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Article

Systematic Review of Chinese Language Learning Motivation: Choice, Temporal Changes, and the L2 Chinese Self

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Abstract
The importance of researching the motivation to learn languages other than English has been acknowledged; however, the factors that affect initial and evolving motivation to learn Chinese as a second language (L2) are understudied. This systematic review aimed to understand the choice and sustained motivation, and the role of the L2 self, for learning Mandarin. A total of 53 empirical studies published in English and Chinese between January 2012 and March 2026 were systematically selected for review. Findings revealed there is a consensus that choice motivation is affected by both integrative and instrumental factors; motivational changes are affected by context, phase of learning, and language proficiency; and that a strong ideal L2 self increases motivation. However, there is a lack of research on temporal changes and a lack of theorization of the current L2 Chinese self. According to the findings, we offer recommendations for future research and possible pedagogical implications.

Keywords
Motivation, second language learning, Chinese language, systematic review

1 Introduction

Motivation is the key to successful language learning, and research on second language learning motivation has increased in recent decades (Aryadoust et al., 2023). The majority of the research has focused on Global English, including topics such as self-concept (Dörnyei, 2009), engagement (Teravainen-Goff, 2022), and mindset (Sadoughi et al., 2023). Regarding systematic reviews on second language (L2) learning motivation, most reviews are research syntheses focusing on the bibliographical information, theoretical frameworks, and methods used. There is a lack of systematic reviews to answer specific questions on factors affecting motivation or long-term changes in motivation. Review studies on motivation to study specific Languages Other Than English (LOTE) are even more scarce.

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Therefore, we conducted a systematic review to investigate the initial motivation, motivational changes, and the role of the self-concept in learning a specific LOTE, in this case, Mandarin Chinese. For a comprehensive review, we included studies published both in English and in Chinese, from international and Chinese databases. Theoretically, we draw from three frameworks: Gardner's (1985, 2010) socio-educational model, Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system theory (L2MSS), and Mercer's (2011) foreign language self-concept.

2 Background

2.1 Second language learning motivation

L2 learning motivation has been theorized with many different concepts and theoretical frameworks; following a consensus, in this study we define motivation as "the choice of a particular action; the persistence with it; and the effort expended on it (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, p. 20). Motivation is rarely stable; instead, it is dynamic and complex (Shoaib & Dornyei, 2007).

During the preactional phase (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998), the learner decides to study a language, which can be called initial motivation or choice motivation. Different factors can ignite the motivation in the beginning, such as instrumental and integrative reasons Gardner, 2012). Once the action of learning is started, motivation needs to be sustained as well (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2010). In this study, we use the term sustained motivation when discussing motivation during the actional phase. One of the main characteristics of motivation is that change is more common than stability; thus, motivational change in this study refers to changes in motivational intensity.

Another factor shown to affect motivation is how the learner views themselves as a current and future learner or user of the language (Dörnyei, 2005; Mercer, 2011). During the past two decades, Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) has been the leading theoretical framework, which includes the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and the learning environment. The ideal L2 self is how the learner wants to ideally be as a future user of the language; the ought-to L2 self refers to what attributes the learner believes they should possess to meet the expectations of other people; and the learning environment includes factors such as peers, the teacher, and the curriculum. These factors can have varying importance on motivation, and it can be affected by regional and cultural factors as well (Aryadoust et al., 2023).

In recent years, new research trends include LOTE learning motivation (Mendoza & Phung, 2019), long-term L2 learning motivation (Dörnyei & Henry, 2022), and complementing the L2MSS with the current L2 self (Hu et al., 2025; Thorsen et al., 2020). In this study, we use Mercer's (2011) Foreign language self-concept as the theoretical basis for the current L2 self, meaning how a learner sees themselves currently as a learner or user of their target language.

These self-concepts can be employed to investigate the learning of any second or additional language; learners tend to have a separate self-concept for each language they are learning (Mercer, 2011). Regarding review studies focusing on Languages Other Than English (LOTE), Yaprak (2025) synthesized the L2 German motivational research among tertiary students. Learners chose to study German due to reasons of multilingualism, career opportunities, and personal interests. Motivation was increased by online learning platforms and tools, and decreased by pressure, learning materials, distance learning, and grading. Mendoza and Phung (2019) synthesized L2MSS research of different LOTEs among students from elementary school to adults, but did not focus on specific research findings of the included studies. There is a clear lack of review studies reporting empirical findings on LOTE L2 self and motivation.

