



# The Changing Language Ideology and

## Linguistic Market in the Globalization of China

Feng Hui 

**Abstract:** Language ideology in contemporary China is changing in the milieu of globalization. Previously, especially during the early promotion of *Putonghua* in the 1950s, language was considered as a tool to ensure effective communication between people of various linguistic backgrounds. Nowadays, language is considered more a capital than a tool, the exploitation of which will benefit the society more. Under the influence of the changing ideology on language, the linguistic market in China is not exactly the same as what Bourdieu (1977, 1991) describes, and there is a boom both in the standard and vernacular linguistic markets.

*Keywords: language ideology, linguistic market, globalization process, China*

In the unique process of globalization in China, the influence of globalization finds its way into the ideology on language and into the linguistic market. This paper will first explain the unique process of globalization that China has experienced and now is still experiencing, and then some of its influences on the revival of local culture and the promotion of *Putonghua* will be examined. Finally, the changing language ideology and linguistic market will be elaborated on.

## 1 Uniqueness of Globalization Process in China and Some of Its Influences

In the past two hundred years the world has experienced two distinct forms of globalization. The first is founded on colonialism and the use of force to open up markets in developing countries to the products of the economies of Western Europe and North America. This form reached its fullest expression in the early twentieth century. Although China was unwillingly involved, it is the form that we firmly struggled against. As this older global form was dismantled by the countries of Western Europe and North America after World War II, a new form gradually emerges. The new global form has been more subtle—the USA and western European countries have led the way in creating a single space over which capital, commodities, organizations, information and (to a lesser extent) people may flow more freely. Until the late 1970s, China largely ignored and was excluded from this new form of economic organization. It is the influence of this new form that our paper will focus on because of its profound influence on various aspects in China, in particular, the revival of local culture and the promotion of *Putonghua*.

As states have different national interests, countries of the world have adopted a variety of responses to the pressures and opportunities created by this new form of global economy (Martin 1994). Generally, three different processes can be identified: transition, structural adjustment and national accumulation.

First are the economies in transition from one form of economic organization to another. Departing from socialism to avoid imminent chaos, most countries in Eastern Europe and the former USSR chose to reform once and for all, quickly replacing all their mechanisms of economic planning by market mechanisms (Solimano 1994).

Second are the economies in structural adjustment programs commonly practiced in Africa, Latin America and the Indian subcontinent, where the adaptation of market forms of economic organization and the opening up of their economy to global goods, money and ideas are under the auspices of the agencies of international financial governance, particularly the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Fitzgerald 1997; Killick *et al* 1998). Subject to the vagaries of international commodity and capital prices, the countries were one by one forced to borrow, on terms that mandated marketization and economic opening. This process of globalization has dictated the abolition of many programs of social welfare, local forms of economic development and policies of local economic protection (Schaeffer 1997).

The third process of globalization is represented by the late industrializing economies of northeast Asia, notably Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Until the financial crisis of 1997, the crucial controls over growth in the east Asian newly industrialized economies have been national accumulation strategies and nationally directed investment policies. Although these states have used global capital to finance their development programs, commonly to permit national firms to grow, the programs were indigenous rather than driven by foreign direct investment.

The political, social and economic changes within China over the past 30 years cannot usefully be judged against theoretical criteria deduced from the principles of orthodox economics. China has not followed any single one of the three processes mentioned above in the process of globalization. The evolution of China since the late 1970s has been quite different from that of Eastern Europe and the former USSR. In China, marketization has been hesitant, subject to periodic reversals, and implemented experimentally in specific regions and sectors. New institutional forms have been introduced without abandoning the old. Changes have sometimes been led by government, sometimes been spontaneous. There has been little opening in the financial sector. Thus, in contrast to transition and structural adjustment, China has opted to reform gradually and partially, by crossing the river while groping for the stones (Linge and Forbe 1990), seeking to exploit both existing socialist and introduced capitalist structures. This strategy of gradualism implies the coexistence of centralized political control and market-oriented firms, of state-owned enterprises and capitalist foreign-funded firms (Goldman 1994).

The current process of globalization in China has given rise to the following phenomena: the commodification of language, pressures towards standardization, and the valuing of local characteristics in order to legitimate local control over local markets and attach a value of distinction to linguistic commodities in world markets of culture and tourism. Consequently, the breakdown of modern ideologies of language becomes one of the central characteristics of this current period of high modernity (Giddens 1990).

