

Exploring Motivation in Studying English as A Major for The Chinese Third Year Students at Universities in Sichuan Province, China

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Abstract

Due to the increasing popularity of English, it has become the most widely used language in the world. This study aims to find the reasons that Chinese third-year students select English as their major at the undergraduate-level, to investigate the types of motivation that mostly affect students in learning English and to explore the degree of motivation students have while studying English at the undergraduate level. A convenience sampling method was applied in this study. In addition, 214 third-year English major students were reached to complete a 27-item self-administered online questionnaire in China. Descriptive analysis and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to compare the mean of different types of motivation. The results reveal that the overall highest-lowest rankings of the mean of motivation are as follow: (1) integrative motivation ($\bar{x} = 4.11$, S.D. = 0.632), (2) instrumental motivation ($\bar{x} = 3.88$, S.D. = 0.569), (3) intrinsic motivation ($\bar{x} = 3.84$, S.D. = 0.821), and (4) extrinsic motivation ($\bar{x} = 3.77$, S.D. = 0.628). Additionally, the finding that students were highly motivated by integrative motivation is an indication for lecturers for teaching the English language at the undergraduate-level; that is, instructors should actively recognize this spontaneous learning interest of students, and invite students to share their favorite singers, films and television clips in the class for the purpose of helping students to move from superficial imitation and pastime to a deep understanding of English.

Keywords: integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation

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Introduction

Nowadays, English is regarded as a global language. The English language is not only a language but a technique to solve various barriers to careers, especially in the era of globalization (Tatte, 2020). People with good communication in English can create a national and international existence since they can share their national and international views and thoughts with others. Thus, English plays a central role in helping to ensure a minimum of internal communication and unity as well as promoting higher access to the global community (Gramley, 2012). Besides, English is a necessity for connection among people from different first language backgrounds (Moedjito et al., 2019). The importance of English has been emphasized in China as well. Faced with globalization and international competition, Chinese people need to improve English proficiency to survive amid international competition. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China decided to implement English courses in primary schools as an important part of the fundamental education curriculum reform in the early 21st century. In the context of higher education, the Office of the Ministry of Education of China also proposed the English course teaching requirements at the undergraduate level for the purpose of promoting college English reform as well as improving the quality of English courses. The English language is regarded as a degree major for students when they start their bachelor's degree in China. However, there are still problems for students from the undergraduate level in learning the English language. For instance, a study by Zhang and Liu (2017) found there was a problem related to English pragmatic failure among Chinese college students due to college English teaching emphasizing the English linguistic competence of students from elementary school to college. According to academic recording and practical experiences, learning a foreign language is seen as a difficult activity, especially for adults. Learning a language requires high motivation because language learning involves extensive work in order to achieve language acquisition (Nation, 2014 as cited in Dadi, 2018). Thus, scholars conclude that motivation is an essential element for adults to learn a foreign language (Akram & Ghani, 2013; Sun, 2014). Thus, it is vital to explore the motivation in existing Chinese students towards learning the English language at the undergraduate level.

This research is based on Gardner's theory (1959 as cited in Alizadeh, 2016) and self-determination theory, to discuss and divide motivation into four types: integrative, instrumental, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985 as cited in Ngo et al., 2015) by using a sample from the third-year students who major in English in Sichuan province, China. In particular, Sichuan province is considered as a suitable research context for investigating students' learning motivation toward the English language. According to the data of the Ministry of Education in China in the year 2020, there are in total 109 universities offering bachelor's degrees. Among them, 51 universities are situated in the province of Sichuan and ranked top 10 in China. This study focuses on third-year students who have studied English in university for the past two years. It shows that they have a greater knowledge of English than their peers in their first and second years. For fourth-year students, they have finished their coursework on the campus, and are in the period of internship, so it is not possible to investigate them.

The study begins with a review of literature on motivation and language learning. The authors will then illustrate the various aspects of motivation and the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. After presenting the results of the data analysis, the authors will discuss these findings, provide some practical significance, and then draw conclusions.