2.2 L2 Chinese learning motivation

Regarding review studies specifically on L2 Chinese learning motivation, to our knowledge, three have been published. Qian et al. (2022) reviewed literature (n=18) on the Chinese learning motivation of heritage learners. Main motivators were social, family, and school environments. As motivation can vary between heritage and non-heritage learners, there is a need for a more focused look at non-heritage learners' L2 Chinese motivation. Li et al. (2024) reviewed Thai publications (n=18) on L2 Chinese motivation, course engagement, and vocabulary acquisition of learners above 10 years old. The main reason for choosing to learn Chinese was related to the economic importance of the language and the career opportunities it could offer. Given that adults and minors can be affected by a variety of motivational factors, a more focused review on either children's or adults' motivation is still needed. The most comprehensive review (n=40) on L2 Chinese motivation so far was by Lam et al. (2024), which investigated the theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and topical trends. They identified that studies were focused on the learner and learning (n=30), teacher and teaching (n=4), technology and learning (n=3), and other themes (n=3). However, Chinese scientific databases were not included.

3 Research scope and research questions

Given the lack of focused systematic reviews on L2 Chinese choice motivation, motivational changes, and the role of L2 self, we conducted a systematic study on the relevant literature on adult L2 Chinese learning motivation between January 2012 and March 2026. As previous review studies had focused on heritage learners (Qian et al., 2022), Thai learners (C. Li et al., 2024), and a review of theory and methodology (Lam et al., 2024), our focus was to examine factors influencing choice motivation, motivational fluctuations, and the role of self-concept.

In detail, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the reasons for learners to choose to study the Chinese language? (Choice motivation)

RQ2. How does motivation change during a Chinese course or academic year?

RQ3. What is the role of the L2 self in Chinese language learning motivation?

4 Methodology

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement. The selection process was the following: identification of records in databases, screening of titles and abstracts, screening and assessment of full-text articles, decisions of inclusion, and a quality appraisal.

4.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We included peer-reviewed journal articles in English and Chinese that focused on the L2 Mandarin Chinese learning motivation of adult learners. The full inclusion and exclusion criteria can be seen in Table 1.

During screening, several challenges emerged. First, both "Chinese" and "Mandarin" were accepted, as studies used the terms interchangeably. Second, "adult learners" was clarified to mean university-level or other adult learners, excluding, for example, high school students who were legally adults. Third, most studies did not specify whether participants were heritage or non-heritage learners. As motivations may differ, we focused on non-heritage learners where this could be determined with sufficient accuracy.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journals Empirical research published between January 2012 and March 2026	Other publications
Population	Adult learners in universities, schools and other institutions Non-heritage or mixed learners	Minors, self-learners, not enrolled during data collection Studies with only heritage learners
Educational context	Offline, online or hybrid learning with an active teacher	Self-learning, self-paced courses
Language being studied	Mandarin Chinese (In multiple language studies, results for Mandarin Chinese clearly separated.)	Other variants of Chinese, other languages
Language of publication	English and Chinese	Other languages
Methodology	Primary studies using quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods	Review articles
Clarification of terms	Motivation defined and discussed	Motivation not defined and/or discussed
Main focus of the publication (RQ1)	Describing motivation, factors affecting motivation, motivation affecting learning	Single task motivation
Main focus of the publication (RQ2 and RQ3)	Factors affecting motivation	Single task motivation

4.2 Information source, search strategy, and screening

Literature search was conducted on the following databases: Scopus, ERIC, ProQuest, Science Direct, Wiley Open Library, CNKI, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Education Source. Our extensive search gathered 2183 possibly relevant research articles. Only articles published in English and Mandarin Chinese between January 2012 and March 2026 were included.

Different search terms were tested to determine the optimal search strategy that provided enough articles and minimized the retrieval of irrelevant studies. Due to differences in search functions among different databases, the search terms used were also slightly different. However, the main terms used were: (Chinese OR Mandarin) AND (motivation OR motivational OR motivating OR motivator) AND language AND adult.

