

CHINA'S LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING IN EDUCATION: A COMPARISON OF THEORETICAL APPROACHES

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China, renowned for its linguistic and ethnic diversity, grapples with a complex language landscape where Mandarin Chinese dominates as the official language. Despite Mandarin's prominence, the country harbors various regional dialects and 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups, each contributing to a rich linguistic tapestry. Recent language policies aimed at enhancing literacy and ensuring stability have sparked debates on the implications for minority languages and dialects. This article evaluates China's language policy through the neo-classical and historical-structural approaches, shedding light on the intricate dynamics shaping linguistic diversity and national identity. The historical-structural approach to language policy analysis involves examining societal, historical, and political factors that shape and influence language policies. It considers the historical context, power structures, and the role of the state. The neo-classical approach focuses more on individual choices, market trends, and the influence of various actors in language policy development. The neo-classical approach, while valuable, falls short in capturing the influence of state-driven initiatives and the agency of local actors. In contrast, the historical-structural perspective proves more insightful, considering political, societal, and historical factors in shaping language policies. The dissemination of English within multilingual communities underscores the importance of resource distribution, emphasizing the need for a historical-structural perspective. While the historical-structural perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding, acknowledging the potential of strengthening the neo-classical approach through empirical research is crucial. Further investigations into academic performance, code-switching practices, and in-depth interviews could offer nuanced insights into language policy implementation dynamics and their impact on stakeholders in China's educational landscape.

Key words: language policy, language planning, language of instruction, public policy, bilingual education.

МОВНА ПОЛІТИКА КИТАЮ ТА ПЛАНУВАННЯ В ОСВІТІ: ПОРІВНЯННЯ ТЕОРЕТИЧНИХ ПІДХОДІВ

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Китай, відомий своєю мовною та етнічною різноманітністю, бореться зі складним мовним ландшафтом, де офіційною мовою домінує китайська. Незважаючи на популярність офіційної китайської мови, КНР багата на різноманітні регіональні діалекти та 55 офіційно визнаних груп етнічних меншин. Мовна політика, спрямована на підвищення грамотності та забезпечення стабільності, викликала дискусії щодо наслідків для мов і діалектів меншин. У статті оцінюється мовна політика Китаю через призму неокласичного та історико-структурного підходів, проливаючи світло на складну динаміку формування мовного розмаїття та національної ідентичності в КНР. Історико-структурний підхід до аналізу мовної політики передбачає вивчення суспільних,

історичних і політичних чинників, які формують і впливають на мовну політику. Він розглядає історичний контекст, структуру влади та роль держави. Неокласичний підхід більше зосереджується на індивідуальному виборі, ринкових та загальноекономічних тенденціях і впливі різних акторів на розвиток мовної політики. Неокласичний підхід хоча і цінний, проте не повною мірою відображає вплив державних ініціатив і рівень активності місцевих акторів. Навпаки, історично-структурна перспектива виявляється більш проникливою, ураховуючи політичні, суспільні та історичні чинники у формуванні мовної політики. Поширення англійської мови в багатомовних спільнотах підкреслює важливість розподілу ресурсів, наголошуючи на необхідності історично-структурної перспективи. Хоча історико-структурний підхід забезпечує більш повне розуміння, визнання потенціалу зміцнення неокласичного підходу через емпіричні дослідження є вирішальним. Подальші дослідження академічної успішності, практики «перемикання кодів» (code-switching) і глибокі інтерв'ю можуть запропонувати тонке розуміння динаміки реалізації мовної політики та її впливу на зацікавлені сторони в освітньому середовищі Китаю.

Ключові слова: мовна політика, мовне планування, мова навчання, державна політика, білінгвальна освіта.

China, characterized by linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, stands as a testament to a complex language landscape with Mandarin Chinese, predominantly spoken by 73% of the population, serving as the official language [Wang, King 2022]. This linguistic mosaic extends beyond Mandarin, encompassing various regional dialects such as Wu, Minbei, Minnan, Xiang, Gan, Hakka, and others, each contributing to a rich linguistic tapestry [Han, Johnson 2021]. While Mandarin holds a position of prominence, the country boasts 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups, each preserving their unique languages, further enriching the linguistic fabric [Wang, King 2022; Han, Johnson 2021]. Despite this diversity, recent language policies within China, aiming to enhance literacy, ensure stability, and facilitate knowledge transfer, have led to debates on the implications for minority languages and dialects [Adamson, Feng, 2009].

