

# A Comparative Study of the Chinese Language Curriculum System between Chinese High Schools and A-Level Edexcel Chinese

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**Abstract**—The Chinese language program is widely implemented in China and holds a crucial position in the country's education system as the official language. With an increasing number of students opting to attend international schools and selecting the A-level Chinese curriculum, this dissertation conducts a comparative study to identify the disparities between the two curriculums. This research aids students in comprehending the strengths and weaknesses of both programs, allowing them to make more suitable choices. It also facilitates a deeper understanding of the curriculum, helping students to better adapt to the A-level curriculum. Furthermore, the findings of this study benefit teachers by providing insights into the advantages and limitations of different curriculum systems, serving as a reference for further enhancement and optimization of the curriculum.

**Keywords**—curriculum, traditional and international school, A-level curriculum, Gaokao

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the epidemic's end, China's policy on international students has been liberalized. The country has established a new era of study abroad policy that "supports study abroad, encourages a return to China, freedom to come and go, and the ability to play a role" [1]. As a result, both the number of students applying to study abroad for university from China and the number of applications have increased by 63 percent in the 2022–2023 application season. In contrast to the start of the epidemic, the study abroad market has started to pick up this year, and according to current trends, the number of international students will continue to increase. In line with the demand for study abroad, the option to study at an international school has also become a popular choice. For example, students who want to apply for an undergraduate degree in the UK may choose to enroll in an international school to study the A-level curriculum during their high school years.

The A-level (General Certificate of Education Advanced Level) is the UK high school curriculum and university entrance exam for UK students. It is the same as the Chinese college entrance examination. There are

some differences between the Chinese college entrance examination system and the A-level curriculum. For instance, there are variations in the way that course objectives are set and how the courses are structured. The challenge faced by Chinese students in adapting to the A-level curriculum necessitates an earnest examination of methods to enhance its accessibility and adaptability, ensuring a more inclusive educational experience. Despite these differences, there also are some similarities in course content. Therefore, comparing the differences and similarities can help to identify the areas that Chinese students may struggle with in the A-level system.

This essay aims to compare the differences in curriculum between the Chinese public education system and the A-level education system in the subjects of Chinese. Specifically, within the context of Opening up education to the outside world [1] the objectives of this research are to:

- Compare the similarities and differences between the two education curricula.
- Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the two education systems.
- Explore the impact of the education system on students.
- Recommendations combining the advantages and disadvantages of both.

The essay begins with an introduction to the current educational environment, in an era of globalization the Chinese government wants schools to produce talented people with an international outlook and gives a brief overview of the Public Curriculum and the A-level Curriculum in the context of the current social situation.

It then compares the curriculum and assessment criteria for the Chinese language subjects. This paper has analyzed Lu Xun's writings, which appear in both courses, to identify the differences between the two courses in terms of how they present the same author and the same topic in the course. Finally, the similarities and differences are identified and the advantages and disadvantages are analyzed.

## II. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

### A. Definition

The curriculum is defined as the entirety of the learning experiences in which children participate as they

progress through school [2]. The curriculum is very important to students and a central role in this is the transfer of knowledge. But what makes it crucial is not the knowledge itself but the argument that knowledge is imparted.

However, in the “curriculum design”, it is mentioned that there is a widespread consensus that the deepest level of learning involves transitioning from mere knowledge acquisition (“knowing that”) to the practical application of knowledge (“knowing how to”) and comprehensive understanding of a subject (“knowing about”) (ibid).

So, we can conclude that in addition to knowledge skills and understanding are also a key part of the curriculum. The reason for considering these different types of learning in the curriculum is twofold. First, they each entail distinct forms of learning that the curriculum should acknowledge and accommodate. Second, the curriculum should encompass more than just knowledge, as a curriculum lacking skills or understanding would be superficial and devoid of meaningful substance (ibid).

Furthermore, the curriculum is also understood by David Scott as a structure. He perceives all human learning as an ‘epistemic’ or ‘knowledge-building’ activity. (One sentence to explain the structure) [3]. So, in talking about a course, whether it achieved the initial creating purpose should be taken into consideration. Does it equip students with the ability to think?

### *B. Three Different Dimensions*

There will be dimensions for the content and curriculum of the course.

At a national level, education is an integral part of nation-building. This is why the state sets educational objectives and determines the needs of the personnel to be trained and the requirements of social development. When discussing the curriculum, one should think about whether the content of the curriculum is in line with the country’s educational objectives and whether it provides students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values [4]. The State also looks at diversity and inclusiveness in the curriculum to ensure that it is adapted to the needs and backgrounds of different students, including culture, gender, ability, etc. This helps to provide equitable access to education and promotes social justice.

