

AI-Driven Development of Authentic Chu Culture Texts in College English Teaching

Shan Sheng

School of Foreign Languages, Yangtze University College of Arts and Sciences, Jingzhou 434020, Hubei, China

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Abstract: Authentic texts have long been valued in language teaching, yet materials representing regional Chinese traditions remain scarce in college English courses. This paper examines how artificial intelligence can support the selection, adaptation, and classroom use of authentic texts drawn from Chu culture, the distinctive tradition of the middle Yangtze region during the Zhou period. Drawing on research in second language acquisition, intercultural competence, and educational technology, it proposes a workflow that combines machine assistance with systematic teacher review, and then considers task design, scaffolding, and assessment. Risks such as factual fabrication, cultural reduction, and lexical overload are also discussed. The paper concludes that artificial intelligence can enlarge the cultural range of college English reading only when its outputs are treated as drafts to be judged rather than as authoritative accounts, and when teachers retain responsibility for cultural fidelity.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Authentic texts; Chu culture; College English teaching; Intercultural competence

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1. Introduction

College English teaching in China has gradually moved away from a purely instrumental view of language study. Curricular documents and institutional missions call for graduates who can present Chinese culture accurately in English and who can take part in intercultural dialogue with confidence and judgment. This expectation meets a stubborn practical difficulty. The reading materials used in most college English classrooms are drawn from a narrow pool of Anglophone sources, and texts that represent regional Chinese traditions are rare, poorly graded, or written in a register that removes the very features that make them worth reading.

Chu culture, which flourished in the middle Yangtze region during the Zhou period and left behind bronze ritual vessels, lacquer work, silk manuscripts, and the poetry of the Chuci anthology, offers unusually rich material for reading and discussion. Its vocabulary, imagery, and assumptions about the world are unfamiliar even to well-prepared students, and publishers have produced few graded treatments of it. The arrival of generative artificial intelligence changes this situation in a limited but real way, since large

language models can retrieve, summarize, translate, and rewrite source material faster than any individual teacher. This paper asks how such tools can be used to build authentic Chu culture texts for college English courses, what safeguards are needed at each stage, and what the consequences are for teaching and assessment. The discussion proceeds in three main stages, moving from the construction of texts to classroom use and finally to questions of evaluation, risk, and professional responsibility.

2. Artificial intelligence and the construction of authentic Chu culture texts

Before turning to classroom practice, it is necessary to consider where such texts come from and how they should be prepared. Authenticity is not a property of a document alone; it is a relation between a text, a reader, and a purpose. A museum label, an excavation report, and a translated poem can all be authentic in different ways, and each places a different demand on the reader. The three subsections below describe how machine assistance can be used at the stages of retrieval, adaptation, and verification, and **Figure 1** summarizes the workflow as a whole.

2.1. Locating and digitizing primary sources

Gilmore ^[1] usefully distinguishes between the authenticity of a text, the authenticity of the learner's response to it, and the authenticity of the classroom activity in which it is used. Widdowson ^[2] had earlier argued that a passage produced for purposes other than language teaching becomes authentic in the classroom only when learners engage with it for a genuine communicative purpose. These distinctions matter for Chu culture because the surviving sources are heterogeneous. They include inscribed bronze vessels and bamboo slips, archaeological excavation reports published by Chinese institutes, catalog entries and interpretive panels produced for museum visitors, and English renderings of the Chuci poems such as those collected by Hawkes ^[3]. For teaching purposes, the first step is to locate material that carries genuine cultural information and exists in a form that can be processed.

Machine reading tools can search across digitized catalogs, extract passages from scanned reports, and produce working translations of specialized Chinese prose within minutes. Teachers who previously spent an afternoon assembling one usable passage can now assemble a small corpus in the same time. This gain is real, but it is also uneven. Optical character recognition still struggles with classical Chinese and with the small print of older catalogs, and a summary produced by a model may silently reorganize the chronology of a site or conflate two finds that a specialist would keep apart. The output of this stage should therefore be treated as a candidate set of materials rather than as finished text, and each item should be kept alongside a note of where it came from.