Literature Review

1. The Definition of Motivation

Theorists define the term "motivation" differently in various context, which reveals the difficulty of describing it in clear and simple terms. In general, motivation is defined as a series of powerful energies of an individual's behavior to gain one purpose, intentionally or unintentionally (Kholid & Supriyadi, 2019). Alizadeh (2016) states that motivation is an essential factor for demonstrating the success or failure of any tough work. In other words, motivation is regarded as an attempt to explain nothing less than why humans behave and think as they do. Based on the perspective of psychological context, motivation is usually considered to be an internal state of need or desire that activates individuals to do something to satisfy them. (Kholid & Supriyadi, 2019). To be

motivated means to be moved to do something. Motivation can also be defined as the forces that account for the arousal, selection, direction, and continuation of behavior. Gilakjani (2012) states that the success of any action depends on the degree of people's efforts to achieve their goals and their willingness to achieve them. In other words, motivation is about a person choosing specific actions, determination, and effort for their interests or goals. Dornyei (2003) mentions that motivation is a dynamic dimension that is related to the fundamental question of why people think and behave in a particular way. It shows that most people who work or play with others care about motivation, and people make choices based on their inner beliefs. This is consistent with the point of view of expectation theory, which shows that an individual is highly motivated for achievement because he or she believes there will be compensation. (Kholid & Supriyadi, 2019).

2. Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is always considered a key concept in language learning research. In the foreign language learning context, Gardner (1985) defined motivation as a personal learning effort, because students have the expectation to do so and the achievement they get in the activity (quoted from Dadi, 2018). As a result, motivation is a central and important area that is widely studied in second language and foreign-language learning (e.g., Dital, 2012; Chang, 2010). There are many elements influencing the language learning of students. Luo and Feng (2018) mentioned that the factors that affect students' English learning are multi-dimensional and dynamic. Among those factors, motivation is regarded as a significant cause for various accomplishment. Alizadeh (2016) believes that motivation is a very substantial element that shapes the success or collapse of second language learning. Besides, motivation can directly modify the frequency of applying learning strategies, the willingness of learning, establishing goals, and continuous studying. Without enough motivation, the person with the most outstanding ability will not be able to achieve long-term goals. Language learning is a long-term goal. Students cannot get a foreign language in a few days; they need time to learn it. If students lose their motivation on this long-term project, they will suffer and won't be able to study the language well. In another word, students need to understand the reason why they have

to make an effort. The same goes for the instructors, they need to identify the needs and purposes of learning a language in order to provide clearer instruction to students. In addition, the type of motivation that remains is also important, particularly for reviewing different elements which may develop an individual's motivation. Thus, the following content will discuss the types of motivation in detail as integrative, instrumental, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation.

Many people think that motivation is one of the most crucial factors in learning English. Scholars suggest that motivation can be demarcated into two sorts: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). According to Gardner's theory, English learner with high integrative motivation will have a good attitude towards the culture of English speakers; and English learners with high instrumental motivation will consider English as significant equipment for their future (Hashim & Yunus, 2018). To be more concise, integrative motivation relates to positive feelings as well as attitudes toward the target language society (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In addition, integrative motivation is the interest in language learning in order to communicate with members of the second language community. Gholami et al. (2012) found that in the foreign language learning context, students with integrative motivation performed significantly better than those who were instrumentally motivated. Therefore, an integratively motivated second language learner shows interest in the culture and people of the target language. Moreover, the learners agree with the language group and eventually join the group. In short, integrative motivation is related to language learning for personal growth and participation in the target language and culture. Instrumental motivation refers to getting the probable awards of foreign language proficiency, for instance, receiving a better workplace or earning an expected salary. Gardner and Lambert (1972) described instrumental motivation as motivation to gain certain advantages by learning a foreign language. This means that learners with instrumental motivation will view language learning as a rewarding tool. In addition, instrumental motivation is associated with a specific goal, because its influence is often maintained only when the goal is achieved. Therefore, instrumental motivation is as important as integrative motivation.

