Conflicting notions of language purity: the interplay of archaising, ethnographic, reformist, elitist and xenophobic purism in the perception of Standard Chinese

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Abstract

This paper examines factors complicating the definition of Standard Chinese, including register and socio-geographical variation, sound change and folk etymology, foreign loans and contact-induced structural change, and inherent imprecisions in the national spelling system. Also examined are reactions to change in the linguistic and language-teaching communities, how lay and academic attitudes towards impurities and linguistic innovation differ, and how differences between Chinese and western notions of ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ serve to further widen the gap between the textbook standard and perceived standardness. Predictions are made regarding the future development of Modern Standard Chinese that take into consideration the popular appeal of the language of westernized Chinese societies (e.g., Hong Kong and Taiwan) and the effect of the growth of native speakers of Mandarin in the Chinese-speaking world.

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1. Introduction

Modern Standard Chinese is in a state of flux—hardly a surprising fact considering that it has been some 80 years since the official standard was first agreed upon, and close to 50 years since its last major revision in mainland China. Within the
same time span, English Received Pronunciation has seen a number of vowel shifts and mergers (Bauer, 1979; Henton, 1983; Coggle, 1993), and Standard Spanish has undergone yeismo and other consonantal changes (Penny, 2000, pp. 132–135). We would expect changes in Standard Chinese to be on a comparable scale, if not greater due to extreme instances of social upheaval and population shift (Jesperson, 1964, pp. 259–262). What is surprising however is the general tendency in the Chinese linguistic and pedagogical literature to treat the standard language as if nothing has changed at all, and to apply the observations of 80 years ago to the description of the present-day standard language.

In addition to natural wear and tear accompanying the passage of time, ongoing changes and their consequence—the widening of the gap between the officially stipulated standard and the notion of ‘standardness’ in the intuition of the native speaker—are exacerbated by population and cultural factors. Population pressure comes from the rapid increase in native speakers of the standard language over the past eighty years: back in the 1920s the standard variety Beijing Mandarin and its close cousin Northeastern Mandarin were spoken as a native language by approximately 118.2 million people in China’s northeastern corridor; today it is the first or second language of some 1.2 billion people from all regions of the Chinese-speaking world. According to estimates (Zhou, 1999, p. 3), some 80% of the urban population of Greater China now use Mandarin as their main language of communication. It stands to reason that the billion or so regional speakers of Mandarin would contribute to the development of the standard language and bring about changes due to substratum influence from regional languages.

The situation is comparable to the expansion of Spanish and Portuguese to Latin America, and the subsequent influence of the Latin American varieties on the European dialects of the language due to speaker numbers. Mencken (1936, p. 609) saw the same happen in the spread of the English language to North America, and says of superiority in numbers, ‘there is no reason under the sun why a dialect spoken almost uniformly by 125,000,000 people should yield anything to the dialect of a small minority in a nation of 45,000,000.’ Or in the words of McAlpine (1929, p. 156), ‘when two-thirds of the people who use a certain language decide to call it a freight train instead of a goods train, they are ‘right’.

Cultural pressure, on the other hand, comes from the trend since the end of the nineteenth century towards modernization and westernization of Chinese society. Westernization of society implies on the one hand large-scale loans of western terminology and rapid exposure to European language patterns (Kubler, 1985; Li, 1985; Xie, 2001), both of which have left a mark in the development of Mandarin in the twentieth century. But more pertinent to this paper, westernization also brings prestige status to the language varieties spoken in locales that serve as portals of western culture, namely Hong Kong, Taiwan, and increasingly, Shanghai. While textbooks and government publications state without exception that only the Beijing accent is standard, linguists paint a different picture. Phonologist San Duanmu writes that

Standard Chinese does not carry a superior social prestige. Instead, many Chinese see Standard Chinese as a practical tool, not a symbol of status.
Naturally, many people spend only as much effort learning Standard Chinese as will make them understood, and do not bother with the accent they still have. This includes government leaders, academics, and the average person (Duanmu, 2000, p. 5).

Duanmu’s view is shared by Ding (1998), who writes that ‘many Chinese regard the Beijing accent as pompous’, and notes that his fellow academics have found the Mandarin of Taiwanese newsreaders to be more pleasant-sounding than that of mainland Chinese newsreaders, this notwithstanding that that most Taiwanese newsreaders have a southern Chinese language background, while mainland newsreaders are for the most part natives of Beijing. The picture that emerges is that while the pronunciation of the political capital Beijing is considered square and proper, speaking with an educated Taiwan or Hong Kong accent carries an air of cultivation, trendiness and wealth. The stage is set for a tug-of-war between the culturally-dominant Mandarin varieties of southern coastal China, fueled by westernization and free market forces, and the politically-dominant northern Mandarin varieties, with their status secured by government support and promotion. (Fig. 1).

Having established the presence of change in Modern Standard Chinese, this paper looks at the growing gap between textbook definition and lay intuition, and the subsequent reception of phonological and lexical deviations from the standard.

Fig. 1. Westernization tipping the balance between cultural and political centers of influence.

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1 What is considered prestigious is a light Taiwan or Hong Kong accent, one that betrays a southern upbringing but does not deviate significantly from textbook Beijing phonology. Broad rural Taiwanese or Cantonese accents still carry stigma.

2 This is not the first time that the language of China’s political capital is pitched against that of its cultural hub. Prior to the Chinese Middle Ages the pronunciation of Chang’an (present-day Xian), capital of successive Chinese dynasties, competed with the accent of cultural capital Luoyang for linguistic supremacy. In the end it was the language of the cultural capital that won out. History repeated itself in the late Ming dynasty, when the capital was moved from cultural hub Nanjing to the new political center Beijing—the culturally-dominant Nanjing accent held out for some 400 years before finally losing ground to the language of the capital, resulting in a Nanjing-Beijing hybrid that is the basis of present-day Modern Standard Chinese (Coblin, 2000 p. 542).
by the general public. These attitudes are viewed through the prism of universal mindsets of language purism, owing to the balance of which changes are accepted or rejected, and the future shape of Standard Chinese is determined. Section 2 begins with the theoretical background needed for an analysis of contemporary developments in the Chinese language and the purist mentalities driving these changes, including a history of the modern standard language and a skeletal outline of the theory of linguistic purism. Section 3 looks at population pressure and the Popular Mandarin movement that it brought about—a movement for greater tolerance of diversity in the standard language, and its implications for the evolution of contemporary Chinese. Section 4 puts under intense scrutiny one of the key objections to Popular Mandarin: the purported fear of unintelligibility—which will be shown to stem from Chinese muddling of the notions of ‘language’ and ‘dialect’. Section 5 examines the role of orthography in promoting or inhibiting changes in the spoken language, and finally, in Section 6, predictions are made regarding the future of Modern Standard Chinese, citing evidence from linguistic convergence in the language of broadcast media and language preferences of speakers in overseas Chinese communities. Ultimately it will be shown that the face of contemporary Chinese is quite different from that presented on paper, and that the forces determining the direction of change have little to do with Chinese language planning or government policy, but rather are dependent upon folk mindsets revering pristineness and pureness in language, which are the same the world over.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. History of Modern Standard Chinese

While a full account of the recent development of Standard Chinese is beyond the scope of this paper, it may be helpful to offer an overview of some of the major turning points in the development of the standard language, so as to distinguish between historical fact and lay hearsay.

A common justification for the adoption of Beijing Mandarin as the phonological basis for Modern Standard Chinese is the belief that Beijing Mandarin has been the official standard for much of Chinese history, due to Beijing’s status as capital of China. An exemplification of this view is found in Wang (1957, p. 2)

The city of Beijing...has been the political, economic and cultural capital of China for the past eight or nine hundred years, having established its status in the Yuan dynasty...this shows that the pronunciation of Beijing was long ago established as the basis of a Chinese lingua franca.

This simplistic view of the standard language as language of the capital however conflicts with major findings in Chinese historical linguistics, on which Coblin (2000, p. 537) comments:
The received view of standard Mandarin is that it has been Pekinese-based for at least 600 years. Recent research, little known outside a small circle of specialists, has revealed that this view is flawed and that for most of its history this standard language had little to do with Pekinese.

Coblin goes on to provide extensive documentation in the form of missionary records and language training manuals to show that Nanjing was the standard pronunciation from the mid-Ming dynasty (1368–1644) up until the end of the 18th century. He quotes Spanish dominican Francisco Varo (1627–1687), for example, who wrote in his *Arte de la Lengua Mandarina* (Canton 1703) that in order to enunciate Mandarin words well,

one must understand the way in which such words are pronounced by the Chinese. Not just any Chinese, but only those who have the natural gift of speaking the Mandarin language well, such as those natives of the Province of Nán jìng (Coblin, 2000, p. 540).

It was not until the early 19th century that the mantle of standard pronunciation began its northward shift towards Beijing. British lexicographer Robert Morrison (1782–1834) witnessed the change in progress, and commented that Beijing pronunciation “is now gradually gaining ground, and if the [Qing] dynasty continues long, will finally prevail” (Coblin, 2000, p. 540). By the mid-19th century, British diplomat Joseph Edkins was advising that while “the Nanking Mandarin is more widely understood than that of Peking...the Peking dialect must be studied by those who would speak the language of the imperial court” (Coblin, 2000, p. 541).

