply knowledge but also ability, namely the ability to draw connections and put oneself into historical situations, conflicts and crises.

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