Based on the Self-Determination Theory which was introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985), motivation is generally categorized into two categories that are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In this theory, people differentiate various types of motivation according to numerous reasons or goals that cause actions. There are two basic motivations in this theory which are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation relates to doing particular things because it is fun or enjoyable for people. Deci and Ryan (2000) define intrinsic motivation as activities performed for internal satisfaction rather than for some separable results. In other words, when a person gains intrinsic motivation, that person will act for fun or an inevitable challenge, not for external pressure or reward. To be concise, intrinsic motivation is the willingness to participate in certain activities since the individual feels those activities are enjoyable and attractive. and Ryan (2000) describe extrinsic motivation as a concept that occurs whenever an action is performed with the purpose of getting some separable outcome. In another word, individuals execute some activities because they believe those activities can lead to some separable result that is not from the original will. Thus, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are considered to be contrastive concepts. For instance, a student decides to learn English well when she supposes it is profitable for her future like getting a good job rather than because she finds it interesting.

Methodology

1. Sample and data collection

By applying a convenience sampling method, this research work was conducted at two universities in Sichuan province, China. The population of this study includes third-year students majoring in the English language from both universities. The major object of the current research was to explore the motivation of Chinese third-year students majoring in the English language to study English at their undergraduate level. From this reason, a structured and self-administered questionnaire formatted in a Likert five-scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1 point) to “Strongly Agree” (5 points) was applied in order to gather data from respondents as a survey tool. A total of 566 questionnaires were distributed through the WeChat application and 240 questionnaires were sent back,

which accounts for a response rate of 42.40 percent. Of this amount, 214 questionnaires were valid for data analysis; none of them contained missing data.

The descriptive statistics of the sample's characteristics are summarized in Table 1. It shows that female students outnumbered the male respondents at 80.4 percent compared to 19.6 percent. Besides, the ages of the English major third-year students who participated in this survey were between 20 to 40 years old. The majority were 20 years old (45.3 percent) and followed by 21 years old (25.7 percent). Interestingly, the oldest was 40 years old (0.5 percent).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of samples

Variables	Descriptive statistics
Gender	Female: 172 (80.4%) Male: 42 (19.6%)
Age	20 years old: 97 (45.3%) 21 years old: 55 (25.7%) 22 years old: 43 (20.1%) 23 years old: 11 (5.1%) 24 years old: 7 (3.3%) 40 years old: 1 (0.5%)

2. Instrument Development

All of the scales used to measure the motivation concepts in this study were adapted from prior studies (Wimolmas, 2013; Saheb, 2014; Ngo et al., 2015; Fachraini, 2017). In order to elucidate intrinsic motivation, there were five items adapted from prior research conducted by Ngo et al. (2015) and by Fachraini (2017). In terms of extrinsic motivation, there were five items adapted from past research conducted both by Saheb (2014) and by Fachraini (2017). For integrative motivation, there were nine items adapted from former research conducted both by Wimolmas (2013) and by Saheb (2014). According to instrumental motivation, there were six items adapted from preceding research conducted by Wimolmas (2013) and by Saheb (2014).

Since the population was in China and the questionnaire was adapted from previous studies which were not investigated in Chinese students, for the sake of the survey's validity, the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) value was applied to check the validity of the content. Thus, the questionnaire was checked by three experts in the field of English and motivation. The IOC value was applied to measure the items of the questionnaire based on the score range from -1 to +1, which are "Congruent / Clearly measuring = +1", "Questionable / Degree to which it measures the content area is unclear = 0", and "Incongruent / Clearly not measuring = -1". The total scores from each expert were divided by the number of experts, and the final scores were marked as the IOC value for every item. The items that had scores higher than or equal to 0.5 were reserved. There was no item lower than a score of 0.5. Thus, the results showed good validity for the questionnaire based on the IOC perspective. On the other hand, a pilot study was done by pre-testing the questionnaire for the sake of the survey's reliability. The first draft of the questionnaire was piloted to a small group of 10 students from other universities and the data was tested through Cronbach Alphas coefficient (α). The results showed that the questionnaire was reliable since the values of Cronbach alpha coefficient (α) of each type of motivation are higher than 0.7 as suggested by Feng & Chen (2020).

