From Cultural Bridge to Linguistic Key: Evaluating Literary Texts in Intermediate and Advanced CFL Textbooks

Zeng Yuhui
China International Language and Culture College, Krirk University, Thailand
E-mail: 55779436@qq.com ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1294-5760

Abstract

Background and Aim: Literary texts are increasingly featured in intermediate and advanced Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) textbooks, where they serve dual functions: as cultural bridges and as linguistic scaffolds. However, their pedagogical integration remains uneven and under-theorized. Despite their potential to promote intercultural competence and advanced language skills, current textbook practices often present literature as static heritage rather than scaffolded discourse, resulting in learning challenges for international students.

Materials and Methods: To address this gap, this study evaluates 38 literary texts from eight internationally circulated CFL textbooks. A triadic analytical model is proposed, comprising the Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI), Linguistic Scaffolding Density (LSD), and Interpretive Openness Score (IOS). Each text was analyzed for symbolic density, instructional support, and interpretive flexibility, using both quantitative scoring and qualitative coding via NVivo software.

Results: The findings reveal three key tensions: (1) high-symbolism texts are disproportionately positioned in early units without adequate framing, overwhelming learners; (2) linguistic scaffolding is inconsistently applied, with a frequent mismatch between textual complexity and learner readiness; and (3) interpretive and intercultural tasks are notably scarce, limiting learners' opportunities for symbolic reflection and cultural negotiation.

Conclusion: This study repositions literary texts as dynamic, scaffolded learning interfaces and introduces a transferable diagnostic tool for evaluating textbooks. The CSI–LSD–IOS framework offers actionable insights for CFL curriculum reform aimed at promoting symbolic literacy, intercultural engagement, and advanced language proficiency in global Chinese language education.

Keywords: Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL); Literary Pedagogy; Symbolic Scaffolding; Textbook Evaluation; Intercultural Communication; Advanced Proficiency.

Introduction

In recent years, literary texts have played an increasingly prominent role in international Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) curricula, especially at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. Literature is widely regarded as a dual-function resource: on one hand, it introduces learners to authentic and nuanced language forms, including complex grammar, stylistic variation, and contextually embedded vocabulary; on the other, it is seen as a cultural bridge, providing symbolic narratives that foster intercultural understanding and identity reflection. However, this dual expectation often creates tension in pedagogical practice. Literary texts are often taught as cultural artifacts, not scaffolded learning tools, thereby placing a disproportionate cognitive burden on learners.

Despite growing emphasis on integrating culture and language instruction, existing scholarship on CFL textbook design has primarily centered on grammatical sequencing, vocabulary control, or intercultural themes in isolation (Diamantidaki, 2018; Wang, 2020). While some studies address the ideological or canonical dimensions of literary inclusion (Zahng, 2021), few have systematically examined how literature functions pedagogically—how it is sequenced, mediated, and staged within curricular materials. This study addresses that gap by analyzing 38 literary texts drawn from eight widely used CFL textbooks. It introduces a triadic evaluation framework comprising the Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI), Linguistic Scaffolding Density (LSD), and Interpretive Openness Score (IOS), supplemented by NVivo-based thematic coding. By investigating how literature serves not just as content but as a pedagogical interface, the study aims to inform both theory and practice in CFL curriculum design. This study proposes a triadic diagnostic model to evaluate how literary texts function as cultural, linguistic, and interpretive scaffolds in CFL textbooks.

Objectives

1. To explore the genres, symbolic features, and curricular placement of literary texts used in intermediate and advanced CFL instruction.

2. To evaluate the pedagogical alignment between literary content and language scaffolding, using a triadic model that includes cultural symbolism, linguistic support, and interpretive openness.

3. To analyze how textbook-integrated literary texts facilitate or constrain learner engagement with intercultural meaning, symbolic interpretation, and advanced linguistic practice.