At the teacher level, teachers need to be more attentive to the needs and interests of their students. As far as possible, they will design course content and activities that engage students. They will closely observe students’ learning status and feedback, and make appropriate adjustments and optimizations to the content of the course according to the student’s actual situation. At the same time, coherence and articulation between the courses is ensured. Every effort is made to ensure that the content and learning objectives of the different courses are complementary and coherent so that students can develop a more complete body of knowledge and competencies. Achieving better teaching outcomes [5].

For students, they may be concerned about the feasibility and burden of the curriculum. They want a reasonable curriculum, that does not overburden them with learning and can accommodate other learning and

interest activities. They also need a variety of course choices to meet their interests and needs. To allow them to take courses that match their interests and develop their strengths and unique abilities. A good curriculum not only helps students gain more knowledge but also the ability to dub independent thinking. This can be very helpful for students in their future life and career planning [6].

Among these three different levels, what really counts – is the student experience. However, this essay’s literature aims to provide a theoretical foundation for future empirical studies, Therefore, the focus is merely on national and teacher.

At the national level, the requirements for the curriculum are generally minimal, consisting of policies and guidelines. However, schools have the flexibility to go beyond these requirements and design a more comprehensive curriculum. By adapting the curriculum to suit the region and the student’s needs, schools can provide a better learning experience and enable students to achieve better outcomes in their studies.

Schools may introduce additional teaching content, activities, and resources to make the curriculum more targeted and adaptable [7]. For instance, incorporating local culture, history, and current social issues into the curriculum can help students better understand their community and country. Furthermore, schools can provide various learning opportunities and practical activities such as field trips and community service projects to develop student’s practical skills, teamwork abilities, and social responsibility.

Through such personalized adjustments and expansions, students can benefit from a more diverse and flexible curriculum, experiencing a wide range of learning opportunities and educational resources. They are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but actively engage in their learning, unleashing their creativity and talents. This student-centered approach enhances their motivation and learning effectiveness, equipping them to tackle future challenges more effectively.

### *C. Instruction of Curriculum System*

The A-Level examination system is characterized by being taken in four rounds over two years; two rounds per year. Each subject is generally divided into six modules or units. All modules are taken in four rounds over two years of study. Fewer students take the first round of exams because of the short time gap between the start of A-Level teaching; most A-Levels are completed in the second, third, and fourth rounds. If exam results are unsatisfactory, they can be retaken in subsequent exam seasons. Cambridge International A level develops learners’ knowledge, understanding, and skills in thinking independently, applying knowledge and understanding to new as well as familiar situations, etc. (Pearson Edexcel). There are a total of 55 subjects to choose from and students can select as many as they want. This flexibility means that students can choose individual courses and focus on specific areas of study.

A-Levels, run by different exam boards, have different materials, exam questions, and grade mark divisions. There are seven A-level examination boards in the UK, each with a separate syllabus and separate examinations. Edexcel Exam Board is my choice for research.

The Gaokao, or the National College Entrance Examination, is a selection test for high school graduates in mainland China to enter the higher education level. It is a nationwide unified examination, organized and administered by provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government, and has a high degree of authority and importance.

Gaokao is usually held in June each year. The examination subjects include language, mathematics, foreign languages, and optional arts or science subjects. The content of the exams is mainly based on the educational curriculum standards at the senior secondary level and covers the knowledge, skills, and thinking skills that students have learned in various subjects. The results of the Gaokao are the main basis for judging whether a student will be able to enter a university or other higher education institution. Individual schools and programs will make admissions based on students' Gaokao results.

The Gaokao curriculum consists of three types of courses: compulsory, optional compulsory, and optional. Of these, the Compulsory and optional compulsory is the national curriculum, and optional is the school-based curriculum. Compulsory courses are set by the State according to the overall development needs of students and must be taken by all students. The optional compulsory courses are set by the State according to the needs of students' personal development and further education examinations. Students who take the national unified examination for admission to higher education must choose relevant subjects within the scope of this category of courses; other students must also choose some of the subject content to meet the requirements for graduation credits, taking into account their interests. Optional are developed and set up by the school according to the diverse needs of students, the needs of local social, economic, and cultural development, the recommendations of the subject curriculum standards, and the school's school characteristics. Students choose to take them on their own.