Due to the questionnaire being adapted from previous studies, it was measured for both construct validity and content reliability in order to reassure that the questionnaire suits the China context. The reliability of each type of motivation was tested through Cronbach Alphas coefficient and the results show that this questionnaire is reliable since the coefficients are all greater than 0.7, which exceeds the suggestion of prior scholars (Feng & Chen, 2020). In addition, in order to measure the construct validity of the questionnaire, an EFA was executed. Before performing the EFA, the KMO measurement and Bartlett's test are required to be tested for confirming if the sample size is suitable for EFA. The results illustrated that KMO was greater than 0.925; besides, the P-value of Bartlett's test was 0.000, less than 0.05. In conclusion, there was a nice construct validation in this sample size and EFA can be continued. An EFA using varimax rotation was performed on 25 items. Based on the results of rotation sums of squared loadings, the question items can be grouped into 4 factors as expected on the main types of

motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative motivation, in this study. Besides, the loading values are greater than 0.5 as advised by Hair et al. (2006, as cited in Sun & Suntranyuth, 2020).

3. Statistical analysis

The results were quantitatively presented by applying descriptive statistics analysis. In addition, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied to investigate the validity construction. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used for checking sampling adequacy, along with a Bartlett's test constructed for checking the homogeneity of variances for all factors. The reliability of each type of motivation was tested through Cronbach Alphas coefficient (α) to measure the internal consistency. In addition, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to if the results are statistically significant.

Results

Table 2 presents the results providing the mean score and standard deviation of intrinsic motivation and its question items. The mean score of intrinsic motivation is 3.84; besides, the highest mean score of five items was “studying English for a satisfaction derived from learning new things”, which is reported as 3.92. The item ranked second place was “studying English for the good feeling when hearing English spoken”, with a mean score of 3.90. Surprisingly, the lowest mean score was from the item “study English because enjoy learning it”, which is only 3.75.

Table 2. Intrinsic Motivation for Learning English

No.	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I am studying English because I enjoy the feeling of acquiring knowledge about the English-speaking community and their way of life.	3.85	0.949
2	I am studying English for a satisfaction derived from learning new things.	3.92	0.855
3	I am studying English for the good feeling when hearing English spoken.	3.90	0.947
4	I learn English because it is something that I always want to do.	3.8	1.008
5	I study English because I enjoy learning it.	3.75	0.974
Average		3.84	0.821

The results illustrated in Table 3 presented the mean score and standard deviation of extrinsic motivation and its question items. According to the results, the overall mean score of extrinsic motivation is 3.77. Among the five-question items, the highest mean score is 4.18, which is “English is essential for personal development”. “Learning English is useful in getting a good job” was ranked second place with a mean score of 3.98. The lowest mean score is 3.25, which is “study English in order to please family”.

Table 3. Extrinsic Motivation for Learning English

No.	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Learning English is useful in getting a good job.	3.98	0.916
2	I study English because I want to do well in my examination.	3.88	0.935
3	I study English in order to please my family.	3.25	0.903
4	English is essential for personal development.	4.18	0.769
5	Others will have a better opinion of me if I speak English.	3.56	0.906
Average		3.77	0.628

Table 4 shows the English major third-year students' instrumental motivation for learning English at the undergraduate level. The mean score of instrumental motivation was 3.88 according to the results. Moreover, the question item that "English will be helpful for career" received the highest mean score of 4.21. The question item of "learning English is important for travelling abroad" got a mean score of 4.19, which is slightly higher than the third-ranking item, that "English will broaden my future options". Lastly, the question items of "using English for class assignment and the exams" and "be interested in earning a university degree and a good job than learning English language itself" obtained the same mean score of 3.36, which is the lowest in the instrumental motivation.