Literature review

1. Literature as a Pedagogical Tool in CFL Instruction

Literary texts have long been recognized as valuable assets in second language acquisition due to their linguistic richness, stylistic diversity, and cultural depth (Chan et al., 2018). Within Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) instruction, literature is frequently conceptualized as a dual-function tool: a vehicle for advanced language development and a symbolic conduit for cultural immersion (Hua et al., 2022). However, this dual role often fails to materialize in practice. Research has identified a persistent lack of structured scaffolding in the presentation of literary texts, leading to learner disengagement and interpretive confusion (Diamantidaki, 2018). These findings underscore the need for pedagogical frameworks that go beyond content selection to address how literary texts are staged, supported, and made accessible to L2 readers.

2. Canonical Dominance and Ideological Framing

A growing body of scholarship critiques the dominance of Han-centric canonical texts in CFL literary instruction, which are often selected based on cultural prestige rather than learner accessibility (Han, 2024). These selections are frequently guided by ideological imperatives that privilege national heritage, thereby reinforcing monolithic cultural narratives while limiting opportunities for intercultural engagement (Han, 2022). This concern aligns with critiques from critical textbook theory, which argues that teaching materials often embed ideological assumptions under the appearance of neutrality. In CFL contexts, literary texts may thus serve as instruments of symbolic affirmation rather than as entry points for dialogic learning. These critiques point to the need for analytical tools that evaluate not just literary inclusion but the ideological and pedagogical positioning of texts.

3. Symbolic Overload and Linguistic Misalignment

Studies have highlighted a recurrent issue of symbolic overload in CFL literary selections, particularly in the early stages of intermediate and advanced textbooks (Tang, 2002). Texts rich in metaphors, historical references, and culturally specific values are often introduced without sufficient contextualization or preparatory linguistic support (Han, 2022). This misalignment between symbolic complexity and learners' readiness violates fundamental principles of input gradation and scaffolding. As a result, literature becomes a gatekeeping mechanism that privileges interpretive sophistication over learner inclusion (Zhang, 2021). Addressing this disconnect requires a calibrated model that assesses the interplay between symbolic density and linguistic accessibility across textbook units.

4. Technological Mediation and Multilingual Pedagogy

In contemporary CFL classrooms shaped by digital tools and multilingual learners, literature is increasingly mediated by technology and diverse linguistic repertoires. Digital affordances—such as embedded glossaries, audio dramatizations, and annotation platforms—are reshaping how learners process and interpret literary content (Wang, 2020). Furthermore, multilingual pedagogy challenges the monolingual assumptions underpinning traditional CFL materials, advocating for translanguaging spaces that activate learners' full linguistic resources (Shei et al., 2019). Despite these developments, literary texts in most CFL textbooks remain teacher-centered, monolingual, and decontextualized from multimodal learning environments. This disjuncture calls for reimagining literary instruction as a dynamic, cross-linguistic process that leverages technological and multilingual resources.

5. Synthesis and Research Gap

Collectively, the reviewed literature reveals five key gaps: (1) inadequate scaffolding of literary texts for language development; (2) excessive symbolic loading without interpretive mediation; (3) ideological filtering that constrains learner agency; (4) misalignment with multilingual pedagogical realities; and (5) underutilization of digital affordances in literary interpretation. These shortcomings justify the development of the present study's triadic evaluation framework, comprising the Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI), Linguistic Scaffolding Density (LSD), and Interpretive Openness Score (IOS). This framework seeks to offer not only a diagnostic tool for assessing existing CFL literary practices but also a transferable design model for aligning literature with advanced language proficiency, intercultural dialogue, and cognitive flexibility (Xiong, 2022).

