

LITERATURE LEARNING AND TASK DESIGN IN HONG KONG CHINESE LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

YINBING LEUNG

Department of Education Studies, Baptist University of Hong Kong

Abstract: The new high school Chinese language curriculum in Hong Kong (2002) calls for the integration of literature after more than two decades of emphasis on language skills learning. However, many language teachers do not really know how to incorporate literature instruction into a language class and rely heavily on textbooks. The textbook becomes the ‘hidden teacher’, guiding the content of learning, the sequence of teaching and the approaches to learning. Few teachers investigate the learning tasks designed by material writer(s) and question the nature of these tasks, or the underpinning pedagogy. This article reports on a survey of three sets of commonly used Chinese language textbooks in terms of the structure of learning units and the design of learning tasks for literary texts.

Dutch. Samenvatting [translation Tanja Janssen] Het nieuwe curriculum Chinese taal voor het secundair onderwijs in Hong Kong (2002) vereist dat literatuur wordt opgenomen, na meer dan twee decennia van nadruk op het leren van taalvaardigheden. Veel taaldocenten weten echter niet hoe zij literatuuronderwijs kunnen integreren in hun taalonderwijs en steunen daarom sterk op schoolboeken. Het schoolboek wordt een ‘verborgen leraar’, richtinggevend voor de leerinhoud, de volgorde van behandeling en benaderingen van leren. Slechts weinig docenten kijken kritisch naar de leertaken ontworpen door de methodeschrijver(s), naar de aard van deze taken, de onderliggende pedagogische opvattingen, etc. In deze bijdrage wordt verslag gedaan van een onderzoek naar drie veelgebruikte methodes voor Chinese taal, in het bijzonder naar de structuur van leereenheden en de ontworpen leertaken voor literaire teksten in deze methodes.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Yinbing Leung:
ybleung@hkbu.edu.hk

French. Résumé [Translation Laurence Pasa].

Le nouveau programme d'enseignement du chinois dans les lycées de Hong Kong (2002) implique l'intégration de la littérature, après plus de deux décennies d'insistance sur l'apprentissage des compétences linguistiques. Cependant, beaucoup de professeurs de langue ne savent pas vraiment intégrer l'enseignement de la littérature dans leur cours et s'appuient largement sur des manuels. Le manuel devient 'le professeur caché', guidant les contenus d'enseignement, le déroulement de la séquence didactique et les conceptions de l'apprentissage. Peu de professeurs étudient les activités d'apprentissage proposées par les concepteurs des manuels, s'interroge sur la nature de ces activités, ou la pédagogie sous-jacente etc. Cette étude s'intéresse à trois ensembles de manuels de chinois très répandus, du point de vue de la structure des leçons et des objectifs d'apprentissage des textes littéraires.

German. Zusammenfassung [Translation Irene Pieper].

Lernen mit Literatur und Aufgabenentwicklung.

Nach mehr als zwei Jahrzehnten der Priorisierung des Erwerbs von Sprachfähigkeiten und –fertigkeiten verlangt das neue Chinesisch-Curriculum für die Oberschule in Hong Kong (2002) die Integration von Literatur. Gegenwärtig ist es vielen Lehrenden im Bereich der Sprache recht unklar, wie sie den Literaturunterricht in den Sprachunterricht integrieren können, so dass sie sich stark an Lehrwerken orientieren. Das Lehrwerk wird zum „heimlichen Lehrer“, es bestimmt die Lerninhalte, deren Abfolge und auch die Aufbereitung der Lerninhalte. Nur wenige Lehrer setzen sich mit Gestaltung und Gehalt der Lernaufgaben oder ihrem pädagogischen Ansatz auseinander. Der Artikel berichtet die Ergebnisse einer Studie, die drei verbreitete Lehrwerke in Bezug auf die Struktur der Lerneinheiten und die Gestaltung der Aufgaben für literarische Texte untersucht hat.

Polish. Streszczenie [translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

Po ponad dwóch dekadach koncentracji na kształceniu umiejętności językowych nowy program do nauczania języka chińskiego w liceum w Hong Kongu (2002) nawołuje do integracji z literaturą. Wielu nauczycieli języka ojczystego nie wie, jak włączyć nauczanie literatury do lekcji. Opierają się głównie na podręcznikach. Podręcznik staje się 'ukrytym nauczycielem', decydującym o treściach nauczania, ich sekwencji oraz podejściu do uczenia się. Niewielu nauczycieli analizuje zadania proponowane przez autorów materiałów dydaktycznych i pyta o naturę tych zadań lub leżącą u ich podstaw teorię pedagogiczną. Artykuł omawia wyniki badań trzech zestawów popularnych podręczników języka chińskiego pod kątem struktury jednostek lekcyjnych oraz jakości zadań proponowanych do tekstów literackich.

