

Enhancing Linguistic and Cultural Proficiency through Chinese Children's Literature

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Abstract—This paper addresses the issue of selecting high-quality materials for teaching Chinese to non-native-speaker students. The paper argues that the unique nature of literary texts for children and adolescents written in simple and standard language reflecting the rich social fabric of China make them valuable materials for teaching foreign learners of the modern Chinese language. The special value of these materials to non-native learners lies not only in their linguistic aptness, but also in their informative connection between the modern Chinese language and the history and culture of China. The paper demonstrates how to effectively use these materials in a cooperative Chinese language classroom.

Index Terms—Chinese teaching materials, Chinese children's literature, linguistic skills, cultural awareness, cooperative learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The Australian Government's White Paper, *Australia in the Asian Century*, points out that Australia's future prosperity will be built on its Asia-relevant strengths and capabilities. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, calls "on all of us to play our part in becoming a more Asia-literate and Asia-capable nation" (Australian Government *White Paper*, 2012). Over the last few decades, Chinese language has been given a high priority by decision-makers within Australian universities. This increased interest in Chinese has undoubtedly been driven by the view that the vitality of Australian economy, and indeed, that of the world economy, depends on broadening our understanding of Chinese society and its language. Thus, student enrolment in Chinese has increased greatly (Fang, 2012). This great achievement is somewhat negated, however, by the emergence of a number of significant problems and challenges, one of which is the scarcity of high-quality materials for teaching Chinese to non-native speaker students (Huang, Xu & Liu, 2011). Another problem identified by Lo Bianco (2011) is that "Constantly hitching language teaching to trade statistics" has resulted in "an almost absence of a rationale... for substantive educational, intellectual and cultural reasons" (p. xv). Indeed, it is difficult to separate communication from other goals, such as socio-cultural awareness.

Language cannot be removed from cultural and historical contexts. Thus, language teaching resources ought to reflect the fact that language is the carrier of culture, and that the cultural context gives language meaning (Farquhar & Cao, 1995). Kramsch (1994) points out that, "As language teachers are encouraged to help their students not only to read texts for information, but to interpret them for their many layers of meaning, it would seem natural to draw on literature as a means of language teaching" (p. 7). The problem with Chinese language teaching is that, traditionally, literature textbooks use texts selected for their aesthetic and literary values. More advanced students often feel frustrated because, after years of being taught in functional approaches, they are confronted with texts in which authors do not follow the routine of using grammatical and lexical rules in an orderly sequence. This paper argues that, given the proper selection of literary works, for length, difficulty, student interest, and appropriateness, Chinese children's literature – with its unique nature of standard language and realistic themes reflecting Chinese society – can be a very effective tool in improving communicative competence in Chinese language learning.

II. LANGUAGE REFORM AND MODERN CHINESE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The language reform in the early twentieth century from the classical Chinese written language (*wenyan*) was vital for the emergence of modern Chinese children's literature. Traditional Chinese education had preserved the form of Confucian writings as well as their content (Bi, 2012a). The classics were written in an abbreviated style and used a different syntax and vocabulary from those of the spoken language. Written language was developed through its use in political and administrative documents and historical writings, but it retained its abbreviated form and special structure and so, as time went on, it became far removed from the living spoken language. Traditional education in China required not only the memorising of thousands of characters, but also the knowledge of the classical written language and its special forms of expression. Because of its independence from everyday speech, its demanding nature, and also because of the authoritarian and uncritical way in which literacy is imparted through rote learning, teachers of classical

literary written language encourage copying and repeating what has been written before (Bi, 2012a). However, as classical Chinese prefers implied to explicit meanings, grammatical relations between words and phrases are often left to the reader's intuition. The classical writing is thus intended to be read by readers who are in tune with the writer, sharing enough experience and assumptions to be able to understand the author's meaning without clues (Bi, 2012a).

In the early twentieth century, Hu Shi (1891–1962) provided a very concrete strategy for language reform which was a resounding success. De Francis claims that the victory of Hu Shi's vernacular movement was made possible "by its identification with the cause of Chinese nationalism" (De Francis, 1950, p. 11). After the outbreak of the demonstrations on May 4th 1919, the vernacular language came to be used in all the new literary journals; thus, it spread rapidly, with over four hundred newspapers and journals appeared within a short time, all using the vernacular. In this way, the new writing became a tool and a symbol for the new nationalism. In 1921, the Education Ministry was compelled to decree the introduction of textbooks for the primary schools in the new writing, and in 1922 this decree was extended to secondary schools. From that time on, the new writing became the vehicle of Chinese education and book publishers began to accept it as "the national language" (Michael & Taylor, 1964, p. 231). Furthermore, as predicted by Hu Shi, the vernacular movement culminated in "a literary flowering that was one of the most creative and brilliant episodes" in the history of Chinese literature (Goldman, 1977, p. i).