Conceptual Framework
This study is guided by a triadic conceptual framework that integrates three analytical dimensions—Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI), Linguistic Scaffolding Density (LSD), and Interpretive Openness Score (IOS)—to evaluate the pedagogical design of literary texts in intermediate and advanced CFL textbooks. CSI captures the depth and density of culturally embedded references, LSD measures the extent and quality of language support provided, and IOS assesses the degree of interpretive engagement enabled through textbook tasks. Together, these components map the alignment between symbolic content, linguistic accessibility, and learner agency. The framework positions literary texts not as static heritage artifacts but as dynamic pedagogical interfaces where intercultural meaning-making and advanced language development converge (Figure 1).
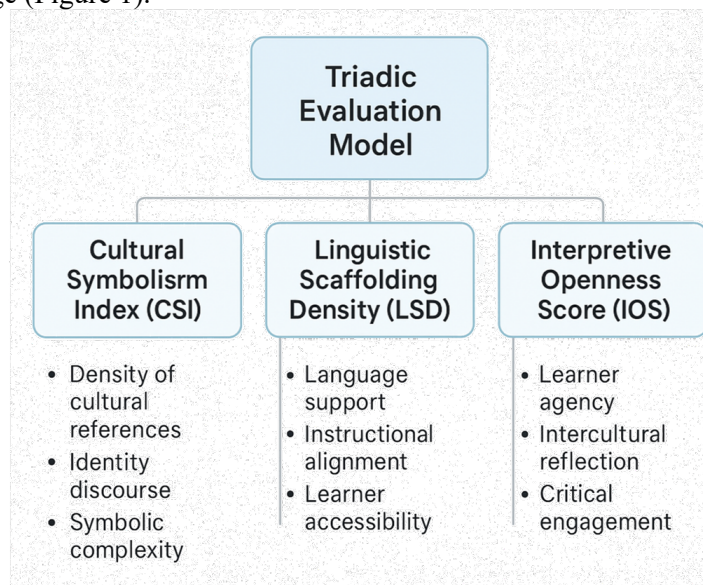

Figure 1: Research Framework
Note: Constructed by the researcher

Methodology
1. Research Design and Data Sources
This study employed a mixed-methods content analysis to examine how literary texts are positioned as both cultural and linguistic resources in internationally used Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL)textbooks. A total of 38 literary texts were extracted from eight CFL textbooks that target intermediate and advanced learners. Textbooks were selected based on three criteria:
(1) international adoption in at least two countries beyond China, (2) clear orientation toward HSK 4–6 or CEFR B1–C1 levels, and (3) inclusion of at least three extended literary texts (excluding single quotes or idioms).

Selected materials were published by leading presses in China, North America, and Europe, and are commonly used in Confucius Institutes and university-level CFL programs.

2. Analytical Framework: Triadic Evaluation Model

The study was guided by a custom-designed Triadic Evaluation Model, comprising three interrelated indices:

Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI): This measures the density of culturally embedded references, including idioms, historical allusions, metaphors, and political symbols. A higher CSI indicates a heavier cultural decoding burden. This index was designed to reflect how texts encode symbolic identity discourse and represent cultural heritage.

Linguistic Scaffolding Density (LSD): This index assesses the degree of pedagogical language support provided in the textbook, such as vocabulary glossing, grammar annotations, and structured comprehension activities. It gauges whether linguistic complexity is accompanied by sufficient instructional mediation (Zhang, 2021).

Interpretive Openness Score (IOS): This evaluates how much the accompanying tasks promote cognitive engagement, intercultural reflection, and learner agency. High IOS scores are assigned when open-ended questions, comparative tasks, or personalized prompts are present, whereas low scores indicate closed or recall-based exercises.

Each index was scored on a 0–3 scale based on a detailed rubric. The full scoring rubric is provided in Appendix A to ensure evaluation transparency and reproducibility.

3. Coding Procedures and Reliability

Two trained researchers independently coded the dataset using NVivo 14.0. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's κ, resulting in a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high consistency. Any discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussion and rubric refinement. All coding decisions were documented to ensure replicability and transparency.

4. Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Dimensions

By integrating index-based scoring with NVivo-assisted thematic analysis, this method allowed for a granular and multidimensional evaluation of literary pedagogy in CFL textbooks. Beyond textual inclusion, the analysis explored how literary texts are scaffolded, symbolically loaded, and cognitively framed. This approach supported both a structural diagnosis and an interpretive understanding of how literature mediates advanced language acquisition and cultural literacy.