Portuguese. Resumo [Translation Paulo Feytor Pinto]

O novo currículo de língua chinesa do ensino secundário em Hong Kong (2002) institui a integração da literatura depois de mais de duas décadas de ênfase na aprendizagem de competências linguísticas. No entanto, muitos professores da língua não sabem realmente como incorporar a educação literária na aula de língua e apoiam-se muito nos manuais escolares, que se tornam no 'professor escondido', orientando o conteúdo da aprendizagem, a sequência do ensino e as estratégias de aprendizagem. Poucos professores reflectem sobre as tarefas concebidas pelos autores de materiais e questionam a natureza dessas tarefas ou a pedagogia subjacente, etc. Este artigo baseia-se num estudo sobre a estrutura de unidades didácticas e de tarefas de abordagem do texto literário em três tipos de manuais de língua chinesa comumente utilizados.

Key words: Chinese language, literature instruction, textbook, learning tasks, pedagogical approach

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, the objectives of the Chinese language education curriculum for junior high schools in Hong Kong have focused on developing the functional skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Chinese literature is of secondary importance in a skills-orientated curriculum in elementary education¹. Language education

¹ *Elementary education (or 'Basic education' in Hong Kong) includes a 6-year primary education and a 3-year junior high education.*

is discussed in terms of practical reading and writing skills. However, this emphasis on basic skills has prompted a reaction in the last few years in the form of a reassertion of values and a renewed emphasis on cultural heritage and identity (Applebee, 1993). This in turn has led to a widespread re-examination of the curriculum and materials used in the teaching of Chinese language, and the return of literature teaching to the curriculum.

This article examines how Chinese language textbooks integrate literature into the learning units. The selection of materials, the tasks designed and the pedagogical approaches underpinning such tasks will be discussed.

2. BRIEF REVIEW OF THE NEW CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN HONG KONG'S JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

In 1998, Hong Kong launched a major review of the school curriculum, with an emphasis on the learning experiences of students and the new values promoted within the society, especially after the hand-over of sovereignty from Britain to China. The newly-founded government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region stressed the importance of teaching Chinese history and culture in the curriculum, as these are part of the heritage of the Hong Kong community. In 1998, the Curriculum Development Council formed a committee to look at all the 'Chinese elements' within the school curriculum. Six types of elements were recommended as having the potential to foster students' identification with and positive attitude towards China (HKCDC, 1998). These are: Chinese language; literature and art; daily living; values and beliefs; history and geography, and China today. Chinese language is the one school subject capable of including all these elements.

The new curriculum for Chinese language education was implemented in 2002. It is notable that the objective emphasises the development of students' language skills. In addition, the importance of cultivating the appreciation of beauty, moulding students' temperament and behaviour, fostering a sense of responsibility and establishing positive values and attitudes are also included in the learning objectives (HKCDC, 2002). While literature and language learning both help to raise students' language proficiency, the former also offers students pleasurable and aesthetic experiences. According to the *Guide* (HKCDC, 2002), one of the objectives of literature learning is to provide students with a unique experience while reading literary works, which may help develop their ability to express and respond to ideas and experiences freely and imaginatively. A close examination of the aims reveals that most extend beyond the realm of the cognitive development and language competence of students to that of culture, values and morals. There is a strong emphasis on Chinese culture and identity in the new curriculum. A functional approach to language teaching may achieve the aim of language development, but may not achieve the others. To fulfil this purpose, it is proposed that literature teaching be integrated into the curriculum of Chinese language education at all levels of learning.

When literary texts are used in the language class, they are usually regarded as the best resource for language development. They are authentic materials that can activate student response. As Maley (1989) argues, literature teaching has the advan-

tage of being non-trivial, interesting and ambiguous. Apart from developing the language competence of the students, the materials motivate them to read and to give emotional responses. Literature is regarded as a tool for personal enrichment (Lazar, 1993), with texts allowing students to access the values and culture portrayed by the work. This is one of the objectives valued in the new Chinese language curriculum.

Literature is an elective subject in senior high school, but the number of literature students is low. The majority of students study literature within a language curriculum. In the following, I compare the learning task design of a poem from three textbooks in order to understand the approaches adopted by the writer(s) and the pedagogical implications.

3. TEXTBOOKS WITH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

There is a triangular relationship between the textbook, the teacher and the student in a formal educational setting. The writers make certain assumptions about the students and convey their pedagogical approaches through the textbook (Kearsey & Turner, 1999; Poyas, 2004).

