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# **Motivation of Learning Chinese as an International Language: A Review of Theories and Research Findings**

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## **Abstract**

While there is extensive literature on motivation of learning English as a second/ foreign language and an increasing body of literature dedicated to researching teaching and learning, scarce studies were dedicated to investigating the motivation of learning Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL). The article aims to provide a systematic review of studies related to Chinese learning motivation published in peer-reviewed journals from 2010-2023, specifically on empirical studies where data had been collected from language classroom settings at different proficiency levels. In total, 477 articles from eight databases have been reviewed. After formalising the inclusion criteria among the researchers, 40 articles were selected and analysed to explore the current theoretical, methodological, and topical trends in CSL/CFL learning motivation research.

This study reviewed several significant studies in the field of CSL/CFL; however, there are few theories specifically tailored to this field. Additionally, most studies employed quantitative research methods, lacking an emphasis on exploring the underlying mechanisms and processes that drive the outcomes. The authors conclude that the field requires further research to investigate multiple aspects of language learning motivation and calls for future research in the field to (i) expand beyond the individual-psychological dimension to include macro-sociological perspectives, (ii) make use of (quasi-) experimental studies to draw causality, and (iii) provide thick description of learner demographics to address the cultural contexts are necessary in language learning studies.

## **Keywords**

Motivation, Chinese as a second/foreign language, motivational self-system

## **1 Introduction**

In the past decade, with Chinese being an uprising language along with the economic and political influence of China (Duff et al., 2015; Li & Duff, 2014), this has led to increased research on teaching

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Chinese as a second/ foreign language (CSL/CFL). Most learners started learning Chinese with enthusiasm, however, the extensive number of Chinese characters and the lack of morpheme-phoneme correspondence make it one of the most difficult languages to learn, especially for learners with alphabetic first language (Grenfell & Harris, 2015; Shen & Xu, 2015). CSL/CFL learners must learn the pronunciation of Chinese characters and then match it with their meanings, resulting in slower progress and increased effort and capacity from learners. Encountering difficulties and feeling lack of accomplishment are deemed to be the reasons for decreased motivation and high drop-out rate among learners. For instance, in Australia, over 90% of learners discontinue Chinese learning beyond beginner level, and such phenomenon is also found in other countries (Du & Kirkebaek, 2012; Orton, 2016).

Voluminous research on second language acquisition (SLA) has built a consensus that motivation is one of the pivotal factors to determine learners' success in acquiring a second/foreign language (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei, 2019). Gardner (1985, p. 7) defined motivation as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity". In other words, L2 motivation refers to the wide and multifaceted incentives one has for learning a language to receive something perceived as a reward (De Brabander & Martens, 2014). It has become a prominent field for scholars and researchers for the past few decades to obtain a better theoretical and empirical insight into the characteristics of L2 motivation. The evolution of motivation theories is typically categorised into three phases (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012): social psychological period, cognitive-situated period and process-oriented period. The social psychological period focuses on the relationship between individual language learning perspectives and the target language communities; cognitive-situated period typically draws on related research in the field of psychology, exploring motivation situated in classroom or specific learning situation; process-oriented period emphasises on the temporal organisation of motivation and capture motivational processes. These phases represent a shift from static, macro-perspective to dynamic, micro-perspective toward L2 motivation in later studies (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

L2 motivation has been conceptualised in various theoretical perspectives, with Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (Gardner, 1985, 2010) marking as the pioneering contribution. Through a social psychological perspective, this model highlights the relationship between motivation and orientation, with orientation acting as the antecedent of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). It incorporates two types of motivations, instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. The former refers to utilitarian motives in learning a language and the latter refers to the learner's willingness to interact and eventually assimilate into the target language community. Despite the model's popularity, it has faced criticisms regarding its feasibility. Apart from the model developed by Gardner, other predominant theoretical frameworks such as self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1997), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2005), have remained very influential in contemporary studies. The L2MSS, developed by Dörnyei (2005), has become the most frequently invoked theoretical foundation in recent empirical studies and has received widespread acceptance (Boo et al., 2015). It explores the relationship between self-identity of the learner, learning experience and L2 motivation (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Although previous studies have focused on learning English as a second/ foreign language (ESL/ EFL), there are scant studies regarding motivation in learning languages other than English such as Spanish, French and German (cf. Boo et al., 2015; Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2021 for a recent comprehensive overview). Mahmoodi and Yousefi's (2021) synthetic review analysed the scope of L2 foreign language motivation research in a sample of 100 studies conducted between 2010 and 2019. While their study examined L2 motivation studies across various target languages, studies on motivation in learning Chinese have also gradually increased throughout the years. The systematic review of Gong et al. (2018) informs that out of 175 CSL/CFL studies in international journals from 2004 to 2016, it encompassed a broad scope to review the learning and teaching of CSL/CFL in general, including the development trajectories and topical trends. Gong et al. (2020b) also reviewed 60 selected empirical

studies on CSL/CFL but it only offered a preliminary discussion on the topic of learning motivation. Additionally, specific investigations were conducted within the context of the United Kingdom (Zhang & Li, 2010; Zhu & Li, 2014). Li and Li (2020) specifically focused on the L2 Chinese learner identity. It shows that a limited number of studies explore how L2 learners' personal factors, including motivation, affect their learning of Chinese.

While the importance of motivation in language learning has been widely acknowledged, it has received relatively greater attention in the context of L2 Chinese acquisition compared to other factors in second language acquisition. Our systematic review particularly focuses on motivation to learn Chinese as an international language which timely addresses the increasing popularity of Chinese language worldwide. Therefore, a comprehensive review of studies undertaken in the domain of L2 Chinese can provide valuable insights in two main areas: the development of learning and teaching of L2 Chinese, as well as the theoretical frameworks pertaining to motivation in CSL/CFL. The review attempts to answer the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What theoretical and methodological perspectives can be identified in the studies on Chinese L2 motivation?