5. Summary Table of Research Methodology

Table 1: Summary Table of Research Methodology.

Research Component	Details
Design	Mixed-method: content analysis + thematic NVivo coding
Sample	38 literary texts from 8 textbooks (HSK 4–6 / CEFR B1–C1)
Instruments	Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI), Linguistic Scaffolding Density (LSD), Interpretive Openness Score (IOS)
Coding Reliability	Cohen's κ = 0.87
Theoretical Frameworks	Literary semiotics (Tang, 2002); scaffolding theory (Wang, 2020); translanguaging/interpretation (Han, 2024)
Data Sources	International textbooks used in Asia, North America, Europe, and Confucius Institutes

Results

The results are presented according to the study's four research objectives. Each subsection reports quantitative index data and qualitative coding findings, with integrated interpretation of patterns observed across the eight textbooks and 38 literary texts. Tables and figures are referenced to illustrate key analytical outcomes and support pedagogical synthesis.

1. To explore the genres, symbolic features, and curricular placement of literary texts used in intermediate and advanced CFL instruction.

A systematic analysis of 38 literary texts extracted from eight internationally adopted CFL/CSL textbooks reveals significant disparities in symbolic complexity and curricular sequencing. Drawing on the Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI), literary texts were classified into three tiers of symbolic density, reflecting the extent of embedded cultural archetypes, philosophical imagery, and historical allusion.

High-density texts (CSI ≥ 0.75)—including excerpts from Laozi, Dream of the Red Chamber, and essays by Lu Xun—are imbued with premodern cosmologies, moral dualisms, and intertextual references. While these selections offer rich access to Chinese intellectual heritage, they demand substantial pre-existing cultural capital, often inaccessible to international learners unfamiliar with Confucian, Daoist, or May Fourth Movement paradigms. These texts function more as authentic repositories of symbolic meaning than as pedagogically tractable materials for second language learners.

Medium-density texts (CSI = 0.40–0.74)—such as adapted short stories by Yu Hua, vernacular narratives, and reworked folk tales—strike a more balanced pedagogical position. Cultural resonance is preserved through moral symbolism, idiomatic proverbs, and socially encoded behavior, but is expressed in narratively transparent forms, reducing reliance on deep prior cultural literacy. These texts show greater potential to serve as transitional bridges between basic literacy and symbolic comprehension.

Low-density texts (CSI < 0.40), typically found in simplified poetry selections (e.g., Tang couplets) or heavily edited classical excerpts, prioritize linguistic accessibility. However, this often results in a "form-content mismatch", where literary genre is maintained, but semiotic depth is flattened, diminishing opportunities for learners to engage with literature as a site of cultural interpretation.

Cross-textbook comparison further reveals geopolitical and editorial asymmetries in literary selection and symbolic loading. Domestically published textbooks tend to prioritize unadapted canonical works to uphold symbolic authority and cultural transmission imperatives. In contrast, internationally oriented materials (e.g., Comprehensive Chinese, Integrated Chinese) introduce more accessible forms—with greater use of footnotes, annotations, and thematic previews—yet often dilute symbolic density to accommodate learner variability.

This pattern is further complicated by curricular sequencing practices. A key issue is the premature placement of symbolically dense texts: over 63% of high-CSI texts appear within the first two chapters of their respective textbooks. As shown in Table 2, this placement typically occurs without sufficient linguistic or cultural scaffolding, such as pre-reading framing, historical contextualization, or thematic glossing. The result is a pedagogical disjunction—texts rich in cultural meaning are delivered before learners have developed the interpretive strategies needed to decode them.

Pedagogical implication: These findings indicate that symbolic richness is often prioritized over learner readiness, revealing a fundamental tension between curricular heritage objectives and scaffolded intercultural literacy development. Without calibrated staging and interpretive support, literature risks becoming a site of cognitive overload rather than cross-cultural engagement.

