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Diversity and Uniformity in Multilingual Education in China: Balancing Tensions for Sustainability
中国多语教育之多元与统一：张弛有度、平衡利弊、持续发展

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Abstract
In this overview of the scholarship and practices in multilingualism in education in Mainland China since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), we focus on policies, models, and challenges that policy makers, researchers and practitioners have had to face in the last two decades, in which multilingualism and multilingual education have been most active. Our overview suggests that while the promotion of Mandarin Chinese has remained consistently strong in the PRC era and is further intensified in the whole society in recent years, policies and practices concerning minority languages, varieties of Chinese (Fangyan), and foreign languages have fluctuated, particularly in education. In the current post-COVID-19 context, where tensions deepen between ideologies of diversity and uniformity for language education and for the society at large, we argue that a nuanced balance between the two is critical for sustainable development of multilingualism and affordance of quality multilingual education.

Keywords: Linguistic diversity, topolect, dialect, minority languages, language policy, sustainable development

摘要
本文旨在全面回顾和综述中国自建国以来在多语教育方面的政策演变、教育实践与主要挑战，聚焦于近二十多年来的多语制与多语教育理论、模式与研究的发展变化。我们的综述表明，普通话的推广在中国保持了最强势的状态，并且近二十多年来在整个社会中得到了进一步的升级。然而少数民族语言、汉语方言、和外语的政策和实践却有波动，这些波动在教育领域特别明显。在目前后疫情的背景下，语言教育和整个社会的多样性和统一性之间的紧张关系进一步加深，由此我们认为这两者之间应该尽量张弛有度、平衡利弊，这对于中国多语言的可持续发展和提供优质多语言教育至关重要。

关键词: 语言多元,大区域语言, 方言, 少数民族语言, 多语制, 多语教育, 语言政策, 可持续发展

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Introduction

Language use and language education in China have indubitably been more complex in the post-Mao era than ever before for both the majority Han and the 55 officially recognized indigenous minority groups. While vigorous promotion of *Putonghua*, the national lingua franca, has remained constant in the last four decades, sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and educational discourses shaped by the government's reform and modernization aspirations have led to the accelerated promotion of English throughout the country (Adamson & Feng, 2022; Feng, 2011). The importance of English has been repeatedly highlighted in policy documents and is perceived by key stakeholders as vital to strengthening the country and to accessing life chances for individuals; schools and universities have robustly promoted it. As a result, English, a relatively minor subject offered in schools and universities in the Mao era, has been enthusiastically pursued as linguistic capital not only by students but by the general public. Bilingualism and bilingual education, once primarily associated with indigenous minority groups, have become increasingly relevant to the majority Han Chinese population since the turn of the century. As a consequence of the rapid rise of English, there has been a growing shift toward trilingualism and trilingual education among China's minority groups (Feng & Adamson, 2015). This marks a move beyond the traditional focus on bilingualism in minority home languages and Chinese and expands the scope of educational and linguistic debates.

Many overviews (e.g., Adamson & Feng, 2022) suggest that while the promotion of Mandarin Chinese has remained most consistent and is further intensified in the whole society in the last two decades, policies and practices concerning minority languages, varieties of Chinese (*Fangyan*), and foreign languages have fluctuated, particularly in education. In this post-pandemic context, we see tensions deepen between ideologies of diversity and uniformity for language education and for the society at large. A critical analysis of the causes of these tensions and an argument for a nuanced balance between the two on that basis are crucial for the sustainable development of multilingualism and for the affordance of multilingual education in China.

Linguistic Diversity

The literature concerning linguistic diversity suggests that the notion can be discussed from two different perspectives: linguistically (how human languages vary regionally) and nationally (across the world has been studied extensively). The works of Harmon and Loh (2010) and the works of Nettle (1999), for example, investigate linguistic diversity from three related perspectives: language richness (the number of different languages spoken in a given geographical area), phylogenetic diversity (the number of different lineages of languages found in the area), and structural diversity (variation found among structures within languages such as morphology, phonology, word order, and so on). Ethnologue, acclaimed to be the most comprehensive reference work that provides statistical information on linguistic diversity, lists 7,164 living languages spoken in the world on the basis of more than seven decades of empirical research (Simons, 2024). The major criteria used by researchers for *Ethnologue* include the degree of

mutual intelligibility and the existence or absence of a common literature or ethnolinguistic identity (Campbell & Grondona, 2008).