2.2. Adapting texts without losing cultural specificity

Raw sources are rarely readable by second-year undergraduates. An excavation report may contain technical terms for soil strata, bronze casting techniques, and ritual ranking, while a translated poem may preserve archaic pronouns that obscure meaning rather than convey it. Krashen's input hypothesis ^[4] suggests that comprehension depends on material that lies slightly beyond the learner's current level, and Nation's work on vocabulary load ^[7] indicates how quickly a density of unknown words can make a passage unreadable. Machine assistance is well suited to the mechanical part of this problem. A model can be asked to shorten sentences, replace low-frequency grammatical structures, and supply glosses for culture-specific terms such as *bianzhong*, the set of tuned bronze bells; *fengniao*, the bird motif that dominates Chu lacquer work; and

wu, the ritual specialist whose practices shape much of Chu poetry.

The important instruction is to keep those terms rather than replace them with convenient European equivalents. When a model is left to its own devices, it tends to smooth the unfamiliar into the familiar, turning a Chu ritual specialist into a generic priest and a tuned bell chime into a musical instrument. Retaining the original term with a short gloss preserves the cultural specificity, signals to students that the concept does not map neatly onto English, and gives them a word they can reuse in their own writing. Teachers can also request parallel versions of the same passage at two levels of difficulty and choose the one that fits a particular class, or ask for a version that keeps the original sentence rhythm while reducing the number of separate noun phrases.

2.3. Verifying cultural fidelity through human review

Adaptation introduces errors, and some of them are serious. A generative model may attach a ritual object to the wrong period, merge two distinct burial sites, or invent a quotation from a poem that does not exist. Independent review is therefore not optional. The standard reference works on Chu material culture, notably the essays collected by Cook and Major ^[5], provide a check for such claims, as do established translations that can be compared line by line with a machine version ^[3]. A practical arrangement is a two-pass review. The first pass asks whether every cultural claim in the passage can be traced to an identifiable source; the second asks whether the text works as reading material, whether the glosses are accurate, and whether the tone suits the intended audience.

Recording this process in a short provenance note, which lists the source, the prompt used, the date, and the reviewer, allows a colleague to audit the material later and allows the same text to be revised when a better source appears. Students can be involved in this work as well. Asking a class to trace one claim in a text back to its source turns verification into a reading task and makes the constructed nature of classroom material visible. **Figure 1** presents the workflow described in this section as a cycle, in which classroom use generates new questions and sends the teacher back to the sources.

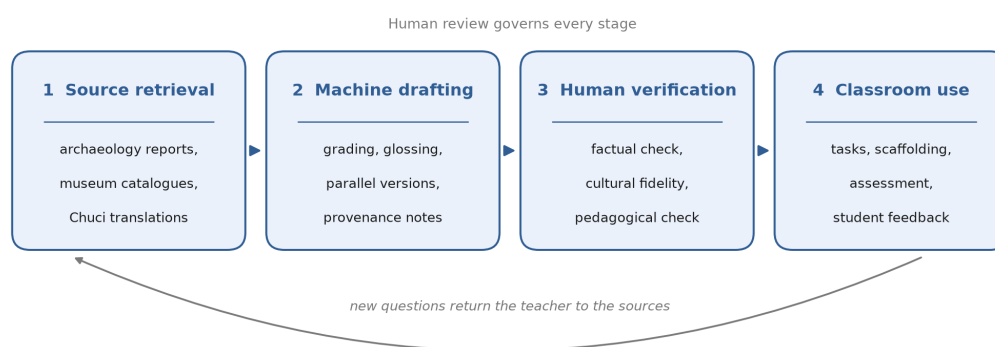


Figure 1. A four-stage workflow for building authentic Chu culture texts with artificial intelligence

3. Pedagogical integration in the college English classroom

The value of a text is realized only in use. This section considers how adapted Chu culture materials can be

embedded in tasks, how comprehension and vocabulary can be supported without removing the difficulty that makes reading worthwhile, and how comparison with other traditions can deepen the encounter.

