

Redefining the Role of Textbook: New Approaches for Fostering L2 Autonomous Learners

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Abstract

Textbook is one of the key elements for second language learners to achieve autonomous learning. However, applying this concept to textbook compilation presents significant challenges. This paper explores new pathways to address this challenge. Drawing on the author's over ten years of experience in developing L2 Chinese textbooks for Western teenage learners, the paper redefines the role of textbooks — not as providers of ready-made learning materials, but as a tool offering multiple learning pathways. These pathways guide learners to ask questions, engage in critical thinking, challenge themselves, and independently find solutions. This approach to textbook design aims to empower learners to take charge of and control their own learning journey. As a result, they not only master the target language as active participants but, more importantly, stimulate their creativity, enhance critical thinking skills, and boost their self-awareness and confidence in their potential. Through numerous examples of textbook compilation, the paper demonstrates how to pave new pathways for autonomous second language learners in L2 Chinese textbook design and shares preliminary feedback from teenage L2 Chinese learners who participated in the trial of the innovative sample textbook courses.

Keywords: Innovative teaching materials, new pathways for autonomous learning, L2 Chinese textbooks, examples of textbook compilation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern education, autonomous learning is one of the most important concepts. Mastering the content of study is not the sole goal; cultivating independent and critical thinking, creativity, and civic awareness are equally vital. Learners do not passively accept language knowledge taught by teachers; instead, they take an active role in their own learning through participation and interaction. In this process, the teacher's primary task is not to instil knowledge but to guide learners to challenge preconceived notions, develop independent thinking habits, analyse critically, and fully realise their creative potential through self-directed learning.

However, traditional L2 Chinese textbooks have not fully moved away from rote teaching methods. Examples can be drawn from the Chinese textbooks used by teenage learners in Irish secondary schools and local community Chinese schools, including *Kuaile Hanyu* (快樂漢語) (Li & et al, 2015), *Jin Bu* (進步) (Zhu & Bin, 2010), *Easy Steps to Chinese* (輕鬆學中文) (Ma & Li, 2007), and *Edexcel GCSE Chinese* (Yan & et al, 2009). In these textbooks, new words are typically presented in isolated blocks with specialised glossaries. This approach forces learners to acquire new vocabulary passively and reluctantly, as it overlooks the unique ideographic function of each Chinese character and its role in word formation. It also disrupts the natural connection between the meaning of Chinese characters, their ideological concepts, etymology, related imagery, cultural elements, and character radicals. Even when some of these elements are included, such as the exploration of the pictographic nature and radicals of Chinese characters in *Jin Bu*, they are often segregated within additional text boxes, depriving learners of the richness, enjoyment, and depth that learning Chinese can offer.

Regarding grammar points, many of the traditional L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners prioritise standardised, rigorous, and systematic grammar learning. They present grammar points as modules, with terminological explanations and formulas. Some textbooks, like *Easy Steps to Chinese*, attempt to simplify this

formulaic teaching method but swing to the opposite extreme. In this series, grammar points are reduced to an English translation followed by a single example sentence. These teaching methods leave learners in a passive state, requiring them to react passively to new grammar points rather than actively engaging in the learning process.

Moreover, in these L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners, texts and exercises are often presented separately, resulting in a disconnection between learning and practice. When reading texts, learners passively accept presented knowledge without interacting or engaging with it. Conversely, during exercises, learners frequently detach from the scenarios and contexts provided by the textbooks, transforming practice into an inactive learning process rather than a steppingstone for autonomous learning.

Furthermore, language and culture are inherently interconnected, and Chinese teaching materials should seamlessly integrate cultural content. However, in these L2 Chinese textbooks, cultural elements are either ignored or presented in English as separate blocks. While incorporating cultural points explained in English can enhance learners' understanding of diverse cultures during the process of learning the target language, this approach has several drawbacks. It disrupts the natural integration of language and culture, neglects many valuable cultural aspects, and diminishes learners' motivation for autonomous cultural exploration due to the rigid insertion of unrelated cultural elements.

Regarding the integration of new concepts in foreign language teaching and learning, such as promoting learners' self-awareness of well-being and enhancing their sense of social responsibility and global citizenship, the issues raised from traditional L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners are twofold: a) the teaching content completely overlooks these new concepts, or b) the teaching content that incorporates these new concepts fails to facilitate learners in achieving a self-directed learning process. This demonstrates a significant challenge in applying these new concepts to textbooks for teenage learners, whose language proficiency

may not be sufficient to deal with such learning content on one hand, and whose learning process should be interactive and engaging on the other.

Finally, when compiling L2 Chinese textbooks, testing and assessment should enable learners to actively engage in monitoring and evaluating their own progress, fostering reflective and self-directed learning. However, the testing and assessment methods employed in traditional L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners still adhere to passive formats, failing to meet this essential requirement.

The existence of these issues highlights a significant conflict between the needs of cultivating autonomous young learners through L2 Chinese learning and the limitations of traditional L2 Chinese textbooks that hinder this goal. To resolve the conflict, action research¹ project was conducted to address two key questions: 1) What role can textbooks play in promoting autonomous learning and fostering autonomous learners? 2) How can the concept of autonomous learning be applied to the compilation of L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners? This paper seeks to demonstrate how these questions are addressed through a decade-long experimental effort in compiling L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners. In the following sections, I will first provide a brief overview of the literature on the theory and practice of enhancing learner autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning, identifying the challenges in compiling L2 Chinese textbooks that hinder the development of autonomous learners. Next, I will introduce the research background and methodology, explaining how the action research was initiated and the methods by which it was conducted to compile the set of L2 Chinese textbooks. Following this, I will present examples that illustrate how the concepts and approaches of autonomous learning were integrated into our textbook compilation. Finally, I will discuss the initial feedback from learners during the piloting phase before concluding with a summary of the key points of this paper.

¹ Action research is a method that seeks to investigate and address an issue simultaneously. As the name implies, it involves conducting research while taking action to implement solutions at the same time.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the publication of Holec's book, *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning* (1981), autonomy in language learning has been a significant topic of discussion regarding language learning practices and teaching principles (Yarahmadzehi & Bazleh, 2012). Consequently, promoting self-directed learning and fostering learner autonomy has become one of the key strategies in modern language education. With the rapid development of modern technology, many language advisors now utilise various electronic tools and online resources to support autonomous learning (Lai, 2018; McDougald, 2013; Ibanez, 2021; Eneau & Develotte, 2012; Salem, 2022; Costa & et al, 2013). Meanwhile, a Hybrid Learning (HL) approach has been implemented, combining traditional classroom learning, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and self-directed learning (SDL) (Bärenfänger, 2005, Shams, 2013). Similarly, Luke (2008) reported research results where the curriculum was presented using a technology-enhanced, inquiry-based learning approach. Other studies have focused on the teacher's role in fostering learner autonomy. For example, Kaur (2014) shows how a committed lecturer can play an instrumental role in facilitating self-directed learning among learners. Clemente (2001) examines the attitudes of language teachers who work as counsellors for self-directed language learners. Yang (2020) reports on how a language instructor designed an informal, semi-structured self-directed English listening program beyond the classroom, aiming to examine learners' autonomous learning processes and their perceptions of the program. Similarly, Almusharraf's (2018) study suggests ways to enhance L2 learner autonomy using strategies such as inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. Izadpanah (2022) examines the impact of flipped teaching on EFL learners' academic resilience, self-directed learning, and learner autonomy. While many studies typically concentrate on the diverse teaching methods employed by instructors, Ozer and Yükselir (2023) deviate from this norm by focusing on the learner's role in fostering autonomy. They pose a thought-provoking question in the

title of their article: "Am I aware of my roles as a learner?" This study explores the relationships between learner autonomy (LA), self-directed learning (SDL), goal commitment (GC), and academic achievement in the target language. Similarly, Harris (1997) examines the self-assessment of language learning in formal settings, indicating that self-assessment is a key strategy for autonomous language learning. Research findings by Kan & *et al* (2018) indicate the emergence of significant new practices and previously unreported strategies, such as frequent self-testing and using pinyin input to identify new characters.