Table 2: Linguistic Scaffolding Features in CFL Textbooks

Textbook Name	Vocabulary annotation density (per 100 words)	Grammar support coverage (%)	The proportion of guidance tasks included (%)
Developing the Chinese Language	8.5	92%	25%
Chinese bridge	7.9	88%	22%
Integrated Chinese	4.2	56%	14%
Bridge to Chinese Literature	3.8	49%	11%

2. To evaluate the pedagogical alignment between literary content and language scaffolding, using a triadic model that includes cultural symbolism, linguistic support, and interpretive openness.

A central aim of this study was to assess whether literary texts embedded in CFL textbooks are pedagogically framed to support both linguistic development and cross-cultural interpretation. This objective was operationalized through the Language Scaffolding Density (LSD) index, which measured the presence, consistency, and quality of lexical annotation, grammar explanation, rhetorical signal marking, and instructional sequencing surrounding each literary selection.

The results revealed a high degree of inconsistency in the level and type of scaffolding provided. Across the 38 texts, only 42% included any form of lexical annotation for culturally embedded expressions—such as idioms, historical allusions, or classical references—leaving many key semiotic elements unexplained. Among those that did provide support, domestically published textbooks tended to favor dense grammatical notes, often embedded in Chinese-language metalanguage, which, while technically precise, lacked interlanguage mediation strategies necessary for CEFR B1–C1 learners to internalize abstract or literary structures.

By contrast, internationally produced materials (e.g., Integrated Chinese, Bridge to Chinese Literature) offered fewer annotations overall but incorporated L1-based etymological or semantic bridges, helping learners map unfamiliar terms onto known linguistic frameworks. This indicates a divergence in pedagogical philosophy: domestic materials emphasize structural fidelity, whereas international textbooks prioritize cognitive accessibility.

A more critical finding relates to syntactic alignment. Only 34% of the literary texts demonstrated structural congruence with grammatical content introduced in prior textbook units. In many cases, complex rhetorical constructions—such as parallelism, embedded antithesis, and allegorical clause chaining—were neither foregrounded nor explicitly parsed in adjacent instructional content. This created what we term a scaffolding gap, wherein learners are expected to interpret structurally advanced texts without being given the requisite tools to do so.

Pedagogical implication: This misalignment compromises the text's role as a reinforcement mechanism and transforms literature into a formally opaque artifact rather than a comprehensible input source, contradicting core tenets of both i+1 input theory and schema-based reading models.

Further analysis revealed that textual sequencing within textbooks failed to follow a progressive complexity gradient. Notably, high-symbolism texts—such as Li Bai's "Quiet Night Thought" or excerpts from The Analects—were frequently positioned within the first three units, well before foundational vocabulary or grammatical schema had been established. This placement contradicts standard input staging principles, wherein cognitively and linguistically demanding texts should follow a scaffolding trajectory from low to high challenge.

The problem was compounded by the lack of pre-reading tasks: only 18% of texts were preceded by any form of cultural activation, such as background briefings, idiomatic previews, or schema-building discussion prompts. Without these supports, learners faced not only linguistic opacity but also cultural disorientation, undermining engagement and interpretive confidence.

As detailed in Table 2, a pedagogical trade-off emerges between textbook types. Domestic textbooks tend to offer grammatical scaffolding with limited contextualization, while international series provide broader cultural integration but often at the cost of syntactic or lexical density. This reflects a broader epistemological divergence: where the former uphold literature as an immutable cultural product, the latter frame it as a negotiable communicative medium.

Synthesis: These findings suggest that current CFL textbook designs frequently fail to align symbolic content with linguistic readiness and rarely treat literature as a developmentally staged input. To fully harness literature's instructional potential, textbooks must better coordinate textual symbolism, language support, and learner-centered interpretive preparation within a vertically scaffolded progression.

