

Navigating GenAI for Chinese Research: From Brainstorm to Research Question

Tools, Strategies, and a Worked Example on Hong Kong Cantonese

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Upon completing the reading and practice of this guide, you will be able to:

1. Use and develop structured prompts to refine and formulate vague, broad ideas into specific, feasible research questions.
2. Summarise, analyse, and appraise the scholarly landscape using AI academic tools, and judge and defend whether a claimed research gap is genuine.
3. Recognise, distinguish, and evaluate AI hallucinations by applying and refining cross-verification techniques to ensure that cited references and corpora are authentic and reliable.
4. Value, defend, and apply principles of academic integrity and data security by planning and articulating appropriate disclosure of GenAI use in research writing.

Introduction

In the initial stage of research, you can responsibly use generative AI (GenAI) tools to overcome cognitive limitations, rapidly map out existing literature, and refine a broad area of interest into a specific, feasible, and academically valuable research topic.

This guide is tailored specifically for students conducting Chinese-related research and presents a structured methodology for utilising GenAI tools and resources. The entire guide uses “A study of lexical borrowing from English in Hong Kong Chinese” as a running case study, systematically guiding you through the complete research lifecycle, from brainstorming and literature review to identifying research gaps and finalising your research questions.

The guide is divided into three parts:

1. **Part 1 (Quick Start):** A four-step workflow table leading from brainstorming to topic finalisation, including recommended GenAI tools and prompt examples.
2. **Part 2 (Upgrading Your Questioning Skills):** Guidance on crafting academic grade prompts.
3. **Part 3 (Common Questions and Critical Reflections):** A discussion of boundaries, pitfalls, and ethical issues you may encounter when using GenAI in your research.

We have also prepared three video summaries to help you quickly grasp the core content of this guide (only the Traditional Chinese version is provided).

Case Practice: From a Broad Direction to a Specific Topic

- **Initial Broad Direction:** A study of lexical borrowing from English in Hong Kong Chinese
- **Research Bottleneck:** This topic is far too broad. Should the study focus on phonetic assimilation, semantic evolution, or identity construction from a sociolinguistic perspective? You need AI assistance to narrow the focus effectively.



Video Summary 1: Conducting Research with Generative AI

Part 1: Quick Start – AI-Assisted Brainstorming Flow Table

Research Stages	Recommended AI Tools	Prompt Examples	Expected AI Output & Your Judgement
1. Brainstorming	General LLM (Deepseek, Doubao, ChatGPT, etc.)	“I am planning a linguistics paper on ‘lexical borrowing from English in Hong Kong Chinese’. Please provide me with 10 specific research angles from four dimensions: sociolinguistics, pragmatics, morphology, and cognitive linguistics.”	AI output: Lists directions such as “English-Chinese code mixing in social media”, “part of speech conversion rules of loanwords”, and “loanwords and Hong Kong youth identity”. Your judgement: You find “morphological variations of loanwords on social media (e.g., LIHKG or Instagram)” compelling and the required data easily accessible.
2. Chinese literature review	CNKI AI	“Please summarise core Chinese journal literature from the past five years on ‘lexical borrowing from English in Hong Kong Chinese’. What are the primary research foci in the current academic literature? What under-researched gaps remain?”	AI output: Summarises that existing studies mostly focus on traditional print media or spoken language, highlighting that “loanword variations on emerging online social platforms” remain under-researched. Your judgement: You confirm that “online social platforms” represent a genuine academic gap and decide to restrict your context to online corpora.
3. International validation	Consensus	“What is the impact of social media on lexical borrowing from English in Hong Kong Chinese?”	AI output: Draws on peer-reviewed English publications (e.g., <i>Journal of Asian Pacific Communication</i>) to provide a summary confirming that social media accelerates the morphological variation of loanwords. Your judgement: You verify that this direction aligns with international academic discourse, ensuring the academic merit of your selected topic.
4. Topic finalisation	General LLM (Deepseek, Doubao, ChatGPT, etc.)	“Based on the above findings, my research will focus on English loanwords on Hong Kong social media. Please generate 3 academically deep paper titles that include specific research methods (e.g., corpus analysis).”	AI output: Provides several academic titles. Finalised topic: “ <i>A Corpus-based Study on the Morphological Adaptation of English Loanwords in Hong Kong Social Media</i> ”