The existing research mentioned above has undoubtedly made significant contributions to both the theory and practice of enhancing learner autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, two fundamental issues remain inadequately addressed: namely, a) the role of textbooks in fostering learner autonomy, and b) whether autonomy is merely a specific learning method or technique for language learners. Regarding the first issue, as Zhu correctly points out, "Textbooks are obviously extremely important for both teaching and learning. What we teach, how we teach, and the success or failure of teaching and learning, to a certain extent, are all dependent on the textbooks we choose" (Zhu, 2004). Thus, when Canale (2021) summarises the research discoveries and results in the Special Issue *the Language Textbook: Representation, Interaction, and Learning: Conclusion*, he argues that "a deeper articulation between *representation*, *interaction*, and *learning* is needed to further explore the dynamics of structural and situated power and agency in language textbook studies." As such, his paper "calls for more attention to empirically and situated research in the field so as to better account for textbook discourse circulation and use and to better capture the agentive role of students and teachers in negotiating textbook discourse, representations, and contents." Regarding the second issue, Benson (2011, p. 2), in his book *Teaching and Researching: Autonomy in Language Learning*, argues that "autonomy is not a method of learning, but an attribute of the learner's approach to the learning process." For Benson, "autonomy is a precondition for effective learning; when learners succeed in developing autonomy, they not only become

better language learners, but they also develop into more responsible and critical members of the communities in which they live" (2011, p. 1).

For these reasons, the research presented in this paper emphasises fostering independence, creativity, critical thinking, and autonomy in teenage learners through the compilation of L2 Chinese textbooks. By empowering students with agency and control over their learning journey, it is hoped that they will not only become self-aware learners but also evolve into responsible, civic-minded individuals who actively contribute to their communities and help shape a better society.

3. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Background

The research was initiated in response to a request from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2009, an educational agency of the Government of Ireland. The NCCA entrusted the Irish Institute for Chinese Studies (IICS) at University College Dublin (UCD) to develop teaching materials for Chinese Language and Culture for the Transition Year (CLCTY) in Irish post-primary schools. In 2012, the *Chinese Language and Culture Teaching Pack for Transition Year* (Li & et al) was developed by a research team led by IICS and officially launched by the then Minister of Education in Ireland. Since its release, the Teaching Pack has been adopted by all Irish secondary schools offering CLCTY programs.

In 2014, the Department of Education in Ireland (DEI) initiated the Short Course in Chinese Language and Culture, aimed at Junior Cycle students in Irish secondary schools. To meet the requirements of this course, the IICS research team developed a textbook series titled *Chinese for the Junior Cycle Short Course* (Li & et al, 2014), specifically designed for Irish post-primary school students.

In 2020, the DEI introduced Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese as part of Ireland's university entrance examinations. To address the needs of Senior

Cycle students in Irish post-primary schools taking this examination, as well as a wider audience of teenage L2 Chinese learners in other English-speaking countries learning Chinese from beginner to intermediate levels, the IICS research team has developed a new set of textbooks. These textbooks are currently nearing completion and are scheduled for publication.

3.2 Research Methodology

Guidance of local educational concepts

Researching local foreign language curriculums is a crucial step towards reforming traditional L2 Chinese textbooks for western teenage learners. These curriculums serve as guides for our research team to depart from traditional educational concepts and explore new approaches to meet the requirements of cultivating autonomous learners in today's modern world. For instance, the *Mandarin Chinese Curriculum Specification* (NCCA, 2020) for Leaving Certificate Mandarin Chinese categorises the key skills of foreign language learners into five categories: information processing, critical/creative thinking, communication, personal effectiveness, and collaboration (see Figure 1). These skills embody a core set of educational principles that not only shape the design of the new textbooks but also serve as a foundation for evaluating traditional textbooks.

Figure 1. 'Five Key Skills for Language Education', presented in the *Mandarin Chinese Curriculum Specification* by NCCA, Government of Ireland, 2020. (pp. 13–14).



According to this curriculum, mastery of the study content itself is not the sole objective; far from it. The primary focus lies in cultivating independent and critical thinking, alongside fostering creativity and civic awareness. Learners are not passive recipients of language knowledge from their teachers; instead, they actively drive their own learning through participation and interaction. In this context, the role of teaching shifts from imparting knowledge to actively guiding learners to challenge established and inherent concepts, fostering independent thought, encouraging critical analysis, and unleashing creative potential through self-directed learning. Thus, learners develop their information-processing skills, as well as critical and creative thinking, through language activities. They engage in authentic text exploration, identifying and extracting specific information, and crafting creative compositions. Consequently, rather than passively absorbing knowledge, learners engage in active thought, questioning, discussion, and critique. For them, the learning journey is characterised by continuous exploration, innovation, and self-improvement. The educational concepts emphasised in the curriculum are crucial guiding principles for our research team. It is through the implementation of these principles that our compilation of L2 Chinese textbooks has undergone a comprehensive transformation from traditional ones.

Local Teachers' Involvement

To achieve the localisation of Chinese teaching materials, the role of local teachers in curriculum development cannot be underestimated. Over the course of more than a decade of compiling teaching packs and textbooks for L2 Chinese teenage learners, a group of 12 Irish native teachers has been actively involved in the process. These local teachers learned Chinese language and culture themselves and taught the subject in post-primary schools. The local educational concepts and methods they applied in their Chinese classes, along with their extensive teaching experience in local schools, greatly contributed to the research and the textbook compilation. These local teachers participated in forum discussions organised by

the research team and took part in workshops where they collaborated with the research team members to design sample lessons. After the draft lessons were completed, some of the local teachers piloted them in their Chinese classes and provided valuable feedback to the research team. Additionally, some members of the research team had the opportunity to observe the classes taught by these local teachers, gaining insights into how they inspired learners to critically and creatively engage with the information presented in the piloted textbooks. Through this collaborative approach, the textbooks were refined and tailored to better meet the needs of the teenage learners, bridging the gap between traditional Chinese teaching methods and modern educational practices.