3. To analyze how textbook-integrated literary texts facilitate or constrain learner engagement with intercultural meaning, symbolic interpretation, and advanced linguistic practice.

The third research objective sought to uncover how literary texts in CFL textbooks either support or inhibit learner engagement with symbolic meaning, intercultural reflection, and higher-order language processing. Through interpretive task coding and cross-index analysis, several structural limitations and pedagogical oversights were identified.

A primary shortcoming was the underdevelopment of interpretive design. Approximately 47% of the analyzed texts lacked any follow-up discussion, reflective prompt, or interpretive task, treating literature as a static cultural input rather than a dialogic space for meaning construction. An additional 28% included only surface-level comprehension questions, often limited to factual recall (e.g., "What happened?" "Who is the main character?"), without invitations for analytical reading, emotional inference, or cultural comparison. This task design reinforces a monologic instructional model, where meaning is delivered rather than co-constructed.

Pedagogical insight: Without open-ended engagement, literature fails to activate critical literacy, intercultural empathy, or symbolic transfer skills—all essential to advanced CFL learning.

Critically, the study also found a complete absence of translanguaging strategies. None of the textbooks incorporated L1-mediated interpretation tasks, bilingual annotation, or reflective prompts encouraging learners to connect Chinese symbolic structures to their own linguistic-cultural frameworks. This is a major gap given current research in intercultural pedagogy (Han, 2024), which emphasizes translanguaging as a means to bridge semiotic systems, reduce affective barriers, and promote intercultural sense-making. The omission of L1 scaffolding reflects an implicit adherence to monolingual ideology that marginalizes learners' full cognitive resources.

These shortcomings converge across three dimensions:

Symbolic overload without developmental sequencing — high-CSI texts are introduced early, without staged symbolic literacy building.

Inconsistent linguistic scaffolding — the language support provided often fails to correspond with the interpretive complexity of the text.

Lack of learner-centered interpretive opportunities — activities are predominantly passive, offering little room for personal reflection, intercultural dialogue, or critical imagination.

To address these interlinked challenges, this study proposes a reconceptualization of literary texts as pedagogical interfaces—not mere vehicles of canonical culture, but dynamic learning spaces where symbolic, linguistic, and intercultural competencies intersect. Four strategies are proposed:

Graduated symbolic sequencing: Align the introduction of texts with a progressively increasing Cultural Symbolism Index (CSI) value. Begin with accessible, low-density texts and gradually build toward complex symbolic narratives, allowing learners to develop interpretive endurance.

L1-mediated and multimodal scaffolding: Incorporate bilingual glosses, visual metaphor maps, and audio commentary to enhance semantic resonance and invite comparative reflection across languages and cultures.

Interpretive tasks promoting learner agency: Design activities such as open-ended interpretation, comparative cultural reflection, and symbolic journaling, empowering learners to read literature through their lenses and sociolinguistic identities.

Translanguaging implementation: Encourage learners to use L1 in annotation, group discussion, and response writing to activate full cognitive-linguistic repertoires, enhancing symbolic decoding and intercultural awareness.

Synthesis: Ultimately, literary texts in CFL must be repositioned from authoritative monologues to interactive learning sites, enabling learners not only to understand Chinese literature but to interpret it, question it, and connect it meaningfully to their own lived experiences.

Only when supported by intentional scaffolding and learner-centered design can literary materials realize their dual potential: to expand linguistic proficiency and cultivate symbolic literacy in globally engaged CFL classrooms.

Discussion

1. Theoretical Integration: Reframing CFL Literary Pedagogy

The findings of this study reinforce and extend several strands of existing scholarship in CFL pedagogy. The observed scarcity of interpretive prompts and the dominance of monologic task types align with Wang's (2020) critique of "content-first" approaches, which treat literature as fixed heritage rather than dialogic discourse. Similarly, the complete absence of translanguaging strategies confirms Han's (2024) observation that CFL materials often adhere to monolingual ideologies, ignoring learners' full semiotic repertoires. These patterns reveal a persistent gap between literary ambition and pedagogical practice. By introducing the CSI–LSD–IOS model, this study offers a new lens that bridges symbolic literacy with second language acquisition frameworks, suggesting that literary texts must be recontextualized not only as cultural content but also as interactive learning sites that activate interpretive, emotional, and intercultural competencies.