Modern Chinese children's literature, as an independent and identifiable branch of literature in the new vernacular language, emerged from the May Fourth New Culture Movement. When China faced a national predicament, children represented a new vigour for a revitalised young China. Indeed, O'Sullivan (2005) has found that the educational status of children's literature is particularly high at times when there are new values to be conveyed in societies in a phase of transition from tradition to modernity. Modern Chinese children's literature, commencing from its "infancy", is closely and intricately related to political themes and nationalist sentiments, thus making it valuable and informative for foreign learners of the modern Chinese language and culture.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Although enhancing linguistic and cultural proficiency through Chinese children's literary texts is usually placed at the advanced level in the third year, linguistic simplicity is still the main criterion for selecting a text for foreign language students. A linguistically easy text is still able to present a narrative sophistication that arouses students' aesthetic and cultural curiosity and lead to sophisticated communicative interactive activities in classrooms. In order to prevent class activities from meandering into vague generalities that have nothing to do with the text, the teacher needs to identify the main textual features and choose relevant focus points, which may pertain to both the story level and historical and cultural contexts. The teacher needs to plan what classroom format best suits teaching the text and what activities relevant to the main points stimulates learning: whole class discussion, group discussion and presentation, role-play, pair work or individual student reports.

It is essential to explain to students the difference between reading for information, reading for aesthetic purpose and reading for understanding history and culture. For the purpose of obtaining information, the reader must go back and forth to check new information against the old, skimming and scanning the text for relevant contents. For the purposes of aesthetics and understanding history and culture, the reader must pause to think, letting their minds make associations, evoke previous texts, and assess the effect of the choice of words and phrases by the author (Kramsch, 1994). It is also essential to tell students exactly what is expected of them when assigning them a text to read at home. Often, the expectations are three-fold: first, at the linguistic level, students are expected to grasp what the text is about; secondly, at the narrative level, students are expected to understand why events and actions take place in the story; and thirdly, at the level of historical and cultural contexts, students are expected to explore how the text expresses the intent of the author and the significance of the text.

At the linguistic level, it is beneficial to have the whole class in an activity in which the teacher starts with reciting the first part of the text or paraphrasing the beginning of the story. Then the teacher can assign some students to read the rest of the text aloud, passage after passage. The teacher should then read aloud the whole text, stopping after some words and phrases to encourage students to interpolate possible meanings, associations, comments or questions.

Once the syntax and vocabulary are clarified, the whole class can be divided in groups for the next level, looking at the narrative. There are many classroom activities to facilitate cooperative group work among students, so that communicative use of the target language can be promoted in a stimulating environment. The purpose of these activities is to help students understand the events in the story and to encourage them to use the target language to solve assigned problems through meaningful communication. The most effective activities include dramatisation, expansion and improvisation of the story. The process of the group activities is more important than the end product. At the end, each group delivers its presentation, which can be a report or a small drama, to the whole class.

At the level of historical and cultural contexts, writing as a collaborative activity can be effective. Although many people like writing on their own, in language class, students can take advantage of the knowledge of their peers and the teacher. It is challenging for students, because they need organise their abstract thought in the target language, relying on their critical thinking abilities, to engage in analysis and argument. Writing in groups can be greatly motivating to students for research, discussion and peer evaluation. The teacher should always be ready to provide help in terms of information and vocabulary, as well as suggestions in a constructive and tactful way. The end product can be a co-

authored paper from the group to be delivered at the whole class “conference”, or an individual student’s essay based on the group draft but completed at home by individual students, to be published in an online “journal”.

It is important that the teacher should be flexible and ready to switch lesson plan if students arrive unprepared. For example, giving them ten minutes to read portion of the text silently in class or selecting a section to read together intensively would be better than starting with half of the class having not read the text at all. Some strategies for encouraging cooperative learning of Chinese embrace: (1) Ensuring that all learners understand that the classroom is a welcoming setting where all ideas are appreciated, and everyone is encouraged to contribute; (2) Making it unmistakable that it is the teacher’s expectation that all learners will take part in discussions; (3) Using examples to show why group work is essential to learning development and providing students with a motivation to work together; (4) Telling students that the teacher does not always expect a perfect response, and that making mistakes is a part of learning process; and (5) Explaining that disagreement among students is normal in group work (Fang, 2012).