Analysing Other L2 Textbooks Used by Local Teachers and Students

Our research team also carefully analysed and drew on the concepts and methods of other local foreign language textbooks, especially those designed and used in the multilingual environment of the European continent. These textbooks encompass various European languages such as French, Italian, Spanish, as well as an Asian language like Japanese (Bertoni, 2005; Zimmermann, 2007; Bongrand & et al, 2015; Harrow, 2006; Fenton, 2021; Kelly & et al, 2016). While drawing inspiration from the approaches explored by the authors of these textbooks, the research team critically and creatively considered: a) how the authors applied concepts of autonomous learning to the textbooks compilation, and b) what limitations the textbooks might have in terms of contributing to the development of autonomous learners. This research represents a significant step in the process of compiling L2 Chinese textbooks for our target learners. It offers valuable examples of how foreign language textbooks are compiled in local educational environments, serving as a source of inspiration for innovative ideas. These ideas aim to bridge the gap in using textbooks to promote autonomous and self-directed learning for L2 Chinese learners, ultimately enhancing their ability to learn independently and effectively.

Piloting Sample Lessons and Feedback Collecting

Since our target learners are at the core of the learning process, their feedback on the textbooks compiled by the research team is exceptionally valuable. Once sample lessons were drafted, they were provided to teachers to test students' reactions and responses in their Chinese classes. Learners' feedback was then collected, analysed, and carefully considered by the research team during the revision of the sample lessons. This direct feedback from learners helped the research team identify issues from the learners' perspective and understand the factors that hindered them from actively engaging in and taking control of their learning journey (details on the feedback collection process will be discussed later in the paper).

In summary, as argued by Benson (2011), “the best research on autonomy is often not research concerned with ‘grand theory,’ but action research conducted by practicing teachers on the specific conditions of teaching and learning within which they work.” The methodology outlined above was implemented to achieve the objectives of our action research. The following section will illustrate how the concept of autonomous learning was integrated into the textbook compilation process, transforming the landscape of L2 Chinese textbook development.

4. INCORPORATION OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES INTO THE COMPILATION OF L2 CHINESE TEXTBOOKS

4.1 Breaking Down Barriers, Building Steppingstones, and Encouraging Creativity: Empowering Autonomous Learners to Master Characters and Phrases

In L2 Chinese textbooks used by Irish teenage learners, as stated earlier, vocabularies are often presented in blocks, accompanied by specialised glossaries of new terms. This approach compels learners to acquire new vocabulary passively and reluctantly, as it overlooks the unique ideographic function of each

individual Chinese character and its role in word formation. Consequently, the natural connection between the meaning of Chinese characters, their ideological concepts, etymology, related imagery, cultural elements, and character radicals is severed. Even when some of these elements are included, such as the exploration of the pictographic nature and radicals of Chinese characters in *Jin Bu*, they are often segregated within additional text boxes, depriving learners of the richness, enjoyment, and depth that learning Chinese can offer.

Here, the fundamental issue lies not solely in the presentation of characters and phrases to learners, but rather in determining who should take the lead in the learning process. If the learner is to be the focal point of learning, then the role of the textbook should be to offer steppingstones that guide them towards discovery, critical thinking, and comprehension of the learning materials autonomously. In the designed lesson titled “你喜欢吃什么” (What do you like to eat), for example, the traditional block-style glossaries are eliminated. Instead, the unit commences with two pictographs, 牛 (cattle) and 羊 (goat), wherein their etymology, pictographic characteristics, and developmental histories are elucidated. This approach endeavours to prompt L2 Chinese learners to forge connections between these characters and the real-life objects they represent. Similarly, 鸟 (bird) is introduced, naturally leading to the characters 鸡 (chicken) and 鸭 (duck), prompting learners to deduce the shared component of 鸟. This strategy aims to guide learners towards comprehending the structural principles and formative functions inherent in Chinese characters through independent inquiry. Subsequently, phrases comprising animal names and 肉 (meat) are presented, allowing learners to appreciate the logical and ideographic nature of Chinese compounds by contrasting them with expressions in their mother tongue. Through such introspection and learning, learners not only acquire mastery over these phrases and understand the fundamental rules governing their formation, but also enhance the autonomy and efficacy of their learning process. With these steppingstones in place, learners can effortlessly comprehend the character 吃 (to eat), discern its radical 口 (mouth), and navigate the learning

process to grasp the sentence pattern 吃 / 不吃 + 牛肉、羊肉、鸡肉、鸭肉 , seamlessly transitioning into the realm of phrasal communication (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Innovative methods are used to present new characters and words in the textbook, supporting learners' autonomous learning process.

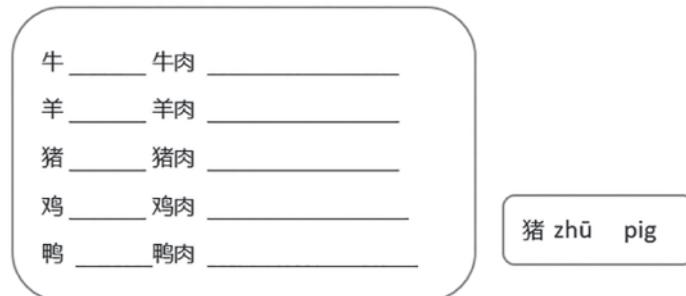
1) Examine the ancient forms of these two characters and explain how they were created.



2) Observe the image of a bird and the character '鸟' and identify the similarities between them. Then, examine the characters '鸡' (chicken) and '鸭' (duck), noting the parts they share, and explain the reasons behind these similarities.



3) In Chinese, '肉' means meat. Look at the following characters, translate them into English, and discover how these Chinese words are constructed.

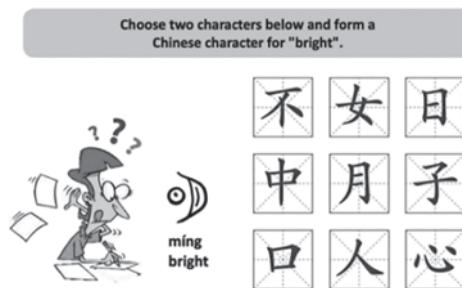


4) Examine both the ancient and modern forms of the character '吃' (to eat) and explain why it includes the component '口' (mouth).



Another effective method to engage learners with new characters is to stimulate their creative thinking. For example, rather than simply presenting the character 明 (bright) in a list of new words, an interactive exercise can be devised. In this exercise, learners are tasked with selecting two characters out of nine provided options to create the character for ‘bright’. Learners must carefully examine the nine characters and contemplate which two symbolise something bright in the universe. They then select 日 (the sun) and 月 (the moon) to form 明, which is the correct learning outcome (see Figure 3). This approach not only encourages active engagement and independent thinking but also fosters a deeper understanding of the character and its components.

Figure 3. A fun exercise that allows learners to acquire new characters through their own creative thinking.



Furthermore, to enhance interaction between learners and learning materials, students are encouraged to design their own Chinese characters based on their life experiences and understanding of Chinese character formation. For instance, after studying relevant graphics or ancient inscriptions of characters like 点 (dot), 半 (half), and 分 (to divide), students are tasked with designing these three characters themselves based on their observations and understanding of objects (see Figure 4). This activity not only encourages creativity but also deepens students’ understanding of the structural components and ideographic nature of Chinese characters.