RQ2: What topical trends can be identified in studies on Chinese L2 motivation?

## **2 Methods**

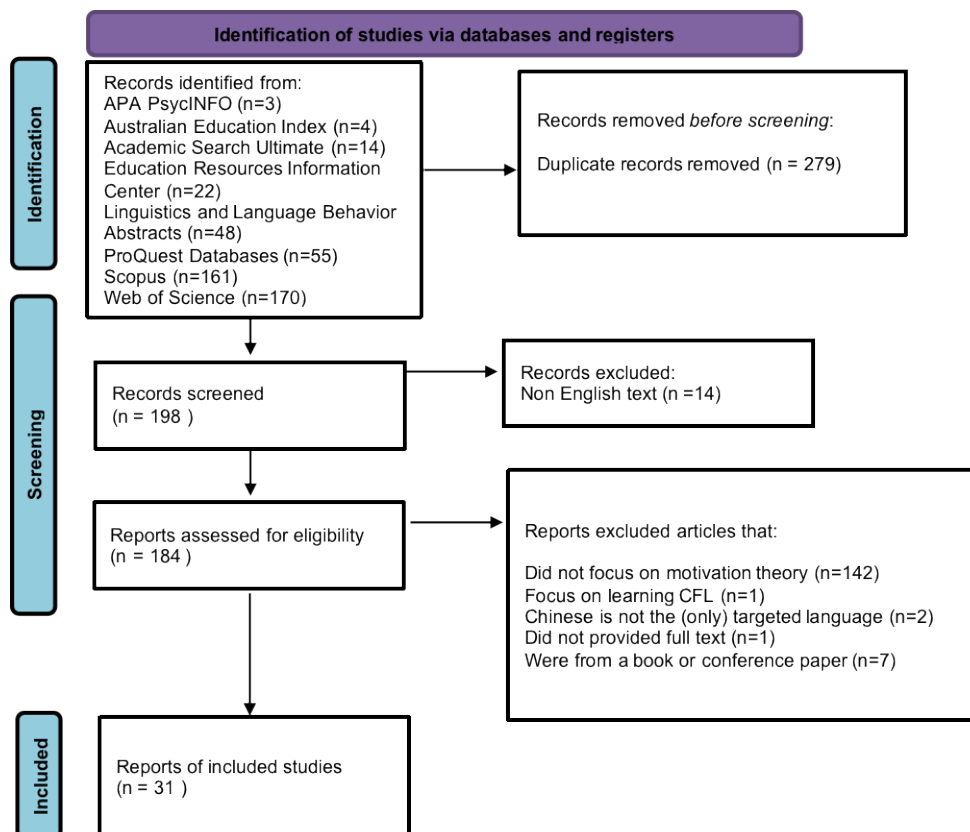
### **2.1 Research Design**

The reporting of this systematic review was guided by the standards of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) Statement. To focus on Chinese L2 motivation, the term “Chinese language” AND “motivational strategies” were used in the preliminary searching process to broadly capture research in this area and identify the potential keywords. Then, variations on terms were picked out, for example, “Chinese language” is related to “Mandarin”, “Chinese”, “Cantonese”; while learning Chinese can be related to learning Chinese as “first”, “second” and “foreign” language. To narrow the search, the researchers compiled a list of keywords, aiming at articles in teaching and learning of Chinese as an international language in terms of motivation theories and resulted in the search string: (“Chinese” OR “Cantonese” OR “Mandarin”) AND (“Second” OR “Foreign”) AND (“Motivation” OR “Motivational”) AND (“teaching” OR “learning”) NOT (“EFL” OR “ESL”). The researchers limited the search to articles published between 2010 and 2023 to align with research published in the burgeoning demand of Mandarin learning. Eight databases were chosen based on their relevance to the subject area of the research. The researchers searched abstracts of peer-reviewed, scholarly articles published in any languages. The researchers initially generated 477 results. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA procedures this study has conducted to screen and select the final 40 included studies.

### **2.2 Data analysis**

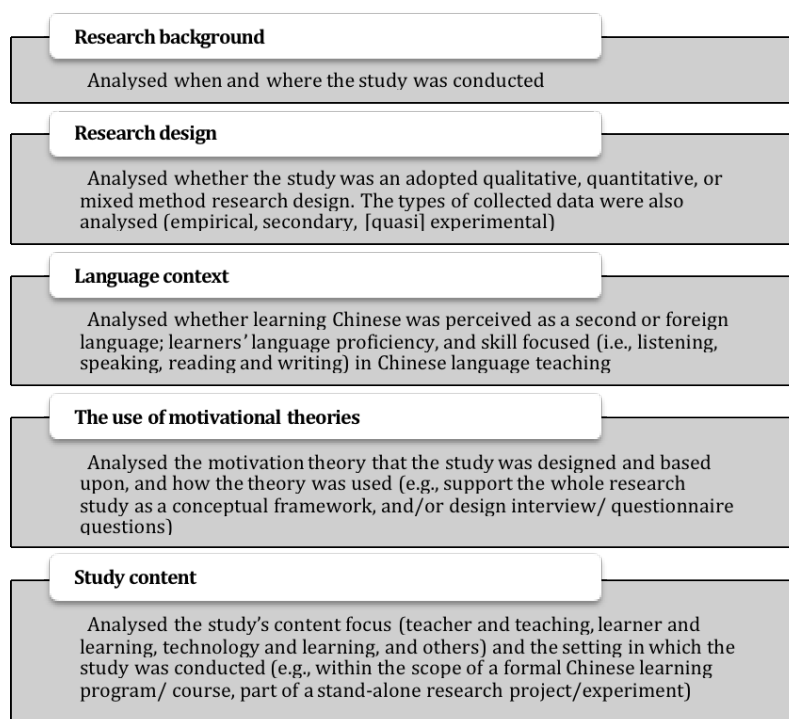
The authors of this article conducted in-depth reading of the 40 selected articles. Informed by previous systematic review in education (e.g., Bautista et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2018; Cheng, et al., 2021) and guided by the data itself, five dimensions were highlighted for review (see Figure 2), including the research background, research design, language context, the use of motivation theories and study content. Two authors individually identified the primary categorisation of different articles, and then, the third author verified the classification. Potential disagreements among the three authors regarding the coding were solved via discussion.