In addition to this, the new curriculum also introduces the concept of 'subject core qualities'. For example, the core qualities of language subjects include language construction and usage, thinking development and enhancement, aesthetic appreciation and creation, and cultural heritage and understanding.

#### D. Case Analysis

The subject of Chinese was chosen for comparison because it plays a very important role in the learning of Chinese students and contributes greatly to their learning and values. And it is representative of the subject.

Chinese is the mother tongue of Chinese students and is the basis for communication and thinking development. It is also the mother tongue of Chinese students, which is the basis for communication and thinking development. It can help students establish a good framework for

language learning and improve their language expression, reading, and writing skills.

The A-level Chinese Curriculum does not provide standardized teaching materials, only a guided syllabus. The Edexcel Chinese syllabus states that it is hoped that the course will stimulate interest in the language, literature, film, and culture of the Chinese-speaking world. So, the difference between the two courses is clearly shown in the objectives of the course. Firstly, Gaokao is a compulsory course for high school students as most of them are native Chinese speakers, but A-level Chinese is an optional second language course for students who are interested in languages and want to learn Chinese in depth. Therefore, there is a clear difference in the content and difficulty of the Curriculums [8].

The Edexcel Chinese syllabus gives detailed information about the topics to be examined and the specific texts to be read. In the section on Reading Appreciation Texts, specific titles of works, basic information about the authors, and the points that will be examined in the test will be listed. This information will provide an important reference for the teacher to select and organize the study materials.

For example, the list of literature given to teachers at the A level gives what needs to be learned throughout the A-level Chinese curriculum. The period of the literature covers the Republican period to modern times. There are critical works such as Lu Xun's *The Homeland* which also help students to understand more vividly the conditions of the lower classes and the impact of society on the people. In addition to novels, there is also Cao Wen Xuan's short story *A Pigeon with a Phoenix*.

In addition to this, there is a list of films that expose students to a richer and more diverse range of literary and non-literary texts. The list contains films of different types and themes. There is *Please Vote for Me* a documentary about democracy from the perspective of primary school students, *The Way We Are* about mother-daughter relationships in Hong Kong, and *Beijing Bicycle* a film about adolescents.

Teachers can use this list (see Fig. 1) to customize the learning content for their students and think about how to use the materials to build a body of knowledge for their students based on the assessment given in the syllabus.

"A pigeon called Phoenix"(Cao Wenxuan ),2014(short story)

"Memories of Peking: South Side Stories" (Lam Hai Yin), 1960 (autobiographical novel)

"Hometown" (Lu Xun),1921 (novel)

Fig. 1. Literature list of teaching material [9].

" Please Vote for Me"(Chen Weijun),2007

" Beijing Bicycle"(Wang Xiaoshuai ),2001

"The Way We Are "(Xu Anhua),2008

Fig. 2. Items list of teaching material [9].

In June 2020, China's Ministry of Education officially issued the Opinions of the Eighth Sector of the Ministry of Education on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening Up of Education to the World in the New Era, which focuses on the topic of "Enhancing the International

Influence of China's Education" [1]. In this document, people can see that China needs higher education talents with an international outlook, so to make more students have an international outlook, the high school language curriculum standard has also produced new changes. Teachers are beginning to focus on developing critical and creative thinking, the ability and willingness to cooperate, leadership, entrepreneurship, and other key competencies and qualities needed to survive and thrive in this era. Therefore, in my contention there exists substantial comparative worth between the two curricula.

The A-level Chinese language curriculum and the Gaokao Chinese language curriculum have different aims but the same hope of improving students' literary literacy and developing their literary analysis skills. It is possible to analyze the similarities between the two curricula.

From the list given in the A-level curriculum, this paper has chosen to compare Lu Xun's *Hometown* with Lu Xun's *Blessing* in the senior secondary curriculum. In the senior secondary Chinese curriculum, the article *Blessing* will appear in Unit 6 of the second book of Compulsory Three. This unit focuses on people and society, allowing students to understand the symbiotic and interactive relationship between characters and their social environments and to recognize the formation and development of character. The A-level Chinese curriculum expects students to be able to appreciate literature independently and to reflect on the social issues

reflected in the texts, which is similar to the aim of this unit.

*Hometown* is a short story written by Lu Xun, in which he also criticizes the society of that time, as you can see from the questions in the A-level exam, the exam board wants students to master the ability to analyze artistic techniques through this text.