IV. EXAMPLE: YE SHENGTAO’S SCARECROW

Ye Shengtao’s “*Daocao ren* [Scarecrow]” (1923) was the first major work of modern Chinese children’s literature. This work depicts the scarecrow as a creature with human motivations and the ability to reason.

A. Story Introduction

The teacher starts with reciting the first part of the text:

田野里白天的风景和情形，有诗人 把它写成美妙的诗，有画家把它画成生动的画。到了夜间，诗人喝了酒，有些醉了，画家呢，正在抱着精致乐器低低地唱，都没有功夫到田野里来。那么，还有谁把田野里夜间的风景和情形告诉人们呢？有，还有，就是稻草人。

(The following English translation is adapted from Farquhar, 1999.)

The rural sceneries and occurrences in the fields by day have been described by poets in beautiful poems and painted by artists in lively pictures. At night, poets become a bit tipsy after drinking and artists, with exquisite musical instruments in arms, enjoy humming softly. None of them have time to spare for the fields. Is there anyone capable of telling what it is like in the fields and what really happens there at night? Yes, there is the scarecrow.

B. Story Development

The teacher goes through the story with the whole class, helping students understand the three women whose lives provide the story’s narrative content. In the first account, the victim was an elderly peasant widow. Her husband died eight years ago. It took her and her son three years of hard labour to pay off the funeral debt. Misfortune hit her again. Her son died of illness too. It took her another three years to pay the expense of her son’s funeral. Floods in the following two years caused further agony. For the first time in eight years, there seemed to be some hope for her to improve her living; however, insects started to attack her crops. The scarecrow wanted to drive the insects away but the breeze that came from the scarecrow’s shabby fan was not strong enough.

The second account is of a fisherwoman, who was unable to look after her sick son, because she had to catch fish to make a living. While sitting by the river, she fell asleep from exhaustion. The scarecrow wanted to sacrifice itself as firewood so she could make some hot tea for the thirsty sick child, or be used as a quilt to bring some warmth to the shivering child, but he couldn’t.

The third victim of the night was a woman walking into the river to drown herself, leaving her child behind, because she didn’t want her husband, who was an alcoholic and an addicted gambler, to sell her the next morning. The scarecrow waved his fan even harder, but again, in vain.

C. Structured Debate

The teacher should organise a debate. There are seven steps to help students to gain deep understanding of the significance in the historical context:

(1) The teacher should put on the board the question in Chinese: “稻草人的意义” (Significance of the Scarecrow): “In the early twentieth century, patriotism, in the modern sense of loving one’s country, became closely linked to the exposure of social problems in literary production of China’s May Fourth era. Do you agree or disagree? [in Chinese]”

(2) Students should be divided into two teams, a red team and a blue team. The red team is to argue for “agree” and the blue team for “disagree” (Fang, 2012).

(3) The teams should discuss in Chinese on how to form their arguments and list their reasons in Chinese characters on big sheets of paper. This step is the central stage of this activity and may last for up to 20 minutes (Fang, 2012).

(4) A row of desks should be placed across the classroom. The members of the same team sit on the same side, facing their opponents, thus forming debating pairs. The big sheets of paper with their arguing reasons are put on the walls, facing their producers (see Figure 1) (Fang, 2012).

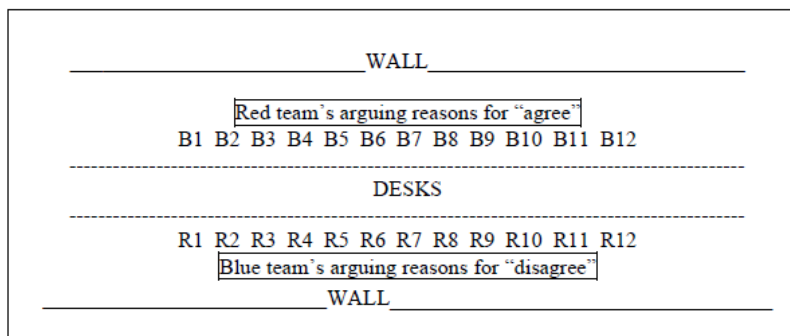


Figure 1. Classroom setting for debating (Fang, 2012).