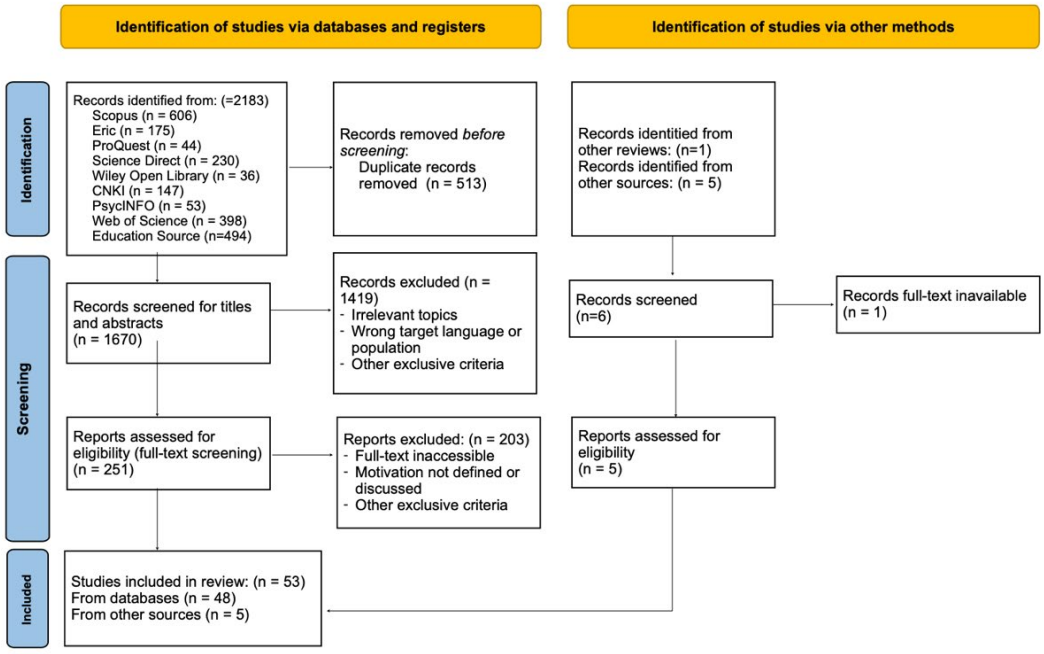
After database searches, Rayyan web-based software was used to remove duplicate results and screen all remaining articles (n=1670). Three authors participated in the screening. Author 1 screened the 1670 articles based on title and abstract and removed all articles that did not match the inclusion criteria. The full texts of the remaining 251 articles were screened by three authors independently; the first author screened all the articles, the second author screened all the English articles, and the third author screened the Chinese articles. The screening process is documented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). Although study selection was conducted independently by three reviewers, author 2 and author 3 were in charge of different article sets based on the language; therefore, inter-rater reliability statistics were not calculated. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

Through screening, we first identified 48 relevant articles. Then, by investigating the references and

previously published articles, other relevant research articles (n=4) were added. Finally, the articles chosen were compared to the articles selected for a related review by Lam et al. (2024). Out of 30 articles related to learning, 11 articles were already selected during our screening process, one article was added to our review, and the rest (n=18) were excluded according to our exclusion criteria. Thus, the total number of articles included for this review was 53 (Appendix A).

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram.



4.3 Quality appraisal

A quality appraisal was performed for each article (n=53) to investigate the rigor and validity of the studies. For qualitative studies, the CASP qualitative research checklist was used (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2023); for quantitative studies, the EBL critical appraisal checklist (EBLCAC) was used (Glynn, 2006). The EBLCAC included 26 questions, and we added two extra questions regarding the aim and value of the research, similar to Bui et al. (2023), making the score range from -28 to 28. The CASP included 10 questions; thus, the score range was from -10 to 10. According to the checklist, each item was given a score of -1, 0, or 1 according to if they matched the criteria or not. The higher the score, the better the article matches the quality criteria of the particular checklists used, informing the authors of the relative quality of the studies.

The first author performed a critical appraisal of all the articles (n=53). The second author appraised 18% (n=7) of the articles written in English (n=39), and the third author appraised 35% (n=5) of the articles written in Chinese (n=14). The results of the appraisals were then compared with the score each author gave. The general results can be seen in Table 2. These results informed us that there was a higher level of consistency of assessment for the English studies and greater variance for the Chinese studies, especially qualitative studies.

The quality appraisal highlighted a potential source of bias arising from differences in reporting conventions between English- and Chinese-language publications. Studies published in English received higher scores, but it has to be taken into consideration that publishing traditions vary, and in general,

articles are shorter in Chinese publications. Given the potential influence of different academic publishing conventions on appraisal scores, we did not exclude any articles from this synthesis due to this scoring. Appraisal scores were not used to weight the studies in the synthesis or to conduct sensitivity analyses. Instead, we included the appraisal in order to provide a descriptive assessment of the methodological strengths and limitations of the included studies. Further methodological research is needed to establish how studies from different linguistic and academic publishing traditions can be appraised comparably before appraisal scores are used to determine their relative contributions to a synthesis.

Table 2
Quality Appraisal

Type of studies	Average score of author 1	Average score of author 2	Average score of author 3
Quantitative and mixed	10.32	11.5	8
English	11.56	11.5	-
Chinese	9.5	-	8
Qualitative	5.69	7	0
English	6.25	7	-
Chinese	4	-	0

4.4 Coding of variables

During the screening process, the data were familiarized by the authors. After screening, we transferred the articles into NVivo for coding and thematic analysis. We employed a qualitative analysis for this systematic review, and the chosen articles were coded by the first author to answer the research questions. A similar method has also been used by Baucal et al. (2023). First, the findings, discussions, and conclusions of the articles were coded inductively for all relevant parts related to our research questions. Next, similar codes were grouped to form categories such as current L2 self, ideal L2 self, learning experience, demographic factors, initial motivation, motivation affecting learning, and motivational changes. Then, relevant codes were categorized again according to our research questions, leading to three final themes: initial motivation, temporal changes in motivation, and the role of the L2 self. Finally, the relevant parts of the original articles were read again to confirm that the coded data answered our research questions.