Chambliss and Calfee comment that 'textbooks offer students a rich array of new and potentially interesting facts, and open the door to a world of fantastic experiences' (1998: 7). Apart from providing the students with information, a good textbook can stimulate students to think and discover through solving problems, reinforce what they have learned and foster self-directed learning skills. Ben-Peretz (1990) suggests that when designing a textbook, the opportunity for students to participate in self-directed learning should be considered. There should also be different learning opportunities, structured and unstructured.

Although teachers understand that they cannot rely solely on textbooks, Chambliss and Calfee (1998) estimate that 75-90% of instructional content and activities in schools in the United States are determined by textbooks. Textbooks help teachers to organise the hierarchy of learning objectives and realise the aims of the curriculum in a systematic way. At the end of a chapter or unit, there are usually summary questions, lists of activities and exercises that teachers do not have time to create (Biemer, 1992).

Textbooks often provide teachers with additional background information and teaching aids. Teachers may do some 'creative' work in addition to that designed in the textbooks, such as adopting materials, re-adjusting activities etc. However, more often than not, expediency dictates that the textbook becomes the curriculum. With increases in workload and pressure, teachers may resort to using the textbook as the major resource in the classroom. In many cases, it is simply assumed that a textbook matches the curriculum of the Education Ministry.

In Hong Kong, most teachers rely heavily on textbooks during the course of teaching. It is the concern of educators that teachers might not read the documents related to the school curriculum or the curriculum of their subject, but rather formulate an understanding of the content of their subject through the textbook. Hong Kong textbooks are required to be examined and approved by government. This gives many teachers the impression that textbooks have passed the necessary crite-

ria. As a result, they tend not to have a critical view of textbooks. In fact, as Bonset & Rijlaarsdam (2004) point out, the textbook is a hidden teacher, laying down 'default' instruction and learning paths. Since the textbook is so highly regarded in Hong Kong, the approaches of writers on how to integrate literature study into the new Chinese language curriculum warrants some kind of detailed analysis. The following questions need to be addressed:

- 1) How are literary works integrated into a language-oriented curriculum?
- 2) What types of learning tasks or activities are suggested by the writer(s)?
- 3) What kind of teaching approach is adopted by the writer(s)?
- 4) What are the implications for teacher development?

4. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TEXT INTERPRETATION

Different approaches to the teaching of literature are based on different attitudes to the interpretation of literary texts. In recent years, many teachers have favoured the reader-response approach to text interpretation. Rosenblatt (1994) argues that the reader interprets the text, and the text produces a response in the reader, according to the reader's attitudes or personal background. Poyas (2004) believes that 'the meaning of a literary text is not perceived as embedded in itself and never changing, but rather constructed through a dialogic process between the text and the readers' diverse worlds'. Readers are active during the reading process during which their personal experiences, background etc. are brought in. The instinctive responses of the reader are released during the act of reading. The literary work exists in the transaction between the reader and the text (Karolides, 2000).

The formalist approach is well-accepted in literature study and 'emphasizes the work itself rather than the author's intention, a reader's response, or other outside frames of reference. Formalist criticism searches for ironies and paradoxes within a work that come together to give a text overall unity' (Sipiora, 2002). The meaning of the text is interpreted by analysing the form and structure of a work. The relationship between parts and the whole is also a key concern. The different component parts, such as words, phrases, sentences, tone, voice, themes, tensions, metaphors, images, paradoxes, ambiguities etc. are examined closely for understanding how they work together to form the overall unity of the literary work. Formalist criticism is also concerned with the aesthetic qualities of a literary text: the elements of beauty and harmony, symmetry and proportion.

Many teachers adopt a language approach in teaching literature. Yopp and Yopp (2006: 2) speak highly of literature as a facilitator of language development. It influences students' perceptions and attitudes towards reading (Morrow, 1992). It also increases comprehension and writing ability (Deford, 1981). This approach regards literature as a useful tool for language learning and focuses on the development of students' comprehension skills and linguistic awareness. There is an existential relationship between language and literature since writers are the creators of an elaborated language (Spanos, 2001). By analysing the language of the literary text, students not only interpret and evaluate the work, they also increase their awareness and understanding of the language. They are encouraged to draw upon their knowl-

edge of familiar grammatical, lexical and discourse categories to make aesthetic judgements of the text (Lazar, 1993: 23). Materials which can illustrate certain stylistic features of the language are chosen for teaching.