(5) Students should shake hands and commence debate simultaneously, for 15 minutes. A lot of noise is generated in the room, as students become involved and generate a large amount of language use while deepening their understanding of various cultural characteristics (Fang, 2012).

(6) Students should come back to their teams to discuss how to improve their arguments. This lasts 10 minutes (Fang, 2012).

(7) The teacher should then instruct the two teams to swap the arguments. The red team is now arguing for “disagree” and the blue team arguing for “agree”. Students are also instructed to sit in their opponent’s seats, facing the arguing reasons prepared by the other team in Chinese characters. This becomes more stimulating and motivating because the extra challenge demands reading ability and oral fluency concurrently. The simultaneous debate lasts another 15 minutes (Fang, 2012).

There are some important points. To avoid problems, clearly communicate to the students the debate rules that will guide the interaction: (1) Encourage all students to have input when forming argument; (2) Focus on the best choice of expressions in Chinese, not on “winning”; (3) Respect everyone’s views, even if you do not agree; (4) Be critical of ideas, not people; and (5) Try to understand both sides of the debate (Fang, 2012). Finally, the teacher should ask their students to write up their views on the debate in Chinese and publish in an online “open access journal” as homework.

V. EXAMPLE: ZHANG TIANYI’S BIG LIN AND LITTLE LIN

Zhang Tianyi’s (1906-1985) revolutionary fairytale *Dalin he Xiaolin* [Big Lin and Little Lin] (1932) consists of nineteen chapters totalling 151 pages. The teacher should assign a section of the story to a group for reading at home before class.

A. Story Introduction

The teacher starts by going through the first part with the whole class, which begins with an intimate connection with the Chinese agrarian milieu and the two main characters representing millions of Chinese rural children:

从前有一个很穷很穷的农人，和他的妻子住在乡下。他们都很老了，老得连他们自己都说不上有多大岁数了。有一天，他们忽然生了两个儿子。

(The following English translation is adapted from Farquhar, 1999.)

Once upon a time there was a very, very poor peasant, who lived with his wife in the countryside. They were both very old, so old that they even didn’t remember how old they were. But, one day, all of a sudden they had two sons.

The twins are identical, but there is a fundamental distinction between them which is made clear shortly after their parents’ deaths, ten years after they are born. When the two tired and hungry ten-year-old orphans lie down to have a rest on their way to make a living, Big Lin looked at their empty sacks and sighed,

“When I grow up, I’m going to be a rich man. Rich men have all the food and clothes they want and they needn’t work.”

Little Lin didn’t agree, “but Dad said; ‘Everyone has to work.’”

“That’s because he was a poor man. Wealthy landlords needn’t work. Dad used to say, ‘It’d be nice if we had land!’”

“Mum and Dad were poor, but they were good people, not like those nasty mean wealthy landlords.”

“But, wealthy people always have a good time. I want...”

Their argument is interrupted by a deafening voice: “What do I want? I want to eat you up!” It is the roar of a ghastly Ogre. To escape, the two boys have to run in two different directions, hence starting two different lives. Little Lin is captured by a Dog Gentleman and sold in his shop at an auction as a child labourer to Sisi Ge, a factory owner.

The setting now moves to a big city, paralleling Shanghai, which emerged in the 1930s as one of the major cities in the world, with a population of about 4 million, among which there were 50,000 foreigners, mostly British and Japanese. Here in Shanghai, the key to power was money. It is here that Big Lin’s dream comes true. With the help of a very cunning Fox Gentleman, Big Lin becomes the adopted son of Mr Ba Ha, a childless wealthy man. The power of money in the fantasy world, just like in the real world of Shanghai in the 1930s, is fully displayed at the dinner party that Ba Ha throws to celebrate the arrival of the gift from the heaven – his adopted son. The dinner table is said to be about twenty

kilometres long, and the guests include all the rich people, important government officials, and upper classes and aristocracy. Even the Majesty King himself attends the party. The King is described as always taking Ba Ha's advice very seriously, that is, he basically accepts whatever Ba Ha says.)

B. Group Activities

The teacher divides the class into groups for drama work and improvisation of the following sections of the fairytale. They should then perform their works to the whole class.