In the meantime, linguistic diversity is often adopted by stakeholders of multilingual education, including researchers and educators, as an ideology for providing quality education for all and preserving linguistic resources through education. As an ideology, it can be considered an attempt to balance tensions between linguistic diversity and uniformity or, more specifically, between preserving and developing multilingual resources and forceful promotion of language standardization by nation states. Examples of such attempts include UN's declaration of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages since 2022 on its official website (UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org) and publications by scholars in multilingual education, notably Cenoz et al. (2012) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000). Linguistic diversity as an ideological orientation is often used interchangeably with multilingualism for societies and individuals and is celebrated as a universal value and right for achieving sustainable development goals including quality education.

The Context of Mainland China

As Feng & Wang (2022) noted, China is linguistically diverse, often more so than it is normally perceived to be. For the 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities, it is officially claimed that some 130 languages still exist, though many of them are endangered languages spoken by only a handful of people (Huang, 2013). For the dominant Han majority comprising 91% of the total population, Chinese is stated to be their native language. From the point of view of linguistic diversity, however, it is important to note that Chinese consists of several major regional varieties called *Fangyan*[1] which are not mutually intelligible. Without competence in Mandarin Chinese, usually called *Putonghua* (literally, "the national common speech"), speakers of different Chinese *Fangyan* would not be able to interact with one another. Furthermore, it is equally worth noting that under each major regional variety, there are numerous *Cifangyan* (literally, "sub-dialects"). Speakers of *Cifangyan* are in most cases able to communicate with various degrees of mutual intelligibility. Even in formal discussions, and despite fundamental differences, *Fangyan* and *Cifangyan* are often collectively called *Fangyan* in Chinese, which is usually turned into *dialect* in English. The labeling is plainly misleading because, while users of different *Fangyan* have to rely on *Putonghua* for interaction, *Cifangyan* speakers do not. For this reason, two English terms are now adopted as their translation: *topolects*, coined the American Sinologist Mair (1991), to refer to the large regional varieties of Chinese that are mutually unintelligible; and *dialects* to refer to those *Cifangyan* that are mutually intelligible to a greater or lesser degree.

It is of course always a daunting task to present linguistic diversity in statistical terms. The number of living languages said to be spoken by minority groups can vary significantly from one source to another (from 80 to 130) even in China (e.g., Dao, 1998; Huang, 2013;

[1] See below for further discussion on the disputed number of the major varieties.

https://www.gov.cn, 2009). In the same fashion, for the number of major regional varieties of Han Chinese—that is, topolects—scholars and official sources also differ in typology and statistics. According to Liu (2004), the number of the major regional varieties depends on differing criteria of categorization, and it could range from 7 to 12. Determining whether a variety is a major one is important because regional varieties or topolects usually differ so significantly that they could be counted as languages.[2] On its website, *Ethnologue* (2025), for example, lists 284 "living indigenous languages" for the People's Republic of China (PRC). The number includes not only minority languages but counts the topolects determined by their definitions. 284 doubles the published estimates by Chinese sociolinguists and official counts.

Like many countries in the world, there is hardly an easy relationship between preservation of linguistic diversity and promotion of *Putonghua* in China. At the highest state policy level, while government stances on language education for schools and universities have varied in accordance with political priorities in different periods, Feng & Adamson (2018) observe that state policies to popularize *Putonghua* as the common speech to unify the country have remained most consistent (and increasingly vigorous in recent decades) in official documents as well as in actual implementation. What has also remained unchanged, at least at the official policy level, is the constitutional mandate that ethnic minority groups have the freedom to use and develop their languages and cultures. Since its inscription in the PRC's first Constitution (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1952), this statement has reappeared in later versions and many other state laws such as the Law for Regional Autonomy (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1984) and the Language Law (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2000). Despite mentioning of *Fangyan* use in some designated domains such as officially approved TV and radio stations and local operas, *explicit* policies for *Fangyan* (as discussed earlier) use and preservation seem to be largely missing from the Constitution and key laws. The supreme status of *Putonghua* was more assertively proclaimed in the 2000 Language Law, effectively outlawing all other linguistic varieties in formal domains, particularly in education. Given the fact that state policies are normally put in practice in potent and top-down fashions, this would apparently be detrimental to preserving linguistic diversity in China.

It is worth noting, however, that in more recent years the government has apparently become more aware of the importance of preserving linguistic diversity in the country. Most notably, the Ministry of Education (2015) issued an official notice to launch a nation-wide "Language Protection Project" to record, digitalize, and preserve minority languages and local dialects as they are considered as valuable intangible cultural heritages. Two years later, a higher-level document by the Central People's Government (2017) distributed a statement to protect *Fangyan* cultures and minority languages. These high-level directives have led to large-scale research projects to digitize languages and dialects in the country (Wang & Kang, 2022), although it remains to be seen how the projects can effectively help *protect* linguistic diversity.

[2] Regional varieties, or topolects, can differ so vastly that some topolects such as Yue have even developed their own written script (Bauer, 1988).