The ethical approach locates the centre of meaning in the moral or ethical dimension of a text. In this view, literature is used to moralise, civilise and humanise the masses (Schowalter, 2003: 22). To F.R. Leavis (1979), literature was the chief weapon against the corruption and vulgarity of mass urban industrial society. Treatment of ethics through textual study can be related to personal responsibility, duty and the burden of acting in good faith – and how our ethics are determined through encounters with others. In this view, students search for a morality as it is revealed through character's words and actions. The characters are judged by what they do, what they say. They are also judged as moral agents with responsibilities. In judging literary figures, we make judgements about ourselves and the values, duties and responsibilities we hold. While interacting with the literary characters to see their viewpoints, our own values are projected into the situation they face.

Teaching literature has also become a political act through what is often called the 'critical approach'. The text can become a portrait of social injustice. Here, feminism, racism and conflicting political issues can become part of the curriculum. Students make judgements about the rightness or wrongness of the actions of characters based on ideology. Literature becomes a mode of consciousness-raising or awakening for oppressed groups and even an agent for social reform.

As well, there is a 'cultural' approach, which focuses on the life of the author, the context (social, economic, political) in which the work was written, and various cultural representations contained within the work.

These various schools of literary interpretation represent the most commonly used approaches in literature teaching in Hong Kong. They form the framework for analysing the tasks designed in different textbooks.

There were altogether seven sets of Chinese textbooks approved by the Hong Kong Education Department in 2002. Below, I have chosen three sets of textbooks for comparison and detailed study of task design since they occupy nearly 80% of the textbook market. I shall analyse how literary works are integrated into language units, then I shall compare the task design of a famous Chinese poem, the *Ode of Mulan* in the literature units and non-literature units of the textbooks.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 *Integration of literature in the Chinese language curriculum*

The texts are organised into different units based on genres of writing, themes or language skills. One unit is exclusively devoted to the study of Chinese literature in each grade, starting usually with poetry and prose in Grade 7 and Grade 8 in secondary school, and moving to novels and drama in Grade 9. However, many literary texts are also selected in 'non-literature' units. The following table illustrates the use of literary works included in each unit of Textbooks A, B, C.

Table 1. *Number of literary works selected in three sets of textbooks for junior high schools(Grade 7-9) in Hong Kong*

| | | Textbook A | | Textbook B | | Textbook C | |
|-----------------------|----|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| | | Non literature | Literature | Non literature | Literature | Non literature | Literature |
| Prose | G7 | 19 | | 17 | 7 | 10 | |
| | G8 | 22 | 4 | 15 | | 14 | 3 |
| | G9 | 15 | | 9 | | 11 | |
| Poem | G7 | 2 | 9 | | | 3 | 12 |
| | G8 | 7 | | 5 | 7 | - | 7 |
| | G9 | 4 | 6 | | | 3 | 2 |
| Novel / Short stories | G7 | 2 | | 8 | | 9 | |
| | G8 | 9 | | 4 | | 4 | |
| | G9 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Drama | G9 | - | 1 | - | 3 | - | 3 |

In the teaching of Chinese language as mother tongue, the selection of practical writing, popular science fiction or scientific pieces cannot fully serve the overall development of children. If authentic specimens of literature are not included in the textbooks, language skills, proficiency and aesthetic sense are geared towards the above-mentioned genres. In fact, the number of literary works adopted as authentic materials for reading is quite impressive. There are usually 4 to 5 pieces of work in each unit for reading. The most popular form is prose. Due to limitations on the number of pages in each textbook, the reading of prose is usually limited to short stories or excerpts from novels. This actually creates problem in that there is no reading or discussion of long literary works in class.

As mentioned above, literary works are incorporated into the units as reading passages or models for writing development. Therefore, literature reading and appreciation is not limited to the units on literature. For example, in Textbook A, Unit 4 of Grade 7 has a teaching focus on the writing of narrative and expressive genres. Four pieces of prose and one poem are included in this unit. One piece of prose is chosen for detailed discussion in class. Various tasks are usually designed related to this latter text. The other pieces of work are left for guided reading and extensive reading. Worksheets are attached for these pieces of work after reading. After reading, there is information on language use, followed by tasks in writing, listening and speaking.

As for Textbook B, Unit 2 of Grade 7 has a learning objective on 'learning the different components and development in narratives'. Three short stories and two other pieces of prose are adopted for reading and discussion. One short story is chosen for intensive reading, and tasks are set related to the different components of the story, (narrator's point of view etc.). Discussion on ethics and responsibility is in-

cluded. The other pieces of work are for comparative study. Background information on authors and contexts is given, followed by tasks after the texts.

Unit 1 (Grade 7) of Textbook C organises around the theme of ‘Drawing the moral from a story’. Four short stories and excerpts from two biographies of famous people are selected. The unit integrates tasks around the development of the four language skills. These usually start with reading, followed by tasks on language use, character analysis and rhetorical skills. Listening and speaking activities are included. The teacher can simply follow the steps given in the handbook to conduct all these activities. Instructions on writing strategies are provided, with a focus on narrative writing and writing about a character.