Figure 1

*PRISMA Model*

\* To ensure our results are as up to date as possible, we have also gone through the same article selection process and have included 9 additional articles published between 2020 and 2023. These newer articles will be incorporated into the discussion as well.

Figure 2

*Detailed Descriptions of the Corresponding Dimensions*

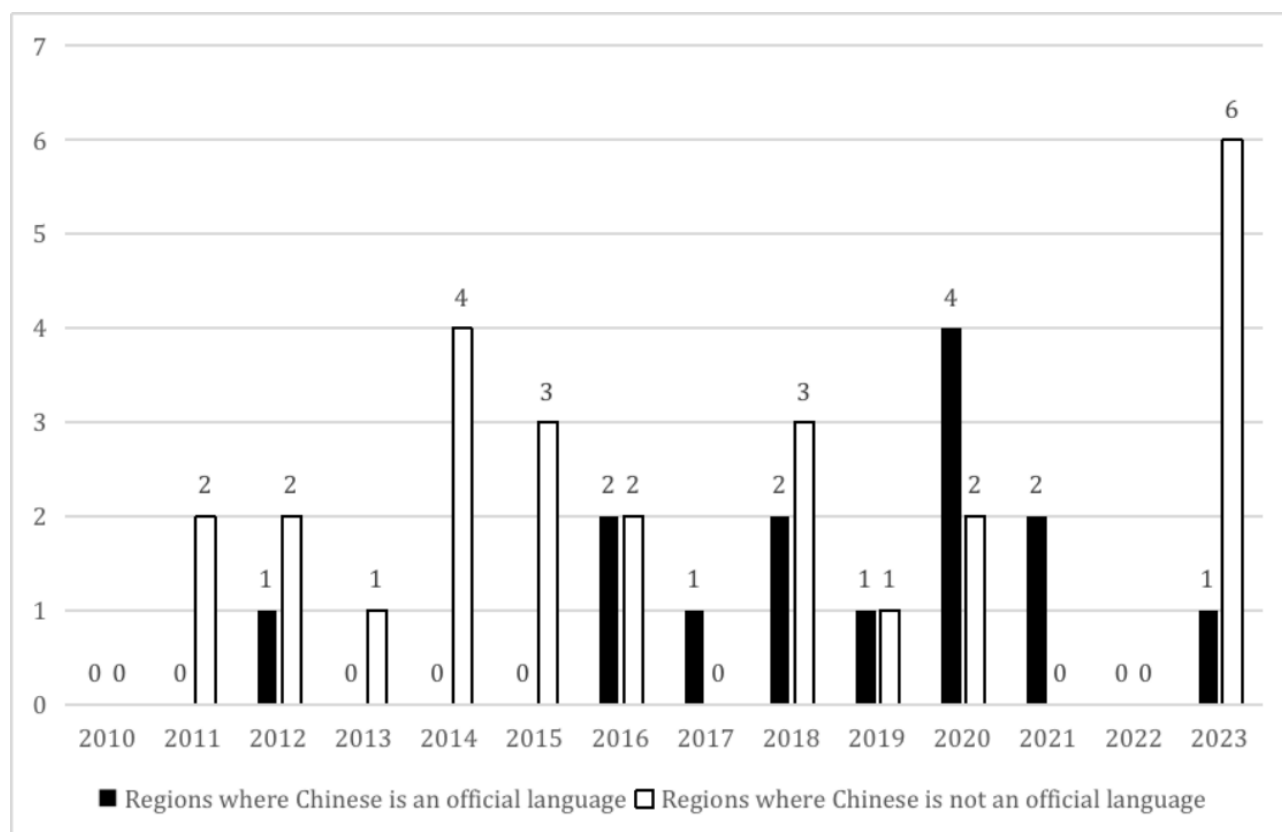
### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 Research background

Among the total of 40 articles, 14 were based on the research conducted in regions where Chinese was an official language (see Figure 3), including China (8), Hong Kong (4), Singapore (1), and Taiwan (1). Whereas the remainder were conducted in regions where Chinese was not an official language, including the United Kingdom (1), United States (7), Africa (2), Australia (2), New Zealand (2), Denmark (2), Turkey (1) and other Asian countries such as Malaysia (2), Japan (2), Korea (1), Vietnam (1), Thailand (1) and Saudi Arabia (1), and one that is not region-specific. It is worth noting that this research topic gained more attention only after 2010, with most studies conducted in regions where Chinese is not an official language. Research in regions where Chinese is the official language only increased after 2015.

Figure 3

*The Research Context of the Selected Articles*



#### 3.2 Research design

It was found that 22 of the 40 articles employed quantitative designs (55%), 12 employed mixed-methods design (30%), and six others were qualitative in nature (15%). There is a variety of research methods utilised in studying CSL/ CFL motivation, with quantitative designs being the most commonly used.

Among the quantitative studies, 77% were cross-sectional and only 23% were longitudinal.

Most quantitative papers administered motivation questionnaires regarding second language learning (e.g., Winke, 2013; Wong, 2018). In addition, different Chinese language tests were used to collect performance data, for instance, written test (Kim & Yan, 2014), pinyin input test (Chai et al., 2012), and overall proficiency test (Cui, 2019). Only three studies were experimental in nature (Cui, 2019; Kim &

Yan, 2014; Lan et al., 2016) and one was quasi-experimental (Loh, 2016), suggesting the need to conduct more experimental studies to investigate not only correlational but also causal relationships among variables.