5 Findings

5.1 Description of included studies

This review consisted of 53 eligible studies (Appendix A). In Table 4, the studies are categorized by research design and publication language. A total of 73.6% (n=39) of the articles were in English and 26.4% (n=14) in Chinese. Regarding methodology, 41.5% of the studies were quantitative, 28.3% qualitative, and 30.2% mixed methods. The majority of the studies (67%) were cross-sectional, and the rest were longitudinal. This echoes the general trend in the research on L2 learning motivation, which is dominated by cross-sectional quantitative research.

The number of participants varied from a case study of a single learner to a mass survey of 1025 learners. In the majority of studies, participants were university students (90.6% of studies). Most studies were conducted in China (n=19, 35.8%), the USA (n=7, 13.2%), and in Malaysia (n=6, 11.3%). Looking

at publications, the articles were published in 45 different journals, indicating that there are no leading journals for L2 Chinese motivation. For the articles in Chinese, all but one (Y. Xie, 2017) were published in China. There were other differences between English and Chinese publications as well, perhaps due to the different publishing traditions. Chinese publications were, in general, more concise. This was reflected in the critical appraisal as well, as articles published in Chinese received lower scores.

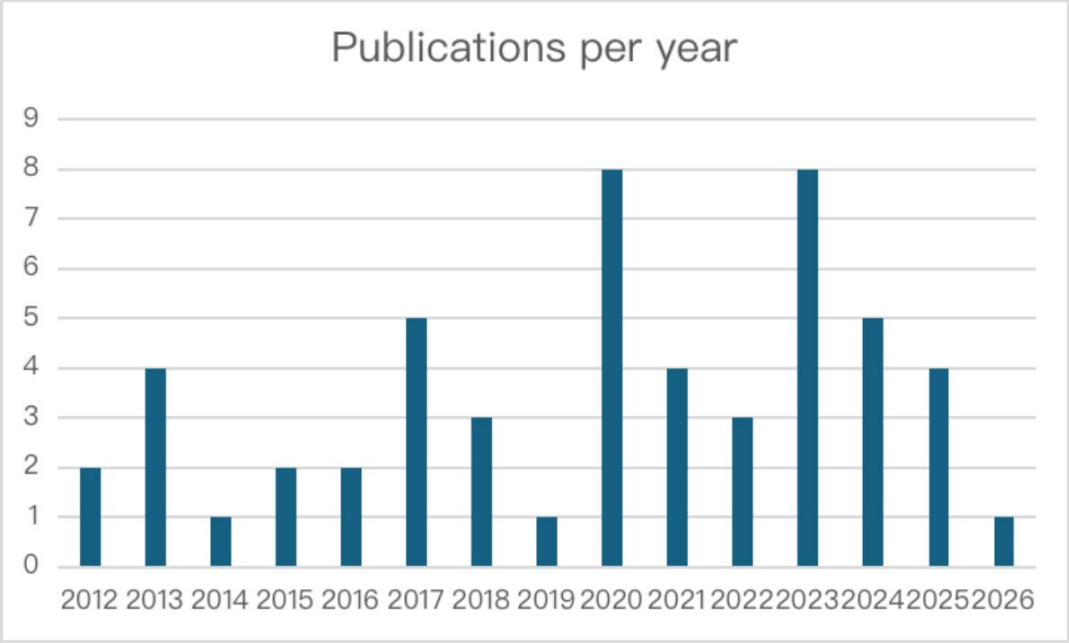
Table 3

Articles' Language of Publication and Research Design

Language	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed	Total
English	**14**	**12**	**13**	**39**
Cross-sectional	*13*	*5*	*7*	25
Longitudinal	*1*	*7*	*6*	15
Chinese	**8**	**3**	**3**	**14**
Cross-sectional	*8*	*0*	*3*	11
Longitudinal	*0*	*3*	*0*	3
Total	**22**	**15**	**16**	**53**

Figure 2

Publications per Year (2026 till March)



In Summary, L2 Chinese motivation research of adult learners has been published in a variety of research traditions, throughout the 15-year window, and in various countries. The number of publications has increased from 19 studies between 2012 and 2018 to 33 studies between 2019 and 2025 (Figure 2). There is a clear lack of longitudinal quantitative studies (n=1) to create generalizable results about motivational changes over time. In addition, there is a lack of studies conducted in Europe (n=4), South America (n=1), Africa (n=1), and Oceania (n=1). Among adult participants, most studies were conducted at universities, showing a lack of research on other settings for adult language learners. Next, we present the relevant findings to our research questions.