Table 4. Instrumental Motivation for Learning English

No.	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I mainly focus on using English for class assignment and the exams.	3.36	0.967
2	I am more interested in earning a university degree and a good job than learning English language itself.	3.36	1.064
3	Learning English is important for travelling abroad.	4.19	0.829
4	English proficiency can bring more success and achievements to my life.	4.00	0.778
5	English will be helpful for my career.	4.21	0.747
6	English will broaden my future options.	4.18	0.793
Average		3.88	0.569

Table 5 illustrated the respondents' integrative motivation towards learning the English language at the undergraduate level. There were in total 9 items to express the integrative motivation in this study. The overall mean score of integrative motivation is 4.11. The question item of "English will be useful in travelling abroad" collected the highest mean score of 4.36, followed by the item of "studying English enhances to understand English books, movies, pop music etc." with a mean score of 4.31. The other influential factors, ranked in the same place, were "studying English to discuss interesting topics in English with the people from other national backgrounds" and "studying English

enhances me to participate freely in academic, social, and professional activities among other cultural groups”, with a mean score of 4.07. Interestingly, there were an other two items that received the same ranking, which are “studying English to speak like native English speakers” and “studying English enhances to appreciate English arts and literature”, with a mean score of 3.96. The item with a mean score of 3.90 received the lowest ranking in the integrative motivation, which is “studying English helps me to be an open-minded, and sociable person like English speaking people”.

Table 5. Integrative Motivation for Learning English

No.	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Studying English enhances me to understand English books, movies, pop music etc.	4.31	0.725
2	Studying English enhances me to better understand and appreciate the ways of life of native English speakers.	4.10	0.774
3	Studying English allows me to discuss interesting topics in English with the people from other national backgrounds.	4.07	0.778
4	Studying English enhances me to participate freely in academic, social, and professional activities among other cultural groups.	4.07	0.778
5	Studying English let me to speak like native English speakers: e.g accent, using English expressions.	3.96	0.795
6	Studying English enhances me to appreciate English arts and literature.	3.96	0.860
7	Studying English helps me to be an open-minded, and sociable person like English speaking people.	3.90	0.885
8	English helps/will help me learn about other cultures, values and thoughts.	4.23	0.684
9	English will be useful for me in travelling aboard.	4.36	0.722
Average		4.11	0.632

Last of all, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to check if there were any statistically significant differences between the means of intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental and integrative motivation. Table 6 illustrated that the significance value is 0.000 for extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative motivation, which is below 0.05; therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the means of intrinsic motivation between extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative motivation.

Table 6. ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Extrinsic motivation	Between Groups	25.615	17	1.507	5.047	.000
	Within Groups	58.514	196	.299		
	Total	84.129	213			
Instrumental motivation	Between Groups	19.884	17	1.170	4.663	.000
	Within Groups	49.161	196	.251		
	Total	69.045	213			
Integrative motivation	Between Groups	37.916	17	2.230	9.292	.000
	Within Groups	47.044	196	.240		
	Total	84.959	213			

Note: factor: Intrinsic

Conclusion and Discussion

The intention of this study was to explore the types of motivation of third-year English major students towards learning English at the undergraduate level. Overall, the means ranged from 3.77 to 4.11, so it can be concluded that the respondents had high motivation for learning the English language at the undergraduate level. To be more concise, it was surprisingly found that the most influential motivation was the integrative motivation (mean score of 4.11), which indicates that third-year students hold interests in the English language, the culture of native English speakers, and are willing to participate in the English-speaking community while learning the English language during the

undergraduate level. Among nine items of the integrative motivation, the highest mean score was 4.36, which was the highest mean score within the overall 25 question items in this study. This item is “English will be useful for me in travelling abroad”, which indicates that most of the students would like to travel overseas and apply their English abilities while traveling. Followed by the item of “English enhances to understand English books, movies, pop music etc.”, it reveals that students have high interests in the cultural products of English-speaking countries. In addition, the result of a high mean score of integrative motivation corresponds to a study of Luo and Feng (2018) on the motivation of Chinese English major students of private universities towards learning English language before and after CET-4 examination; that is, students had a high extent of integrative motivation for English language learning.