The legitimacy of globalization lies in being able to create linkages which increase (and supposedly democratize) the circulation of valued resources in ways which create room for local or regional differences. The tension of high modernity lies in the balance between unifying markets and sets of resources, on the one hand, and, on the other, the valuing of authentic, distinctive local products. High modernity therefore, seemingly paradoxically, produces both fragmentation and uniformization (Keyman 1997; Larochelle 1992; Slater 1996; Tomlinson 1999; Vertova 2006).

Globalization also redefines the value and importance of language. The new economies are based on services and information, both of which require linguistic competencies to an extent and of a kind not relevant to the primary- and secondary-resource economies of the modern world. In addition, high modernity calls into question the ways we have so far thought about multilingualism (bidialectalism in the case of most Chinese, as most of them can speak *Putonghua*, the standard form, in addition to their own dialect), valuing as it does both the expansion of world languages and the authenticating distinctiveness of local vernaculars. At the same time, the nature of global markets seems to create interstices which permit a certain amount of local control, in the regulation of which language can play an important part.

Against such a globalizing background, shared norms of evaluation throughout speech community have been questioned. Meanwhile, the vitality and persistence of nonstandard vernacular communities uncovered by many researchers are more readily interpretable as evidence of conflict and sharp divisions in society than as evidence of consensus (Labov and Harris 1986; Rickford 1986; Sankoff *et al* 1989).

### **1.1 Revival of Local Culture in Chinese Cities**

In recent years, in the wake of burgeoning urban and rural housing construction, several historical cities and traditional streets have been destroyed. As China crosses the threshold of globalization, the historical and cultural areas

of her cities are faced with an unprecedented threat, and present a dilemma, causing people to think seriously about this issue, and take action to preserve the history and culture of these cities. In March 2000 the first move towards the protection of historical and cultural cities was submitted, in the form of a motion to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. And the preservation of cultural relics has become a common concern ever since.

As mentioned early in this paper, China is experiencing a unique process of globalization. In the 1980s China began large-scale urban construction. The process of China's advance from an agricultural country towards modern industrial civilization has not been linear, orderly and progressive, as was the case in Western countries. For instance, for several centuries there has been no dramatic change in France, where old houses have been replaced gradually by new ones, but in China, things are different. China has been beset by unprecedented problems in its process of modernization, and no small number of traditional sites containing items of historical and cultural value accumulated over thousands of years has been ruthlessly destroyed.

Many cities in China have suddenly become huge construction sites. While some boast that the city maps now require changing every three months, the tragic fact that emerges is that the cities are losing their own characteristics and becoming merely a duplicate of other cities. Nowadays, more and more people come to a sudden realization that once a nation has lost its own culture, it faces a spiritual crisis more dreadful than that brought on by material poverty. The same is true for a city.

The dialect, as an indispensable part to the culture of a city, has aroused great interest among both natives and linguists. Starting from the late 20th century and early 21st century, there has been a boom in drama and TV series, with dialects of various areas as the feature. In the programs of CCTV Spring Festival Specials and in TV series, the dialects unique to different cities have never failed to bring happiness to those who are enjoying the programs. Under the influence of media, those who were previously reluctant to speak their own dialect, especially teenagers and young people, consider it a fashion to speak decent dialect, even though most complain that the dialect used today is no longer as pure as it used to be. The revival of local culture has given rise to the boom in the dialect. This fever will continue with the deepening of globalization in China.

## 1.2 Promotion of *PÔtônghuà*

Popularization of Chinese language, since the early 20th century, has been considered as the most important step to the realization of democratic China. Till the 1940s, though a series of movements <sup>2</sup> had been launched, the efforts bore little fruit. It is not until the 1950s that the new government played a much more active role in initiating and coordinating all the main activities in the undertaking.

Promotion of *PÔtônghuà* proceeded across the land after 1955 when it was formally defined as the standard form of Modern Chinese with the Beijing phonological system as its norm of pronunciation, and Northern dialects as its base dialect, and looking to exemplary modern works in *b,ihuà* (vernacular literary language) for its grammatical norms.

To facilitate the learning of *PÔtônghuà* by dialect speakers, surveys were conducted on dialects in more than 1,800 selected places. Hundreds of pamphlets were compiled on the basis of the survey which highlighted the similarities and differences between the dialects and *PÔtônghuà* in the hope that they could provide some help to the learners. Under the specific social and political conditions,

<sup>2</sup> Such as Baihuawen Yundong (Vernacular Movement), Guoyu Tongyi Yundong (National Language Movement), Dazhonghua Taolun (Popular Language Discussion), and Hanzi Ladinghua Xinwenzi Gaige (Latinized New Writing System Reform).

there was a fever to learn *PŌtōnghuà* all over China. Those who insisted on speaking dialects were considered ignorant and comical (Lehmann 1975).