The exclusive recognized language in China is “Standard Chinese,” alternatively termed as “Standard Mandarin.” In the mainland, this standard form is referred to as “Putonghua” (普通话). It's essential to note that “Mandarin” encompasses both the spoken and written aspects, whereas “Putonghua” specifically denotes the spoken form, serving as the common language in Mandarin-speaking areas. In 2015, China initiated the “Project for the Protection of Language Resources of China” to examine and document language varieties [Wang, King 2022]. By June 2019, over 500 ethnic and regional variations were cataloged, spanning ten language families. Approximately 8.4% of China's population speaks minoritized ethnic languages, while 90% use regional varieties. The most common is the Wu dialect (8.4%), followed by Cantonese (5%), Hokkien (4.5%), and Hakka (4%) [Wang, King 2022].

The evolving landscape of language policies within China's education system has been a subject of exploration by various researchers, reflecting the intricate relationship between language, identity, and national unity. As the central government strives to balance linguistic diversity with a desire for a unified national identity, researchers have approached this topic from different theoretical perspectives. This article contributes to this ongoing dialogue by evaluating China's language policy in education through two distinct lenses: the neo-classical approach

and the historical-structural approach. Through this analysis, we seek to provide insights into the dynamic nature of language policies in China and their implications for linguistic diversity and national identity.

Literature Review

The language policy and planning (LPP) in China has been discussed in academic literature with a varying degree of interest both from Chinese researchers, as well as political scientists, linguists and language-in-education specialists. To a large extent, particular attention is paid to the language policy development over time, from 1950s till modern days, as well as the policy and implementation in the context of autonomous regions and provinces with a high concentration of minority groups. When it comes to the study of the LPP in the field of education, the discussions tend to be more centered around political discourse or factors leading to a certain policy formation and implementation. Meanwhile, there is a lack of studies on the effects of language-in-education practices on students' academic performance.

One prevalent approach involves describing and evaluating policy documents within their historical contexts. Scholars, both within and outside China, favor this descriptive method, providing an account of policies and their implementations across three historical stages [Feng 2007; Feng, Adamson 2017]. Agnes Lam delineates five distinct phases in the development of language policies in China since 1949 [Lam 2005]. These phases highlight shifts in the treatment of ethnic minority languages, ranging from codification and script development to periods of instability, active promotion of the Chinese language, and coercive language policies. Notably, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) witnessed the suppression of ethnic minority languages, followed by a post-Cultural Revolution era that generally supported the maintenance and development of minority cultures and languages. In the subsequent phase (1977–1990), there was a return to affirming the rights of minority languages and resuming codification work, leading to the current policy goal of technical bilingualism of ethnic languages and Chinese in various spheres of life, including education.

Li Xulian and Huang Quanzhi's (2004) analysis provides an alternative yet analogous chronological ranging: the "start-up stage" promoting bilingual education or *shuangyu jiaoyu* (双语教育), the "stagnancy stage" marked by interruptions during the Cultural Revolution, and the "recovery and development stage" robustly promoting bi/trilingual education [Li, Huang 2004]. Thus, the descriptive approach underscores the connection between minority education policies and the evolving socio-political landscape in China over time. For example, Hu Wenzhong also highlighted the historical interplay between political and educational agendas in the People's Republic, noting that when political priorities overshadowed educational objectives, foreign language (FL) teaching suffered, while alignment of political and educational goals led to advancements in FL teaching [Hu 2001].

Regarding the LPP in autonomous regions, Feng Anwei and Mamtimyn Sunuodula contribute to the discourse by focusing on the examination and debate surrounding "preferential policies" designed for minority nationalities in various regions [Feng, Sunuodula 2009]. Blachford Dongyan proposed a model for studying minority education policies in China, which delves into the roles of key actors at various administrative levels, exploring dynamic relationships and functions within the policy process [Blachford 2004].

However, with many discussions rooted in Party doctrines, national legislations, and official canons, the analysis lacks a broader perspective or clarity on the way the policy analysis is approached given the multifaceted nature of the topic. A cause-and-effect or descriptive approach, examining only a few variables, falls short in capturing the complexity of language policy within the intricate world of contextual variables. Policy makers need to navigate linguistic and non-linguistic variables, incorporating socio-political, demographic, psychological, cultural, and bureaucratic factors. Policy implementation involves regional or local actors adapting policies, teachers in classrooms exercising acceptable improvisation, and pupils balancing time and effort with risks and rewards.