Major Forms in Language Education

In the specific context of China as described above, one would not feel surprised to see language provision highly centralized in mainstream schools and increasingly so even in designated autonomous minority regions and prefectures. In the vast country of China with geographically, culturally, and economically complex and dynamic linguistic landscapes, the issues surrounding language provision for mainstream schools and minority dominated schools have been historically diverse and multifaceted. In the literature on bilingual or multilingual education, therefore, forms of language education are usually studied and discussed along the lines of "mainstream" and "minority" schooling (Feng, 2005).

Mainstream Language Education

Although terms like *multilingualism* and *multilingual education* are relatively new in language education discourse, China has a long-standing tradition of teaching foreign languages in mainstream schools. In the first few decades of the PRC (except for the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1977), secondary and tertiary students were required to study a foreign language as a minor school subject. Russian was the main foreign language taught in the 1950s and was later replaced by English (Adamson, 2004; Hu, 2009). Until the turn of the century, foreign language education was widely claimed to be conducted in a rather *weak form* in Baker's (2011) terms; that is, traditional grammar-translation teaching in a "drip-feed" fashion leading to limited bilingualism. Nevertheless, due to strong promotion of English language education throughout the country in the post-Mao era, many schools and universities started to introduce stronger forms of bilingual education in the 1990s.

Starting from 2001, however, three policy documents were disseminated by the Ministry of Education (MoE). The first two, applicable to schools nationwide, specify the New English Curriculum Standards (NECS) for primary and secondary schools. One (MoE, 2001a) stipulated that English provisions would start from Year 3 in all primary schools by the autumn of 2002. On the premise that primary school graduates achieve level 2 in English, the other document (MoE, 2001b) established specific English standards for secondary schools, with level 5 being for junior secondary school graduates completing compulsory education and level 7 to level 9 for senior secondary school graduates (for detailed discussion on the levels, see Feng and Adamson, 2024). Appendices attached to the second document provided lists of detailed standards required for vocabulary, phrases, pronunciation, grammar, functional and notional inventories, and even a list of English expressions to be used in classrooms. The two documents seek to standardize teaching approaches, even though mention is made of accommodating diversity in terms of pupils' backgrounds, resources, and other contextual factors. In response to the 2001 MoE policy documents which set much higher targets in English for primary and secondary students than before, schools, particularly in metropolitan and coastal areas, were mobilized to enhance English language teaching, including offering "strong forms" (Baker, 2011) of bilingual education such as full or partial immersion programs (Knell et al., 2007; Wang, 2003, 2008; Zhu, 2015).

The two NECS documents formed the basis for revising the traditional College English (CE) syllabus for tertiary-level students in China (MoE, 2007). In the third document issued in

the same year by the (MoE, 2001c), a significant "suggestion" was made for a new approach to English-language education to address the problems in CE education. It stipulates that by 2004, 5%–10% of the tertiary courses for undergraduate students should be conducted in English or another foreign language. The provision is seen as an official endorsement of a strong form of bilingual education; that is, using a foreign language as the medium of instruction for teaching content subjects. The endorsement apparently arose from a dissatisfaction with the existing CE practices and from an increasing awareness of research published internationally and nationally evidencing the efficacy of strong forms such as immersion models (Baker, 2011; Wang, 2003). In China, many metropolitan and coastal schools and universities had been practicing (mostly partial) immersion and had shown its effectiveness and popularity (Feng, 2005). Since the endorsement, the past two decades have witnessed a significant shift in CE education from English for General Purpose (EGP) to various *strong forms* using English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) (see Zhao & Dixon, 2017). In other words, China seems to have entered the era of *English-knowing bilingualism* in the last two decades (to borrow a popular concept coined by Pakir [1991] to describe the then English-dominant situation in Singapore).

Critiques from commentators against the drive for English-Chinese bilingual education from different perspectives warrant analysis. Hu (2008), for example, questions the economic, sociolinguistic, and cultural rationales of bilingual education and argues that stakeholders in general are misled by a misconceived and misrepresented academic discourse. Moreover, strong forms of bilingual education such as EMI are criticized by some as contravening Decree 37 of the 2000 Language Law which ordains that all education institutions, with the exception of minority regions, use Mandarin Chinese as the language of teaching. According to Chen (2002), policy makers, linguists, and lawyers are aware of the "illicitness" of strong forms of bilingual education. So far, however, this legal challenge has not elicited an official response. In the post-COVID and sociopolitical context when China's relationship with the West, especially English-speaking countries, is becoming increasingly tense, top-level enthusiasm for fostering English-knowing bilinguals has begun to ebb. Official measures have been taken to reduce the importance accorded to English in high-stakes examinations and to promote learning Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) in schools (Fan, 2023). It remains to be seen how far or how long English, the world's lingua franca, can be continuously taught, further sidelined, or even eradicated all together from the education system. However, given the immeasurable social, cultural, and economic benefits English-Chinese bilingualism has brought to the country, it is highly unlikely for English to be removed from its education system.