5.2 Factors affecting the choice motivation of L2 Chinese

Among the articles, 22 articles (Table 4) presented clear findings on choice motivation. Learners had both instrumental and integrative reasons for choosing to study Chinese. The main reasons of cultural interest (integrative) and wanting to use Chinese when traveling (instrumental) appeared across articles with varying methodologies, including qualitative (Chen, 2013; Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; X. Wen & Piao, 2020), quantitative (Shi & Gao, 2017; Y. Wang & Yang, 2023), and mixed studies (Ruan et al., 2015b; X. Wen, 2022; Y. Xie, 2017). Also, these motives were found among learners both within and outside the target-language environment, suggesting they were not tied to a specific context.

More individualized choice motives were more commonly reported in qualitative and mixed-method studies. The wish for a new challenge and acquiring a unique skill were reported in several studies (Table 4), potentially reflecting learners' self-concepts and the value they place on developing distinctive abilities. Besides factors for choosing to learn Chinese specifically, learners can also have formed a multilingual self that leads them to study languages at university (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023). Together, the greater variety of individualized motivational factors identified in qualitative and mixed-methods studies points to the value of methodological diversity in investigating choice motivation.

Table 4

Main Reasons for Choosing to Study Chinese

Choice motivation	**Articles**
Interest in the Chinese culture	(Chen, 2013; Fu & Huang, 2025; Olaleye & Xiao, 2026; Ruan et al., 2015b; Shi & Gao, 2017; Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; Turkpenova, 2023; Y. Wang & Yang, 2023; X. Wen, 2022; X. Wen & Piao, 2020; Wu & Wang, 2017; Y. Xie, 2017; X. Yang, 2017)
Interest in the Chinese language itself	(Chen, 2013; Kamaruddin et al., 2020; Ruan et al., 2015b; Wu & Wang, 2017)
Communicating with Chinese speakers	(Chen, 2013; M. Gong et al., 2023; Turkpenova, 2023)
Wanting to travel in China	(Chen, 2013; Gao et al., 2024; Olaleye & Xiao, 2026; Ruan et al., 2015a; Shi & Gao, 2017; Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; Turkpenova, 2023; X. Wen & Piao, 2020; Y. Xie, 2017)
Wish for a new challenge	(M. Gong et al., 2023; Mayumi & Zheng, 2023; Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; X. Wen, 2022; X. Wen & Piao, 2020)
Acquiring a unique skill	(Fukui & Yashima, 2021; N. Li & Wang, 2023).
Importance of China in the world	(Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; X. Wen & Piao, 2020).
Usefulness of Chinese for future career	(Chen, 2013; Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Gao et al., 2024; Olaleye & Xiao, 2026; Turkpenova, 2023; Zhang & Pan, 2023)
Other reasons	Following friends to a Chinese course (Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016), gain respect (C. H. Wen et al., 2020), study opportunities (Olaleye & Xiao, 2026; Tian, 2019; Zhang & Pan, 2023), following an internal calling (X. Wen & Piao, 2020), and fulfilling university requirements (Zhang & Pan, 2023).

5.3 Temporal changes of L2 Chinese motivation

Regarding temporal changes, eight studies were conducted in the target language environment (Chen, 2013; Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Y. F. Gong et al., 2020; N. Li & Wang, 2023; Liu, 2023; Mayumi & Zheng, 2023; F. Xie, 2025; Zhang & Pan, 2023). Three studies were done in a non-target language environment (Bo & Fu, 2018; Ruan et al., 2015b; Zhai, 2021). In both contexts, the studies' findings show that motivation fluctuated over time, and the factors driving those changes varied through time. Both integrative (Y. F. Gong et al., 2020) and instrumental motivators were found(Chen, 2013; Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Y. F. Gong et al., 2020; Zhang & Pan, 2023). The importance of the L2 learning environment was also evident (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; N. Li & Wang, 2023). Studies in target language and non-target language environments reported similar findings, the main difference being the integration process when studying abroad in a Chinese-speaking region. The reason for aligned findings could be due to the fact that participants in these studies were all university students, while other populations' results might be more varied.

Looking at how motivational intensity changed among study abroad students, even though motivation fluctuated both ways, it tended to rise both before (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023), and during the study abroad period (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Y. F. Gong et al., 2020; F. Xie, 2025). This increasing level of motivation was reported in studies of different time frames, from six weeks (Y. F. Gong et al., 2020) to a year (Fukui & Yashima, 2021). Methodologically, studies including multiple time points can capture motivational fluctuations in more detail and illustrate fluctuations with motivational graphs (N. Li & Wang, 2023), providing a more comprehensive understanding of motivational changes. For learners in the non-target learning environment, beginner-level learners' motivation rose (Ruan et al., 2015b), whereas intermediate and upper-level learners' motivation was challenged in the middle of the course (Bo & Fu, 2018; Zhai, 2021). However, as only three studies reported findings on motivational change in a non-target language environment, generalizations cannot be made.