Morrison, in his references to the Mandarin of Beijing, describes it as a “Tatar-Chinese dialect” (Coblin, 2000, p. 540), a description that sheds light on the dialect’s Manchu origins in northeastern China. Strong similarities remain to this day between Beijing Mandarin and the Mandarin dialects of the northeast, as pointed out by Chen (1985, p. 112, Fig. 2):

The dialects of Jilin and Changchun are closer to Modern Beijing than the dialects of Shenyang; the dialect of Harbin is even closer to Beijing than the dialect of Changchun. Here it appears that there is an inverse relationship between geographical distance and dialect affinity; the farther to the northeast the location of the dialect, the closer it is to Beijing Mandarin.

Like most Northeastern Mandarin dialects, Beijing has initial [w] instead of [v] found in neighboring Hebei province (W-C Li, 1999, pp. 102–104), and the tonal values of Beijing are closer to those of the northeast than to counties in its immediate vicinity Li (1989, p. 247). By criteria used to separate the dialects of northern China, Li (1989, p. 247) believes that Beijing could have been grouped with the Northeast Mandarin dialects.

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3 Peking is the early postal transliteration of Beijing. Pekinese hereafter refers to Beijing Mandarin.
Additional evidence against the received view of Beijing Mandarin as a 600-year-old imperial standard with claims to historical continuity comes from the population studies of Yu (1987) and Zhang (1992). According to Zhang (1992, p. 269), in 1368, the original inhabitants of Beijing were forcibly moved to Kaifeng (Henan province), and inhabitants of other provinces were moved into the new capital. In 1644, 236,771 Manchus from the northeast moved into the capital, accounting for 33.56% of the population—explaining also why Beijing pronunciation bears close resemblance to the dialects of the northeast.

By the early twentieth century, the prestige status of Beijing Mandarin was far from secure—so much so that in a 1913 meeting called by the government of the newly formed Republic of China to choose a national language, the pronunciation of choice was not that of the old imperial capital; rather, delegates voted to created an artificial language comprising features unique to each of the major Sinitic language families of China. This became known as the lao guoyin ‘old national pronunciation’. But with no native speakers capable of giving definitive judgements on the finer points of this pieced-together language, efforts at promotion of the 1913 standard failed miserably. It was in the wake of this failure that the use of Beijing pronunciation as a viable alternative began to look attractive. As a pronunciation born of Sino-Altaic language contact, Pekinese exhibits a simplicity of structure typical of creole languages (Hashimoto, 1986, p. 95), a quality that makes it easier to learn. Among the more notable efforts to promote the language of old capital was that of schoolteacher Zhang Shiyi, who in a 1920 article titled ‘Issues in the
Unification of the National Language called for the use of “the pronunciation of educated natives of Beijing” as the national standard, a notion which finally received official backing in 1926. This later became known as the xin guoyin ‘new national pronunciation’, and remains the definition of standard Mandarin to this day in Taiwan.

On the mainland however, the shape of the modern standard language underwent further revisions. On October 15, 1955, it was announced that the national standard, newly named putonghua, literally ‘ordinary’ or ‘commoner’s’ language, was to be ‘modelled on the pronunciation of Beijing’ [Read: ‘educated’ deleted from earlier definition]. Two weeks later, on October 25, the definition was changed to ‘having Northern Chinese as its base dialect and modelled on the pronunciation of Beijing’. Finally, on February 6, 1956, the committee arrived at the definition used in textbooks today, namely, that the standard language “is modelled on the pronunciation of Beijing, draws on Northern Chinese as its base dialect [i.e., lexicon], and receives its syntactic norms from exemplary works of vernacular literature”4 (Yao, 1998, p. 6).

The split of China following the civil war of 1949 has meant that different linguistic norms continue to be used in mainland China and Taiwan: the 1926 standard in Taiwan, and the 1956 revision in China. The two standards, while both based on the pronunciation of Beijing and superficially similar, do contain subtle differences. The norm in Taiwan is modelled on the language of the educated classes, which translates to a preference for the Nanjing-based literary stratum of Beijing Mandarin. The norm on the mainland, due to anti-bourgeois sentiments following the communist takeover, favors the language of the lower socio-economic classes, and subsequent revisions of standard pronunciation in 1957, 1962 and 1985 (Pan, 1995, p. 1) have steered the standard towards the colloquial stratum of the Beijing dialect. The mainland development is typical of nations where social revolutions have occurred, in which, according to Lipski (1994, p. 144) “popular speech modes [are often elevated] to the highest echelons” (in reference to Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua).

This bifurcation of norms has led academics to label Modern Standard Chinese as a pluricentric language (Bradley, 1992), for which multiple standards exist in different Chinese-speaking communities. Hu (1999, p. 20) believes that recognition of this pluricentric state may hold clues to the future of Standard Chinese:

The great mistake is that people believe there needs to be a single set of standards [for the entire Chinese-speaking world]. An ideal solution would be to allow multiple standards…

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4 Hu (1999, p.20) however notes that the official definition is often mistaken for full equivalence between Modern Standard Chinese and Pekinese: ‘Although the Chinese government made it clear in its definition of the standard language in the 1950s that putonghua is not identical to Pekinese, the government policies of the past few decades all seem to be promoting Pekinese, making it very difficult for those who want to follow the standard definition.’
An outline of the evolution of Mandarin Chinese from its earliest origins to its present pluricentric state is given in Fig. 3.

In addition to contrasts arising from the historical adoption of different definitions for the standard language, differences between the speech of mainland China and Taiwan have been exacerbated by differences in attitude towards foreign influence and language change. While the Taiwan government generally adopts a hands-off policy towards loans and ongoing change, the mainland government is meticulous about preventing ‘contamination’ of Chinese by foreign and dialect sources, and does its best to allow only translations approved by central government agencies.

Fig. 3. The evolution of Modern Standard Chinese.
This attitude, typical of xenophobic purism (see *Linguistic Purism* below), is exemplified in a comment by renowned linguist Lü Shuxiang on English loans in Chinese:

> Not only is the proliferation of English [in Chinese] unwholesome and impure, it is a sign of the revival of colonialism in the name of reform—it reminds one of how before the communist liberation of China, there were people who liked to use English to intimidate and swindle Chinese citizens (*Lü, 2000*, p. 272).

The Chinese government’s reaction to the perceived onslaught of verbiage from the West has been to pass laws to restrict the use of foreign loans (“Language in Pearl Delta leaning towards Taiwan and Hong Kong: Government to pass new laws to rid language of foreign loans”, *World Journal*, November 11, 2000), and to prohibit domestic airing of the language of the more westernized Chinese societies of Taiwan and Hong Kong, as described in the following news report:

> China’s State Administration for Radio, Film and Television recently sent out memos to television stations across the nation forbidding them from airing talk shows on topics of bad taste, and prohibiting television hosts from speaking with ‘ridiculous Taiwan and Hong Kong accents’. Violations of this directive could result in cancellation of the program (“China censors broadcast Media: ‘ridiculous’ Taiwan and Hong Kong accents prohibited”, *China Times*, January 24, 2002).

The result of these contrasting language policies, on top of the already different definitions of the standard language, are clear. Modern Standard Chinese in Taiwan contains more educated pronunciations and lexicon, and is inundated with contemporary loans from English and Japanese, while the standard language in China is more earthy and colloquial-sounding, with decidedly less foreign influence.

But what makes for these varying preferences that are the driving force behind language policies? What makes notions such as ‘educated’ or ‘uncontaminated’ desirable? Are these preferences universal or language specific? And how will these opposing forces ultimately play out in the development of Standard Chinese? To answer these questions, and to determine the eventual shape of the modern standard language, we need to place these linguistic mindsets within a theoretical framework, and compare them with similar mentalities observed in the languages of the world.

*Linguistic purism*

The issues relating to the perception of Standard Chinese in this paper are placed within the theoretical framework of linguistic purism developed by Thomas (1991), and attitudes towards Standard Chinese are compared with attitudes towards the standardization of Spanish (Lipski, 1994) and French (Ager, 1999, 2001).

Thomas defines linguistic purism as:

> the manifestation of a desire on the part of a speech community (or some section of it) to preserve a language from, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or
other elements held to be undesirable (including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language). (Thomas, 1991, p. 12).

This notion of purism is predicated upon a number of folk perceptions about a language:

1. That it can be divided into acceptable and unacceptable elements.
2. That these elements can be labelled ‘pure’ or ‘impure’ respectively.
3. That a language characterized as ‘pure’ is one which is relatively free of ‘impure’ elements.
4. That this concern about the ‘purity’ of a language can and indeed should be translated into some form of intervention which renders the language in question purer (Thomas, 1991, p. 36).