3.1. Task design around Chu culture texts

A reading passage becomes authentic in the classroom when students do with it something that a real reader would do, which is Gilmore's third category ^[1]. With Chu material, several task types work well. Students can compare two English renderings of the same museum label and argue which serves an international visitor better. They can prepare the script for a short audio guide to a bianzhong set, drawing on an excavation report for the facts and on a translated poem for the imagery. They can read a brief excerpt from the Chuci in translation, identify the natural images that recur in it, and test those observations against a second excerpt. In each case, the task has an audience beyond the teacher, a product that can be judged, and a requirement to use evidence drawn from the text.

Project work extends the same logic over a longer period. A class can build a small digital exhibition in English, selecting objects, writing captions of a fixed length, and recording a spoken introduction. Such work makes the constraints of real writing visible, including the discipline of writing to length and the need to decide what a foreign visitor genuinely needs to know rather than what is easiest to say. It also gives students a reason to reread, which is the single most reliable way of turning an unfamiliar passage into usable knowledge. Tasks of this kind also make unreflective copying harder, since a caption written for a particular object at a fixed length cannot be produced by a generic request.

3.2. Scaffolding comprehension and vocabulary with intelligent feedback

Culture-specific vocabulary is the main obstacle in these materials. A student who meets terms such as bianzhong, fengniao, and wu only once is unlikely to remember them, and Nation's work on vocabulary load ^[6] shows that a word must be met several times in meaningful contexts before it becomes available for use. The practical aim is therefore to arrange four or five short encounters with the same ten or twelve terms across a unit, rather than to explain each term once at length. Three routines do this. A model can write a second passage of about 120 words that reuses the target terms in a different setting. It can produce gap-filling exercises in which the missing term can be recovered only from the surrounding sentence, so that students work from context rather than from a remembered gloss. It can also prepare a short list of collocations for each term, which students then use in a sentence of their own.

Timing matters as much as quantity. If students consult a tool before they read, they never meet the difficulty, and the passage stops functioning as reading practice. The rule should be that help is available only after the first reading is finished, and that each request must name the particular word or sentence that caused the trouble. Teachers can also ask a model to draft comprehension questions, but every item needs checking, because a generated question sometimes asks about a detail the passage does not state or makes the answer obvious from the wording.

3.3. Intercultural comparison and critical reflection

Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence ^[7] identifies skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness as distinct components that teaching should address. Chu's material supports all three. Interpreting and relating can be practiced by placing Chu

cosmological imagery beside a Greek or Celtic analog and asking what each tradition assumes about the relationship between the human and the natural world. Discovery and interaction can be practiced by asking students to find out how a particular term has been rendered by different translators, and to consult, in writing or in person, a specialist or a museum educator.

Critical awareness is the hardest component to teach and the most valuable. Students should be encouraged to notice when a comparison makes Chu culture seem merely exotic, and when an English rendering imports a European category that does not fit the material. The habit of asking what is lost in a translation is more durable than any list of facts about a period, and it transfers to other contexts in which students must represent their own culture to outsiders. It also protects against a subtle failure mode of machine assistance, which is to produce fluent descriptions that borrow their framing from sources written for a different audience. Teachers can make the point explicit by asking students to rewrite a machine-generated description of a Chu object and to note every change they make, together with a reason for it.

4. Assessment, risks, and teacher development

The final section turns to questions of evaluation and risk. Authentic materials and machine assistance both change what can reasonably be assessed, and both introduce failure modes that departments would do well to name in advance.

4.1. Assessing learning with authentic texts

Assessment should follow from the tasks described earlier. If students write captions, argue for a translation, or prepare a guide script, then the criteria should include use of evidence, accuracy of cultural detail, suitability for the intended audience, and control of language. A rubric with four or five dimensions, each described at two or three levels, is usually enough and can be shared with students in advance. Machine assistance can draft rubrics and item banks, but the drafts require scrutiny, because a generated question often rewards recall of an isolated fact rather than the ability to use a source in support of a claim.