The image (see Fig. 2) displays the official Edexcel teaching catalog, which provides comprehensive information about the learning content. The catalog is divided into eight sections, each covering specific aspects of the curriculum. To facilitate a meaningful comparison, this paper will concentrate on three selected sections, carefully analyzing their content and highlighting any noteworthy differences or similarities.

### III. COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS OF THE TWO COURSES

According to the Tables I and II, the backgrounds of authors and the context of their works are covered in both courses. However, there is a subtle difference between the two, as Chinese students have already been exposed to Lu Xun's works at the junior high school level, so there is little information about Lu Xun himself mentioned in the introduction. The teacher prefers that students master the intertextuality of the text so that they can relate the new content to the lessons they have learned previously.

TABLE I. A LEVEL TEACHING FRAMEWORK

Teaching aim	Teaching content	Material	Forms of teaching activities
Author's introduction and background	An introduction to the author, Lu Xun, and the context of the times in which the author lived.	PowerPoint Textbook mind map	1. reading material 2. Students find their information on the Internet 3. Mapping the author's background timeline
Content and writing features	Introduction to Simple style of writing and Antithesis. And learn to use writing techniques to analyze characters in texts and understand their role of them. Try to analyze in their own words and practice students' ability to think independently	PowerPoint Textbook	1. Teacher introduction 2. Group discussion 3. Internet search 4. Exercise
The main idea of the article and the importance of reflecting on it	Through the experiences of the characters and the changes in their characterization, the students are made to appreciate the opium that the society of the time had on its people. Generate critical thinking about why this was the case and the author's purpose in telling	PowerPoint Text Book Homework	1. Teacher introduction 2. Group discussion 3. Internet search 4. Exercise

TABLE II. GAOKAO TEACHING FRAMEWORK

Teaching aim	Teaching content	Material	Forms of teaching activities
Author's introduction and background	An introduction to the author, Lu Xun, and the context of the times in which the author lived.	PowerPoint Textbook mind map	1. Reading material 2. Students find their information on the Internet 3. Mapping the author's background timeline
Content and writing features	Introduction to Simple style of writing and Antithesis. And learn to use writing techniques to analyze characters in texts and understand the roles of them. Try to analyze in their own words and practice students' ability to think independently.	PowerPoint Textbook	1. Teacher introduction 2. Group discussion 3. Internet search 4. Exercise
The main idea of the article and the importance of reflecting on it	Through the experiences of the characters and the changes in their characterization, the students are made to appreciate the opium that the society of the time had on its people. Generate critical thinking about why this was the case and the author's purpose in telling it.	PowerPoint Text Book Homework	1. Teacher introduction 2. Group discussion 3. Internet search 4. Exercise

The main focus of the Chinese Language curriculum of the Gao Kao is on reading, analyzing, and comprehending students' classic works of Chinese literature, including general knowledge of literature, rhetorical techniques, ancient literary works, and so on.

In the assessment, emphasis is placed on the test of students' memory of knowledge and comprehension, mainly examining students' ability in the literary language and modern literary works [10].

In A-level Chinese, the focus is on studying a wide range of literary genres, literary theories, and cultural contexts, and on understanding literary works through analysis and critical thinking. So, the language itself is not as demanding, but there is more emphasis on cross-cultural thinking.

Although the primary focus of this essay revolves around the curriculum, it is imperative to acknowledge that the methodologies employed in teaching and assessment hold significant implications for students.

Furthermore, the teaching methods in these two systems exhibit notable disparities. In the Chinese high school curriculum, the predominant approach revolves around lectures, with a key focus on the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and rote memorization. Classroom learning and homework assignments form the basis of the learning process.

Conversely, the A-level Chinese curriculum emphasizes active participation and independent thinking as core teaching methodologies. Students are encouraged to partake in textual analysis, engage in personal argumentation, and conduct independent research. They are urged to acquire knowledge through self-study, research tasks, collaborative discussions, and other interactive approaches.

Moreover, there is a discernible distinction in the assessment methods employed by these systems. The Chinese high school curriculum heavily relies on examinations as the primary form of assessment, often emphasizing students' memorization abilities and test-taking skills. The Chinese education system's heavy reliance on examinations has long been a hallmark of its assessment methodology. High-stakes exams like the Gaokao, for instance, are known for their pivotal role in determining a student's future academic and career prospects. These exams test a student's knowledge of subjects such as mathematics, science, and literature, and success is often seen as a gateway to prestigious universities and professional success.