Thomas makes clear in his discussions that none of these perceptions can be substantiated by the principles of descriptive linguistics—rather, explanations for these notions are to be found in elements of folk psychology that associate ‘purity’ with the aesthetic notions of ‘wholeness’, ‘oneness’, ‘homogeneity’, ‘pristineness’ and ‘correctness’. In the words of Axmanova (1966, in Thomas, 1991, p. 11): “[Purism is] the struggle against neologisms, against the introduction into usage of loan and international words etc., not based on a scientific study of developmental tendencies of a given language”. These convictions find expression in the sentiment of nationalism, which often attempts to validate linguistic purism arguing from the need for standardization and language vitality, the need for intelligibility and the need to protect native culture. But linguists point out that “in the short run purists can do a certain amount of harm, and can bring about results opposite to those they wish to achieve, by interventions in situations concerning which they have little or no first-hand knowledge of” (Hall, 1974, p. 199). Through a cross-comparison of purist mentalities in the languages of Central and Eastern Europe, Thomas develops a taxonomy of puristic orientations, of which the main types are:

1. *Archaising purism*: attempt to resuscitate the linguistic material of a past golden age, an exaggerated respect for past literary models, an excessive conservatism towards innovations or a recognition of the importance of literary tradition.
2. *Ethnographic purism*: nostalgia and idealization of the countryside and folk virtues; rural dialects are somehow purer than city speech.
3. *Elitist purism*: embodies a negative, prescriptive attitude to substandard and regional usage; often manifest when prestige has to be defended against the democratizing force of an army of newly literate speakers.
4. *Reformist purism*: renunciation, rationalization, or outright acceptance of language traditions that have accrued over earlier periods, and adaptation of the language for communication in a modern society—a salient feature of efforts to create standard languages.
These five orientations can be analyzed along three dimensions: temporal, social, and perspectual. The temporal dimension distinguishes between reverence for the past (archaising purism) and the desirability of progress (reformist purism); the social dimension looks at whether the preferred variety is spoken by well-educated urban speakers (elitist purism) or ‘uncorrupted’ rural speakers (ethnographic purism); finally, the perspectual dimension looks at whether contamination of the language is coming from foreign sources (xenophobic purism) or from within, i.e., from dialects, registers or sociolects of the same language. The classification of the five purist orientations along temporal, social and perspectual scales is shown in Fig. 4.

In addition to types of linguistic purism, a typology can also be constructed according to the degree of application of the purist mindset in language planning. On one extreme there are languages like English that adopt a liberal attitude towards the common language, with governments making little effort to standardize or steer the language towards a particular path of development, leaving the job to society at large. On the other extreme are languages like French, in which governments or national language academies play an active role in shaping and promoting the standard language. In between the two are languages like Spanish, for which language academies exist but have a much more diminished role, (Fig. 5).

While Chinese is comparable to Spanish and English in speaker numbers, mainland Chinese centrist tendencies in language planning closely resemble that of the French. Like the French (Ager, 1999, pp. 8–14), the Chinese desire for control is rooted in language insecurity, and fear of loss of identity and image: insecurity due to the past glory of a historical empire and the nation’s present decline in power, reflected in part by the global domination of English, coupled with the feeling that the intrusion of English into the Chinese sphere implies loss of face, hurting the Chinese world image, and ultimately threatens the notion of ‘Chineseness’, in which the Chinese are supposed to take pride.

French and Chinese reactions to perceived threats to the standard language are strikingly similar. In the French press too there is lament of ‘pure’ French giving way to substandard varieties of the language, and more importantly, English. The
French also passed laws to reinforce the use of Standard French: the Toubon Act of 1994, which made the use of French obligatory in education, employment, audio-visual media, commerce and public meetings (Ager, 1999, pp. 116, 132–135), has a similar ring to laws passed by the Chinese government in an effort to curb foreign and dialect intrusions.

One result of the French government’s effort to promote the French language in France has been the rise in status of regional French (i.e., French with substratum influence from regional languages) at the expense of non-French languages spoken throughout the country (e.g., Basque, Flemish). In Chinese we see a similar rise in the prestige of regional Mandarin as opposed to the non-Mandarin dialects originally spoken in each area. The rise of regional Mandarins and their impact on the standard language will be explored in the next section.

3. Population pressure: the Popular Mandarin Movement

Perhaps one of the strongest pushes to make the standard language resemble the usage of the majority of native speakers of Chinese is the Popular Mandarin Movement (dazhong putonghua), an ongoing forum at the Hong Kong journal Chinese Language Review (Yuwen Tongxun Jianshe) started by Huaide Yao’s 1998 article ‘Standard Putonghua and Popular Mandarin’, and to this day still drawing criticism, support, and discussion from all corners of Chinese academia.

Many authors have touched upon the issue of Mandarin in the popular psyche. Liu (1995, p. 453), for example, writes that

Speaking of putonghua, there is some distance between the textbook definition and the lay notion of what it is. The textbook definition states that putonghua is the Beijing dialect—the standard language, so to speak. But the popular understanding of putonghua is somewhat more nebulous, tolerating regional accents and general Chinese lexicon pronounced in an approximation of the Beijing dialect.

Along the same lines, Popular Mandarin is defined by Lin (2000, p. 10) as a type of ‘dialect Mandarin’ or ‘local Mandarin’ which has phonological, lexical, and syntactic features of the local dialects of different regions—varieties of Mandarin he claims which may sound different, but are still intelligible to the average Mandarin speaker.

A number of arguments have been advanced for the acceptance of Popular Mandarin, foremost of which is the fact that it is the type of Chinese spoken in the greater part of China and by the majority of its speakers. As Youren Li (1999, p. 15) puts it, ‘non-standard Mandarin is used in some 70% of Chinese territory, is spoken by around 80% of the population of China, and has been around for over a thousand years’.

Also raised as an issue was the growing social acceptance of features of so-called ‘non-standard’ Mandarin. This sentiment is put forth in Ding (1998, p. 14), who
mentions that ‘many Chinese do not regard the type of Mandarin which distinguishes [the retroflex initial consonants] zh/ch/sh and [the nasal endings] n/ng as elegant; rather, they feel it is pompous’. Ding claims also that many Chinese regard the light southern accents of news anchors in Taiwan as more desirable than those of newsreaders in Beijing, and that in Hong Kong, Chinese of southern extraction have been known receive compliments on their elocution of the Chinese language (Ding, 1998, p. 14). In support of this observation, Zhou (1999, p. 4) notes that characteristically northern features—such as the er diminutive and weak stress—which are not shared by the language varieties of the south, are slowly disappearing from the language of mainland Chinese news and variety shows.

The hue and cry raised by the proponents of Popular Mandarin and its subsequent positive reception from all corners of Chinese academia can be attributed to two factors: (1) that the issue was raised at a time when the number of native speakers of dialect Mandarin was undergoing exponential growth—fast reaching critical mass and dwarfing the number of native speakers of the base dialect of Standard Mandarin—which is shown in Fig. 6, and (2) the name dazhong putonghua, literally ‘language of the masses’, has a certain political appeal in communist societies where the working classes enjoy inverted prestige. Jianmin Chen (1998, p. 12) writes that he had raised the issue of promoting local varieties of Mandarin at the National Conference of Dialects and Putonghua in the early 1990s, but received little support. The preferential treatment given to the recent promotion of dazhong putonghua, Chen claims, is due in no small part to the wording dazhong ‘the masses’ in its name—few academics are willing to risk jeopardizing their political career by speaking ill of ‘the masses’.

Chen’s observation suggests that in the battle for linguistic supremacy, it is often necessary to pitch one form of purist mentality against another—in this case using the reformist and ethnographic purist appeal of the language of the proletariat to counter the political elitist appeal of the language of the national capital. With central political control weakening and capitalist populism on the rise in Chinese society, the odds appear to be in favor the popular language.

While most writings on the subject of Popular Mandarin give support to the cause, a number of objections have been raised against this populist paradigm. The most common type of objection comes in the form of a restatement of the purist objective: ‘If we content ourselves with this imprecise form of the standard language, then our goal of ‘speaking exactly like one another’ will never become reality’ (Lin, 2000, p. 11). Why ‘speaking exactly like one another’ should be a desirable goal in

![Fig. 6. Changes in the Mandarin speaking population.](image-url)
the first place is never addressed. Lin mentions also that tolerance of the populist paradigm would “make those working to promote the standard language feel as though their efforts were in vain” (Lin, 2000, p. 10). Again we are presented with a tautological paraphrase of the need to promote standard *putonghua*: the importance of the goal is stressed time and again, but no justification is given for the legitimacy of the objective.

Objections to the popular language take a different form in Zhou (1999), in which conformity to government standards is portrayed as a sign of modernization and progress, while emotional attachment to local dialects is identified with the feudalism of old society. In the words of Zhou (1999, p. 4): “In the age of feudalism, people placed great emphasis on local affiliations and had no need to learn a standard language. But China is now reluctantly moving into the modern age...[and cannot afford to] cling to the habits of ancient Chinese society...” In effect, Zhou is dressing the standard language in a different type of reformist garb—by placing the debate within the communist framework of new vs old society, the author is effectively using the desirability of socialist progress and the undesirability of corrupt traditional society to counter the populist purist criticisms that have been aimed at it.

So far, we have seen that Popular Mandarin serves as a battleground for different types of linguistic purism, reflecting perhaps changes in social values as much as reverence for the language itself. The different purist forces tugging at the standard language are represented in Fig. 7.