After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), promotion of *PŌtōnghuà* resumed, but with less enthusiasm than in the mid-1950s (P. Chen 1999). In 1982, a new clause was added to the revised Constitution of the People's Republic of China which stated that *PŌtōnghuà* was to be promoted across the country. In 1986, the following goals were proposed at the National Conference on Language and Script (Proceedings 1987):

- a. *PŌtōnghuà* is to become the language of instruction in all schools;
  - b. *PŌtōnghuà* is to become the working language in government at all levels;
  - c. *PŌtōnghuà* is to be the language used in radio and television broadcasting, and in cinemas and theatres;
  - d. *PŌtōnghuà* is to become the lingua franca among speakers of various local dialects.
- In the year 2000, Law of National Language and Script was issued in which the legal position of promotion of *PŌtōnghuà* is established.

Under the influence of the increasingly powerful and effective measures, more dialect speakers are fluent in speaking *PŌtōnghuà*. They have fewer chances to speak their own dialect. Though there is the revival of local culture, no one can deny the impact of *PŌtōnghuà* on the local dialect.

## 2. The Changing Language Ideology in China

The homogenizing tendencies which appear inherent to globalization seem to imply a continued or even intensified heterogeneity in cultural terms (Geschiere and Meyer 1998; Mlinar 1992). Kubota (2002) suggests three related processes: "Globalization implies increased local diversity influenced by human contact across cultural boundaries as well as speedy exchange of commodity and information, ... cultural homogenization influenced by global standardization of economic activities and a flow of cultural goods from the center to the periphery", and increased nationalism as a form of protection. However, globalization is not the story of cultural homogenization (Appadurai 1996: 11). It is a "deeply historical, uneven and even *localizing* process". Globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization, since "different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently" (Appadurai 1996: 17). The case of people's attitudes to *Putonghua* and dialects can be a typical example of these two opposing forces of globalization.

As we know, language is highly socially indexical (Silverstein 1979): the choice of linguistic forms is determined in part by sociological and ideological factors that shape the linguistic features of the speech. In any linguistic exchange, the speakers perform a series of "acts of identity" (LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985), projecting personae which are defined in contradistinction to "others" (Bourdieu 1982; Irvine & Gal 1994).

Language ideology in contemporary China is changing in the milieu of globalization. Previously, especially during the early promotion of *Putonghua* in the 1950s, language was considered as a tool to ensure effective communication between people of various linguistic backgrounds. As a consequence, more attention has been paid to the social problems brought about by the differences among dialects. The root cause for the ordinary people to learn *Putonghua* lay in the construction of a modernized China. In China, the overwhelming globalization process also gives rise to the change in ideology on language. Language is more a capital than a tool, the exploitation of which will benefit the society more (Q. Zhao 2006).

Johnstone (1999) and Eckert (1997) suggest that explanations correlating linguistic variant with accounts of general class, ethnicity or gender related practice are unsatisfactory because the significance of linguistic differentiation is embedded in the politics of the region and its observers (Gal and Irvine 1995). An interpretation situated in the local knowledge may be more illuminating. Speakers construct their individual and group identities in opposition to others in their verbal communication with others, and their ideology with which their practices operate is also revealed (Dyer 2002), for example, the heavy use of dialect is understood by the community to symbolize local loyalty (L. Milroy 1991: 17).

On the basis of evidence from language attitudes research, sociolinguists commonly assume that an ideological motivation underlies the long term maintenance of distinctive, often stigmatized, local norms in the face of pressures from numerically or socially more powerful speech communities; speakers want to sound (for example) Cantonese or Hakka and unlike whatever social group they perceive themselves as contrasting with. Yet, motivations alone appear to be insufficient for maintaining non-standard patterns reliably, since spreading supra-local varieties of the kind discussed by Trudgill (1999) often engulf minority dialects contrary to the desires of their speakers to maintain distinctiveness (the case of many minority languages in China are such examples). Language change from this perspective is viewed as an ideologically fueled process of increasing divergence (Gal and Irvine 1995) or convergence.

In the case of dialect-speaking where the more heterogeneous, mobile, globally (or at least nationally) interactive groupings characterize the contemporary social world, the relationship between *Putonghua* and the dialect is more complex. Rather than disappearing, regional differences are in some cases taking on new symbolic value, and regionally-marked ways of talking are coming to serve new, more clearly rhetorical functions (Coupland 2003; Johnstone 1999). This is the way that some cities respond to the globalization process in terms of speech.