Of the six qualitative studies, only two were longitudinal studies. Most studies conducted interviews and reflective journals (e.g., Sun & Zhang, 2020), analyzed student theses (Chen & Yeung, 2015) and conducted case studies (Nel, 2016), with only one employing ethnography (Bo & Fu, 2018). For the mixed-method studies (e.g., Avoungnansou, 2015; Cai & Zhu, 2012; Campbell & Storch, 2011; He, 2018; Ruan et al., 2015a, 2015b; Sugie & Mitsugi, 2014; Tong & Tsung, 2020; Wen, 2011; Zhang et al., 2020), they combined methods derived from class / participant observations, (pre/post) questionnaire (with open-ended questions), and individual / group interviews. Among these studies, four were cross-sectional, five were longitudinal, and one was a mixed-method study that included both longitudinal and cross-sectional components (Campbell & Storch, 2011).

### 3.3 Language context

Our study categorised the language context based on the four fundamental skills in language learning (Sadiku, 2015), namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Out of all the articles reviewed, five (12.5%) solely focused on developing Chinese speaking skills, while two studies focused on Chinese reading, and two focused on writing skills. Additionally, 22 articles (55%) did not provide any specific information on this aspect, indicating that many studies use “learning Chinese” as a general term without clear specificity. Only seven out of the total studies (17.5%) focused on more than one language skill. Among them, three covered all four skill areas (Bo & Fu, 2018; Loh, 2016; Luo, 2018) while the rest examined a combination of listening, reading, writing (Wong, 2020), speaking and listening (Ruan et al., 2015a), or listening, reading, and speaking (Winke, 2013). Although there does not seem to be an overemphasis on specific skills, it should be noted that none of the articles solely concentrated on Chinese listening skills.

In our analysis, we also considered the Chinese language proficiency levels of the learners. Out of the total studies (40), only 31 of them (77.5%) provided this information. Apart from the eight studies that involved learners with varying levels of Chinese proficiency (such as Gong et al., 2020a; Tong & Tsung, 2020; Wen, 2011), majority of studies (12 articles) were carried out with learners who had beginner to lower intermediate levels of proficiency, followed by advanced level (4 articles), and intermediate to pre-advanced level (4 articles). This suggests a lack of research on learners with higher levels of proficiency.

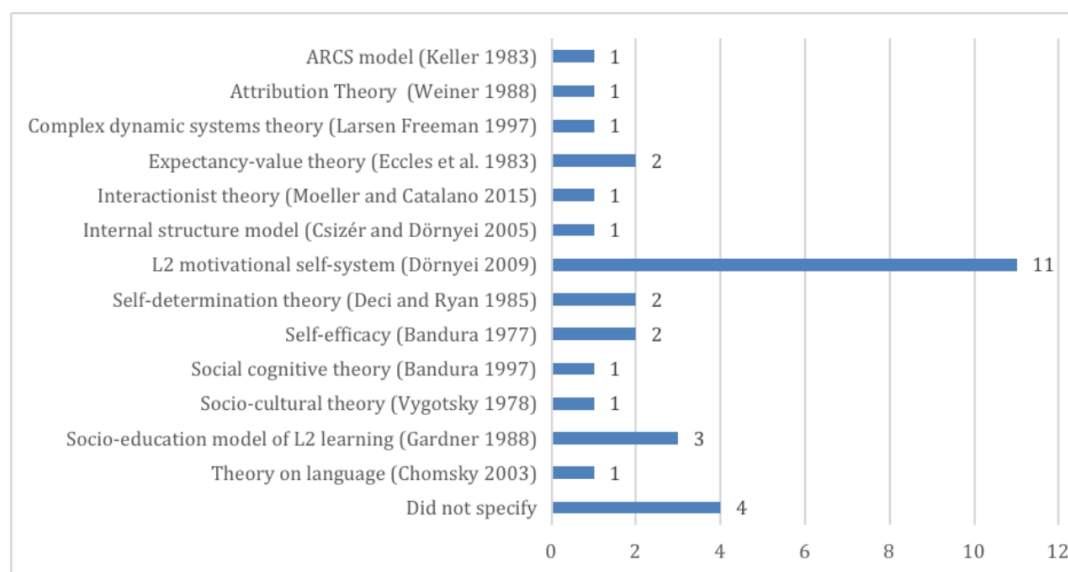
Out of the 40 studies, 20 (50%) considered Chinese as a foreign language, while 13 (32.5%) considered it as a second language, with one article including learning Chinese as a second and foreign language. In six studies (15%), the language setting was not clearly defined, and instead, broader terms such as “second” foreign language (Sugie & Mitsugi, 2014) or second (foreign) language (Campbell & Storch, 2011) were used. The varying definitions of Chinese as a foreign or second language in the studies highlight the complexity of language learning and the need for clear definitions in research.

### 3.4 The use of motivational theories

The analysis found 24 of the 40 articles (60%) have adopted motivational theories to build the conceptual framework for the research studies (see Figure 4). On the other hand, only four studies (10%) used theories to solely aid in the development of their questionnaire design, rather than shaping the entire research framework (Ee et al., 2018; Lan et al., 2016; Liu, 2017; Winke, 2013). The remaining 12 studies (30%) did not use any theories to design their studies.



Figure 4

*Adopted Motivation Theories among the Selected Articles*

The L2MSS is the most frequently adopted model among studies that were built upon past theories/models. For instance, Wong (2020) examined grade-six ethnic minority students in Hong Kong by involving them in proficiency tests in listening and reading comprehension, asking them to rate their own Chinese proficiency, and responding to a L2MSS questionnaire to evaluate their ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. The second most used theory is the expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983). It is worth highlighting that four studies used motivation theory as a general term without specifying any theory.