4. Language vs dialect: the fear of unintelligibility

Among the seemingly more rational justifications given in Thomas (1991) for the promotion of standard languages is the need for intelligibility, an argument which has been used to defend purist attitudes in French (Hall, 1974, p. 174) and Russian (Rothstein, 1976, p. 63). In Chinese, the need for intelligibility, or rather, its flip side—the fear of unintelligibility—is widely used as an argument against allowing populist elements from regional dialects into the common language. As mentioned in Section 2, laws have been passed in Canton province to prohibit the use of terminology borrowed from Hong Kong and Taiwan (World Journal, November 11, 2000), and at the national level, the Chinese Radio, Film and Television Bureau issued edicts explicitly prohibiting variety show hosts from speaking in “ridiculous
Hong Kong or Taiwan accents” (China Times, January 24, 2002). But is the use of dialect loans and dialect-tainted accents as big a threat to comprehension as purists make it out to be? Thomas believes not, concluding that “the intelligibility argument is based on an unproven hypothesis” (Thomas, 1991, p. 52). He goes on to explain that “the intelligibility argument is in most cases a rationalization of nationally motivated purism” (Thomas, 1991, p. 52), a description valid also for Chinese.

What makes the Chinese situation different however from the European appropriation of intelligibility in the defense of purism is that the intelligibility argument in the Chinese setting is intricately linked to the Chinese notion of language and dialect, which differs considerably from similar notions in the Western tradition. While in the Western linguistic tradition ‘mutual intelligibility’ lies at the heart of the distinction between language and dialect (Hock, 1988, pp. 380–381), in Chinese scholarship intelligibility plays no role; instead political unity, genetic affiliation and shared orthography decide whether two speech varieties are to be labelled dialects of the same language or not. Thus under the Chinese system ‘Chinese’ is a single ‘language’, with Mandarin, Wu, Min, Yue, Xiang, Gan and Hakka being dialects of that language, a classification differing markedly from the western approach to the issue, which treats ‘Chinese’ as a language family, and Mandarin, Wu, Min, Yue, Xiang, Gan and Hakka as separate languages, considering that they are not mutually intelligible despite shared orthography and common roots. Kratochvil (1968, pp. 15–16) encapsulates the differences between the two traditions in a comparison of Chinese and the Romance languages:

...if speakers of Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Italian coexisted at the moment in a single political unit, if they had been using Latin as their common written form of communication up to the 20th century...they could be...compared to the speakers of the four large dialectal areas in China.

The point is reiterated by Norman (1988, p. 187), who writes that

To the historical linguist Chinese is rather more like a language family than a single language made up of a number of regional forms. The Chinese dialectal complex is in many ways analogous to the Romance language family in Europe: both have their roots in a large-scale imperial expansion that took place in the centuries just preceding and just following the birth of Christ, the Qin-Han empire in the case of China and the Roman empire

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5 In recent years, many criticisms of the intelligibility criterion have focused on its gradient nature and the fact that degrees of mutual intelligibility may ultimately depend on exposure, experience, and other extralinguistic factors. But as Hock points out, the notion of ‘language’ vs ‘dialect’ built upon mutual intelligibility in still useful in that it can be used to ‘define the extreme or cardinal points of a continuum’ (Hock, 1988, p.381).
in the case of Europe; in both instances the imperial language was carried
by armies and settlers to areas previously occupied by speakers of different
languages; in the course of their development both were affected by these
‘substratum languages’; in both cases, the newly developing vernaculars
existed alongside an antiquated written language and were profoundly
influenced by it. In view of these parallels, it would not be surprising if we
found about the same degree of diversity among the Chinese dialects as we
do among the Romance languages, and in fact I believe this to be the case.
To take an extreme example, there is probably as much difference between
the dialects of Peking and Cháozhōu as there is between Italian and
French; the Hainan Min dialects are as different from the Xiān dialect as
Spanish is from Rumanian.

The western and Chinese definitions of language clashed head on when Leonard
Bloomfield (1933, p. 44) stated that ‘the term Chinese denotes a family of mutually
unintelligible languages’, and renowned Chinese linguist Wang Li responded with an
uncharacteristic personal attack on Bloomfield, calling him the most reactionary of
capitalist American linguists and coming to the conclusion that ‘to deny that the
Chinese have a common language is tantamount to denying that they have a com-
mon nation—obviously utter nonsense!’ (L. Wang, 1956, p. 287).

Returning to our earlier question, namely, will the borrowing of phonological
and lexical features from Chinese ‘dialects’ other than the designated standard
hamper intelligibility, as the Chinese authorities claim, it becomes evident that an
answer to the question is possible only if we adopt western notions of language
and dialect, since the equivalent Chinese terms do not relate to the concept of
‘mutual intelligibility’.

By the western definition of language and dialect, we would expect intelligibility
not to be a big problem within dialects of the same language, but to be a problem
between different languages. Translated into Chinese terms, elements from Taiwan
Mandarin, Shanghai Mandarin or Sichuan Mandarin, all dialects of Mandarin,
would not hamper intelligibility, but borrowings from Taiwanese (Southern Min),
Cantonese (Yue) or Shanghainese (Wu) would have a harder time being understood
by Mandarin native speakers, as these are in effect borrowings from another
language. Note that this is a conclusion that can be reached only by adopting the
western view of what languages and dialects are, as traditional Chinese renderings of
‘language’ and ‘dialect’, which are not built upon the notion of ‘intelligibility’, would
not have allowed us to draw such a distinction.

Note also that the western language-dialect distinction cuts through traditional
Chinese regional groupings of language. The Chinese layman, reasoning from
historico-geographical proximity, would group Taiwan Mandarin with Taiwanese,
and Shanghai Mandarin with Shanghainese, concluding that both varieties are
distant from and thus unintelligible with northern or Beijing Mandarin, when in fact
similarities between the Mandarin varieties of Taiwan, Beijing and Shanghai are in
fact far greater than those between Taiwan Mandarin and Taiwanese, or between
Shanghai Mandarin and Shanghainese. A native speaker of Taiwan Mandarin can
comprehend Beijing or Shanghai Mandarin without any difficulty, but for him to understand Taiwanese requires prior exposure or conscious learning.

From the point of view of intelligibility then, it would appear that instead of tweaking with the intricacies of phonology, lexicon and syntax in an attempt to come up with an ideal manmade standard (cf. Section 2.1), Chinese language planners would be better off designating Mandarin as the official language and embracing all mutually intelligible regional varieties of the Mandarin ‘language’. For Chinese traditionalists used to thinking about language in historico-geographical terms, this may be a hard adjustment to make, but for the intelligibility argument not to devolve into a logical tautology, such disambiguation is necessary. The closest a Chinese linguist has come to acknowledging this viewpoint has been Mai (1999), who argues that instead of requiring that Standard Chinese be an exact replica of Beijing, pedagogists should insist only that it conform to the phonological system represented by pinyin, and that any departures from the Beijing vernacular which are within the confines of the pinyin spelling system should be tolerated. After all, Mai explains, Standard Chinese will always have regional variants, and this type of variation isn’t likely to vanish anytime soon (Mai, 1999, p. 28).

A comparison of different views of the language-dialect relationship, including western and Chinese, lay and academic, is given in Fig. 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITION</th>
<th>WESTERN (ACADEMIC)</th>
<th>CHINESE (ACADEMIC)</th>
<th>LAY VIEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITION</td>
<td>If speakers can understand each other, then they must be speaking (dialects of) the same language; if they cannot understand each other, then they are speaking different languages</td>
<td>If two speech varieties (1) are genetically- related, (2) share the same orthography, and (3) share the same political boundaries, then they are considered the same language. If any of the above conditions is not met, then they are different languages</td>
<td>Max Weinreich: ‘A language is a dialect with an army and a navy’; languages are officially-sanctioned prestige varieties, often with a standard writing system; dialects are local, stigmatized varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEY DISTINCTION</td>
<td>mutual intelligibility</td>
<td>political unity, genetic affiliation and shared writing system</td>
<td>prestige or official recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOPE OF LANGUAGE</td>
<td>speech takes precedence over orthography</td>
<td>orthography takes precedence over spoken language</td>
<td>language includes both orthographic and spoken forms; dialects have only a spoken form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLICATION TO CHINESE</td>
<td>Cantonese and Mandarin are different languages (mutually unintelligible); 'the term Chinese denotes a family of mutually unintelligible languages’ (Bloomfield 1933: 44)</td>
<td>Cantonese and Mandarin are dialects of the same language because they have common ancestry and share the same writing system, and are used in the same country; ‘to deny that the Chinese have a common language is tantamount to denying that they have a common nation’ (Li Wang 1956: 287-290)</td>
<td>Mandarin is a language because it is officially sanctioned; Cantonese, Taiwanese, Shanghainese etc are all ‘dialects’ due to lack of official status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 8. Views of language and dialect.
5. Orthographic correspondence

Related to the Chinese language–dialect distinction is the traditional Chinese emphasis on written form rather than spoken language. Note that in the Chinese definition of language the presence of a shared orthography takes precedence over mutual intelligibility. Another manifestation of this reverence for the written word comes in the form of worship of official spelling—be it in the form of *pinyin* on the mainland, or *zhuyin fuhao* in Taiwan. The belief, especially strong in the teaching profession, is that a one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation indicates standardness, and any deviation in pronunciation from the standard spelling makes the variety less acceptable. Such attitudes have also been observed in Spanish, of which Lipski (1994, p. 139) writes about a ‘semiconscious notion that the ‘best’ varieties of Spanish are those with the greatest correspondence between spelling and pronunciation’.