They do so perhaps partly because of people's resistance to what they see as media- and economically induced homogenization of other aspects of life and the pride they take in speaking their own dialect. Social theorist Anthony Giddens speaks of the "disembedded" quality of contemporary social life (Giddens 1991: 146-147), in which he acknowledges "active attempts to re-embed the lifespan within a local milieu" such as "the cultivation of a sense of community pride", but he is pessimistic about the likelihood that people can effectively reinstate local meaning into their lives.

In this sense, language does much more than reflect people's positions in an abstract hierarchical society, demarcating general social class, sex and age groups (L. Milroy 1991). When people manipulate the linguistic resources available to them, they are not "blobs of clay" moulded by a series of social and situational constraints (Giles and Smith 1979:64), but one way to indicate loyalty to a local community, to present their local culture, and thus symbolizes their local identity (Eckert 2000; L. Milroy 1991).

### 3. The Changing Linguistic Market in China

The notion of the linguistic market has been used in urban sociolinguistics (Sankoff *et al* 1989), the general contention being that language represents a form of social and cultural capital that is convertible into economic capital (L. Milroy and J. Milroy 1992). Dittmar, Schlobinski, and Wachs (1988) provide a particular useful exposition of the linguistic market concept in relation to their analysis of Berlin vernacular. Woolard (1985) suggests that standard/ vernacular



opposition emerging from so much research needs to be discussed in terms of alternative linguistic markets. This is contrary to Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) view of a single dominant linguistic market where the rule of the legitimate language is merely suspended, its domination temporarily absent, when the vernacular is used. L. Milroy and J. Milroy's (1992) work supports Woolard's (1985) analysis: just as there is strong institutional pressure to use varieties approximating to the standard in formal situations, effective sanctions are also in force in nonstandard domains. Woolard suggests that much recent sociolinguistic work that has concentrated on competing social values using contrastive status/ solidarity concepts (or something similar) offers a particular promising bridge between sociolinguistic and social theory. J. Milroy (1992b) interprets close-knit social networks as mechanisms enabling speakers to maintain vernacular codes, which themselves constitute an actively constructed, symbolic opposition to dominant, legitimized codes.

Kroch (1978) accounted for social differentiation of variation in terms of mutually opposed forces of innovation and resistance. The stratification of linguistic variables reflects the stratification of resistance to change. The notion of standard linguistic market, as introduced into the study of variation by Sankoff and Laberge (1978), complements Kroch's view. The authors show that within a single socioeconomic stratum, speakers' use of standard variants in Montreal French correlates with their relative engagement in networks and institutions that require the use of standard varieties. This notion also emphasizes the relation of language to the production of the self, and to the individual's own viability in the economic marketplace.

The linguistic market in China is not exactly the same as what Bourdieu (1977, 1991) describes (Q. Zhang 2005). Bourdieu (1991) argues that the competence in the legitimate language constitutes the most valuable linguistic capital on the standard linguistic market. Possession of this kind of linguistic capital helps one become a viable participant in the standard linguistic market. Yet, in China, the existence of the vernacular linguistic market counters to some degree the norms of standard linguistic market.

Explicit study of standard linguistic market has focused on institutional engagement, correlating variables with occupations that require varying amounts of standard language (Eckert 2000). Occupation and education are primarily used to construct indices of socio-economic status of informants in survey studies, and further measure the degree of engagement in the standard linguistic market. Current qualification for, and engagement in, a specific workplace is directly related to one's current use of standard language, which is reflected in the increasing tendency to substitute occupation for complex indices in studies of variation (Labov 1990). Such a tendency is yet to be accepted in Chinese sociolinguistic studies, as linguistic market is comparatively a new term for Chinese linguistic circle <sup>3</sup>.

The standard linguistic market in China has been established under the influence of the prevailing language ideology guided by the Marxist-Leninist theory of language in the mid-20th century. Language is intimately connected with man's productive activity. Without language, men could not communicate their thoughts, nor could they participate in productive labor. "Without a language understood by a society and common to all its members, that society must cease to produce, must disintegrate and cease to exist. ... In this sense, while it is a medium of intercourse, it is at the same time an instrument of struggle and development of society" (Stalin 1972: 21). This view is clearly reflected in the language reform movement for the popularization of *Putonghua* and *pinyin*, and the simplification of characters. A common language is considered a necessity

<sup>3</sup> Little or no mention of "linguistic market/ marketplace" in the influential sociolinguistics textbooks in Chinese.

for effective communication in China, and for the “construction of a socialist society.”