5.2 Tasks

A *task* is defined by Ellis (2000) as a ‘workplan’ which involves some input and some instructions relating to what outcome the learners are supposed to achieve. The characteristics of tasks as pointed out by Skehan (1998) are: first, the task has some meaning; second, there is a goal of working on a task; third, the outcome is evaluated; fourth, the communicative use of language is related to the real usage of language. Tasks from the three textbooks are now discussed according to the definitions and criteria used by Ellis and Skehan.

A well-known Chinese poem, the *Ode of Mulan* (Appendix I) will be used to study task design for poetry learning in three widely-adopted Chinese textbooks.

The *Ode of Mulan* is an epic, written about 5 A.D. The story is well-known in China. It is about a young maid, disguised as a man, replacing his elderly father in the army. The poem can be divided into six stanzas.

- First: Mulan knows that her elderly father is listed, and she decides to serve in the army in her father’s place.
- Second: Mulan prepares her journey. After leaving her parents, the army moves quickly to different places. Mulan can no longer see her parents.
- Third: The life in the army for ten years.
- Fourth: Mulan returns to be awarded by the Emperor. She declines the offer of a ministry post and pleads to be permitted to return home.
- Fifth: The family is excited about Mulan’s return. Mulan meets her comrades as a lady. They are all surprised.
- Sixth: The allegory of a male and a female rabbit is used to demonstrate that none can tell whether Mulan is a male or a female.

Textbook A includes the *Ode of Mulan* as a reading piece in a non-literature unit called ‘Character building in narratives’². It is believed that students acquire similar skills in developing characters in their own narrative writing. There are discussion questions to help students comprehend the poem. These questions are:

- 1) Find out the reasons from the first stanza why Mulan decides to replace her father and join the army.

² *Unit 3 of Grade 7*

- 2) Elaborate on Mulan's character, based on her decision to join the army.
- 3) Infer the meaning of the word (...) from the second stanza.
- 4) What are described in the second stanza? How would you associate these with the character of Mulan?
- 5) How does Mulan respond to the awards bestowed on her by the Emperor? What kind of character do you think she has?
- 6) What does Mulan do after she returns home? What aspect of her character does this show?
- 7) Why could her comrades not find out Mulan is a lady? What does this imply?

The aims of this unit are: understanding the character in the epic; inferring the meanings of words from context; general understanding of the content of the poem; nourishing the spirit of diligence and determination, and a moral around care and love. The tasks mainly focus on the text itself. The answers to questions 1, 4, 5 and 6 can be directly found out from the epic without much discussion among the students. These can be regarded as comprehension questions, checking whether students can understand what is described or narrated in the epic. Other questions require students to evaluate Mulan's characters from her decisions or actions.

In Textbook B, the *Ode of Mulan* is one of the poems included in a literature unit on poetry learning (Unit 9 from Grade 8). There are a variety of tasks set.

Task I: Some discussion questions during reading. These are:

- 1) What socio-economic class does Mulan belong to, judging from the first two lines?
- 2) Why does Mulan sigh?
- 3) What does she decide to do? What kind of character does this show?
- 4) What kinds of preparation work does she undertake? How does this demonstrate her feelings?
- 5) What significance do the names of places imply in Stanza 2? What is her feeling after leaving home?
- 6) Find the lines in Stanza 3 narrating her life in the army, the battle etc.
- 7) How does Mulan respond to the awards bestowed on her by the Emperor? And why?
- 8) How would you evaluate the performance of Mulan as a soldier?
- 9) This poem can be divided into three parts: her replacement of her father in the army; her life in the army and battle, and lastly, her return. Which part(s) is/are written in detail and which part(s) is/are briefly described? Why did the poet write in this way?
- 10) Elaborate the main theme of this poem.
- 11) How does the image of Mulan differ from that of traditional Chinese women? What meaning does it bring to us when we read the poem today?

Task II. Students analyse Mulan's characters by reading closely the descriptions of her:

- 1) daily life
- 2) relationship with her parents
- 3) duty to her country
- 4) declining the award.

They then give an overall evaluation on the character of Mulan.

Task III. Students read a short passage related to the stories of some successful women who are in no way inferior to men. Students are then asked to reflect on what they have learned from these successful women. They are asked to share with the class some stories about successful women.