### 3.5 Study content

Regarding the study setting, 32 of the 40 studies (80%) were conducted within formal Chinese learning programme/course, and eight studies (20%) were stand-alone research projects or experiments. Among the studies, 25 studies targeted undergraduates, six focused on secondary school, three on master's programme and four on primary school. The remaining studies involved participants such as curriculum designer (Alshammari, 2020) and military personnel (Winke, 2013), suggesting that research studies are still mostly dominated by those targeting undergraduate students. To further analyze the study content, the 40 selected articles were categorised into four themes taking reference from de Araujo and colleagues (2018)'s systematic review: learner and learning (30), teacher and teaching (4), technology and learning (3), and others (3).

#### 3.5.1 Learner and learning

Amongst the 30 studies belonging to this category (Appendix 1), 11 adopted Dörnyei's L2MSS (e.g. Campbell & Storch, 2011; Zhang & Chinokul, 2023; Jia, 2019; Li & Zhang, 2021; Mayumi & Zheng, 2023; Wen, 2011; Wong, 2018, 2020; Xie, 2014). These studies found that students' self-perceived proficiency was substantially related to their performance (Campbell & Storch, 2011; Wong, 2018, 2020) and cultural identity was the most influential factor for Chinese heritage learners' motivation in learning Chinese as a second language (Jia, 2019; Wen, 2011; Xie, 2014).

Three studies examined the motivation changes of learners. Bo and Fu (2018) examined the changes of adult learners' motivational beliefs and behaviours by adopting Expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983). The study reported that examination increased motivation (i.e., utility value) and peer comparison

weakened ability beliefs, thus decreased motivation. Gong et al. (2020b) reported motivational shifts of a group of New Zealand students before and after their studies in China. They found that students' motivation fluctuates during their study abroad but was heightened and enhanced by the trip. The dynamic nature of motivation was promoted by continuous interactions between the learning context and their L2 self-concepts, suggesting that providing authentic language contexts is critical to sustain learners' motivation. Avounghansou (2015) and Zhu (2014) explored that students' motivation of learning Chinese is relatively instrumental - the use of Chinese at work or studies in the future. Avounghansou (2015) found that teachers' practices including teachers' instructions, use of teaching materials and teaching methods have an impact on students' motivation. In particular, the students are passive in the non-participatory learning activities and their motivation declines. The two studies suggested students' achievement was built and had a positive influence on their confidence and motivation.

Four studies related to specific teaching methods were implemented to motivate in learning CSL/CFL. Three studies investigated the implementation of Task-based Learning and Teaching (TBLT) at beginner level. Lan, et al. (2016) which studied learners' speaking ability through a task-based approach reported that reasoning gap tasks promoted the oral performance of CSL learners whereas no significant differences were reported in terms of motivation among different groups of participants. The other two studies (Ruan et al., 2015a, 2015b) highlighted peer interaction, cooperative learning, and use of group/pair work and integration of cultural elements into learning as the motivating factors. Another study examined the effectiveness of explicit semantic radical instruction at beginner level on reading comprehension and found that students improved their descriptive translation tremendously and enhanced overall comprehension of the text (He, 2018). Likewise, Loh (2016) discussed the use of picture storybooks in teaching Chinese as a second language and concluded there is positive impact of picture storybooks on ethnic minority adolescents' Chinese language learning motivation in Hong Kong.

Moreover, two articles (Liu, 2017; Luo, 2018) investigated the foreign language anxiety of learning Chinese, an affective construct of motivation. Luo (2018) suggested that foreignness or characteristics of the target language have an impact on learners' foreign language anxiety in which the perception of difficulty in learning Chinese significantly correlated to language anxiety. Similarly, Liu's (2017) study on relationship between language anxiety and willingness to communicate in Chinese concluded that more anxious learners of Chinese tended to be less willing to communicate in Chinese in diverse contexts. Sun and Zhang (2020) examined L2 Chinese speech production and suggested that such ability could be the result of the synergies gained from the cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural dimensions of L2 learning and use.

### 3.5.2 Teacher and teaching

Among the four studies related to teacher and teaching (Appendix 2), one study (Tong & Tsung, 2020) recommended using humor strategies to teach CSL, while the other study (Cui, 2019) demonstrated how to apply a new teaching model – BOPPPS (a closed-loop feedback model of teaching interaction and reflection that is constructed of six stages including bridge-in, objective, pre-assessment, participatory learning, post-assessment and summary) in teaching oral Chinese as a foreign language. Both studies revealed that students' Chinese learning motivation and language use can be facilitated by adopting different teaching strategies and methods other than traditional one-way teaching.

Two other studies were teacher-related in which teachers' perceptions were explored in relation to their thoughts and experiences in teaching CSL/CFL. For instance, in Zhang et al.'s (2020) study, pre-school CSL teachers were invited to complete a questionnaire regarding the variables that influence their motivations to become CSL teachers after graduating from a Master's program in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language. The study found that age, annual family income and frequency of contact with foreigners significantly predicted the participants' motivations. The other study conducted by Chen and Yeung (2015) explored the factors that may influence teachers' self-efficacy to teach Chinese as a foreign



language in an English-speaking school system; the identified influential factors include teacher factors (proficiency in the medium of instruction, teaching experience, and understanding of students), student factors (student responses, classroom discipline, students' motivation, student-teacher relations, and students' ages) and contextual factors (culture, influence from other teachers, class size, and resources). The findings of these two studies help to understand teacher education in teaching CSL/CFL.

### *3.5.3 Technology and learning*

Three studies were related to how the use of technology affects student motivation in learning CSL/CFL (Appendix 3). The study by Chai et al. (2012) examined the ability of computer-based Chinese input (pinyin) among Singapore secondary schools to determine the relationship between Chinese input skills and motivation in learning Chinese. Sugie and Mitsugi (2014) have adopted technology to design blended learning for Chinese novice learners in Japan. Technology helps to provide an authentic context (e.g., Chinese key typing skills, searching information on Chinese websites) that help to increase learners' motivation for learning Chinese. Similarly, Cai and Zhu (2012) designed a four-week online-learning community project to promote students' motivation to learn Chinese in the US. Through the online forum, students could interact with other CFL learners, share their learning experiences, and receive language feedback through reading and posting in the online community. In that, a significant difference regarding the motivation to learn CSL was found before and after the project.