Process matters as much as product. A portfolio that contains the first reading of a passage, the questions asked during it, a revised caption, and a short reflection on what changed gives a fuller picture than a single test score, and it discourages the habit of submitting the first output that a tool produces. Self-assessment has a place here too, particularly if students are asked to identify which parts of their work they checked against a source and which they did not. That single question often reveals more about a student's developing judgment than the finished text does. Portfolios also make the use of machine assistance visible and therefore discussable, which is a prerequisite for teaching students to use such tools well rather than merely often, and for helping them decide when not to use them at all.

4.2. Cultural and pedagogical risks

Three risks deserve explicit attention. The first is factual. Generated text can be fluent and wrong at the same time, and in the cultural domain errors carry weight, since a mistaken account of a tradition may be repeated by students as established fact. The second is interpretive. Models trained largely on Anglophone material tend to frame non-Western cultures through the categories available to them, producing descriptions that are readable but quietly exoticizing. Hockly's discussion of what is good, bad, and ugly in current tools ^[8] is a useful reminder that enthusiasm should be paired with caution rather than replaced by it. The third risk is

pedagogical. Heavy glossing, instant translation, and conversational support can remove the very struggle through which reading ability develops, and an overloaded page can raise demands beyond what the content justifies.

Practical responses are not complicated. They include linking every adapted text to its source, requiring students to declare how a tool was used, limiting assistance during a first reading, and revisiting institutional guidance as the technology changes. What they require is a decision made in advance and applied consistently, rather than an improvised response when a problem appears in class. Departments that write these expectations into their course documents also make life easier for teachers, who otherwise have to justify individual decisions to individual students. None of these safeguards requires technology that a department does not already have, and all of them are easier to apply at department level than course by course.

4.3. The changing role of the teacher

The role of the teacher shifts rather than diminishes. In the workflow described here, the teacher acts as a selector of sources, an editor of adapted text, a verifier of cultural claims, and a designer of tasks, and the last of these remains the least automatable. These responsibilities call for professional learning of a specific kind. Teachers need enough understanding of the tools to write effective prompts and to recognize when an output looks suspicious, and they need enough subject knowledge to judge whether a claim about Chu material culture is plausible in the first place.

Collaboration helps here. A partnership with colleagues in history or archaeology, or with the education staff of a provincial museum, can supply the verification that a language department cannot provide on its own, and a shared repository of reviewed texts prevents the same work being repeated in every course and every year. Reviews of artificial intelligence in higher education ^[9,10] suggest that adoption is proceeding faster than the development of such support structures, and the gap is visible in language programs as much as anywhere else. Departments that invest in review routines and shared resources will get more from these tools than departments that leave individual teachers to experiment alone.

5. Conclusion

This paper has argued that artificial intelligence can widen the range of authentic texts available for college English teaching, and that Chu culture offers a demanding and rewarding test case. The workflow described here, which moves from source retrieval through adaptation to verification, is not specific to one regional tradition and would apply equally to materials drawn from other parts of China. What the Chu case makes clear is the size of the gap between the cultural ambitions now expressed in curriculum documents and the materials actually available in classrooms. Machine assistance narrows that gap in a practical way, but it does not close it, because the deciding factor remains the judgment of teachers who know both the language and the culture. What the tools offer is reach; what teachers supply is judgment.

The risks are manageable when they are named in advance. Fabricated detail, exoticizing description, and excessive support can each be addressed by routines that most departments could adopt without new resources. The alternative, in which each teacher improvises alone, is slower and produces material of uneven quality. The larger question, however, is whether institutions will treat the preparation of culturally grounded materials as professional work worth supporting, or as an individual enthusiasm to be pursued in spare time.

If the aims of college English teaching include the ability to present one's own culture accurately to the world, then the answer should be straightforward, and the tools now available make it easier than before to act on it.

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Disclosure statement

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