Figure 4. Learners are encouraged to design the same three characters based on their observations and understanding of the objects.



4.2 Discovering Grammar: A Task-Based, Student-Driven Approach

As previously mentioned, contemporary L2 Chinese textbooks designed for teenagers often employ a passive approach to teaching grammar. They typically present grammar points in discrete blocks, accompanied by terminological explanations, formulas, and drills. Alternatively, explanations may be reduced to a mere English translation with a single example sentence. To fundamentally alter this approach and empower learners to take ownership of their grammar learning, a completely new instructional method is introduced. Firstly, the rigid, formulaic presentation of grammar is discarded. Instead, learners are encouraged to grasp new concepts through independent thinking and problem-solving. For instance, to help learners understand how the expressions 没 /.....过, 想, and 要 了 convey past, present, and future tenses, they are guided through a process of comparing example sentences, engaging in reflective thinking, offering their insights, and generating three sets of sentences based on their understanding of the sample sentences (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Learners are guided to independently grasp, generalise, and summarize grammar rules.

Compare the sentences in the three boxes below and identify the differences between them. Translate each sentence into English, and then create three sets of sentences by applying what you've learned from the examples.

没/.....过	想.....	要.....了
我没去过北京。	我想去北京。	我要去北京了。
我学过日语, 没学过汉语。	我想学汉语。	我要学汉语了。
我去过英国, 没去过美国。	我想去美国。	我要去美国了。

Another effective grammar teaching method implemented involves guiding learners to understand Chinese grammar structures by comparing them with their native language. For example, when teaching the use of 对 to express 'to', instead of directly explaining its function and position in Chinese sentence construction, learners are asked to deduce the pattern by comparing it with English (see Figure 6). By examining the placement of equivalent phrases (highlighted in matching colours) in both English and Chinese sentences, learners are guided to understand the role of 对 in Chinese sentence structure through their own reasoning and analysis.

Figure 6. Learners are guided to understand Chinese grammar structures through comparisons with English.

你爸爸妈妈对我真好！
Your parents are really kind to me!

我们在中国玩得很开心，中国人对我们很友好。
We had a great time in China, and the Chinese people were very friendly to us.

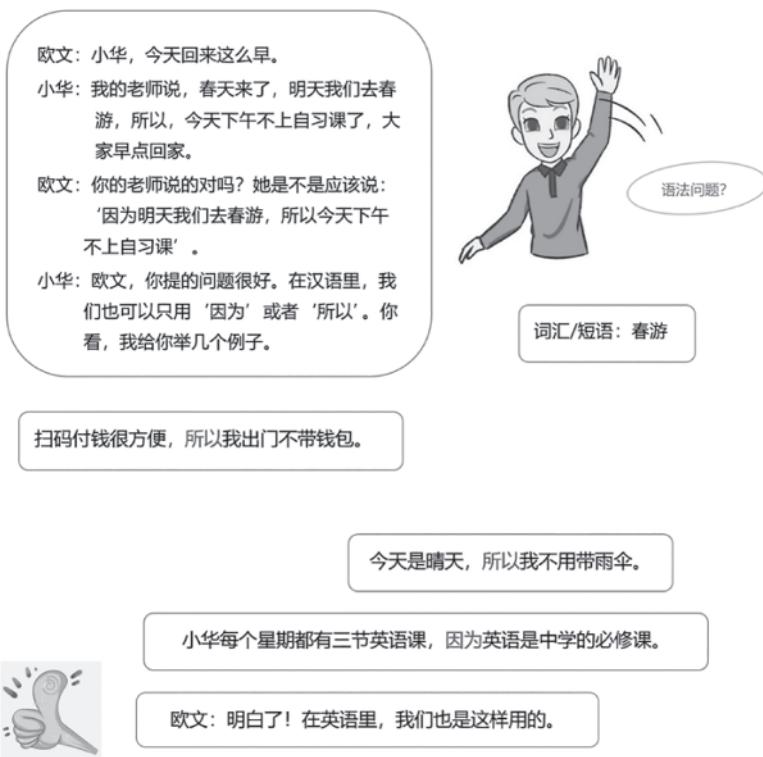
王文对欧文和他的同学说：“欢迎你们，谢谢你们来参观”。
Wang Wen said to Eoin and his classmates, "Welcome, thank you for coming to visit."

我很喜欢中国人对我说：“你的中文说的真好”！
I really like it when Chinese people say to me, "Your Chinese is really good!"

My explanation of the simplest way to determine the correct placement of
对 in Chinese sentences:

Moreover, to encourage learners to take ownership of their learning journey, certain grammar points are introduced through interactive discussions. In the example below (see Figure 7), the character Eoin, a Western learner, questions the teacher's use of causal compound sentences (因为 ..., 所以 ..., because..., therefore...). Eoin's pen friend, Xiaohua, then engages in a dialogue, providing examples to help Eoin understand and internalise this new grammatical structure. This approach is designed to foster learners' ability to discover and solve problems independently, while enhancing their critical thinking skills.

Figure 7. The learner questions the teacher's use of causal compound sentences.



4.3 Breaking Boundaries, Redefining Roles, and Inspiring

Creativity: Integrating Texts and Exercises

As previously noted, L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners often separate texts and exercises, creating a gap between learning and practical application. This separation leads to passive information consumption during text study and disengaged practice during exercises, resulting in a lack of active engagement and autonomous learning. To address this issue, a radical shift is implemented in the new textbook design by seamlessly integrating texts and exercises, fostering a cohesive learning experience for learners. For example, in the lesson titled “我学会打折了” (I Learned How to Bargain), one of the texts is a dialogue between two characters about online shopping. Rather than introducing the text first and then reinforcing new language points through exercises, the new design reverses this approach. Exercises are introduced as steppingstones, guiding

learners to reach their learning destination independently. Take, for instance, the design of the exercise for ‘来得及’ (in time) and ‘来不及’ (too late). This exercise appears before the text is presented, requiring learners to grasp the new language point by completing a task through independent study (see Figure 8). This approach transforms exercises from mere afterthoughts into integral components of the learning process, encouraging learners to actively engage and take control of their learning journey.

Figure 8. An exercise on 来得及 (in time) and 来不及 (too late) is integrated into the context of online shopping.

今天是十号星期三, Eoin 十二号星期五回国。Below are the delivery times for the items Eoin is interested in purchasing. Do you think the goods will arrive before Eoin's departure? Use 来得及 or 来不及 to express your opinion. The first example has been provided for you.