Regarding factors affecting motivation, both learner-related (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Y. F. Gong et al., 2020; Mayumi & Zheng, 2023) and learning environment related factors (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; N. Li & Wang, 2023; Peng & Lou, 2025) were reported. Learner-related factors were connected to the goals they set (Y. F. Gong et al., 2020; Mayumi & Zheng, 2023), their interest in Chinese culture (Y. F. Gong et al., 2020) and feelings of accomplishment through communication with locals (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Y. F. Gong et al., 2020). Whereas learning environment related factors were associated with class enjoyment (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; N. Li & Wang, 2023), inspiring peers (Fukui & Yashima, 2021), peer comparison (Bo & Fu, 2018) and communication with locals (Chen, 2013; Fukui & Yashima, 2021; Y. F. Gong et al., 2020; Zhang & Pan, 2023). Both positive and negative factors might have long-lasting effects; studying abroad often increased motivation even after returning home, whereas negative experiences might lead to loss of motivation (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023).

Besides changes in motivational intensity, the studies also reported on changes in motivational orientation and self-efficacy. Instrumental and integrative orientations varied (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023; Ruan et al., 2015b), and for some participants, study abroad led them to evolve from a multilingual self to wanting to integrate into the target-language society specifically (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023). Self-efficacy and confidence levels were affected by learners' proficiency level and perceived difficulty of Chinese (Ruan et al., 2015b), as well as comparison to peers (Bo & Fu, 2018), and test performance (Zhai, 2021).

In addition, learners' background played a role. Non-Asian students had stronger integrative motivation, and Asian students had more instrumental motivation, suggesting that cultural background can affect motivation (B. Yu & Downing, 2012). Similarly, the educational style of the home country had an effect; if it was similar to the Chinese teaching style, students had an easier time adapting to the lessons, which likely affected their motivation (Chen, 2013). This illustrates how learning contexts may influence motivation, as students studying abroad might have to adapt to unfamiliar educational practices and expectations.

5.4 The role of L2 Self

The role of L2 self-concept was discussed in 21 articles, indicating an acknowledged importance of investigating L2 Chinese self. Having a strong ideal L2 self can make students work harder to achieve their goals (L. Li & Ma, 2021; X. Wen, 2022). The ideal L2 Chinese self was most commonly connected to wanting to have a future career linked to Chinese (Chen, 2013; N. Li & Wang, 2023; Liu et al., 2020; Liu, 2023; Mayumi & Zheng, 2023; Shi & Gao, 2017; Sun & Zhang, 2020; Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; Tan, Ismail, & Ooi, 2016; Tian, 2019; C. H. Wen et al., 2020; X. Wen, 2022; X. Wen & Piao, 2020; Y. Xie, 2017; X. Yang, 2017; B. Yu & Downing, 2012). This association was identified across studies employing different methodologies and in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, suggesting the connection between career and ideal L2 self to be relatively consistent.

More nuanced conceptualizations of the L2 self were especially evident in qualitative studies, as qualitative data can allow participants to describe their experiences outside of predefined categories. While some learners had a clear image of their ideal L2 selves, other learners had a less developed ideal L2 self, such as just wanting to be better Chinese speakers (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; N. Li & Wang, 2023). Aspirations for further study in China were also a part of the ideal L2 self (Chen, 2013; Y. Xie, 2017; X. Yang, 2017; Zhao & Zhang, 2018). Other visions for an ideal L2 Chinese self included being able to use Chinese in daily life situations, to discuss a variety of topics, and to have hobbies related to Chinese culture (X. Wen, 2022). In addition, a study that also included heritage learners found that the learner's heritage background can affect the ought-to L2 self, which in turn can lead to higher anxiety (Lang et al., 2024). For example, family pressure to learn a heritage language can lead to learning anxiety.

Several studies also identified other self-concepts. Some students were reported to have a multilingual self (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023; Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016; X. Wen & Piao, 2020). Some learners also described that learning an additional language would emphasize their status as an intelligent person in an otherwise very monolingual location (N. Li & Wang, 2023). Past positive experiences learning other languages can help to form a multilingual self and further motivate them to learn a new additional language, such as Chinese (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023). Learners might also have a general ideal learner self, a life goal to be a lifelong learner (Z. Li & Liu, 2023). However, if the learner does not form an ideal multilingual self, they might find it difficult to sustain learning multiple languages at once (Fukui & Yashima, 2021). And if they lack an ideal L2 Chinese self, they might find it hard to motivate themselves to keep learning Chinese (Liu et al., 2020). When the ideal multilingual self is blurry, concrete goals are needed to harness the motivating influence of the self (Mayumi & Zheng, 2023).