Textbook B has blended different approaches in the design of tasks. Although the phrase ‘socio-economic class’ appears in Q1, it has nothing to do with the critical approach. The first two lines are read closely to determine the background of Mulan. (In those days, rich families could buy out army service from other families using huge sums of money so that their own sons did not have to join the army.) Questions 1 to 10 in Task I require the students to read the lines closely to see how the different aspects of *Mulan* are put together to form a full picture of the life history of this legendary figure. This is primarily a formalist approach to see how different parts of the work are put together to form an overall unity.

Question 11 requires the students to evaluate the actions of Mulan compared with our traditional image of Chinese women. This question could be seen as based on the ethical approach, which highlights the Chinese value of filial piety and responsibility to one’s country. It could also be seen as a question using the critical approach, showing that the social order worked against women, who had had to disguise themselves as men in order to show their capability.

Task II involves an analysis of the character of Mulan based on the description of her daily life, family relationships, army life and refusal of an award. Students may decide that she is hardworking, shows filial piety and is ready to sacrifice herself for her country etc. Such a task could be seen in terms of the ethical approach so that the virtues which Chinese culture prize highly can be learned by the students through role imitation. However, I think it is still largely a language-based approach with the aim of demonstrating how a female protagonist is created in narratives by describing different aspects of her life.

Task III starts with reading. The students need to respond by sharing their opinions with other students. Their experiences and stories are to be voiced in class. This can be seen as a reader-response approach.

In Textbook C, the epic of Mulan is included again in a unit on narrative writing (Unit 1 of Grade 7), as in Textbook A. The tasks focus on the structure of narratives.

Task I: Students need to identify the six components of narratives. Thus:

- 1) List the six components of narrative from the *Ode of Mulan*.
- 2) The main theme in the *Ode of Mulan* is her replacement of her father in the army. Explain from the following lines the kind of character which Mulan is portrayed as:
 - a. Stanza 1 Lines 3-4, Lines 15-16
 - b. Stanza 4 Lines 40-42

Task II: Students are told that in narrating an event, some parts are written in detail while others are briefly described. Tasks are then:

- 1) List from this poem which parts are written in detail, and which parts are brief.
- 2) Explain why it is arranged in this way. Can the parts in brief be deleted?
- 3) Evaluate the character of Mulan as narrated in this epic.

Task III: Students are to find the main theme of the poem.

Task IV: Attention is drawn to the use of dialogue in epic: Dialogues are used widely in epic poetry. Find the dialogues in this poem and discuss the effectiveness of using dialogues.

Task V: Students are to attend to the structure of narratives. Thus: Use your own words to describe how the family greets Mulan upon her return, what she does and the reaction of her comrades when they see her. A narrative usually includes an opening, development, climax and ending. Which part does the above scene belong to?

Task VI: Students are to nominate a heroine, to discuss what she did and the reasons for their nomination of her.

As a non-literature unit, the objectives of learning fall on the genre – narrative – and on the creation of characters. The tasks are designed in line with these objectives.

Tasks I to V are concerned with analysing the form, structure and arrangement of the poem. Strategies of writing are also examined. The different component parts are identified, detailed description is highlighted, the structure is learned and dialogue use is analysed. Close reading of lines reveals how the character of Mulan is created. This is primarily a formalist approach. The evaluation of Mulan's personality is also related to ethical interpretation.

Task VI is different from Tasks I-V by allowing the experiences of the students to be brought into the process of reading, and shared with other students and the teacher. However, tasks such as these, that encourage free expression of thoughts and ideas, are seldom found in Textbook C.

5.3 Approaches

A careful study of the tasks designed for a common poem in three major textbooks reveals that there are different emphases according to the objectives of the unit.

All three textbooks use the *Ode of Mulan* as an example to illustrate the form and structure of narratives and how the personality of a protagonist is portrayed. Therefore the tasks focus on analysing:

- 1) the structure of narrative: its components and the building up of climax;
- 2) the personality of the main character – through locating words and phrases to demonstrate her different personalities or through inferring her personality from her decisions, actions and feelings.

It seems that Textbooks A and C are advocating a formalist approach in which diction, syntax and other elements of literary language are involved in the 'explication de texte'. The poem is interpreted in isolation, without reference to social, economic and cultural history, or the personal history of the poet. Metaphors and imagery are strategic in interpreting the poem from a formalist perspective. Poetic devices, such as metre, rhythm, voice, diction, tone etc. all come together to form a 'stable text'

(Sipiora, 2002). Tasks designed for the *Ode of Mulan* in Textbooks A and C include such formalist approaches to analysing the poem as: analysing the structure of the poem; finding the major topics of the poem; observing the poet's point of view; identifying the tone of the poem, and analysing the metaphors and allusions in the poem. However, the purposes of these tasks are to help students develop their reading and writing skills with respect to narrative. Many discussion questions are actually traditional comprehension questions. The discussion on Mulan's personality falls onto searching for events in support of certain claims. I would contend that the fundamental approach taken is language-based because the primary aim is not appreciation and interpretation, but the learning of the characteristics of a particular genre, viz. narrative.