(1) *The first group: Little Lin's Life in the Factory*

In his fairytale, Zhang Tianyi relentlessly expresses his concern with the plight of children working in this environment. Although Little Lin's daily routine of work in Sisi Ge's factory is presented in a romanticist exaggeration, the purpose is to demonstrate the reality of the child labourers' wretched life, as shown here in Sisi Ge's instruction to Little Lin on his first day in the factory. Sisi Ge's huge nose makes his speech echo, and it sounds like he stammers:

"You get up at 3.00am and bring my breakfast, bring my breakfast. Then you shave my beard, shave my beard. Then you go to work, go to work. Then you have a rest for a second, for a second. Then work again, work again. Then have another rest for a second, for a second. You go to sleep at 12.00 midnight, at 12.00 midnight. Then you get up at 3.00am and bring my breakfast, bring my breakfast. Then you shave my beard, shave my beard." (pp. 26-27)

Sisi Ge is depicted as someone with atrocious features, who has very fast growing green beard all over his face, which needs shaving daily, and a mammoth appetite that needs to be satisfied with a hundred eggs and a whole cow for breakfast. The whip in his hand symbolizes his tyranny. Sisi Ge uses the whip all the time to make his workers work harder and faster, and he never allows them even a momentary pause, such as even a yawn or a quick look around. After working in the factory for just a few days, Little Lin discovers the secret of how Sisi Ge has accumulated his massive wealth: his children workers vigorously stir black soil in a huge bucket for days, and the drops of their sweat turn into diamonds, each worth \$100,000. Little Lin, as symbolic of the emerging proletariat, begins to question: "It is us who dig the soil, it is us who stir the soil, and it is our sweat that turns into diamonds! Why should Sisi Ge pocket all the money?" Little Lin organizes his first anti-capitalist activity – trying to sell *their own* diamonds on the streets in *their own* very inadequate sleeping time. He and his two fellow workers are arrested for "theft" and punished by a policeman who tickles their feet until their laughing becomes crying in the Foot-torture Department. This foot torture is worse than Sisi Ge's whipping, which they are already used to.

(2) *The second group: Little Lin's Struggle for Equality*

The struggle becomes militant when Little Lin and his friends discover another secret of Sisi Ge: the one hundred eggs that Sisi Ge eats each day for breakfast are actually transformed from children who, after working for him for a few years, are exhausted and feeble, and are no longer able to meet his demands. This horrible news spreads among children workers quickly, and they all become terrified. These poor children are forced to choose either to kill Sisi Ge or to wait to be turned into eggs and eaten. Little Lin organizes his second anti-capitalist activity – to kill Sisi Ge! This time, after careful planning, they succeed. As all the children in Sisi Ge's factory are singing and dancing, celebrating Sisi Ge's death, the door opens and, in comes another Sisi Ge, green-bearded with a whip in hand. The new Sisi Ge announces he is Sisi Ge Number Two, asserting that "there will be Sisi Ge Number Three, Number Three, if you kill me, kill me." His speech also echoes. The narrative here is designed to educate children that killing a cruel individual cannot solve problems that need a fundamental solution based on a thorough socio-political transformation. This point is made even clearer as Sisi Ge yells to the Ogre to come to the factory to suppress the insurrection and maintain order. The Ogre is portrayed as the tame servant of the rich, such as the treaty-port foreign capitalists and wealthy Chinese compradors in the real world. He doesn't need to turn poor people into eggs and then eat them. He eats them alive. On this occasion, when the children run for their life, he catches and eats the slow ones, including Little Lin's two best friends, who previously suffered through the foot torture incident together with Little Lin. A fast runner, Little Lin escapes again and eventually becomes a train driver and an activist in the Railway Workers Union.

(3) *The third group: Big Lin's Wedding and Honeymoon*

Ba Ha's good friend, Sisi Ge (Number One, before he is killed) is shown as very happy for Ba Ha's good luck: "Now you have a son, a son. I congratulate you, congratulate you." Ba Ha describes his friendship with Sisi Ge to Big Lin: "We are good friends, because we are both good men and we both love eating eggs. Yes, it is true that we both turn people into eggs, but those are bad people." Even the Ogre is extremely humble to Ba Ha. Big Lin, of course, is very scared, as the Ogre comes in, but soon becomes very fond of him.

It is true both in the land of fantasy and in the real world that when the poor are violent, the rich are frightened. The Ogre used to come to Ba Ha's house once a day to see if anything needed to be done or anyone needed to be eaten, but after Sisi Ge's death, he has to stay in the house to make sure the absolute security provided to the richest man in the world. The power of Ba Ha's money exemplifies, in a parodic exaggeration, snobbery and flattery around Big Lin's new parasitic life. He is described as growing so fat and so lazy that his servants have to help him to eat, to laugh and to cry. He has two hundred servants to take care of even the smallest detail of his life.