Furthermore, instrumental motivation was ranked in the second place of four types of motivation in this study with a mean score of 3.88. This indicates that, except for personal interests, students had begun to make serious plans for their future. The question item of “English will be helpful for career” was ranked at the first place of instrumental motivation. This could be attributed to the fact that third-year students will start their internship in their fourth year at the undergraduate level; in the meanwhile, they need to figure out their jobs or other plans like studying for a master’s degree. The result not only supported Gardner’s theory (Gardner & Lamberts, 1972), that instrumental motivation is associated with a desire to learn a foreign or second language for pragmatic gains; but was also consistent with previous studies of Dadi (2018), Kholid and Supriyadi (2019), and Ngo et al. (2015) on English major students from Dire Dawa, the Niger and Vietnam, respectively, that they are instrumentally motivated to study the English language at their undergraduate level.

Practical implications

This study found that Chinese third-year students majoring in English at two universities were highly motivated by integrative motivation. To be more concise, the statement of “English is useful in traveling abroad” was agreed upon by most of the students. In another word, Chinese students consider that learning English will be the

most useful while they are traveling abroad. Therefore, universities that offer English majors should constitute travel-related courses as well as develop proper teaching methods according to the integrative motivation of students. For instance, courses related to overseas tours can be offered at universities. These courses can be taught through simulation teaching, multimedia teaching, and books. Moreover, organizing study tours or related activities for students to have the experience of field studying is considerable. It can maximally meet the needs of students; at the same time, the universities can attract more students studying with them along with developing more international activities with the purpose of international communication.

Based on the perspective of lecturers, they should emphasize traveling-related content in their teaching plan. It indicates that lecturers should teach not only the basic knowledge of English, but also introduce some foreign humanities and culture, so that students have a preliminary understanding. From another perspective, as students majoring in English, they should collect more information from books or videos related to overseas travel as reference materials to learn English. For example, learning the names of new places, English expressions referring to directions inquiry, asking for help, booking hotels or air tickets, shopping, and customs, etc.

Apart from integrative motivation, instrumental motivation towards learning English was displayed to a high extent as well for Chinese third-year students majoring in English. Most of the students agreed that learning English can be useful in their future careers; thus, universities can offer courses such as business English, communicative spoken English, English for careers, etc. As a consequence, students are able to gain English knowledge related to jobs and occupations during their undergraduate studies. In addition, students should be arranged to participate in social internships by universities. For instance, students can be sent to an internship at foreign companies in China or an internship at enterprises in English-speaking countries. Since lecturers working at universities are the ones who provide suggestions for students, they should understand the capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, and attitudes of each student for arranging or advising students with a specific purpose. Furthermore, college students should cherish every chance of the internship for practicing and applying their English knowledge to

communicate; as a result, their English capabilities can be effectively improved according to the internship experiences.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

In summary, this study has investigated the motivation types that mostly affect the third-year students majoring in English to study English at their undergraduate level in Sichuan province, China. Overall, these findings offer additional contributions to the previous research that explores the importance of motivation in language learning, particularly in the subjects of adults. The study also filled the research gap by showing that universities should not only emphasize the teaching aspects from the instructor but also students' motivation in English language learning. Lastly, the authors suggest that as the most affected motivation type is integrative motivation, universities should offer travel-related courses as well as develop proper teaching methods according to the integrative motivation of students. For instance, courses related to overseas tours can be offered at universities. As a consequence, students can have a better performance in English language learning.

Despite the contribution that this research provides, the authors need to discuss some research limitations. First, as the sample was limited to the third-year English major students at universities, future research may extend the scope by including other universities from Sichuan province with a bigger sample size. For example, it might be interesting to compare students' motivation who come from other universities. Further studies could also reveal a different result if there were an equal number of males and females in the sample. Second, this study applied only the research method of a questionnaire survey to collect the data. Thus, other instruments such as interviews and observations could be used to obtain more information, allowing respondents to give clarification regarding their responses. This would obtain more in-depth information about the types and variations of motivation. Last, the population could be changed to other language learners to reveal a different trend. For example, it might be interesting to investigate the motivation of Chinese language learners at universities in Thailand as there is an increasing number of students who choose to study the Chinese language at their undergraduate level.

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