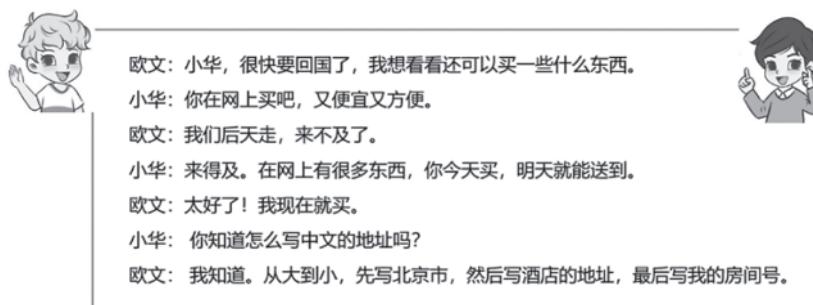


买的东西	到的时间	来得及/来不及
书包	明天	来得及
球衣	今天下午	
旅游鞋	后天	
马克杯	今天下午	
充电器	明天	
运动衫	大后天	

After learners have engaged with and internalised the new language points through exercises, the text is then introduced. At this point, the text is no longer an unfamiliar piece of material but a ‘seemingly familiar’ resource. This allows learners to deepen their understanding and test their learning outcomes through independent work (see Figure 9). By integrating exercises before the text, learners

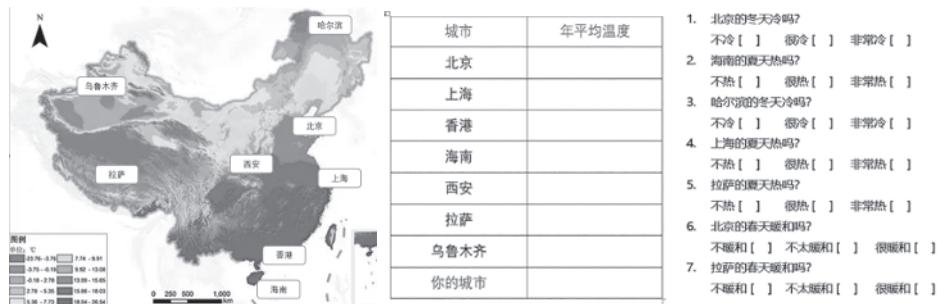
approach the material with greater confidence, fostering a more seamless and self-directed learning experience.

Figure 9. The text transitions from an unfamiliar piece of material to a 'seemingly familiar' resource.



In some instances, the text and exercises are completely integrated into a single learning experience. For example, in the lesson titled “我们要去中国了” (We Are Going to China), learners first encounter a colourful graph presenting the temperature zones of eight Chinese cities, arranged from north to south and east to west. Based on this information, learners fill out a form with the average annual temperatures of these cities. Following this, they research the average annual temperatures of their own cities online. Using this information, learners complete a multiple-choice question sheet and learn how to ask and answer questions about weather and temperature. Finally, learners pair up to engage in a conversation using the newly learned sentence patterns. Throughout this process, the exercises and text are merged into a cohesive learning task, enabling learners to actively engage with the material and take control of their own learning journey (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. An example of seamlessly integrating texts with exercises.



Such design approach dismantles the traditional separation between texts and exercises, transforming the textbook from a pre-packaged model into a self-directed learning pathway that guides learners toward their goals. However, it's important to clarify that integrating texts and exercises does not eliminate the need for separate activities. On the contrary, in addition to the integrated exercises, there are dedicated listening, speaking, reading, writing, and typing tasks specifically designed to reinforce and complement the content of each lesson.

4.4 Seamlessly Integrating Language and Culture: Fostering Autonomous Exploration and Intercultural Understanding

Language and culture share an intrinsic bond and are not mutually exclusive. Chinese language learning materials inherently encompass cultural content. However, as mentioned earlier, two issues arise when integrating culture into traditional L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners. Firstly, cultural content is either isolated from language learning or overlooked, presented as a separate entity. Secondly, due to learners' limited proficiency in Chinese, cultural sections are often presented in their native languages rather than in the target language. These teaching methods not only sever the natural connection between language and culture, weakening learners' understanding and comprehension of both, but also leave no room for learners to imagine, think, or explore by themselves in the learning process.

To tackle these issues, a fresh approach was adopted to seamlessly intertwine language and culture, erasing the boundaries between them and aligning with the proficiency level of the learners. For instance, in the lesson titled “你的生日是几月几号?” (What is your birthday?), instead of presenting the Chinese zodiac signs in isolation, the new design incorporates them into the lesson. Learners are introduced to reading a series of years in Chinese as new learning material and are then tasked with matching the corresponding years in Arabic numerals to their respective zodiac signs in the accompanying diagram (see Figure 11). Through this approach, learners not only learn how to express different years using Chinese characters but also naturally associate this language learning with relevant Chinese cultural traditions. Additionally, to reinforce this connection, learners are tasked with identifying their own zodiac sign and those of their parents or friends from the provided diagram, and then writing down the birth years in Chinese. This innovative method encourages learners to actively participate in and enjoy the dual learning process, rather than passively absorbing knowledge from separate modules. Moreover, the learning task is relatively simple and matches the language proficiency of the target learners.

Figure 11. An example of blending language and culture, making them seamlessly interconnected, while ensuring the content aligns with the learners' proficiency level.



In the lesson titled "小华的家" (Xiaohua's Home), for another example, language and culture are seamlessly integrated to create a holistic learning

experience. As learners explore the interior decoration of character Xiaohua's home, they encounter a landscape painting hanging on the wall of the sitting room. The characters 山 (mountain), 水 (water), and 画 (paintings) are familiar to the learners, but here, they are presented in a new context, forming an intriguing linguistic and cultural connection. Through reading the character Eoin's journal entry, learners gain insight into the importance of landscape paintings in Chinese family traditions. They are then assigned to research and analyse information on both Chinese landscape paintings and those from their own cultural backgrounds, culminating in the creation of a PowerPoint presentation in Chinese for a project. This approach not only enhances language skills but also cultivates a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, all while encouraging learners to take charge of their own learning journey (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. *Another example of merging language and culture to create a seamless integration, while ensuring the content is appropriate for the learners' proficiency level.*



我现在住在小华家。小华家客厅的墙上，有一幅山水画，我很喜欢。我的房间在小华的房间旁边。房间里有一张单人床、一张书桌、两把椅子和一个衣柜。桌子上有一个台灯。小华的家在 11 楼，站在窗前，可以看到小区和小区外面的风景。小区里有很多树和五颜六色的花，很漂亮。小华家的邻居很友好，他们见了我，对我说：“Hello, 你好！”我和他们说中文，他们很吃惊，他们没想到我会说中文。

Similarly, in the lesson titled “生日礼物” (Birthday Gift), a scenario is presented where one character friend plans to buy a red tie featuring Chinese calligraphy as a birthday gift for her friend, Eoin (see Figure 13). This design simultaneously aligns with Western cultural customs - ties are a staple accessory in school uniforms for post-primary students - and acknowledges the global popularity of ties as fashion items often adorned with images and writing. This approach encourages learners to understand the uniquely Chinese tie within

a broader, global cultural context. As learners engage with this dialogue, they encounter vocabulary related to calligraphy and Chinese gift-giving traditions. This immersive experience allows them to appreciate the aesthetic appeal of traditional Chinese calligraphy and its modern-day relevance. Learners then engage actively by designing their own gift tie, incorporating a calligraphic element, either in Chinese or from their own cultural traditions, and writing a short message in Chinese to the recipient of the gift. This activity not only reinforces learners' language skills but also fosters their creativity and cultural awareness.