Language Policy and Language Planning

The terminology surrounding “language policy” can be intricate and multifaceted [Spolsky 2017]. Bernard Spolsky proposes a distinction between language policy as a field and language policy as a normative document produced within the realm of language management or planning. In this context, language management is regarded as a subfield of linguistics pertinent to education [Spolsky 2017, 10].

David Johnson endeavors to present a comprehensive definition of language policy, encompassing unofficial mechanisms such as language beliefs and practices constructed and maintained within specific social contexts or communities [Johnson 2013]. The term “policy as a verb” is introduced, highlighting the diverse agents influencing the formation of language policy. Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth delineate language policy as a societal approach to linguistic communication, while language planning involves concrete measures taken within the broader language policy framework to influence linguistic communication in a community [Bugarski, Hawkesworth 1992]. The compound term “language policy and planning” (LPP) is widely adopted in academic literature, featured in works such as Springer's *Encyclopaedia of Language and Education* (*Encaeclopedia of Language...* 2008) and the *Oxford Handbook of Language Policy and Planning* edited by Tollefson and Pérez-Milans [*The Oxford Handbook...* 2018].

In the realm of education, Robert Kaplan and Richard Baldauf use the term “language-in-education planning” to denote a key implementation procedure for language policy and planning [Kaplan, Baldauf 1997, 122]. Ofelia García and Kate Menken introduce “language education policy” (LEP), encompassing decisions in schools beyond those explicitly about language itself [Garcia, Menken 2010, 254], with a particular focus on the language(s) of instruction (LOI) [Hancock 2014]. David Johnson further defines “educational language policy” as encompassing both official and unofficial policies across various layers and institutional contexts, impacting language use in classrooms and schools [Johnson 2013, 54].

Examining language policy through a political lens, some researchers emphasize the role of the state and political factors in shaping language policy and planning. Richard Ruiz's differentiation between discourse, power, and language's role in social control holds significance within critical language policy (CLP), underscoring the critical examination of power dynamics in language policy discussions [Ruiz 1984]. James Tollefson's assertion that language policy primarily serves the interests of dominant groups aligns with a top-down approach, attributing the capability to influence language policy predominantly to governmental entities [Tollefson 1991]. Juan Cobarrubias accentuates the ideological nature of language planning, shedding

light on the power relations between dominant and opposition groups within society [Cobarrubias 1982]. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson introduce the term “linguicism” to characterize the ideologies perpetuating unequal power and resource distribution among language-defined groups [Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson 1996]. In contrast, an opposing perspective challenges the exclusive power of the state in language policy formation. This narrative emphasizes the role of various agents in policy discussions, highlighting a bidirectional movement of language policy formation, [Cooper 1989, 164].

A crucial point of contention in discussions concerning the role of language in multilingual societies centers on the conflict between the “one state, one language” or monoglot model and the advocacy for multilingualism. Some researchers assert that adhering to a monolingual reductionist approach contributes to the rationalization of linguistic homogenization (Blommaert, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). This perspective implies a tendency to prioritize a singular dominant language, potentially marginalizing linguistic diversity within a given state. Moreover, these scholars challenge the notion of a homogeneous nation-state on a global scale, emphasizing that such states practically do not exist. This debate highlights broader questions about the recognition and accommodation of linguistic diversity within multilingual societies.

The distinction drawn by James Tollefson between the neo-classical and historical-structural approaches has sparked debates on the dynamics of power and agency in shaping language policies, particularly within the realm of education. The neo-classical approach, which places emphasis on individuals, stands in contrast to the historical-structural approach, which delves into the socio-historical factors influencing language policy formation.

The historical-structural approach to LPP, as outlined by James Tollefson, scrutinizes the intricate connections between language (policy) and power, encompassing state power, ideological power, and discursive power. This approach concentrates on historical and societal structures influencing language policies, considering power dynamics, social structures, and historical events that shape language choices and policies. Its application lies in understanding the broader historical and societal factors that influence the development and implementation of language policies [Tollefson 1991].

The Neo-Classical Approach to LPP places a distinct emphasis on individual choices and market forces within the linguistic landscape. Rooted in the notion of rational choice [Rivers 2012], this approach views language as a commodity, with policies designed to facilitate individual preferences and respond to market demands. The origins of the rational choice theory lie in institutionalism, emphasizing the role of institutions in shaping individuals’ rational decisions.