Such a view of standardness draws us into the debate between descriptive and prescriptive attitudes towards language. The chicken and egg problem: is standard pronunciation an attempt to replicate official spelling, or is official spelling an attempt to record standard pronunciation—which comes first? Linguists for the most part believe in the latter view, namely, that orthographies are attempts to describe actual speech, and often imperfect ones at that.

Problems arise when there are discrepancies between the orthography and actual pronunciation. Speakers are often led to believe that the pronunciations they have acquired through natural means are ‘wrong’, and are pressured to hypercorrect and switch to an artificial standard that more closely matches the spelling. We give three examples of this phenomenon from Modern Standard Chinese: (1) final nasal closure, (2) the pronunciation of -*ing*, (3) the pronunciation of -*ian* and -*üan*.

5.1. Final nasal closure

Recent phonetic studies have shown that in Mandarin syllables with final nasal *n* or *ng*, there is an absence of closure; instead, the vowel is nasalized, and the degree of retraction of the vowel serves to distinguish the two nasal endings. As observed by Jenny Wang (1993, p. 168):

...the final nasal is characterized by lack of complete oral occlusion and lack of complete lowering of the soft palate.

In the training of radio and television broadcasters both in China and in Taiwan, coaches are known to instruct newscasters not to close their final nasals in order to achieve a more ‘standard’ accent.

Additional evidence of the non-closure of final nasals in Mandarin comes from the pronunciation of English syllable-final ‘*n*’ by Mandarin native speakers. Karen Steffan Chung (2001, personal correspondence) has noted that one of the most salient indicators of a ‘Chinese accent’ in English is the lack of closure in ‘*n*’: as in the pronunciation of ‘one year’—Chinese [wâjia] vs English [wənji].
Despite the linguistic evidence pointing to the non-closure of the Mandarin final nasal, few non-linguists are persuaded that such is the case. The author of this paper has repeatedly tried to get this point across to native Chinese speakers and language teachers of different levels, only to be told ‘but how can that be when ‘n’ is clearly present in the spelling?’—a clear illustration of the hold of orthography over the notion of standardness.

5.2. The pronunciation of ‘ing’

The problem with ‘ing’ is that in most dialects of Mandarin, Beijing included, the rhyme is not pronounced as it is spelled, but rather with a schwa offglide—[iⁿ]. It is for this reason that in traditional verse and nursery rhymes from the last century ‘ing’ is always allowed to rhyme with ‘eng’—a violation of rhyme conventions if ‘ing’ is not represented as phonological /iⁿ/.

However, since the arrival of Modern Standard Chinese in the 1920s, instructors of the standard language have taught learners to pronounce ‘ing’ as [iⁿ], in line with official orthography, and the push has been so successful that [iⁿ] is how one must pronounce the final today to be taken as educated—[iⁿ] is now considered non-standard or uneducated. An indicator of the psychological reality of the phonological form /iⁿ/ is that, in contrast to traditional song and verse, the lyrics of Mandarin pop songs in Taiwan no longer allow ‘ing’ to rhyme with ‘eng’, instead preferring to let it co-rhyme with ‘in’ (see Section 6.2). The [iⁿ] to [iⁿ] change is an example of conformity to orthography winning over traditional pronunciation, reformist purism winning over archaising purism.

Note however that this pronunciation of ‘ing’ as [iⁿ] has created problems for users of the zhuyin fuhao spelling system in Taiwan. In the zhuyin fuhao, this particular final is written as ‘├’ [iⁿ], but young children learning the system are taught to ignore the schwa and pronounce the form as [iⁿ]. The same goes for ‘in’, which is written ‘├’ [iⁿ], but pronounced as [in], making for some degree of counter-intuitiveness in the spelling system, which young learners have had to make a conscious effort to learn.

5.3. The pronunciation of ‘ian’ and ‘üan’

A similar situation to the pronunciation of -ing is that of -ian and üan. Though spelled with an ‘a’, the main vowel in these two finals is closer to [e] or [e] (ɪɛ] in Northeastern Mandarin), making for a discrepancy between spelling and actual speech. What is different from the -ing situation however is that the tendency in the treatment of -ian and üan appears to be to accept the speech/spelling discrepancy as an artificial convention rather than to alter pronunciation to conform to spelling.

Linguistic evidence that the vowel in -ian and üan is psychologically distinct from /a/ comes again in the form of rhyme usage. In Taiwan pop lyrics, -ian and üan rhyme only with each other and with -ıe and ueue—all rhymes with the surface vowel
[e]. They almost never rhyme with -an or -uan, which have a true [a] vowel (W-C Li, 1999, p. 113).

This discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation, though accepted as a fact by adult speakers of Mandarin, does create problems for young children first learning to use the spelling system. W-C Li (1999, p. 113) has reported that children learning the zhuyin fuhao have trouble spelling [ien] as ‘- 衣’ [i-an] and [yen] as ‘ 衣’ [y-an] more than any other final.

5.4. Ongoing change

In addition to the phonetic spelling system (pinyin and zhuyin fuhao) affecting perceptions of standardness, notions of ‘correctness’ are also determined to a certain extent by the Chinese character representation of syllables. This is most evident in the reception of recent sound changes in the modern standard language: changes that are structure preserving and conform to character representation meet little resistance, and might even be pushed along, while those that create new structures which have no equivalent in the existing character inventory are viewed suspiciously as ‘dialect’ or ‘slang’, and are given little mention in the pedagogical literature.

An example of an orthographically non-conforming sound change is contraction: 怎麼‘how’; ‘how come’ tsɔn ma > tsɔn mə
甚麼‘what’ ʃɔn ma > ʃən mə

The Mandarin syllabary rules out syllables with final nasal [m], hence the resultant form cannot be represented by any existing Chinese character, and subsequently the pronunciation receives little notice.

Also, in disyllabic trochees in Beijing the initial of the second syllable is often voiced (Fu, 1956, p. 3); e.g., in the expressions bushi ‘is not’ and duoshao ‘how much’ in mid-sentence, the intervocalic voiceless retroflex fricative [ʃ] is often weakened to a voiced approximant [ɻ]. However, this is not a change expressible using the Chinese character script, and as such it is for the most part ignored in the literature. Orthography, again, has served to suppress the legitimacy of a naturally-occurring sound change.

An example of character representation aiding rather than inhibiting sound change is to be found in the loss of the lexical neutral tone in Taiwan. As shown in Fig. 9, the Standard Mandarin of Taiwan preserves intrinsic atonality in grammatical function words, but has allowed toneless syllables originating in lexical weak stress to revert back to full tones.

The change is clearly observable in the speech of most Taiwanese speakers of Standard Mandarin. Additional evidence for the psychological reality of this change comes in the form of a type of internet-specific shorthand used by Taiwanese chatroom and discussion list participants. In this script, intrinsically atonal function words are written using the phonetic spelling zhuyin fuhao, while full tone syllables are represented in regular characters (Li, 2001).
The cancellation of tonelessness in lexically weak-stressed syllables as opposed to the preservation of atonality in grammatical function words may be due in part to the distinctness of function words as a grammatical category. But the tendency may also have been motivated by avoidance of multiple pronunciations for each Chinese character, a situation which lexical weak stress would have created, thereby destroying systematicity and regularity in the pronunciation of Chinese characters. The atonal function words pose no such threat, as most of them have been assigned their own character, and do not share characters with full tone syllables.

5.5. Character script and neologisms

Sound change aside, another area of language development over which the character script appears to wield some influence is neologisms. There appears to be a greater willingness on the part of dictionary compilers and the general public to accept borrowings that can be rendered in Chinese characters, and to reject those that are written in a non-character script.

Are okay, pub, CD, and DNA Chinese ‘words’? They are used by native Chinese speakers all the time, and by linguistic criteria should be treated as part of the Modern Standard Chinese lexicon. But xenophobic purism in the form of obligatory traditional orthographic representation leads the layman to reject these romanized forms as lying outside of Standard Chinese proper, and few Chinese dictionaries have opted to include entries such as these. Examples of Chinese vocabulary written in the English alphabet have been collected by Wang (2001, 2002) and Liu (1999); in addition, Cao (2000) and Jiang (2001) give arguments for including English abbreviations and non-nativized English words in the Chinese lexicon.

Much remains to be done in the area of non-Chinese script Chinese lexicon. How does the choice of orthographic representation affect the acceptability of a new lexical item? What about items written in a mixture of European and Chinese scripts (e.g., X 克 ‘X-ray’; K 千 ‘carat gold’; 千 ‘OK ‘karaoke’)? How do numbers behave in these expressions? Why are they sometimes pronounced in Chinese (A4—paper size, pronounced ‘A-si’), and sometimes in English (V6—Japanese pop group, pronounced ‘V-six’)? What are the differences in attitude towards assimilated (i.e., conforming to Chinese syllable structure and written in Chinese characters, e.g., 巧克力 qiǎokèli ‘chocolate’) and unassimilated (e.g., ‘pub’, ‘copy’, ‘gay’) forms? What happens to unassimilated forms in direct competition with native or assimilated
forms (e.g., ‘OK’ vs 好 hǎo, ‘copy’ vs 影 yǐng, ‘gay’ vs 同性恋 tóngxingliàn)—do different shades of meaning develop?