2. Pedagogical Implications: Toward Scaffolded and Learner-Centered Textbooks

This study has direct implications for textbook writing and curriculum development. The data reveal a systemic mismatch between symbolic density and scaffolding, with many high-CSI texts introduced too early and without sufficient pre-reading support. To address this, publishers and authors should adopt graduated symbolic sequencing, pairing complex texts with appropriate vocabulary, grammatical, and cultural scaffolds. Additionally, task design must shift from recall-based questioning to interpretive engagement, including reflective journaling, intercultural comparison, and metaphor analysis. For example, high-IOS tasks might prompt learners to compare a literary dilemma with cultural values in their own society, or to reflect on symbolism through open-ended discussion. The triadic model proposed here can be integrated into teacher training programs, equipping instructors with tools to evaluate and adapt literary texts for diverse learner profiles.

3. Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. The textbook sample, while representative across major global publishers, remains limited in scope and does not include digital or adaptive textbook formats, which are increasingly used in CFL instruction. Moreover, the scoring system for CSI, LSD, and IOS—though operationally defined—still relies partly on qualitative judgment and may benefit from further validation. Future research should explore longitudinal classroom implementation of the model, examining how CSI–LSD–IOS-informed scaffolding affects learner outcomes over time. Additionally, cross-linguistic comparisons with other language contexts (e.g., Japanese, Arabic) could enhance the generalizability of the framework and its relevance for global literary pedagogy. Finally, qualitative classroom studies may provide deeper insight into how learners respond to interpretive and symbolic tasks in real-world settings.

Conclusion

This study addressed a critical yet under-explored problem in CFL pedagogy: the widespread inclusion of literary texts in intermediate and advanced textbooks without sufficient pedagogical scaffolding, interpretive design, or alignment with learner readiness. While literature is expected to serve both linguistic and cultural functions, current curricular practices often reduce it to a static cultural token rather than a dynamic instructional resource.

Three key findings emerged. First, literary texts exhibit significant variation in symbolic density, with many high-CSI works—such as classical essays and philosophical poetry—introduced prematurely in the curriculum, often without regard for learner preparedness. Second, linguistic scaffolding is inconsistently applied, with critical gaps in grammar support, vocabulary annotation, and rhetorical clarification undermining learners' ability to engage with complex texts. Third, the absence of interpretive

and intercultural tasks—and the total neglect of translanguaging strategies—limits opportunities for learner agency, symbolic reflection, and deeper cultural negotiation.

These findings underscore the urgent need for CFL textbook designers to implement graduated symbolic sequencing, align linguistic scaffolds with text complexity, and design learner-centered, multimodal tasks that promote symbolic literacy and intercultural dialogue. The CSI–LSD–IOS triadic model developed in this study offers a practical framework for evaluating and revising literary integration in teaching materials and training programs.

As Chinese language education expands globally, the re-framing of literary content from static tradition to dynamic pedagogy will be essential to cultivating interpretive literacy and intercultural imagination in 21st-century classrooms.

Recommendation

1. Theoretical Recommendations

This study affirms the need for a conceptual shift in CFL literary pedagogy—from literature as a passive container of cultural knowledge to literature as a dynamic interface for symbolic interpretation, linguistic growth, and intercultural reflection. To advance this reframing, scholars and curriculum designers should integrate symbolic literacy as a core component of CFL learning objectives. Diagnostic tools—such as symbolic schema inventories or text-function mapping instruments—could be developed to assess learners' readiness for metaphor, allusion, and cross-cultural transfer. These tools should evaluate variables such as prior cultural exposure, metaphor processing ability, and interpretive fluency in L2 contexts.