Textbook B uses the *Ode of Mulan* in a literature unit on poetry. The objectives of this unit include analysing the content of the epic and learning how characters are created in poetry. The first task requires students to read the poem closely to find out the situation evoked in it, the significance of her preparations and of the names of places, and to infer her character from her decisions and actions. Since analysing the content is one of the learning objectives, a few comprehension questions are included. Task I uses a combination of formalist criticism and a language-based approach.

Task II is similar to that in Textbooks A and C, in which the personality of Mulan is analysed by reading the description of her family life, army life and the reasons for declining awards. Through analysing her personality, the value placed by the Chinese on filial piety is emphasised. Textbook B differs from A and C by having more variety in task design. It adopts an ethical approach to the interpretation of Mulan, comparing a traditional view of Chinese women to this unconventional heroine. It also encourages students to reflect upon the role of women in today's world. This latter task invites students to engage in more reading on successful women who managed to liberate themselves in a male-dominated society. This task allows students to bring their own view of the 'ideal woman' into the class. Textbook C also designs a similar task in which students are asked to vote for their heroines and to share her story with other students. This can be considered as a reader-response approach to teaching literature.

6. DISCUSSION

The new school curriculum in Hong Kong (2002) calls for an approach that is more learner-focused and the creation of more space for students to think and learn. In the structure of the new Chinese language education curriculum, the learning objectives have extended beyond language learning to include aesthetic development, values and culture. Textbooks are developed, presumably, with these guiding principles in mind.

The analysis of these textbooks and the literature units shed some light on the questions raised earlier in the discussion, viz:

6.1 *Integration of literature units in a language-oriented curriculum*

The survey of the learning units containing literature work reveals that learning is highly structured and strongly guided throughout these texts. Even when the students are left with additional literary works to explore by themselves, the extra information and learning tasks which are designed to help them during such independent study guide the students quite rigidly. Moreover, in all places, the learning tasks influence the teachers strongly.

It is generally accepted by educators in Hong Kong (teachers and policy-makers) that it is vital for students to learn classical poetry, even if the language presents difficulties to the students. An implicit learning activity of word recognition and intra-lingual translation, which is not stipulated in the post-reading activities, occupies a major fraction of class time, often leaving little time for the suggested tasks.

6.2 *Learning tasks and approaches*

After reading the *Ode of Mulan*, Textbooks A and C contain more tasks related to the analysis of the text and writing skills. They focus on how the character of Mulan is portrayed in the poem through the narration of different events. This helps students appreciate the technique and structure of the poem, but it does not encourage students to articulate their ideas or open their minds to the ideas of other students. Many tasks are focused on formal analysis, gearing towards formalist interpretation and language-based approaches. There are few tasks that link the skills of writing to students' personal experiences. The dialogic process between the text and the students is undermined. Few activities are developed to promote 'grand' conversations as suggested by Yopp & Yopp (2006).

Examples from Textbook A and C are typical of many task designs in Hong Kong textbooks, in which comprehension and fact-finding aspects are addressed. The writers of the textbook take a stance that literature is part of language learning and advocate a language-based approach to the learning of literature. The tasks do not inspire students to articulate their ideas and feelings, or to pursue further readings in poetry by themselves. Students will always remain in the initial stage of development of their relationship with literature if they do not read extensively (Zheng & Ma, 2004).

Textbook B encourages students to respond to the *Ode of Mulan* by drawing on their personal experiences of women's status. Students are instructed to compare and contrast contemporary women with the world described in the poem. There are opportunities for writing and evaluating situations etc. Language skills are developed through discussion and writing. Textbook B has a similar task design although the poem is used in a non-literature unit. More tasks are designed to encourage students to express their personal feelings. Textbook B also allows for an ethical interpretation of the poem, encouraging students to reflect upon the status of women and their struggle in a male-dominated society. While analysing the character of Mulan, students can also reflect on their relationship with their parents and on the Westernisation of contemporary family structures in Hong Kong.

6.3 *Implications for teacher development*

Few teachers in Hong Kong would question the learning principles and approaches adopted by the writer(s) of a textbook. If literary texts are seen as materials for language learning that develop comprehension skills and command of more sophisticated forms of language, then Textbooks A, B and C have met the objectives. However, the spirit of the new curriculum is to link language learning to the feelings, opinions and experiences of students, with a view to giving students a chance to express their individuality in language. I would argue that few teachers are aware of this. In current teacher training courses, plenty of time has been devoted to the design of the new curriculum, but few discussions have been conducted on its principles and spirit. Pedagogical approaches to using literature in a language class to develop students' language proficiency and to developing their interest in pursuing literature independently is ignored. The integration of literature and language teaching is an issue that needs to be addressed during the course of teacher training.