After numerous funny and absurd events presented in a flippant and satiric tone by the author, Big Lin eventually marries the ugly, but vain Princess of Rose. The couple are to arrive at a seaside resort for their honeymoon in a train driven by Little Lin, but the Railway Workers Union decides to be on strike when the King refuses to allow the train to carry four truckloads of grain to a famine area. This also means that the honeymooning couple are to leave behind the

bride's four truckloads of accessories, and she sobs and faints at this suggestion. This is the first time in the story that the power of Ba Ha's money fails: it cannot buy the union power. So they bring in their tame servant the Ogre again, but he pushes the train too hard and they all end up in the sea.

Big Lin drifts to Rich Man's Island where there are heaps of gold, diamonds, gems and lots of cash, but no servants, labourers or food. He dies. Facing waves of militant strikes, which demand an immediate release of Little Lin and other union leaders, the government officials sigh, "our good days are numbered." Sisi Ge Number Three – Sisi Ge Number Two has also been killed – adds "Before long, they will overthrow us and not let us be bosses, but before that happens, I am still the boss, and I'll make a day's profit for each passing day, for each passing day."

C. The Whole Class Conference

The whole class is divided into different panels with topics like "Attraction of revolution to Chinese working class in the first half of twentieth century"; "Appeals of Marxism and Leninism to Chinese intellectuals"; and "Zhang Tianyi's style of revolutionary fairytales". Students should be instructed to write an essay based on the group discussion to be delivered at the following week's "conference". To help students, the teacher should provide the following information and comments in Chinese:

Back from the fantasy land to the real world: there were indeed numerous strikes in Shanghai then – 120 in 1928; 111 in 1929; 82 in 1930; 145 in 1931; 104 in 1932; and 79 in 1933. Again both in the land of fantasy and in the real world, when workers are united, the bosses are blighted. But, as long as Sisi Ge Number Three tries to make a day's profit, he eats a hundred children-transformed eggs each day. The story presents a burning sense of urgency. Zhang Tianyi perceives Chinese society as an arena of conflict, clearly displayed in his story. Although the poor are easily identifiable as Chinese and most of their oppressors are foreigners, the conflict in *Big Lin and Little Lin* is not so much of a national struggle between Chinese and foreigners, but a clash between the poor and the rich. Zhang defines his characters solely in terms of the individual's socially meaningful acts and intentions: in other words, their class. They are compelled, as shown in the fairytale, to simply play the role that Marxist theory has cast them. As a consequence, their actions are dictated purely by Marxist social logic (Bi, 2012b).

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, a learner's second language ability, at a relatively advanced level (third year and onwards), is understood to be "linguistically and culturally proficient", enabling learners to comprehend and express complicated and abstract ideas in the target language in a given context. This ability consists of knowledge and the capacity for excusing their competence in an appropriate and contextualised communicative language use. It is not just associated with grammatical aspects, but also with the ability to organise one's thoughts through the target language for both culturally-informed and context embedded language utilisation. In conclusion, this paper argues that, at a relatively advanced level in Chinese language instruction, the emphasis has to be placed on the socio-cultural dimension of appropriate language use and texts of children's literature for teaching and learning materials to be valuable and effective. This paper demonstrates some specific strategies to use these texts, including text familiarisation processes, story comprehension processes, theme discussion processes and thought expression processes. Through these stages, students use Chinese creatively through storytelling, debating, role-playing, dramatisation and improvisation of the story, as well as essay writing. All these tasks demand basic grammatical knowledge and vocabulary as well as socio-cultural and historical knowledge.

This paper concludes that culture should not be seen merely as information conveyed by the language, but as a core feature of the language itself, and cultural awareness, as an educational objective, should not be separated from language acquisition. Language should be seen as social practice, and cultural awareness should be viewed as enabling linguistic proficiency, as well as being the outcome of this proficiency. This paper further concludes that cooperative interaction is one of the most important human skills and verbal communication is the first step of such cooperative interaction. This paper points out that, in many Chinese language classrooms, the resource of the students themselves is seriously underutilised. This paper demonstrates how students can help, teach, motivate and encourage one another effectively through cooperative activities through meaningful communication in the target language. Most importantly, this paper shows that using Chinese children's literature to enhance students' linguistic and cultural proficiency through cooperative activities is an exciting endeavour. It also shows that language learning at the advanced level for the purpose of expressing complicated and abstract opinions can be made enjoyable and productive.

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