This practical purpose of promotion *Putonghua* soon fell into eclipse as more emphasis was given to economic development in the 1980s. Meanwhile, before the mid-1990s, the unique social, economic, and political backgrounds in China, as mentioned in Guthrie (2006) and Q. Zhang (2001), have failed to ensure the education-controlled access to the labor market. Therefore, the standard linguistic market in China before the mid-1990s was contrary to what Thompson (1991: 18) has described:

Linguistic utterances or expressions are always produced in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with “value.” On a given linguistic market, some products are valued more highly than others; and part of the practical competence of speakers is to know how, and to be able, to produce expressions which are highly valued on the markets concerned.

The one who speaks perfect *Putonghua* was not “highly valued on the market”, i.e. speaking *Putonghua* was not profit-generating capital in the standard linguistic market at that time.

Starting from the early 1980s, foreign capital and globalization have had impact across China. By the late 1990s, China’s economy has been transforming in significant ways, and that is not simply because the government has consciously worked to dismantle the command economy and allow markets to emerge. The entry of foreign capital into Chinese markets has also had important consequences for the kind of economy that is emerging in China. As a result, fundamental changes can be found in the mechanisms of social stratification, the factors that shape the life chances and outcomes of individuals in China.

In China, political credentials and social class position are of little help in competing in the markets of the transforming economy. Knowledge, educational background, language skills, and, above all, the ability to adapt to the new rules of the market are rewarded in the form of higher salaries and more opportunities that exist for the few in the new global economy.

As Bourdieu (1977, 1991) argues, competence in the legitimate language constitutes the most valuable linguistic capital<sup>4</sup> on the standard linguistic market. Speakers have to possess or accumulate this kind of linguistic capital if they want to secure profit from the standard linguistic market. Even though no significant profit can be guaranteed all over China, the ability to speak *Putonghua* indicates that the speaker is educated or cultivated.

In addition to the changes in the standard linguistic market, the vernacular linguistic market is also undergoing change. According to a survey (issued on December 26, 2004 by Ministry of Education of China 2005) of the use of Chinese languages, which covers 31 provinces, autonomous regions municipalities, and Xinjiang production corps, excluding Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, only 68.32% of Chinese have a good command of *Putonghua*, and 53.06% can communicate in *Putonghua*, while 86.38% can communicate in their dialects. Against this linguistic background, little or no social prestige is sought after by the Chinese, except for those who work in a comparatively small number of occupations such as education and broadcasting, where *Putonghua* is valued. Nor is there a pressure on the majority of the Chinese to speak *Putonghua* because no great advantages can be gained if one speaks *Putonghua* while no harm can be done if one does not (Zhu and Chen 1991). That is why nearly five decades after the initiation of the national language standardization campaign, spoken *Putonghua* has not become a symbolic asset necessary for access to

<sup>4</sup> According to Bourdieu, “the kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field”(1991: 230). Three kinds of capital are discussed in Bourdieu (1991): economical capital, in its various kinds; cultural/informational capital, in its different kinds; and another two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, social capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate



elite status in China (Y. Guo 1990; Harrell 1993) and why most Chinese are content to speak a localized variety.

Such thought is prevailing in the speech communities involved in this study. In the enterprises I went to during the study, the pressure of promoting *Putonghua* can hardly be felt despite the legislation of using *Putonghua* as early as 2001, and where in contrast the vernacular linguistic market can be strongly perceived. This market serves as a counter force against the standard linguistic market discussed previously, thus playing a vital role in the maintenance of dialects.

Some younger people in our study, especially those in their twenties and thirties, have reported that they can speak fluently both their own dialect and *Putonghua*. They prefer the dialect to *Putonghua* simply because its use benefits them more than the latter. One of such benefits is easier communication with their peers and inferiors at work, especially when production or quality problems arise. In some foreign and state-owned enterprises, some of non-local employees take learning some features of the dialect a must for smooth operation at work and in their everyday life as they find more town care in dialect speech. For the employees in foreign enterprises, a proper amount of local speech also helps create a light atmosphere in their intense working environments. Solidarity is created when doing so.

To sum up, the knowledge of a certain dialect therefore is a form of linguistic capital for some speakers, which is inseparable from the speaker's position in the social structure (Bourdieu 1977). And this linguistic capital in vernacular linguistic market functions almost in the same way among some employees in the enterprises as in the standard linguistic market.

In contemporary China, those who have intended to probe into the cultural life, especially the linguistic life, have to take the changing language ideology and linguistic market into consideration. In this way, a better understanding of the changing linguistic situation among Chinese may be achieved.

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