In the context of China, this involves analyzing how individuals make decisions about the languages they use. Factors such as economic opportunities, globalization, and personal preferences play crucial roles in influencing language choices. Additionally, by viewing languages as commodities with individuals investing in language learning based on perceived economic benefits, we can gain insights into language learning trends and preferences. Furthermore, we analyze language policies in the PRC through an economic lens [Hu 2001], considering how these policies may align with economic goals and market demands. This involves exploring

government initiatives that promote certain languages to enhance economic competitiveness. Finally, we consider the influence of globalization on language choices in China.

In the rest of the article, the term LPP is used, defined as a field of study that primarily centers on intentional efforts to influence the use, structure, or functions of languages within a speech community. LPP places emphasis on analyzing how language planning decisions are made and implemented, often involving deliberate actions to shape language use in specific ways. In this article, our examination of LPP decision-making and implementation will be based on the example of China, with a specific focus on the education sector. Moving forward, we will engage in a comparison of two distinct approaches—the neo-classical and historical-structural approaches. This comparative analysis aims to provide insights into the differing perspectives each approach offers in understanding LPP dynamics within the context of the Chinese education sector.

China's language policy in education from neo-classical approach

In the context of language-in-education policymaking, the choice of language poses the key challenge for policymakers, as well as students and their guardians alike, particularly in areas with minority languages and local dialects. This comes in conflict with the need to balance out global trends and the dominance of English in international communication. Thus, the pursuit of trilingual education or *sanyu jiaoyu* (三语教育) in China, encompassing the indigenous minority home language, Mandarin Chinese, and English, presents a multifaceted challenge in the context of language and education [Adamson, Feng 2009].

While the idea of additive trilingualism, where students learn three languages without detriment, is theoretically sound, practical barriers hinder its effective implementation [Liu, Edwards 2017]. This challenge is particularly pronounced for many minority students in China, residing in autonomous regions where their mother tongue often differs from both Mandarin Chinese and English [Adamson, Feng 2013]. The ensuing complexities stem from a myriad of factors, ranging from the low social status ascribed to minority languages to the high regard accorded to standard Chinese and English, reinforced by systemic mechanisms like university entrance examinations.

For instance, the difficulties escalate in regions like Xinjiang, where geopolitical tensions amplify due to the strong cultural identity of the Uyghur population, perceived by state and regional leaders as a potential threat to national unity [Adamson, Feng 2009]. The barriers extend beyond basic education to tertiary levels, posing challenges in providing a trilingual program that encompasses diverse student backgrounds and competencies [Liu, Edwards 2017]. Thus, although national policies advocate for trilingualism, their implementation is heavily influenced by regional and local factors, leading to inconsistencies and challenges.

In some regions, minority languages face toleration only in contexts with high economic capital, creating a stark contradiction between national policy and grassroots practices. The preferential treatment given to Chinese due to economic, social, and political benefits exacerbates the challenges, while the recruitment difficulties in securing qualified English teachers further hinder the realization of trilingualism in ethnic minority students [Adamson, Feng 2009].

Understanding the language choices made by multilingual families involves adopting an interactive, child-centered perspective. For instance, research by Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen with Chinese-speaking families highlights how adults employ discourse strategies with varying degrees of consciousness and explicitness, influenced by interactional styles co-constructed by both adults and children [Curdt-Christiansen 2021].

A recent study by Wang and King (2022) reveals that the majority adopted a 'whatever works' approach to the language, which reflects a rational choice in language use within families. For example, 37.7% of Shanghai families, 85% of Nanjing families, and 81.8% of Yangzhou families favor putonghua in daily use. Shanghai parents with explicit family language policies were more likely to support regional varieties (21.6%), contrasting with lower percentages in Nanjing (15%) and Yangzhou (18.2%). These findings illustrate a rational choice model within families, where language preferences are shaped by pragmatic considerations, regional factors, and intentional language cultivation strategies.

Applying Pierre Bourdieu's capital theory, Chinese-English bilingual education in China becomes a contested arena where different entities compete to maximize various forms of capital and redefine their positions in economic, educational, and sociocultural markets [Bourdieu 1991]. Local governments in cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou, as major promoters, are propelled by a desire for maximal profit of distinction, aiming to maintain their positions as centers of power.

The integration of English into Chinese education is also influenced by multiple factors [Hu 2009]. The driving forces behind further popularization of English is entrenched in the general discourse associating national development with English proficiency and an academic discourse favoring bilingual education. Foreign language (English being the most popular choice) is a compulsory subject for the university entrance exams (gaokao), along with Maths and Chinese.