6 Discussion

This systematic review synthesized the research results of 53 studies on L2 Chinese choice motivation, motivational fluctuations, and the role of the L2 self. Previous reviews discussed factors that affect motivation, but did not explicitly discuss the initial motivation. Qian et al. (2022) noted that the motivation of heritage learners is influenced by the environment, but did not clarify whether this factor affected the initial choice motivation as well. Similarly, Li et al. (2024) mentioned only briefly that the majority of students choose Chinese due to the importance of the language in global economics. Also, several articles did not specify whether the factors investigated were analyzed in terms of initial or sustained motivation. Thus, in this review, we analyzed the initial and sustained motivation separately. Further research should also be more precise about at what point in the studies the motivation is investigated, and whether surveys or interview questions inquire about the initial reason or the continued reasons to study Chinese.

Due to the lack of review studies on LOTE motivation, systematic comparison of choice motivation is difficult; however, we can identify some similarities and differences to L2 German learners (Yaprak,

2025). Commonalities include a wish to be educated and multilingual, studying for career opportunities, cultural interest, and travel aspirations. L2 German learners emphasized becoming globally competent people, whereas L2 Chinese learners emphasized the uniqueness of the Chinese language skill (Fukui & Yashima, 2021; N. Li & Wang, 2023).

No previous reviews investigated the temporal changes in L2 Chinese motivation. Among empirical studies in this review, only nine included a discussion of motivational trajectories, which is insufficient to accurately draw comprehensive conclusions on the temporal changes of L2 Chinese motivation. However, we can conclude that so far, studies are consistent in confirming that motivation indeed fluctuates and is affected by both learner-related and learning environment related factors such as context, phase of study, and proficiency. More longitudinal research is needed to understand how and when these factors affect motivation.

The role of L2 Chinese self-concept is well established. The studies agree that a strong ideal L2 self and a multilingual self increase motivation, and a lack of an ideal self decreases it. There is increasing awareness of the importance of the current L2 self (Hu et al., 2025; Thorsen et al., 2020). However, even though articles in this review present findings and discussion that could potentially be described as the current or actual L2 self, there is a lack of theorization on the concept. Therefore, more research is needed to determine if the data now described as learner characteristics could be conceptualized as the current L2 self.

7 Conclusion

This review brought together an investigation of choice motivation, motivational changes, and the role of L2 self in L2 Chinese learning motivation of adult learners. Findings were synthesized across different learning contexts and methodological approaches. The findings suggest that L2 Chinese motivation is affected by the interplay of learner-related factors, learning experiences, and contexts. They also highlight the hierarchical construct of the self, including general learner self, multilingual self, and L2 Chinese self.

Regarding pedagogical implications, the findings suggest that motivation can be promoted by engaging lessons, clear goals, and opportunities for communicating with L1 users. A supportive classroom environment can promote confidence and foster peer inspiration. In a study abroad setting, challenges in integration should also be taken into consideration.

Limitations in this systematic review include focusing on studies published only in English or Chinese, which might potentially lead to language bias. Critical appraisal was mainly conducted by the first author, with co-authors contributing to the appraisal of selected studies. Expanding multi-reviewer appraisal in future studies may further strengthen validity. Additionally, the first author served as the sole coder, which may have influenced the interpretation and categorization of the findings. This should be considered when interpreting the results of the review. Despite these limitations, we believe this systematic review fills a gap in the review literature on empirical findings on L2 learning motivation.

Based on this review, some recommendations for future research can be given. First, review articles investigating empirical findings should be conducted to build a more comprehensive image of L2 learning motivation and factors affecting it in the LOTE context. Second, for L2 Chinese motivation, more longitudinal studies can be done to further understand the motivational changes. Third, the role of the current L2 self and the multilingual self in learning L2 Chinese and other LOTEs deserve further attention.

Appendix A

Studies included in the systematic review (Locations are reported according to the terminology used in the original articles.)

Paper	***(n=)***	***Participants***	***Nationality***	***Location***	***Design***	***Language***
(B. Yu & Downing, 2012)	118	University students	Various	China	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Bo & Fu, 2018)	6	University students	Various	Hong Kong	Qualitative, longitudinal	EN
(C. H. Wen et al., 2020)	52	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Mixed, longitudinal	EN
(Chen, 2013)	4	University students	Various	China	Qualitative, longitudinal	CH
(E. Wang et al., 2013)	270	Mixed	Vietnamese	Vietnam	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(Feng & Papi, 2020)	94	University students	Various	USA	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Fu & Huang, 2025)	3	University students	Various	China	Qualitative, longitudinal	EN
(Fukui & Yashima, 2021)	2	University students	Japanese	Taiwan	Qualitative, longitudinal	EN
(Gao et al., 2024)	164	University students	Australian	Australia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Guo & Yang, 2012)	360	University students	Various	China	Mixed, cross-sectional	CH
(Jung Ku et al., 2021)	260	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Kamaruddin et al., 2020)	330	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Lang et al., 2024)	4	University students	American	Taiwan	Qualitative, cross-sectional	EN
(N. Li et al., 2024)	375	University students	Mongolian	Mongolia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(L. Li & Ma, 2021)	330	University students	Various	China	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(Liu et al., 2020)	67	University students	Uzbek	China	Mixed, cross-sectional	EN
(Liu, 2023)	97	University students	Various	China	Mixed, longitudinal	EN
(Luo, 2018)	257	University students	American	USA	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(M. Gong et al., 2023)	375	Online course participants	Saudi	Saudi Arabia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(M. Yu et al., 2022)	145	University students	Portuguese	Portugal	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH

Paper	(n=)	Participants	Nationality	Location	Design	Language
(Mayumi & Zheng, 2023)	5	University students	British	UK	Qualitative, retrospective longitudinal	EN
(N. Li & Wang, 2023)	8	University students	American	China	Qualitative, longitudinal	CH
(Olaleye & Xiao, 2026)	73	University students	Nigerian	Nigeria	Mixed, cross-sectional	EN
(Paee et al., 2024)	72	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Qualitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Peng & Lou, 2025)	97	University students	Moroccan	China	Mixed, cross-sectional	EN
(Q. Wang & Du, 2020)	223	University students	Various	China	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Ruan et al., 2015a)	153	University students	Danish	Denmark	Mixed, longitudinal	EN
(Ruan et al., 2015b)	129	University students	Danish and other	Denmark	Mixed, longitudinal	EN
(Shi & Gao, 2017)	1025	University students	Various	China	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(Sun & Zhang, 2020)	17	University students	Various	China	Qualitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Tan et al., 2017)	133	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Tan, Ismail, & Ooi, 2016)	148	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Tan, Ismail, Hoe, et al., 2016)	65	University students	Malaysian	Malaysia	Qualitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Tian, 2019)	18	University students	Various	China	Mixed, cross-sectional	CH
(Turkpenova, 2023)	35	University students	Various	Kazakhstan	Mixed, cross-sectional	EN
(Winke, 2013)	96	Military personnel	American	USA	Quantitative, longitudinal	EN
(Wu & Wang, 2017)	1	University students	American	China	Qualitative, retrospective longitudinal	CH
(X. Wen & Piao, 2020)	20	University students	American	USA	Qualitative, longitudinal	EN
(X. Wen, 2013)	317	University students	American	USA	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(X. Wen, 2022)	120	University students	Various	USA	Mixed, cross-sectional	EN
(Y. Xie, 2014)	208	University students	American	USA	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN

Paper	*(n=)*	*Participants*	*Nationality*	*Location*	*Design*	*Language*
(Y. Xie, 2017)	9	University students	American	USA	Mixed, cross-sectional	CH
(F. Xie, 2025)	120	University students	Various	China	Mixed, longitudinal	EN
(Xu et al., 2022)	90	University students	Thai	Thailand	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Y. F. Gong et al., 2020)	15	University students	New Zealand	China	Qualitative, longitudinal	EN
(Y. Wang & Yang, 2023)	256	University students	Turkish	Turkey	Quantitative, cross-sectional	EN
(X. Yang, 2017)	74	Mixed	Brazilian	Brazil	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(Y. Yang & Jirawit, 2025)	139	University students	Thai	Thailand	Mixed, cross-sectional	EN
(Z. Li & Liu, 2023)	8	University students	Various	China	Qualitative, cross-sectional	EN
(Zhai, 2021)	14	University students	American	USA	Mixed, longitudinal	EN
(Zhao & Zhang, 2018)	298	University students	Nepalese	Nepal	Quantitative, cross-sectional	CH
(Zhang & Pan, 2023)	2	University students	Various	China	Qualitative, longitudinal	EN
(Zhou et al., 2024)	700	University students	Japanese	Japan	Mixed, longitudinal	EN

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汉语学习动机系统综述：选择、时间变化与二语汉语自我

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摘要
英语以外其他语言学习动机研究的重要性已得到学界认可;然而，影响汉语作为第二语言（L2）学习的初始动机及其动态变化的因素仍未得到充分研究。本研究采用系统综述方法，探讨汉语学习的选择动机（choice motivation）与持续动机（sustained motivation），以及二语自我（L2 self）在其中的作用。研究系统筛选并分析了 2012 年 1 月至 2026 年 3 月间以英文和中文发表的 53 项实证研究。结果显示：现有研究普遍认为，汉语学习的选择动机同时受融合型与工具型因素影响；动机变化受学习情境、学习阶段和语言水平影响；较强的理想二语自我有助于增强学习动机。然而，现有研究仍缺乏对学习动机随时间变化的研究，同时对汉语学习者当前第二语言自我的理论探讨也较为不足。基于上述发现，本文提出未来研究建议，并探讨可能的教学启示。

关键词
学习动机，第二语言学习，汉语，系统性文献综述

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