Then there are the instances of English borrowings that are used differently from native Englishes: ‘fashion’ used as an adjective; ‘suppose’ used as an adverb; ‘to be high’ used with a positive rather than drug-related connotation. To further complicate the picture, there are deliberate creations of Chinese expressions in English script: 睡兔 mātú = ‘me too!’; 3Q sānkuǐ = ‘thank you’; 881 bābāyà = ‘bye-bye’. A classification of Chinese neologisms in relation to orthographic conventions is given in Fig. 10, and examples of each category are given in Fig. 11.

5.6. Native speakers vs. grammars and dictionaries

In the above developments in which spelling and the character script play a role in determining the outcome of a sound change, the underlying mentality is a reverence for published standards, which, if viewed in the light of their conservative nature, can be treated as a form of archaising purism.

This conservative mentality reveres the published word over the judgement of native speakers, believing that orthographies, dictionaries, and grammars are always right, and that it is the speakers of the language who are ‘lazy’ or ‘wrong’ when their use of language deviates from published standards. This is in contrast to the view of linguists, who take native speakers to be the ultimate authority when it comes to grammaticality judgements, and believe that dictionaries and grammars are imperfect attempts at capturing the intuitions of native speakers. In the words of poet Walt Whitman (1904, pp. 5–6),

...the words continually used among the people are, in numberless cases, not the words used in writing, or recorded in dictionaries by authority... There are just as many words in daily use, not inscribed in the dictionary, and seldom or never in any print... Also, the forms of grammar are never persistently obeyed, and cannot be.

In a commentary on the standardization debate published in the People’s Daily, Gao (1978) voiced a similar sentiment, namely, that

...when commenting on language, we shouldn’t talk about ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but rather ask ourselves whether anyone would actually say that.

An even more marked difference between the archaising purist mentality of the lay population and the anti-purist mentality of linguists can be found in attitudes towards language change. Whereas the public often sees change as corruption and hence undesirable, linguists see it as natural and inevitable, believing in an ‘organic view of language and the foolishness of trying to halt the process’ (Jungman, 1829, pp. 77–78, in Thomas, 1991, p. 3). This view of language as a constantly evolving entity imparts a temporal dimension to the meaning of standard speech, and implies that any attempt to fix it in a particular time and place will prove to be futile.
As stated by Hayakawa (1939, pp. 57–58):

"The writing of a dictionary...is not a task of setting up authoritative statements about the 'true meanings' of words, but a task of recording, to the best of one’s ability, what various words have meant to authors in the distant or immediate past. The writer of a dictionary is a historian, not a law-giver...To regard the dictionary as an 'authority,' therefore, is to credit the dictionary writer with gifts of prophecy..."

In other words, language is constantly undergoing reanalysis—the classic example is English ‘hamburger’, whose etymological roots relate to ‘Hamburg’ the city; but the word was reanalyzed by speakers of English as modifier ‘ham’ plus stem ‘burger’, using which ‘cheeseburger’ and ‘fishburger’ were subsequently coined. Reanalysis is also commonplace in Chinese: the term féngliú meant ‘elegant’ or ‘classy’ in the age of Sung dynasty poet Su Dongpo (1037–1101), but today it means ‘promiscuous’; 20 years ago tóngzhì was a patriotic term of address throughout communist China—today a search on Chinese Yahoo for keyword tóngzhì will turn up predominantly gay and lesbian websites.

6. The future of Standard Chinese

It remains to be seen how the notion of Modern Standard Chinese stands to be affected by the different forms of linguistic purism tugging at it from different directions. So far, phonological aspects of the present standard that have been singled out for criticism include: (1) the presence of retroflex initials, (2) the distinction between alveolar and velar nasal endings, (3) diminutive er suffixation, and (4) lexical weak stress. In this section, I will discuss possible developments in each of these areas by weighing the strength of the forces rooting for each possible outcome. Then, armed with the results of these sound changes, I will move beyond phonology into lexicon and syntax, and attempt to give an inkling of the shape of things to
come based on the attitudes and intuitions of native Chinese speakers on possible developments in these areas.

6.1. Retroflex initials

The retroflex initials *zh*, *ch* and *sh* are perceived by many Chinese as the single most salient feature of Northern Chinese, and as such have been an object of both pride and derision. It is not uncommon, in both Northern and Southern China, to encounter attitudes which see retroflex-less speech as substandard and uneducated; in parts of the South, however, the use of retroflexion is viewed as pompous and unfriendly (Ding, 1998, p. 14).
The perceptual salience of the retroflex initials in the popular psyche means that they have had to bear the brunt of criticism from Southerners against Northern speech. From a theoretical perspective, it can be argued that Mandarin zh, ch, sh, which are apical palato-alveolars, are phonologically marked, and thus more difficult to acquire. Hsu (1996, p. 113), has shown that the retroflex initials are among the last consonants to be acquired by Mandarin-speaking infants.

In view of speaker numbers, the fact that the majority of Chinese dialects lack these initials means that a great many Chinese speakers are prone to replace retroflex consonants with their corresponding alveolar sibilants when speaking the standard language. The cultural and socio-economic prominence of cities such as Shanghai, Taipei, and Hong Kong, which are located in retroflex-less dialect regions, raises the profile of retroflex-less Mandarin varieties.

The picture is further complicated by a situation in which Northern dialects that have retroflex consonants in their segmental inventory do not necessarily assign them to the same lexical items as in Beijing Mandarin. In the Mandarin dialect of Changli, for example, Beijing cu ‘vinegar’ and su ‘plain’ are pronounced chu and shu respectively—with a retroflex initial; but Beijing chu ‘initial’ and shu ‘number’ are pronounced as cu and su. Xiong (1990) identifies three major patterns in the distribution of retroflex and alveolar sibilant initials in Chinese—Type A (Jinan), Type B (Changxu), and Type C (Nanjing). Beijing, Xiong says (1990, p. 6), is a hybrid of Type A (Jinan) and Type C (Nanjing), making the distribution of retroflex initials much more difficult to predict.

But unlike diminutive er and weak stress, which are lexically determined and can easily be removed from the lexicon, the retroflex initials are part and parcel of the phonological system of Modern Standard Chinese, and are encoded in all of its current phonetic representation systems, including the pinyin spelling system used in China, the zhuyin fuhao symbols used by Taiwan, and popular romanizations such as Tongyong and Wade-Giles. As such, retroflexion is often perceived as standard by Northerners and Southerners alike by virtue of its presence in official spelling.

While many linguists have lobbied for tolerance of the pronunciation of retroflex initials as alveolar sibilants, the keyword is tolerance and not replacement. No one to date has argued for replacement of the retroflex initials with the alveolar sibilants altogether, or proposed a transliteration system with the retroflex initials absent. Li (1992, p. 97) has noted a technical difficulty in merging the retroflex initials with their alveolar counterparts: there are four retroflex initials zh, ch, sh and r, but only three alveolar sibilants z, c, s. Either r must remain retroflex while the other three retroflex consonants become alveolar, or a new segment—voiced alveolar fricative [z]—must be created to accommodate de-retroflexized r. Both tendencies have been noted in the speech of Southern Chinese.

The many obstacles to ridding Modern Standard Chinese of retroflexion means that zh, ch, sh and r look to be here to stay, at least in the short term. A glimpse of the future of retroflexion is to be found in Taiwanese mass media, in which retroflexion is alive and well, and fast gaining ground among younger speakers, despite encroachment from retroflex-less local dialects. Tse (1998), in studying acoustic properties of retroflex consonants produced by Taiwanese college students, dismisses
the popular notion that younger generation Taiwanese do not discriminate between retroflex and non-retroflex initials.

Increasing acceptance of retroflexion as standard, however, appears to be coupled with a practical tolerance towards language varieties that lack the feature. In the design of Chinese language input methods for the computer, manufacturers such as Cititech have chosen to co-list syllables with retroflex initials under alveolar sibilant initials, so as to benefit the segment of the population that do not use this feature.

6.2. Nasal endings

Though often referred to in the same breadth, the discrimination of nasal endings -n vs -ng actually includes two distinct cases: (1) that of -in vs -ing, and (2) that of -en vs -eng, which sometimes show different conditions for and patterns of merger. Furthermore, the direction of merger is variable: in the Mandarin dialects of the northwest provinces (e.g., Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu) the merger favors velar nasal -ng, while in the southwest (e.g., Sichuan, Yunnan provinces) the outcome is often alveolar nasal -n (Lu, 1956, p. 51).

To look at the forces affecting the outcome of nasal ending merger, we examine a Mandarin variety currently undergoing this change—that of Taipei, beginning with the -in / -ing merger. Li (1992, p. 44) has noted that merger of -n and -ng is often the result of loss of the accompanying vocalic distinction—in most Chinese dialects -ing is pronounced as [i^2n], with an offglide [a] between nucleus and coda, which plays a critical role in the distinguishing of /in/ and /i^2n/ in perception. As mentioned in Section 5, this vocalic distinction is not represented in the spelling system ([i^2n] is written as -ing in almost all romanization systems for Mandarin), and as a result, the offglide [a] is regarded by many to be non-standard, due to its absence from modern orthographic conventions—a clear case of orthography determining prestige pronunciation.

