

## Overcoming Challenges: Aedín McConnell

*Aedín McConnell shares her journey of learning Mandarin Chinese, inspired by her passion for traditional Irish music and a fascination with Chinese culture. Despite challenges like fear of making mistakes and limited resources, she found success through immersive experiences and engaging with Chinese media. Her story highlights the importance of perseverance and finding motivating materials in language learning.*

My interest in languages originally started in secondary school where I studied German for my Leaving Certificate, however my real passion for language learning - especially Asian languages – really grew out of my love for music. As a traditional Irish musician, I've always been fascinated by the musical cultures of other countries. I first became interested in Mandarin Chinese after watching a short video about the Guzheng (Chinese harp). I wanted to learn more, but most resources were in Chinese. Google translate lacked the cultural nuance and context needed to fully understand the material so I quickly realised that learning the language was the only way to truly understand the music and culture behind it. That moment sparked my journey into studying Chinese.

I faced many challenges learning Chinese. My fear of making mistakes - especially when speaking – really held me back as I was so focused on trying to be perfect, I avoided many opportunities to practice. Overcoming this mindset has been one of my biggest challenges, but I've come to understand that mistakes are simply part of the learning journey! No one becomes fluent overnight. And in fact, mistakes often lead to the most memorable - and sometimes hilarious - moments, helping you grow both in confidence and skill.

One early frustration was the lack of engaging resources and materials. That changed when I studied in Beijing for my study abroad and discovered Chinese social media platforms and streaming sites with popular dramas and movies. I even found channels dedicated to traditional Chinese instruments, which matched my interests. Engaging with this content expanded my vocabulary, improved my listening skills, and deepened my cultural understanding. It also sparked more natural conversations with local Chinese friends. My advice to anyone facing the same challenge is to find what interests you, then look beyond traditional resources for engaging, related content.

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Chinese friends. My advice to anyone facing the same challenge is to find what interests you, then look beyond traditional resources for engaging, related content.