### *3.5.4 Others*

There were three studies that did not belong to the above themes (Appendix 4). One of the studies conducted by Ee et al. (2018) used a Rasch model to conduct item analysis for the Integrative and Instrumental motivation scale. This was the only study that measured validity and reliability of an adapted motivation scale used in second language learning to identify students' levels of motivation towards learning CSL/CFL. Since the results were only based on a pilot test on 29 students, it highlights the needs for validating a motivation scale for L2 Chinese learners with larger and more diverse sample size in future studies.

Another study conducted by Nel (2016) was a qualitative study that adopted individual and focus group interviews, questionnaires, and observations to collect data from a principal, a teacher facilitator, teachers, and learners of Mandarin classes in a South African primary school. These narratives provided information regarding the motivation to teach Mandarin, as well as learners' Chinese learning experiences. Since this study covered perspectives from both educators and learners, it was not grouped in the above themes.

## **4 Discussion**

### **4.1 Theoretical perspectives on language learning motivation**

Among the theories that were adopted, only a few were specifically designed for second/foreign language learning, such as L2 Motivational Self System by Dörnyei (2009) and Socio-education model of L2 learning by Gardner (1988). It has been evident that LOTE learners, including L2 Chinese learners, always have unique language learning motives (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Theories that recognise the "narrative identity" are expected to have a stronger predictive power to L2 Chinese learners' motivation. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that 41% of the studies did not employ any theory or model in their design which raises concern about the robustness of research. In recent years, academics in SLA have been emphasising the reliability and validity of research (Plonsky, 2014). We contend that mere replication of

previous studies in the context of learning CSL/CFL might not be enough to contribute to the paradigm shift in motivation research. To further deepen the discussion, researchers in the field should make good use of distinctive features of Chinese language, not only does the focus on language learning motivation need to expand beyond the individual-psychological dimension to a macro-sociological perspective, it also needs to include interaction between motivation and educational environment and socio-political factors (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). The present study revealed that motivation research in CSL/ CFL adopted theories from SLA, since it is still in a developmental phase, shifting away from SLA framework of reference to a linguistic multi-competence framework (Cook, 2016) as the theoretical orientation provides distinct and wider perspective of the field of study.

The findings also indicate that Chinese L2 motivation has been studied from diverse theoretical orientations and epistemological perspectives. Although Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (2005) is the leading theoretical framework, a wide range of concepts and variables have been examined in the study of Chinese L2 motivation. The prevalence of L2MSS is explained by the successful deployment in various language learning environment, including Hungary, Germany, Sweden, China, Japan and Iran (Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2021). Most importantly, its simplicity and adaptability to different contexts led to possible application in the context of Chinese as an L2 (Ushioda, 2019).

Moreover, the significance of narrative identity in the context of language learning has gained traction in recent years. As posited by McAdams (1993), narrative identity refers to the internalised life stories that individuals construct, shaping their self-concepts and motivations. For CSL learners, the motivation to learn Chinese often intertwines with their cultural narratives and personal histories (Jia, 2019). This connection suggests that motivation is not a static trait but rather a dynamic construct that evolves as learners navigate their linguistic and cultural journeys.

The study of motivation in Chinese L2 learning is critical and timely, particularly as emerging trends highlight key areas of interest such as task-based teaching, foreign language anxiety, and motivational theories during the cognitive-situated period. This encompasses frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, and various language learning strategies. As the field continues to evolve, a more integrated approach that combines psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic perspectives will provide deeper insights into the multifaceted nature of motivation among Chinese L2 learners.

## 4.2 Methodological trends identified in Chinese L2 motivation

The review underscores a pressing need for a paradigm shift in the research focus of L2 motivation studies, particularly towards understanding the underlying mechanisms and processes that drive motivational outcomes. Currently, only 16.1% of the studies in this area have employed qualitative designs, indicating a significant gap in the literature. The predominance of quantitative research can be attributed to the foundational contributions of scholars such as Wallace Lambert and Robert Gardner, who have significantly shaped the field through their psychological questionnaire-based methodologies. Their work has laid the groundwork for much of the subsequent research paradigm within L2 motivation studies. However, early advocates like Ushioda (1994) emphasised the necessity of qualitative approaches to explore the dynamic and complex structures of motivation in language learning. Ushioda's work remains pivotal in promoting a more nuanced understanding of motivational dynamics. Recent reviews of L2 motivation literature by Boo et al. (2015) and Mahmoodi and Yousefi (2021) highlight an encouraging trend toward increased qualitative research in the past two decades. While Boo et al. (2015) noted that quantitative methods still dominate the landscape, they also observed a notable emergence of qualitative and innovative research methodologies, which are beginning to balance the scales.

It is particularly striking that much of the existing research has focused on ESL/EFL, while studies exploring motivation in CSL/CFL remain relatively scarce. This disparity is likely a reflection of the novel status of CSL/CFL research in comparison to the more established ESL/EFL motivation studies.

We contend that the field of CSL/CFL requires a concerted effort to incorporate more qualitative and longitudinal studies. While quantitative research is adept at examining relationships among variables, it falls short in elucidating the in-depth mechanisms through which motivation influences teaching and learning outcomes in the context of CSL/CFL. Additionally, there is a pressing need for more (quasi-)experimental studies. With over 70% of existing research being empirical, studies employing controlled designs are essential for establishing causality, particularly when evaluating the effectiveness of innovative strategies aimed at enhancing teaching practices and promoting student engagement in Chinese language learning.