As shown in Fig. 12, in the rural Mandarin pronunciation of Taiwan, it is probably because of the huge difference in vowel quality between the textbook pronunciation [in] and Taiwanese [i^2n] that led speakers to not associate the two, but instead substitute /in/ for /i^2n/. The stigma of rural pronunciation then prompted urban speakers to opt for the opposite, namely, to use /i^2n/ in all situations. Lin (1986) claims that current Taipei pronunciation is closer to [i^2n], with a nasal consonant in-between [n] and [ŋ].

The merger of -en and -eng takes a less convoluted route. Again, the original distinction in Beijing Mandarin was accompanied by a difference in vowel quality, which was subsequently lost in the spelling, as shown in Fig. 13, leading to a blurring of the two categories.

As to the direction of the merger, we need to take into consideration the pronunciation of the two rimes in Taiwanese Southern Min. In the Min dialect the rimes surface as [en] and [en], for which reason rural Mandarin speakers in Taiwan substitute [en] for both forms. Educated speakers are aware that [en] does not exist in the Standard Mandarin syllabary, and replace it with [æn]—hence the merger from [æn] to [en].
If we look at the pronunciation of media personalities in Taiwan, we will see that the -en/-eng distinction is sometimes maintained, and sometimes not, even within the same speaker. But where the two are merged, the outcome is always -en, never -eng. Li (1992, p. 56) mentions an experiment in which if one were to substitute -en for -eng in reading, the result sounds normal, but if-eng is substituted for -en, the speech sounds decidedly unnatural.

All these point to an ongoing -eng to -en merger in Taiwan Mandarin, the result of substratum influence and hypocorrection.

6.3. Diminutive er suffixation

To er or not to er is a debate that has been raging in lexicographical circles for decades. The argument for codifying the er suffix appears to be based on the fact that the form is present in colloquial Beijing as well as in all Mandarin dialects of northern China, and that there are many instances in which the presence or lack of er serves to distinguish lexical items, as seen in Fig. 14.

But those arguing for exclusion of er from the standard lexicon point out that although er appears in numerous northern dialects, there is little agreement in the lexical distribution of the item, and it would seem preposterous to require speakers of Mandarin dialects that already have er to forsake existing usages and adopt the suffixation conventions of a hand-picked locale. Hu (1999, p. 20) goes so far as to claim that

Many native Chinese speakers never use expressions that have the er suffix—what’s more the presence of er rarely serves to distinguish lexical meaning. If for this alone we are to insist that er be part of Modern Standard Chinese and force speakers to a conjure a category that is not part of their mental lexicon, it would only add to the inconvenience of learning the standard language.

![Fig. 12. The pronunciation of -in and -ing in Taiwan.](image-url)
Probably because of this discrepancy in er application between different Northern Mandarin dialects, current Mandarin dictionaries vary greatly in the assignment of er markings.

Historically, er is an Altaic element introduced to Northern China by the invading Manchus and Mongols from the 14th century onward that does not feature in traditional rhyme books or rhyme charts. Yu (1987, p. 346) notes that the geographical distribution of Mandarin dialects with diminutive er largely coincides with the deployment of Manchu banner troops in the Qing dynasty. Within the city of Beijing, the speech of Manchu and Mongol quarters exhibits considerably more er than that of Han Chinese quarters. This characterization of er as a foreignism has given fuel to nationalistic sentiments and calls by archaists and xenophobes alike to purge the standard language of non-Chinese elements.

In areas where er is used, the diminutive suffix is generally reserved for colloquial speech, and rarely appears in more formal registers of language—diminutive er is seldom heard, for example, in broadcast news. Ding (1956), while representing the broadcast industry at a nationwide conference on the standardization of Chinese, explained that it was customary in the industry to “avoid the er-suffix in broadcasts of a serious political nature” (Ding, 1956, p. 144). The same tendency is found in Taiwan, where announcers for major networks are advised to “minimize er-ization when broadcasting news, documentary, and other programming having a national, rather than local, character” (Barnes, 1977, p. 218). The reason for this has much to do with the association in northern China of er proliferation with lack of education and social stigma (Barnes, 1977, p. 224; Carr, 1934, p. 63; Forrest, 1948, p. 197)—a form of elitist purism that led media industry experts to conclude that “er-ized

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Fig. 13. The pronunciation of-en and-eng in Taiwan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Suffixied form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>厘</td>
<td>‘door’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>結</td>
<td>‘daughter-in-law’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>燦</td>
<td>‘to add oil’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>堪</td>
<td>‘method; way’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>結</td>
<td>‘wife’ [vernacular]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>燦</td>
<td>‘Go for it!’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 14. Minimal pairs distinguished by diminutive suffixation.
Mandarin in a newscast would diminish its seriousness and authority to the point where it would sacrifice credibility” (Barnes, 1977, p. 219).

Further evidence of the demise of *er* can be found in the shift from *er*-suffixed to plain forms in commonplace lexical items. Jin Zhou (personal correspondence) has noted instances in which words formerly having *er* are now used by younger speakers in Beijing without the *er* suffix, e.g., *yidian-er*→*yidian* ‘a little bit’. Many language teachers also feel that when plain and *er*-suffixed forms are in competition, the more prestigious plain form should be taught to students (Deng, 1956, p. 207; Barnes, 1977, p. 219).

So far, we have described the diminutive suffix *er* as having the following properties: (1) it distinguishes northern (and hence government decreed ‘standard’) speech from its southern counterparts, (2) it is used more often by the lower strata of society than by the educated classes, (3) it is not used consistently throughout northern China (hence difficult to standardize), and (4) it is a foreign element recently introduced to Chinese morphology. Fig. 15 shows these properties translated into forces of linguistic purism.

As can be seen from Fig. 15, forces pushing for the elimination of *er* vastly outnumber those that favor preservation of the diminutive suffix. Back in 1977, Barnes (1977, p. 222) quoted Mandarin specialist Zu Zheng-Ying as saying that the *er*-suffix would vanish from the standard pronunciation of Taiwan in the space of a generation—a prediction that has come true, and is likely to apply to the development of Standard Chinese in mainland China.

6.4. Lexical weak stress

The debate over whether to specify lexical weak stress is one that is similar to the *er* suffix debate in that it has been raging in lexicographical circles for decades (Chen, 1984; Yang and Huang, 2001; Xiang, 2001). The argument for codifying weak stress appears to be based on the fact that the form is abundant in colloquial Beijing as well as in all the Mandarin dialects of northern China, and that there are many instances in which the presence or lack of weak stress serves to distinguish lexical items, as shown in Fig. 16.

But those arguing for exclusion of weak stress labelling from the standard lexicon point out that although the phenomenon appears in numerous northern dialects, there is little agreement in the lexical distribution of the item. Different dialects apply weak stress to different lexicon often based on frequency of usage—and as there are different word frequencies in different dialects, there are different weak stress specifications. Probably because of this discrepancy between dialect regions, current Mandarin dictionaries vary greatly in the assignment of weak stress.

Furthermore, even if we were to restrict ourselves to a fixed locale, application of weak stress is by no means consistent among speakers of the same geographic region, or even within the same speaker. This was pointed out by Chen (1984, p. 30), whose experiments showed that in 87.3% of minimal pairs supposedly distinguished by weak stress, speakers failed to make a distinction. This led her to conclude that
‘the psychological reality of the neutral tone (Read: weak stress) for native speakers is highly questionable’ (Chen, 1984, p. 320).

Based on her findings, Chen made the suggestion that in dictionaries ‘all lexical items marked with the neutral tone should be given their etymological tones’ (Chen, 1984, p. 321)—a sentiment echoed by a number of other authors on the subject. Xiang (2001, p. 12) suggested that weak stress items unique to Beijing and not shared by all Chinese dialects be either dropped, or not considered a compulsory component of the standard language. Yang and Huang (2001, p. 34) proposed four possible treatments of the weak stress in language tests, all of which point to gradual removal of weak stress specifications from the standard language:

1. Give etymological tones where possible, and where it is unavailable use analogy to reduce the number of weak stressed elements.
2. Give both etymological tones and neutral tones, preserving some weak stressed syllables.
3. Reduce the number of weak stressed syllables according to current pronunciation in Beijing.
4. Eliminate elements that are pronounced using weak stress by Beijing natives, but do not serve to distinguish meaning.

Yang and Huang furthermore give extensive lists of weak stressed lexical items in Beijing no longer pronounced with weak stress by the media, and lexical items that receive weak stress in Beijing but not in the rest of China, a portion of which is produced in Fig. 17.

![Fig. 15. Diminutive suffixation and the forces of linguistic purism.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Full tone</th>
<th>gloss</th>
<th>Weak stress</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>東西</td>
<td>dōngxī</td>
<td>‘east and west’</td>
<td>dōngxī</td>
<td>‘thing’; ‘stuff’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>地道</td>
<td>diào</td>
<td>‘tunnel’</td>
<td>diào</td>
<td>‘authentic’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大意</td>
<td>dàyì</td>
<td>‘summary’; ‘gist’</td>
<td>dàyì</td>
<td>‘careless’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Fig. 16. Minimal pairs distinguished by lexical weak stress in Beijing.](image)
Additional evidence for the demise of lexical weak stress as opposed to intrinsic atonality is to be found in a widespread form of internet shorthand used in chat-rooms and discussion lists in Taiwan. In this style of writing, atonal syllables are written using the phonetic symbols zhuyin fuhao, while weak stressed syllables retain their original character representation, providing a clear demarcation of the two categories and showing that the loss of lexical weak stress is psychologically real (Li, 2001).