On the contrary, international curriculum systems tend to employ a more diversified approach to assessment. They often include a combination of examinations, coursework, projects, and presentations. This multifaceted evaluation methodology aims to assess not only a student's ability to retain information but also their critical thinking skills, creativity, and practical application of knowledge.

This divergence in assessment methods underscores the broader shift in educational philosophies and goals among Chinese students who are increasingly drawn to international curricula in pursuit of a more holistic and

skills-oriented education. It highlights the importance of recognizing different cultures and their unique approaches to education.

In contrast, the A-level curriculum sets higher expectations for students writing and oral expression skills, with assessment methods that offer greater flexibility. These methods include essay writing, presentations, and group discussions, enabling students to demonstrate their critical thinking, communication skills, and ability to express themselves effectively [11].

By providing a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on these differences, educators and policymakers can gain valuable insights for the design and implementation of language education programs that effectively meet the diverse needs of learners.

Indeed, despite the differences between the Chinese high school curriculum and the A-level curriculum, it is important to highlight the common goal shared by both: the development of students' Chinese language skills. Whether students are enrolled in the high school curriculum or the A-level curriculum, there is a strong emphasis on enhancing their abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For instance, students in both curricula study and analyze the writings of renowned Chinese author Lu Xun, who is known for his simple yet impactful writing style and his use of antithesis. By examining his works, students gain exposure to different literary techniques and styles, which helps refine their writing skills and deepens their understanding of the Chinese language.

The study of literature in high school and A-level curriculum enhances critical thinking, analytical skills, and empathy. By exploring classic literary works, students gain a deep appreciation for the cultural heritage of China and develop a greater understanding of its artistic characteristics. Through the analysis of literary texts, students uncover deeper meanings, fostering a broader comprehension of literary creativity. Additionally, literature cultivates empathy by exposing students to diverse experiences and perspectives. Overall, literature plays a crucial role in fostering a well-rounded education and empowering students to navigate the complexities of the world.

In summary, while there are indeed differences in teaching methods and assessment approaches between the Chinese high school curriculum and the A-level curriculum, the shared goal of developing Chinese language skills and the inclusion of literary studies help students acquire a strong foundation in the language and develop an appreciation for its rich cultural and artistic traditions.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This essay offers a concise yet comprehensive portrayal of the dynamic shifts within the Chinese educational landscape, extending from the onset of the epidemic to the present day. Over this period, an increasing cohort of Chinese students is gravitating towards international curriculum systems, reflecting a

heightened aspiration for pursuing educational opportunities abroad.

Furthermore, this essay places a significant emphasis on the role and significance of the curriculum. It undertakes an extensive analysis of the disparities between two distinct curriculum systems and thoroughly explores the associated advantages and disadvantages. Drawing upon Lu Xun's literary work, the essay conducts a specific comparative examination of these curriculum systems. This analysis encompasses various dimensions, including the structure of lessons, the portrayal of characters within the literary work, and the methodology employed in framing and presenting questions [12].

Analyzing the author's portrayal of the characters to reflect the society of the time through rhetorical devices and the characters' physical, ecological, and psychological descriptions. By conducting this comparison, teachers can develop a clearer understanding of the curriculum's objectives and engage in profound reflections on cross-cultural learning.

The comparative study goes beyond merely exposing the constraints inherent in the curriculum. For instance, it acknowledges certain limitations, such as the selection of only one text from the high school curriculum for analysis, which leaves other texts unexamined. However, it also serves as a wellspring of inspiration and guidance for educational reform and curriculum innovation. Its findings hold the potential to facilitate a more internationalized education for students and stimulate the expansion of their intellectual horizons [13].

In an era characterized by diversity, cross-cultural exchange provides ample opportunities for inspiration, further enhancing the development and progress of the education system. By exploring different curriculum systems and their outcomes, educators can foster a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to curriculum design, ultimately preparing students for success in an interconnected global society.

Set up Inspiring and engaging themes, Popular literary texts and films, Rewards creativity and Clear and coherent structure, etc. in this account. Hope to attract more students to learn Chinese through this lifestyle approach.

Future research can conduct case studies that focus on specific classrooms for analysis. This is because different teachers can have different approaches to teaching the same content. By examining real-world examples, educators can gain insights into how teachers implement the curriculum, adapt their teaching methods, and engage

students effectively. Case studies provide a more detailed and context-specific understanding of the challenges and successes in implementing the courses, allowing teachers to draw valuable lessons from the experiences of their peers.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has claimed that no conflict of interest exists.

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