Figure 13. Another example of integrating language and culture, creating a seamless connection while ensuring the learning content is suited to the learners' proficiency level.

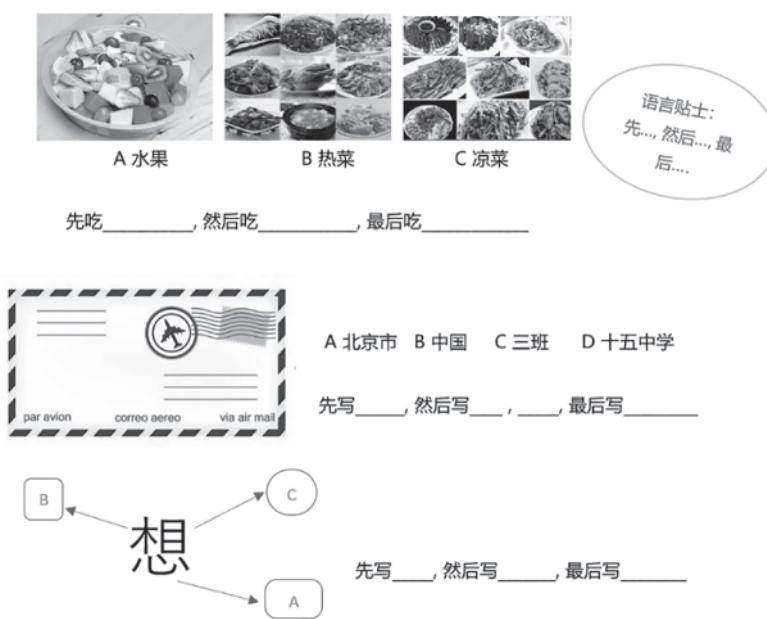
王文：你想给欧文买什么生日礼物？
小华：他喜欢听音乐，送给他一副耳机，你觉得怎么样？
王文：好主意。如果买耳机，可以网购，网上有各种各样的耳机。
小华：好啊。那你要给他买什么礼物？
王文：你看，那条领带上有许多汉字，书法很漂亮。
小华：你想送给他一条书法领带？
王文：你觉得他会喜欢吗？
小华：欧文对汉字和书法感兴趣，我想他会很喜欢。
王文：你是他的好朋友，最知道他喜欢什么！



Moreover, when presenting the expression 先 (first)..., 然后 (then)..., 最后 (finally)..., we avoid introducing the sentence pattern solely from a linguistic perspective by designing a series of culturally rich scenarios. In these scenarios, learners practice the sentence pattern within cultural contexts, such as the order of serving Chinese dishes, writing an address, and constructing a Chinese character (see Figure 14). Learners engage in self-study and fill in the blanks with the correct order, thereby naturally integrating language and culture learning. This approach

enhances their intercultural understanding and communication skills, immersing them in an enjoyable, self-directed learning process.

Figure 14. Another example demonstrates the natural integration of language and culture learning as a unified experience.



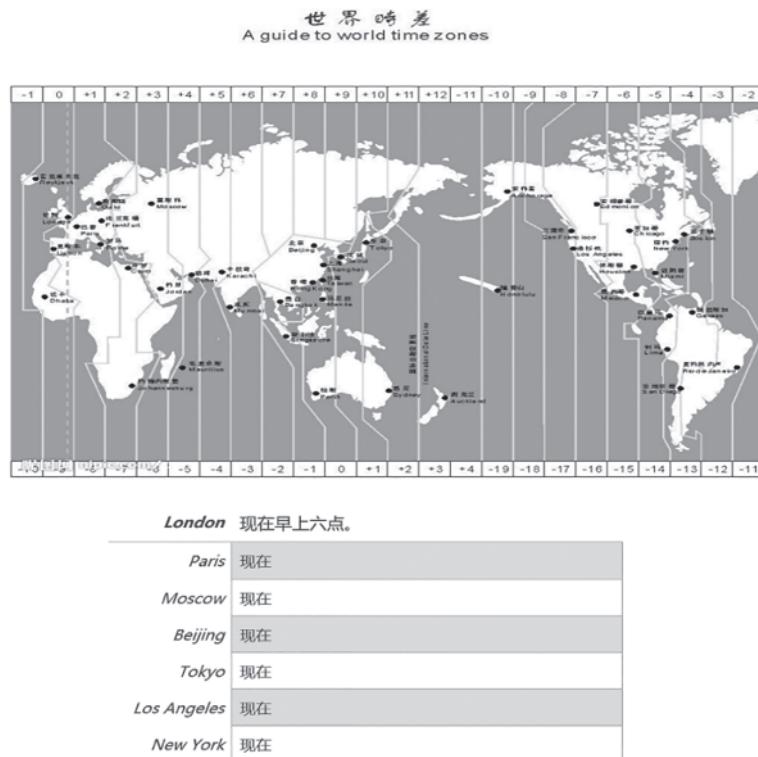
4.5 Empowering Learners for Global Citizenship through Autonomous Exploration

As previously noted, traditional L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners tend to have a narrow focus, emphasising Chinese language and culture in isolation. This approach overlooks a key principle in modern Western foreign language education: the importance of fostering an understanding of oneself, others, and the diverse languages and cultures of the world. It also limits opportunities for young learners to develop autonomy by engaging them in linguistic and cultural comparisons. To overcome these shortcomings, our newly designed textbooks take a more holistic, globally inclusive approach. They encourage learners to expand their perspectives and foster an interest in multilingualism and multiculturalism, all while considering their language proficiency, age, and cognitive development.

This ensures that the content is not only accessible but also engaging, empowering learners to master their educational journey and become independent, culturally aware individuals.

For instance, when learning expressions of time, the lesson “现在几点了” (What time is it?) is contextualised within the concept of global time zones. Learners are tasked with identifying the locations and time zones of six major world cities from a map, calculating the local times of the cities based on their relation to GMT/UTC, and then answering questions about the current time in each city (see Figure 15). This approach not only teaches learners how to ask for and tell time in Chinese but also, through a self-directed learning process and active participation, enhances their understanding of world geography and time zone differences.

Figure 15. An example of redefined teaching materials designed to broaden learners' horizons and cultivate their awareness as global citizens.



Similarly, in the lesson titled “竹 筒 美 食” (Bamboo Tube Delicacies), learners explore language points and cultural aspects through the character Eoin’s experiences with the food and music of some China’s ethnic minorities. As they delve into these cultural elements, they are also encouraged to connect them with globally renowned cultural treasures. The learners are tasked with using Eoin’s PowerPoint presentation as a reference to create their own projects. In his presentation (see Figure 16), Eoin compares a Chinese ethnic minority musical instrument, the Hulusi, with Ireland’s traditional instrument, the harp. He explains appearance of the harp and its significance as a national symbol,

Figure 16. *An example of redefined teaching materials that broaden learners' horizons and foster their awareness as global citizens while developing autonomous learning skills.*



appearing on Ireland's emblem, coins, and more. He also highlights the famous harp-shaped bridge on the River Liffey in the capital city of Ireland, Dublin. This approach encourages learners to contextualise their learning on a global scale while challenging them to conduct independent research for cultural comparison. Ultimately, they use the vocabulary and sentence structures from the lesson to present their findings to the class.