Moreover, the majority of quantitative studies have relied on self-report questionnaires that were initially developed for ESL/EFL contexts. The validity and reliability of these instruments in the context of Chinese or other languages remain untested. There is a critical need for research that provides a thick description of learner demographics, particularly regarding cultural contexts. Most studies have predominantly focused on reading, speaking, and writing skills at beginner levels, often neglecting the critical area of listening skills. Furthermore, very few studies have investigated learners at intermediate or advanced proficiency levels, resulting in a lack of comprehensive understanding of motivation across the proficiency spectrum.

Additionally, researchers have employed varied terminology and inconsistent levels of specificity in describing learners' Chinese proficiency. The classification of Chinese as a second, third, or foreign language has been flexible, complicating efforts to synthesise findings and identify overarching trends. Future research must prioritise the provision of detailed demographic information about learners, including explicit justifications of their Chinese language proficiency. For example, many studies have merely reported the number of years of study, which does not accurately reflect actual proficiency (Tan et al., 2016). Future studies should also clearly delineate the language level of the Chinese courses or programs in which students are enrolled, rather than only stating the study year (Sugie & Mitsugi, 2014). Furthermore, the term "Chinese language" is often used as an umbrella term, which can obscure important distinctions, such as those between Chinese character writing and other skills. References to established frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages, the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK), or the quantification of acquired Chinese characters, would significantly enhance our understanding of language proficiency. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute substantially to the field and provide deeper insights into the complexities of motivation in learning Chinese as an L2.

### **4.3 Future research directions**

This review has illuminated several critical gaps in the current landscape of Chinese L2 motivation research, highlighting areas that warrant further investigation. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications in the field of Chinese language acquisition.

A notable deficiency in the literature is the predominance of studies focused on individual psychological dimensions, such as self-concept and self-efficacy (Dörnyei, 2009), while macro-sociological factors—including social, political, and economic influences—remain underexplored. Investigating these broader dimensions can significantly enhance our understanding of how societal contexts shape learner motivation. Ethnographic methodologies, particularly in settings where Chinese is learned as a second or foreign language, would be well-suited for capturing these dynamics. Such studies could provide crucial insights into how national language policies, economic imperatives, and cultural positioning drive motivation, offering a deeper, contextualised understanding of Chinese L2 acquisition. Longitudinal ethnographies would be particularly impactful in tracking motivational shifts in response to evolving socio-political environments.

Another key gap lies in the dearth of research focused on learners at advanced proficiency levels. While much of the existing literature centers on beginner and intermediate learners, understanding how motivation evolves as learners approach fluency is critical, especially given the increasing global demand for advanced Chinese proficiency. Future studies employing longitudinal mixed-methods designs could combine quantitative measures with in-depth qualitative interviews to examine how motivation is sustained or transformed at higher proficiency levels. In particular, narrative inquiry could reveal how learners' evolving identities and self-concepts influence their continued engagement with the language. Addressing this gap would provide a more comprehensive view of the motivational trajectory throughout the learning process, offering new insights into how advanced learners navigate linguistic and cultural complexities.

The impact of technology-mediated learning environments on motivation also remains insufficiently explored, particularly in the context of Chinese as a second language. With the proliferation of online learning platforms, AI-driven language tools, and virtual immersion technologies, it is crucial to understand how these innovations affect motivation and learning outcomes. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies could provide valuable data on the comparative effectiveness of traditional classroom instruction versus technology-enhanced learning environments. Such research could examine how digital tools influence learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, leveraging pre- and post-test designs alongside self-report measures to track motivational changes.

Furthermore, while some studies have addressed the motivation of heritage learners, there is a significant gap in research on how non-heritage learners navigate cultural identity in their motivation to learn Chinese. Understanding how these learners relate to Chinese culture and how this relationship affects their learning experience is essential for broadening our understanding of L2 motivation. Future research could employ qualitative case studies or focus group discussions to explore the cultural perceptions, identity formation, and motivational drivers of non-heritage learners. Such studies could offer critical insights into how cultural engagement—or the lack thereof—shapes motivation in non-heritage contexts.

In sum, there is considerable scope for future research to address these critical gaps in the literature. By focusing on macro-sociological factors, advanced proficiency learners, the role of technology, and cultural identity in non-heritage learners, future studies can significantly enhance the depth and breadth of our understanding of motivation in Chinese L2 learning. The adoption of diverse methodological approaches, including longitudinal studies, experimental designs, and qualitative inquiries, will not only bridge existing gaps but also provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of motivation in Chinese language acquisition. This expanded research agenda has the potential to shape both academic discourse and practical pedagogy, offering robust frameworks for future inquiry.

## 5 Conclusion

This systematic review provides a general overview of the studies related to motivation and CSL/CFL. Based on our analysis, issues and suggestions for future Chinese L2 motivation research are briefly explained here. Dynamic motivation of learner: Due to the nature of Chinese as a character language and its relatively slow learning progress, the complex social and cultural factors of learners contribute to their motivation and aspiration. There is much room for investigation of motivational change as well as the dynamic nature of motivation of the learners. Chinese language teacher motivation: Most research focused on learners with little attention paid on teachers' motivation and its correlation to learners' motivation. Hence, studies on teacher identity and motivation in CSL will add to the knowledge base in this area. Technology and motivation: As online platforms have emerged as a new mode of learning, research in this area can be enhanced by exploring how technology influences Chinese language learning motivation, and what changes emerge through interactions with these technologies. There is

still an insufficient exploration in Chinese L2 motivation and computer-assisted learning, which can be captured by empirical research studies. Innovative methodological Chinese L2 motivation: Although quantitative research methods are widely used in the selected articles, there is an increasing trend toward qualitative methods. As qualitative research on L2 motivation facilitates a holistic perspective on the lived experiences of language learners (Ushioda, 2017, 2019), other innovative qualitative methods such as retrodictive qualitative modelling, idiodynamics and Q methodology for data collection are suggested to be employed in L2 motivation research.