7. CONCLUSION

There are two levels of encounter in the process of reading as described by Jauss (1982):

- the spontaneous level, focusing on the pleasure of identification with the characters and the enjoyment of wandering in a fictional world;
- the reflective level, in which the reader connects the literary encounter with some objectifying and distancing reflections.

Few tasks discussed above help the students to reach either level. The students may find pleasure in reading the texts because of their beautiful language and stimulating ideas, but they are not encouraged to release their instinctive responses by bringing their experiences into interaction with the text. The pleasure of reading literature is not fully appreciated by the students because they are burdened with comprehension questions and essay writing assignments after reading. It is disappointing to see that few students continue their pursuit of Chinese literature after junior high. Literature to them is about memorising the history of Chinese literature, the background of the authors and the content of literary works, and worst of all, continuously analysing the structure and form of each piece. Too much emphasis has been placed on the cognitive aspect of language development, but the affective domain (Bloom, 1956) is avoided by textbook writers and school teachers. Kennedy & Falvey (1999: 9) point out that 'affective learning can encourage effective second-language learning'. I think that this also holds true for Chinese language learning as mother tongue. This suggests that when preparing lessons on language and literature, Chinese teachers in Hong Kong need to critically examine the learning tasks and activities of their textbooks, which may fail to stimulate the students to think, and to relate the texts to issues in students' lives and experiences.

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TEXTBOOKS (TITLE IN CHINESE, TRANSLATED BY AUTHOR)

Chinese language (2005). Volumes 1–6 for Secondary 1 to 3. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press (China). (A)

Chinese language for secondary schools (2005). Volumes 1–6 for Secondary 1 to 3. Hong Kong: Modern Education Research Ltd. (B)

New version of Chinese language (2005). Volumes 1– 6 for Secondary 1 to 3. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Company. (C)

APPENDIX I

ODE OF MULAN

ANONYMOUS (C.5 A.D.)

1 Click-clack and again click-clack,
Mulan weaves, facing the door.
Not hearing the shuttle's sound,
Only hearing Daughter's sighs.
5 'My Daughter, who is in your heart,
My Daughter, who is on your mind?'
'No one is in my heart,
No one is on my mind.
Last night I saw the draft posters,
10 The Khan is calling many troops,
The army list is in twelve scrolls,
On every scroll there's Father's name.
Father has no grown-up son,
Mulan has no elder brother.
15 I decide to buy a saddle and horse,
And serve in the army in Father's place.'
In the East Market she buys a spirited horse,
In the West Market she buys a saddle,
In the South Market she buys a bridle,
20 In the North Market she buys a long whip.
At dawn she takes leave of Father and Mother,
In the evening camps on the Yellow River's bank.
She doesn't hear the sound of Father and Mother calling,
She only hears the Yellow River's flowing water cry.
25 At dawn she takes leave of the Yellow River,
In the evening she arrives at Black Mountain.
She doesn't hear the sound of Father and Mother calling,
She only hears Mount Yan's nomad horses neigh.
She goes ten thousand miles for war,
30 She crosses passes and mountains as if flying.

Northern cold gusts carry the rattle of army pots,
Chilly light shines on iron armour.
Generals die in battles,
Brave soldiers return after ten years.
35 On her return she sees the Son of Heaven,
The Son of Heaven sits in the Splendid Hall.
He gives out promotions in twelve ranks
And prizes of a hundred thousand and more.
The Khan asks her what she desires.
40 'Mulan has no desire for a minister's post.
I wish to ride a swift mount
To take me back to my home.'
When Father and Mother hear Daughter is coming
They go outside the wall to meet her, leaning on each other.
45 When Elder Sister hears Younger Sister is coming
She fixes her rouge, facing the door.
When Little Brother hears Elder Sister is coming
He whets the knife, quick quick, for pig and sheep.
'I open the door to my east chamber,
50 I sit on my couch in the west room,
I take off my wartime gown
And put on my old-time clothes.'
Facing the window she combs her cloudlike hair,
Hanging up a mirror she fixes on her face the yellow flower
55 She goes out the door and sees her comrades.
Her comrades are all amazed and perplexed.
Traveling together for twelve years
They didn't know Mulan was a girl.
'The he-hare's feet go hop and skip,
60 The she-hare's eyes are muddled and fuddled.
Two hares running side by side,
How can they tell if I am he or she?'