As to why weak stress is on the decline, the answers seems to lie in the fact that the labelling of weak stress in its current configuration benefits only a small handful of native of Beijing, serving only as a marker of local identity—and even these natives are eager to lose their weak stress to disassociate themselves from what is seen as a regional pronunciation betraying a lack of worldliness. By dropping weak stress, the speaker is dropping a marker of regional speech not shared by the Chinese-speaking community at large, an irregular lexical feature criticized by reformists, and an Altaic feature frowned upon by archaists and xenophobes alike. As shown in Fig. 18, all the forces of linguistic purism, with perhaps the exception of ethnocentric purism, appear to be aligned against preservation of Beijing lexical weak stress, for which reason the feature is fast losing ground.

(a) Disyllabic forms in which the second syllable receives weak stress in Beijing, but not in standard media pronunciation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>月亮</th>
<th>學生</th>
<th>智明</th>
<th>告訴</th>
<th>已經</th>
<th>喜歡</th>
<th>活潑</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td>yuèliáng</td>
<td>xuéshēng</td>
<td>cōngmíng</td>
<td>gào sù</td>
<td>yǐ jìng</td>
<td>xǐ huān</td>
<td>huó pō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloss</td>
<td>‘moon’</td>
<td>‘student’</td>
<td>‘smart’</td>
<td>‘tell’</td>
<td>‘already’</td>
<td>‘like’</td>
<td>‘lively’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Disyllabic forms in which the second syllable receives weak stress in Beijing, but not in other dialects of Mandarin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>先生</th>
<th>便宜</th>
<th>漂亮</th>
<th>衣服</th>
<th>舒服</th>
<th>情形</th>
<th>明白</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td>xiānshēng</td>
<td>piányì</td>
<td>piàoliàng</td>
<td>yīfú</td>
<td>shūfú</td>
<td>qíngxíng</td>
<td>míngbái</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloss</td>
<td>‘mister’</td>
<td>‘cheap’</td>
<td>‘pretty’</td>
<td>‘clothes’</td>
<td>‘comfortable’</td>
<td>‘situation’</td>
<td>‘understand’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 17. Discrepancies in weak stress.

Fig. 18. Lexical weak stress and the forces of linguistic purism.
6.5. Network standard: rise of the urban middle class?

So far, we have examined four major ongoing changes in Modern Standard Chinese, analyzed the changes in terms of the sociolinguistic forces promoting and hindering each change, and made predictions regarding the outcome of the changes. In summary, the retroflex initials are likely to be preserved, distinction between nasal endings -n and -ng is being eroded in Taiwan but is maintained in China, and the er-suffix and lexical weak stress are fast being eliminated from the standard language.

Interestingly, most of the predicted outcomes are already present in the language of broadcast media on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. As can be seen in Fig. 19, in both mainland China and Taiwan, retroflexion is being maintained, while diminutive suffixation and lexical weak stress are being lost. Media professionals in both territories seem to share the same intuitions about standardness and prestige, and are picking the same parameters when it comes to sound change, leading to a convergence of network standards despite the lack of contact between the two sides.

Furthermore, the network standard pronunciations of Taiwan and China are more similar to each other than they are to their respective local base dialects. The Chinese network standard is vastly different from the Beijing vernacular in its rejection of er-suffixation and weak stress; the Taiwan network standard is divergent from rural Taiwan Mandarin in its preservation of retroflex initials. In this we may be witnessing the rise of a modern Chinese educated accent that cuts across geographical boundaries, similar to that observed for Spanish (Lipski, 1994, pp. 28–29). The end result may be the development of middle-class urban varieties of Chinese that are generally much more similar to one another all across China than they are to the local working-class or rural varieties.

6.6. The resinicization of Standard Chinese?

Looking at these developments from another angle—if we were to separate the changes that are allowed to proceed from the ones that are rejected, an interesting pattern emerges: the preserved features—retroflexion and nasal ending discrimination—are both native Chinese, whereas the features that are discarded—er-suffixation and lexical weak stress—are both purportedly non-native features that came

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) retroflex vs non-retroflex</th>
<th>(2) n/ng distinction</th>
<th>(3) er suffixation</th>
<th>(4) lexical weak stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China (Beijing)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (Media)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan (Media)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan (Rural)</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 19. Bellwether: the language of the media.

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6 An article in the Beijing Youth Daily titled “Chinese Pronunciation of Beijing Natives Not Standard” cites radio broadcast professionals as saying “It is not true that all natives of Beijing speak with a standard accent... Beijing natives often slur their speech... resulting in Chinese pronunciation that is fast but not necessarily accurate” (Z. Li, 2002).
about as a result of contact with Altaic languages of northern China (Hashimoto, 1980, 1984)—Altaicized Chinese, so to speak. In slowly purging itself of these Altaic features, the standard Chinese language appears to be undergoing a process of resinicization—a sign of the triumph of a xenophobic purist mentality at the subconscious level.

Another way to interpret the results is to say that the features that are preserved—retroflexion and nasal ending discrimination—are characteristic of the phonological system, whereas those dying out are lexical in nature. It is the systemic features, perhaps helped along by encoding in the spelling system, that have lasting power—a result that supports Mai’s (1999) proposal to define Modern Standard Chinese as any variety of Mandarin consistent with the *pinyin* spelling system.

Moving beyond the scope of sound change, if we were to make predictions regarding the phonological, lexical and syntactic development of the standard Chinese language as a whole, we need to re-examine the pluricentricity of Standard Chinese (see Section 2), and find out how the lay speaker perceives the respective language standards of mainland China and Taiwan when exposed to both varieties.

We mentioned in Section 2 that lexical differences between the two standards have much to do with tolerance of foreign loans. Perhaps reflecting democratic vs. communist attitudes towards personal liberties, the standard language of Taiwan is open to borrowings from English, Japanese, and other Chinese dialects in both assimilated and unassimilated form, whereas that of the mainland places strict controls on foreignisms, on the one hand allowing only assimilated forms approved by the government-controlled Xinhua News Agency, and on the other hand passing laws that ban the use of expressions from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This liberal/xenophobe dichotomy can also be applied to syntax, where the standard language of Taiwan sees many more patterns borrowed from Chinese dialects and English than the mainland variety, which prides itself on its proletarian simplicity and its relative freedom from bourgeois borrowings from the capitalist societies of the West and the language of the educated classes.

This is on top of the phonological differences mentioned earlier, whereby mainland Chinese speakers incline towards using lexical weak stress and the diminutive *er* suffix, while Taiwan speakers replace *-ng* for *-n* and avoid retroflexion.

When coming into contact with the mainland and Taiwan varieties of Mandarin Chinese, both staking a claim to ‘standardness’, what is the reaction of the average Chinese native speaker? To arrive at an unbiased assessment, the judgement will ultimately have to come from speakers brought up in a community with equal exposure to both Taiwan and mainland Chinese varieties of Mandarin. While no such third party verdict is currently available, Li’s 1991 study of general stereotypes of Taiwan and mainland Chinese Mandarin amongst mainland immigrants in New York City comes close to providing an answer.

As shown in Fig. 20, Li’s mainland immigrant informants found mainland pronunciation of Mandarin to be more reliable, natural, and intelligent, giving it a high score on the ‘solidarity’ scale, while the Taiwan pronunciation was described as soft, wealthy, and elegant, scoring high on ‘status’ (Li, 1991, pp. 11, 17–24, 34). Between the two, Taiwan pronunciation is the prestige variety (Li, 1991, p. 72).
In terms of lexicon, the preference, even among mainland speakers, was overwhelmingly for the Taiwan variety, which was judged as more ‘open’ or ‘economically developed’, as opposed to connotations of being ‘not urbanized’, ‘revolutionary’ or ‘from a developing country’ for mainland vocabulary (Li, 1991, pp. 51–52, 72)—a triumph for elitist linguistic purism.

When it comes to syntax, however, the mainland variety is seen as more ‘correct’ due to a xenophobic purist mentality that rejects Taiwanese patterns as ‘influenced by English or by southern dialects’ (Li, 1991, pp. 66, 72).

Li’s study of the language attitudes of Chinese immigrants in the USA comes close to providing us with a glimpse of the future of Modern Standard Chinese. The thesis paints a picture drastically different from the monolithic textbook definitions currently in use, unrevised since the 1950s. Rather than remaining unchanged, we see a language undergoing any number of phonological, lexical and syntactic innovations; we see selective adoption of these innovations by Chinese speakers of different political, regional and socioeconomic backgrounds, and we see these different prospective standards battling for supremacy riding the forces of archaising, ethnographic, reformist, elitist and xenophobic linguistic purism.

Standard Chinese is changing, and is moving in several different directions all at once. And as its different offshoots converge, it appears that what will determine the ultimate shape of things to come is not government policy or stricter enforcement of adherence to approved standards, but rather the rise and fall of social values expressed through a multitude of purist mentalities in the lay psyche, which time and again have proved to be kingmakers in the perception of ‘standardness’ in the languages of the world.

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