2. Pedagogical Strategies

Several actionable strategies emerge from the triadic CSI–LSD–IOS model:

Graduated Symbolic Sequencing: Textbooks should organize literary materials along a continuum of symbolic density, beginning with narrative-based or ethical-symbolic texts and moving toward abstract, intertextual, or philosophical works. This ensures alignment between symbolic complexity and learner development.

L1-Mediated and Multimodal Scaffolds: Bilingual glosses, visual metaphor maps, and culturally annotated audio materials should be embedded into teacher guides and learner-facing interfaces. These resources allow learners to draw on their full semiotic repertoires while reducing cognitive overload.

Interpretive Tasks Promoting Agency: Textbooks and classroom practice should replace recall questions with open-ended prompts such as "How would you respond to this dilemma in your culture?" or "Rewrite this story from your own sociolinguistic lens." These tasks foster affective engagement and intercultural voice.

Translanguaging Integration: L1 should be formally included in classroom interaction and textbook design—not as a remedial fallback but as a scaffolded pathway to symbolic insight. Teacher manuals could include prompts for L1–L2 comparative analysis, dual-language journaling, or bilingual storytelling.

These strategies are not limited to CFL instruction but are transferable across language education contexts that involve classical, literary, or ideologically dense texts.

3. Future Research

Further studies are needed to validate and extend the triadic model. First, longitudinal classroom-based research could examine how symbolic sequencing and scaffolded interpretation affect learner outcomes in advanced CFL contexts. Second, cross-linguistic comparisons—e.g., with Japanese, Korean, or Arabic heritage language textbooks—would test the model's transferability and reveal typological implications for symbolic mediation. Finally, research should explore how digital platforms (e.g., AI-augmented readers, hyperlinked glossaries) can support adaptive scaffolding and learner agency in real time.

By integrating these theoretical, pedagogical, and empirical pathways, CFL education can evolve toward a model of interpretive literacy and intercultural imagination, fully leveraging the pedagogical potential of literary texts.

References

Chan, S. F., DeWitt, D., & Chin, H. L. (2018). The analysis of cultural and intercultural elements in Mandarin as a foreign language textbooks from selected Malaysian public higher education institutions. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 6*(1), 65–78.

Diamantidaki, F. (2018). Literature in Chinese language teaching and learning supported by digital technologies. In F. Diamantidaki (Ed.), *Mandarin Chinese teacher education* (pp. 76–92). UCL IOE Press.

Han, J. (2024). Translanguaging as a pedagogy: Exploring the use of teachers' and students' bilingual repertoires in Chinese language education. *Applied Linguistics Review, 15*(4), 1433–1451.

Han, Y. (2022). Translanguaging as a pedagogy: Exploring the use of teachers' and students' bilingual repertoires in Chinese language education. *Applied Linguistics Review, 13*(4), 1–24.

Hua, X., Xiong, T., & Yu, R. (2022). The cultural representation of Chinese-speaking others in localized CFL/CSL textbooks. *International Journal of Chinese Language Teaching, 3*(2), 7–26.

Shei, C.-C., Zikpi, M., & Chao, D. (Eds.). (2019). *The Routledge handbook of Chinese language teaching*. Routledge.

Tang, Y. (2002). Culture and text in teaching Chinese literature. *Education About Asia, 7*(2), 38–42.

Wang, H. (2020). Methods of teaching Chinese: Evolution and emerging trends. In C.-C. Shei, M. Zikpi, & D. Chao (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of Chinese language teaching* (pp. 81–96). Routledge.

Xiong, T. (2022). The cultural representation of Chinese-speaking others in CFL textbooks: A critical examination. *Chinese Language Teaching, 4*(2), 45–68.

Zhang, Q. (2021). A multimodal approach to the technological representations in CFL textbooks. *Chinese as a Second Language Research, 10*(1), 25–50.