Furthermore, in the lesson discussing the association between mask colours and personality traits in Chinese culture, images of Beijing opera masks are juxtaposed with masks from Western cultures for Halloween, as well as masks from African, American, and Greek cultures, serving as examples (see Figure 17). Teenage learners are assigned the task of conducting online research to select their favourite-coloured masks and identify their corresponding personality traits. Subsequently, they are guided to create their own masks based on the results of their independent research and share their creations with classmates through presentations in the class.

Figure 17. *An example of redefined teaching materials aimed at broadening learners' horizons and fostering their awareness as global citizens.*



These examples show how to design language-related culture in a global context, with a de-ego-centric, multicultural dimension, and an open-ended approach, allowing learners to enhance their sense of being global citizens through their own directed learning process.

4.6 Cultivating Self-Awareness of Well-Being and Social Responsibility through Learner-Driven Engagement

Promoting self-awareness of well-being and nurturing a sense of social

responsibility are key educational objectives prevalent in modern Western language learning for teenagers. However, applying these concepts to L2 Chinese textbooks for teenage learners presents several challenges. Firstly, some content may draw from classical Chinese philosophy and ideology, posing comprehension difficulties for L2 learners, particularly teenagers. Secondly, effectively expressing these topics demands more advanced language skills in vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures. For teenage learners operating between beginner and intermediate proficiency levels, grappling with such content can prove challenging, especially as they navigate their learning journey independently. Lastly, these themes must be seamlessly integrated into language learning materials rather than presented separately and in a disjointed manner.

To address these challenges, an innovative approach has been adopted in presenting the concepts of personal well-being and social responsibility in the textbook. For instance, in addressing personal well-being, content related to physical health is seamlessly integrated into the lesson titled “你喜欢什么颜色” (Which colour/s do you like). Here, learners actively participate by matching pictures of five bowls of differently coloured Chinese tea (茶) with the correct characters, all while absorbing information from a related cultural tip that sheds light on how these teas contribute to a healthy lifestyle. In another lesson titled “快乐人生” (Happy Life), learners are challenged to design healthy meals for a day. They begin by exploring a food pyramid accompanied by relevant vocabulary terms, which they learn through accompanying pictures. Subsequently, they delve into a note about the theory of yin and yang, a fundamental aspect of ancient Chinese philosophy, and leverage this knowledge to craft a balanced and nutritious single-day meal plan (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Learners are tasked with creating a balanced and healthy one-day meal plan based on their knowledge of well-being.



Simultaneously, learners are encouraged to explore the concept of mental health through the wisdom of ancient Chinese sages by reading a simplified version of a fable from the *Zhuangzi*. After reading the text, learners are prompted to answer questions such as “Are these monkeys smart?” and “Why or why not?” To respond, they must first understand the text and then reflect on the life philosophy embedded in the fable. This exercise helps them learn to shift their perspectives to develop a more open-minded and optimistic outlook (see Figure 19).

Figure 19. An example of inspiring learners to grasp the true meaning of mental health through the wisdom of ancient Chinese sages.



Complementing individual well-being are the responsibilities and obligations of a citizen within a civil society. Selected themes, such as volunteerism and environmental protection, are used to enhance learners' sense of social responsibility and their desire to contribute to societal development and progress, all while learning a new language. For example, in the lesson titled “课外活动” (Extracurricular Activities), a scenario is designed to promote reading comprehension about volunteer work in a rural primary school. Learners are required to fill in the blanks with characters and phrases such as 希望 (hope)、做义工 (do volunteer work)、送给 (give to), 认为 (should), etc., and then write a short essay of 100-150 words about the story (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. An example of a scenario designed to enhance reading comprehension related to volunteer work in a rural primary school.



Another example is in the lesson featuring the topic “保护地球” (Protecting the Planet), which incorporates various designs for autonomous learning. These include filling out a survey, participating in a discussion about “世界地球日” (Earth Day), designing posters on environmental protection, recognising

environmental protection signs, and choosing eco-friendly gifts. Below is one of the scenarios designed for celebrating Earth Day. In this scenario, teenage learners from different parts of the world form an online discussion group to share how they plan to celebrate the special day (see Figure 21). Through reading and comprehension, learners are tasked with matching each student's discussion topic to the corresponding picture by drawing lines between them. The verb 让 is highlighted in blue to indicate that it is a new word, which learners are expected to study independently and understand based on the context. Then, they engage in a role-playing exercise to ask and answer the question “在地球日你打算做什么？”(What do you plan to do on Earth Day?) based on the content of the texts. Following this exercise, learners write a short paragraph about what they would like to do to celebrate Earth Day and present it in class.

Figure 21. An example of a scenario designed to celebrate Earth Day.

<p>A: 下个星期五是我们学校的绿色校园日。我们会在校园里种树，让地球多一点绿色。</p>	
<p>B: 我们有时候去餐馆吃饭，菜点得太多，吃不完。我们打算今后少点一些。</p>	
<p>C: 我们打算不用电脑的时候，就关机；离开房间的时候，就关灯。</p>	
<p>D: 我们每个人都画了一幅画。我画的是蓝色的地球和白色的云。我还写了一行字：我们只有一个地球。我希望每天都是地球日！</p>	
<p>E: 我们打算今后少坐车，多骑自行车、多走路。</p>	
<p>F: 我们打算做一个海报，让大家知道，我们应该少用塑料袋，少用塑料瓶。</p>	

4.7 Empowering Autonomous Learners through Self-Assessment and Integrated Evaluation

Tests and assessments are an important part of education. When compiling L2 Chinese textbooks, testing and assessment must conform to the concepts and methods discussed above, allowing learners to actively participate in monitoring and evaluating their own progress so that they can become reflective, self-directed learners. To this end, our design emphasises the self-assessment of learners, classroom tests that combine learning and assessment, learning and assessment integrated apps, and student portfolios to maximise learners' drive and initiative to participate in the assessment process.

- a) **Self-Assessment:** At the outset of each lesson, a learning goal box outlines the key objectives and expected competencies. Towards the lesson's conclusion, learners encounter a self-assessment form. Aligned with each learning objective, learners can select from three options: mastery, proficiency, or limited understanding. This framework fosters reflection and self-directed learning. To make their selections, learners must critically assess their progress through review, synthesis, and evaluation, thereby actively engaging in the assessment process to achieve the desired learning outcomes.
- b) **Learning and Assessment Integrated Apps:** Emerging high-tech learning apps offer students opportunities to self-assess their progress and outcomes. By evaluating these apps based on their learning content and integrating testing and assessment features, learners can monitor their progress, foster enthusiasm for self-testing and correction, and embrace autonomous learning. These assessments can take the form of classroom tests that blend learning objectives with assessments or serve as standalone learning tasks for students to complete independently outside of class, combining practice with testing.
- c) **Student Work Portfolio:** A compilation of learning tasks completed

independently by learners through reflection and re-creation, the student work portfolio is a crucial tool in nurturing reflective, self-directed learners. As an integral part of the testing and assessment process, the portfolio encompasses diverse learning tasks, such as slides from class presentations, open-ended discussion essays, workshop-produced artifacts, home projects, and audio recordings of oral presentations.