However, a critical review emphasizes another set of driving forces—vested interests of stakeholders and key players in the English language provision landscape. Teachers, particularly junior ones, find Chinese-English bilingual education appealing as it presents opportunities to acquire more economic, cultural, and symbolic capital than they might otherwise achieve. Possessing greater English proficiency than their senior counterparts, bilingual education allows them to appreciate in value, gain distinction, be recognized, and receive better remuneration.

While systematic longitudinal research on the impact of learning non-language subjects in English is lacking, early indications suggest a possible negative influence on academic attainment [Hu 2009]. This reflects the complex interplay of motivations, interests, and potential consequences within the realm of language policy and education in China.

China's language policy in education from historical-structural perspective

Over time, Chinese language policy has shifted, moving away from accommodating multilingualism and promoting minoritized language education. Instead, there is a notable preference for and promotion of Putonghua as the lingua franca [Han, Johnson 2021]. Historically, the government maintained tolerant language policies, protecting linguistic diversity by promoting Putonghua as the lingua franca for the Han majority, allowing minoritized groups voluntary learning of Putonghua [Zhou 2004]. While constitutional and legal documents emphasize minority

linguistic rights, the importance of Putonghua in national unity takes precedence. Similarly, in the field of education, although policies supporting minority groups in education exist, the broader trend leans towards promoting Putonghua and standardization in China's linguistic landscape [Han, Johnson 2021; Wang, King 2022].

Over time, the main foreign language taught in Chinese schools has evolved, with Russian being promoted in the early years of the PRC due to political and economic collaboration with the Soviet Union. After the disintegration of this relationship in the early 1960s, English became the preferred foreign language, gaining prestigious status in the country. English is considered a high-stakes subject in Chinese schools, serving as a prerequisite for university study and entry into many professions, especially in the context of China's Open Door economic policy and its desire for international prominence [Adamson, Feng 2009; Lam 2005].

The 1982 Constitution and the 1984 Law on Regional National Autonomy highlighted the rights of minority linguistic groups, emphasizing their freedom to use and develop their languages. However, the Constitution also stresses the role of Putonghua in national unity and promotes minority language education [Han, Johnson 2021]. The 2000 National Common Language and Writing Law further supports standard Mandarin Chinese and characters, advocating their use in education, with a distinction between regions based on the majority population—Han-dominant areas mandating Putonghua in schools, government offices, and public domains [Wang, King, 2022]. The 2001 Law on Regional National Autonomy stipulates that, ideally, minority schools should utilize textbooks in their respective languages, with lessons conducted in those languages. However, the law does not mandate the use of Chinese language as the medium of instruction in kindergartens for minority children, emphasizing the introduction of Chinese language from the early stages of primary education without specifying it as the language of instruction [*Law of the People's Republic...* 2001].

Feng Anwei and Mamtimyn Sunuodula describe the coexistence of two educational systems in autonomous regions, such as Tibet and Xinjiang, where minority students are either educated in their mother tongue from primary school onwards, with Chinese only as a school subject (Min Kao Min (民考民) system), or educated in schools where Han Chinese is the teaching medium (Min Kao Han (民考汉) system) [Feng, Sunuodula 2009]. As for non-autonomous provinces, the delicate balance between Putonghua and other Chinese varieties raises concerns, as dialect proficiencies among Chinese youth are perceived to be weaker than in previous generations. Scholars in China hold varying predictions about changing proficiencies among Chinese youth, with some suggesting an increase with age, others proposing a shift rather than a decline, and some maintaining a decline in dialect proficiency [Wang, King 2022].

The Zhuang people, China's largest southern minority with around 16 million members in Guangxi, encounter language education challenges. Despite efforts to promote Zhuang–Chinese bilingual education, the standardization of the Zhuang language, part of the Sino-Tibetan family, remains unaccomplished. This is reflected in the dissatisfaction observed among local Zhuang cadres, who opt against their children learning the Zhuang language [Adamson, Feng 2009]. Studies also indicate that minority students, including Zhuang, are confident language learners, particularly when motivated. English is perceived by them as an opportunity for empowerment [Feng, Sunuodula 2009].

At the turn of the century, there has been a recent surge in ethnic consciousness and identity among the Zhuang, fueled by expanded regional autonomy and policies supporting Zhuang culture. Efforts to preserve the Zhuang language have been made, but there is a lack of regional government commitment to collaborative language policies. Standard Chinese is guaranteed in regions inhabited by minority nationality groups, but differences in policy implementation reflect geographical location, history, traditions, and relationships with the Han Chinese. The Zhuang, historically assimilated with the Han, have shown little interest in cultural diversity, considering standard Chinese as the high-status language and Zhuang as the low-status vernacular [Adamson, Feng 2009].