In summary, although this study reported several meaningful studies in the field of CSL/CFL, we conclude that the domain is still awaiting research attention to explore multiple aspects of language learning motivation. We acknowledge that this study had some limitations such as selecting only empirical studies published in English in peer-reviewed journals. This excludes studies in other languages including Chinese itself. The current review leads us to call for more studies on learning CSL/CFL across diverse contexts globally.

## Appendix 1: Learner and Learning

Authors	Methodology	Context	Participants
Avoungnansou (2015)	Mixed methods	Africa	6 teachers and more than 100 university students
Bo and Fu (2018)	Qualitative	Hong Kong	6 university students/working professionals enrolled in a Chinese language course provided in a university language center in Hong Kong
Campbell and Storch (2011)	Mainly Qualitative with little quantitative data	Australia	9 university students (one participant discontinued Mandarin language study and her data has been omitted) = 8 participants
Gong et al. (2020a)	Qualitative	New Zealand	15 university students from Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia (PMSA) programme
He (2018)	Mixed methods	USA	5 second-year college students
Jia (2019)	Qualitative	USA	2 students in Midwest Chinese Flagship Programme (MCFP)
Kim and Yan (2014)	Quantitative	South Korea	33 first-year university students
Lan et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Taiwan	30 university students (international students)
Liu (2017)	Quantitative	China	162 university students from different countries (international students)
Liu (2023)	Mixed methods	China	97 international university students
Lin et al. (2020)	Quantitative	China	547 international university students
Lin & Zhang (2021)	Quantitative	China	198 Tibetan High school students
Loh (2016)	Quantitative	Hong Kong	13 ethnic minority students from middle school
Luo (2018)	Quantitative	USA	257 university students
Mayumi and Zheng (2023)	Qualitative	United Kingdom	5 university students



Authors	Methodology	Context	Participants
Paul et al. (2023)	Quantitative	New Zealand	1157 primary students
Ruan et al. (2015a)	Mixed methods	Denmark	153 university students (66 participants in 2012 and 87 participants in 2013)
Ruan et al. (2015b)	Mixed methods	Denmark	129 university students (82 participants in 2013 and 47 participants in 2014)
Sun and Zhang (2020)	Qualitative	China	17 undergraduates or postgraduates from two universities in China
Tan et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Malaysia	148 Malay UGs from a public university
Wang and Yang (2023)	Quantitative	Turkey	256 university students
Wang et al. (2023)	Mixed method	Vietnam	229 university students
Wen (2011)	Mixed methods	USA	317 state university students
Winke (2013)	Quantitative	USA	96 students (They were U.S. military personnel) in a Chinese program at the Defense Language Institute (DLI)
Wong (2018)	Quantitative	Hong Kong	121 ethnic minority primary five and six students
Wong (2020)	Quantitative	Hong Kong	121 ethnic minority primary six students
Xie (2014)	Quantitative	USA	208 public/private universities students (126 non-heritage and 82 heritage language learners)
Yaqoub et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Various countries	104 university learners
Zhang and Chinokul (2023)	Quantitative	Thailand	123 high school students
Zhu (2014)	Quantitative	Japan	54 Japanese university students

## Appendix 2: Teacher and Teaching

Authors	Methodology	Context	Participants
Chen and Yeung (2015)	Qualitative	Australia	20 University graduates from China who were invited to teach Chinese as a foreign language in western Sydney schools
Cui (2019)	Quantitative	China	56 sophomore international university students
Tong and Tsung (2020)	Mainly Qualitative with little quantitative data	China	Undergraduate university students (40 participants in lesson observation, 17 participants in interviews)
Zhang et al. (2020)	Mainly Qualitative with little quantitative data	China	411 pre-service Chinese as a second language (CSL) teachers (The data of the 411 participants were used for the first research question. For the second research question, only 296 of them provided complete background information)

### Appendix 3: Technology and Learning

Authors	Methodology	Context	Participants
Cai and Zhu (2012)	concurrent transformative mixed-methods	USA	44 students at public research university (1/4 Chinese heritage learners, 3/4 non-heritage learners)
Chai et al. (2012)	Quantitative	Singapore	419 secondary school students
Sugie and Mitsugi (2014)	Mixed methods	Japan	9 high-school students

### Appendix 4: Other Themes

Authors	Methodology	Context	Participants
Alshammari (2020)	Quantitative	Saudi Arabia	25 foreign language learners at university's seventh level and 15 curriculum designers
Nel (2016)	Qualitative	South Africa	17 top academic achievers from grades 4-7 in a primary school
Ee et al. (2018)	Quantitative	Malaysia	29 national school students

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# 汉语作为国际语言的学习动机：理论和研究结果综合回顾

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## 摘要

过去关于第二语言或外语的动机研究聚焦英语学习，针对教学与学习的相关文献硕果累累；相比之下，汉语作为第二语言或外语（CSL/CFL）的动机研究仍处于发展阶段。本文旨在回顾2010年至2023年间，共八个文献资料库发表的与汉语学习动机有关的研究，搜寻了477篇文章，并以PRISMA步骤进行系统性回顾、筛选及分析共40篇相关研究，从而探讨目前CSL/CFL学习动机的理论、方法和主题趋势。

本研究不单回顾了CSL/CFL领域举足轻重的研究，也填补现时专门针对这一领域的理论空隙。此外，大多数语文动机研究采用量化研究方法，缺乏对探索语文学习者的驱动因果关系、潜在机制、以及语文学习与动机转变的过程。作者的结论是，该领域需要进一步研究来调查语言学习动机的不同方面，并建议以下未来研究方向，(i) 扩展研究视角，以宏观社会学观点深入探究学习者的动机，超越过去着重个人心理维度(ii) 采用(准)实验研究以确立因果关系，采用纵向研究了解学习者的动机转变；以及(iii) 提供研究对象的详细描述，语言学习研究需要考虑其文化背景。

## 关键词

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