The innovated approach to testing and assessment seeks to transform learners from passive examinees into active evaluators. While traditional Chinese examination paper designs remain relevant, the new concepts and methods of testing and assessment have evolved considerably. The central aim of these changes is to foster reflective and independent learners. Testing and assessment now emphasise not only knowledge mastery but also learners' ability to independently identify and address problems and effectively utilise language in real-life communication.

5. INITIAL PILOT FEEDBACK

Piloting a textbook and collecting feedback are crucial steps after completing its draft. Feedback from a pilot can reveal how well the textbook meets authors' goals and student needs, providing valuable insights for revisions. Therefore, after each set of textbooks completed its draft, sample lessons were piloted among a group of students and feedback was collected. For the newly developed set of textbooks mentioned above, a small-scale pilot study was conducted with teenage learners in Irish post-primary schools and Chinese community schools. A total of 35 students participated in the pilot, and the overall feedback was positive. Participants responded favourably to the new approaches for autonomous learning introduced in the textbooks. For example, when asked if the new approaches applied in the textbooks allowed them to manage the learning process independently and if the step-by-step guidance provided was effective for autonomous learning, 89% and 94% of the participants responded

positively, respectively. Regarding the new methods for learning vocabulary and grammar, 89% and 75% of the participants, respectively, indicated that they were actively engaged in the learning process and found it easier to grasp the new language materials with these methods. The pilot results also showed that 94% of the participants felt that integrating culture and language inspired their creativity, interest, and interactivity in the learning process. Moreover, 80% of the participants indicated that the integration of exercises and texts made it easier for them to engage in self-learning. Additionally, 77% of participants responded positively when asked whether they had enhanced their independent thinking by comparing the Chinese language and culture with their own, as well as within a global context. Finally, 74% of the participants stated that the strategy of self-assessment motivated them to pursue and achieve the learning objectives outlined in the assessment.

Since the textbook series is still undergoing publication, the current feedback collection and analysis are constrained by the small sample size and focus solely on student responses. After the official release, it will be necessary to gather feedback from a broader and more diverse group of users, including both students and teachers.

6. CONCLUSION

Textbook is one of the keys to promote autonomous L2 learners. This research fills in a significant gap by providing a new approach in compiling Chinese textbooks for cultivating autonomous L2 teenage learners. When presenting new characters and phrases, by moving away from rigid, block-like presentations of vocabulary, setting up steppingstones, and inspiring recreation, the new approach enables learners to take control of their own learning process while appreciating the unique ideographic function of each Chinese character, its role in word formation, and the natural connections between the character's meaning, its conceptual roots, etymology, imagery, cultural significance, and radicals. When

introducing new grammar points, the traditional rigid and formulaic approach is replaced by a more ‘student-led’ method. Students are assigned tasks to grasp grammar on their own in real contexts through various methods, such as analysing sentence structures, comparing Chinese and English sentences, questioning the use of grammar in specific sentences, etc. This new approach not only avoids rote memorization of grammar rules, making grammar learning more practical and meaningful for learners, but also fosters students’ ability to independently identify and solve problems, while enhancing their critical thinking skills.

To encourage learners to actively engage and take control of their own learning process, the new approach breaks the boundaries between texts and exercises. Exercises are no longer training that follows learning the text; rather, they become an integral part of the text itself. The text, in turn, also becomes part of the exercises, providing learners with an active self-learning experience. In this way, exercises serve as steppingstones for learners to grasp the content of the text, while the text becomes material for learners to test their learning outcomes.

Furthermore, language and culture are deeply intertwined, and L2 Chinese textbooks must not only incorporate cultural content but also ensure that learners actively engage in and enjoy the exploration of the rich cultural context that accompanies the language. To realise this goal, cultural content should be seamlessly integrated with the language learning material; cultural elements presented in the target language must align with the learners’ language proficiency; and the learning process should be highly learner-driven, offering multiple paths to spark learners’ imagination and creativity. By doing so, learners will strengthen their cross-cultural communication skills, both linguistically and socio-culturally.

To foster autonomous L2 Chinese learners, a more globally inclusive approach should be applied to textbook design. By immersing learners in a global context and encouraging linguistic and cultural comparisons, they are guided to complete tasks using independent and critical thinking. However, in implementing this approach, textbook designers must not only identify natural

connections between language learning materials and concepts of multilingualism and multiculturalism, but also consider learners' language proficiency, age, and cognitive maturity. This ensures the content is both accessible and engaging, empowering learners to take ownership of their education and develop into independent, self-aware individuals.

Aligned with the concept of global citizenship, fostering self-awareness and a sense of social responsibility are essential educational goals in contemporary Western language learning for teenagers. However, effectively presenting these concepts in L2 Chinese textbooks for autonomous learners requires a unique approach. Scenarios should closely reflect learners' daily lives, and relevant Chinese philosophical and ideological ideas should be introduced in the target language in a simplified manner. Additionally, sufficient stepping stones and multiple pathways should be provided to facilitate learners' self-study. By doing so, learners can engage their imagination and creativity to actively connect with these concepts, rather than passively absorbing them in an alien manner.

To encourage learners to actively engage in monitoring and evaluating their progress, textbook design should prioritise self-assessment, classroom tests that blend learning with evaluation, integrated learning-assessment apps, and student portfolios. These tools are intended to maximise learners' motivation and initiative in the assessment process. The central goal of these innovations is to nurture reflective and independent learners. Assessment should focus not only on mastery of knowledge but also on the learners' ability to identify and solve problems, and to apply language effectively in real-world communication scenarios.

Endnotes:

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innovative L2 Chinese textbooks.

2 Since the textbook series is still in the process of publication, the examples of the newly designed L2 Chinese textbooks presented in this paper may undergo minor changes during the editorial process.

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重新定義教材的角色：第二語言自主學習者的新路徑

李嵐

摘要

教材是第二語言學習者實現自主學習的關鍵要素之一。然而，將這一理念應用於教材編寫面臨著重大挑戰。本文探討如何應對這一挑戰的新路徑。基於作者為西方青少年學習者編寫二語中文教材超過十年的研發經驗，本文重新定義了教材的角色，即不再提供現成的學習材料，而是為學習者提供多種學習路徑，以引導學習者提出問題，進行批判性思考，挑戰自己，並獨立找到問題的解決方案。這一編寫教材的理念與方法旨在學習者能夠自主引導和控制自己的學習之旅，使他們不僅能夠作為學習的主人更好地掌握目標語言，更重要的是，激發自身的創造力，提高批判性思維能力，並增強對個人潛力的認知和信心。本文通過大量編寫教材的實例，展示如何在 L2 中文教材編寫中開闢第二語言自主學習者的新路徑，並分享參與試驗創新教材樣本課程的青少年二語中文學習者的初步反饋。

關鍵詞：創新教材 自主學習的新路徑 二語中文教材 教材編寫實例

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