The Uyghur population, constituting the majority in Xinjiang, faces intricate challenges in language education, given their demographic significance and the historical evolution of language policies. With over eight million people, the Uyghurs make up about 45% of Xinjiang's total population [United Nations High... 2019]. The intricacies of language reform, as outlined in the 1985 five-year plan, have significantly impacted Uyghur-dominated schools, introducing a shift to standard Chinese as the medium of instruction [Han, Johnson 2021].

Moreover, Xinjiang faces considerable limitations in English language provision, with a shortage of qualified teachers preventing Uyghur pupils from accessing English education in many primary or secondary schools [Feng, Sunuodula 2009]. In 2002, a State Council directive on minority language education excluded minority groups from English language education, emphasizing the correct management of the relationship between minority languages and Mandarin Chinese [Feng, Sunuodula 2009]. The coercive nature of language policies in Xinjiang is evident in the strict imposition of standard Chinese in classrooms and official settings [Han, Johnson 2021]. The situation contrasts with that of the Zhuang people, as Xinjiang experiences more forceful language policies, reflecting a stronger monoglot ideology in China [Adamson, Feng 2009].

While Minzu schools focus on languages with writing systems as the medium of instruction, Hanzu schools prioritize Standard Mandarin, emphasizing bilingualism for different student groups [Han, Johnson 2021]. The introduction of Min Han Hexiao (民汉合校), joint Chinese/minority schools, further complicates the linguistic landscape. These schools, whether Han schools with minority classes or minority schools with Han classes, offer a mix of Putonghua and another language as the medium of instruction, contributing to the intricate tapestry of language education [Han, Johnson 2021]. Uyghur-dominated schools typically introduced Chinese from Year 3, remaining a school subject with Uyghur as the medium of instruction, demonstrating the coexistence of different language systems [Feng, Sunuodula 2009].

Recent changes in language policies within autonomous regions in China have drawn international attention. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed specific concern about restrictions faced by Tibetans and Uighurs, highlighting challenges related to education in Tibetan and Uighur languages [*China's 'Bilingual' Education...* 2020]. In 2020, ethnic Mongolians in Inner Mongolia voiced their concerns about the changes to school curriculums, specifically the removal of Mongolian language from core subjects. New guidelines mandated teaching key subjects, including history and politics, in Mandarin, prompting rare protests and curfews in response [*Ethnic Mongolians...* 2020]. Despite these significant developments, there is a notable scarcity of studies exploring the consequences

of these language policy changes, and the observed trends align with the broader policy objectives of the government.

Conclusion

In conclusion, China's intricate linguistic landscape, characterized by numerous regional dialects and ethnic languages, reflects the nation's rich cultural diversity. The central government's language policies have evolved over the years, aiming to balance the promotion of Mandarin for national unity while recognizing the importance of preserving minority languages. The research presented in this article highlights the ongoing challenges and changes in language policies, particularly in education. Despite the efforts to address linguistic diversity, there remain concerns about the impact on minority languages.

The language policy evaluation from both neo-classical and historical-structural perspectives offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play. The neo-classical approach provides a somewhat limited lens when compared to the historical-structural perspective in the context of China's language policies. Firstly, the strong role of the state in China necessitates a comprehensive analysis that considers political agendas. Merely examining market trends and individual choices overlooks the significant influence of state-driven initiatives in shaping language policies. Secondly, the neo-classical approach falls short in acknowledging the active influence of autonomous regions or minority groups. The agency of local actors alone cannot fully justify the complex role of language in educational institutions and broader societal contexts. A historical-structural perspective proves more insightful, shedding light on the intricate interplay of political, societal, and historical factors that shape language policies in China. Furthermore, in the dissemination of English within multilingual communities and schools, resource distribution plays a pivotal role—an aspect often overlooked by the neo-classical approach. This institutional factor significantly influences the trajectory of language policies, emphasizing the need for a historical-structural perspective to comprehensively address the intricate dynamics at play in China's educational landscape.

In conclusion, while the historical-structural perspective proves more encompassing in understanding China's intricate language policy in education, it is important to acknowledge the potential for strengthening the applicability of the neo-classical approach. Further empirical research, employing methodologies from educational sciences such as investigations into academic performance, code-switching practices in classrooms and at home, and in-depth interviews or observational studies, could provide valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of language policy implementation and its impact on various stakeholders.

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