What appears to be largely neglected in mainstream language education and in research is that *Fangyan* (topolects and dialects), as discussed earlier, is missing from official policies and *strong forms* of bilingual education practice. It is crucial to note that, prior to the promulgation of the 2000 Language Law, *Fangyan* could be (and was) often adopted by local teachers as a medium of instruction in local schools. Apparently, *Fangyan* used in this natural fashion functioned as an important facilitator for maintaining linguistic resources. Once it was ruled out of school by law, the rapid decline of *Fangyan* vitality was observed. This explains why many

educators, researchers, and local policy makers have begun to re-interpret or, more accurately, re-negotiate with the 2000 Language Law (Li, 2017).

Indeed, recent literature shows that in many metropolitan and regional schools, *Fangyan* was (re-)introduced into classrooms, particularly in music education. These efforts, however, are sporadic and the future of topolects and dialects looks gloomy. It is commonplace observation that *Fangyan* is found rarely used not only in formal domains but also in informal domains, including homes where locally-born parents increasingly use *Putonghua* as the home language for communication.

Language Provision for Minority Groups

Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, indigenous minority groups have experienced policy changes in language use and language education oscillating between linguistic assimilation and promotion of bilingualism in Chinese and minority home languages (Dai & Dong, 1997; Zhou, 2003, 2004). Three distinct periods have been identified. The first period (from 1949 to 1957), often called the *Initial Developmental Period*, saw concerted efforts by the government and scholars to develop and promote indigenous minority languages and bilingualism. The period from 1958 to 1976, on the other hand, is often grossly depicted as a *Setback Era* during which radical assimilation ideology dominated policies and approaches in minority education. The period from 1977 on was usually called the *Recovering Phase* when bilingualism and bilingual education resumed in indigenous minority regions, especially in the last two decades of the 20th century. Despite more nuanced analyses made by other commentators to subdivide the three periods (Zhou, 2003, 2004), the broad division is widely accepted in the literature of language use and language provision for indigenous minority groups.

In the first post-Mao decade, to recover from the setback caused in the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, policies were claimed to have shifted to *Min-Han Jiantong* (literally, "mastery of the home language") (L1) and standard Chinese (L2), as the aim of bilingual education. For example, *Zhuang-Han Jiantong* (literally, "mastery of Zhuang and Chinese") is stipulated in the regional policy documents for the Zhuang group, the largest minority group mostly living in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; *Zang-Han Jiantong* for Tibetans; and *Yi-Han Jiantong* for the Yi nationality mainly residing in southern Sichuan and Yunnan (Dai & Dong, 1997). In regions where *Min-Han Jiantong* was promoted in earnest, reports emerged about positive outcomes such as reduced illiteracy and an increased confidence to maintain ethnic minority languages, cultures, and ethnic identity (Feng, 2009; Zhou, 2003). In the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, many local schools used Korean as the medium of instruction and effectively developed students' multilingualism in schools (Zhang et al., 2015). Similar cases could be found in other regions including Inner Mongolia to serve the needs of minority Mongolian students (Dong et al., 2015). However, this period also witnessed tensions between *Min-Han Jiantong* bilingualism and "assimilation" mentalities such as a great-*Han* mindset and a Chauvinism shown in local official and academic discourses of language provision for minority groups (Lin, 1997; Teng, 2000; Zhou, 2004), which resulted in concerted and often potent actions prioritizing the promotion of Mandarin Chinese in schools at the expense of *Min-Han Jiantong* bilingualism.

The impact of mainstream education's *English-knowing bilingualism* on indigenous minority education has been enormous since the turn of the century. Traditional debates on bilingualism in L1 and L2 became obsolete. Official state policies included indigenous minority groups in the campaign to provide English teaching in schools (Feng, 2007). Naturally, in the last two decades, discussions on trilingualism (that is, competence in L1, L2, and English [L3]) and trilingual education have intensified (Feng & Adamson, 2015; LaMuCuo, 2019; Liu, 2013, 2018; Wang, 2016; Yuan, 2007). Without policy documents that provide clear guidelines and necessary resources, researchers and educators in minority education have experienced great difficulties in positioning and managing the three languages appropriately in language education in minority schools.

Divergence in local policies and local practices are noticeable in trilingual provisions for ethnic minority groups (Feng & Adamson, 2015). Schools in minority regions differ in terms of demography, geography, history, local leadership, ethnolinguistic vitality, perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, and cultural and political contexts; and thus, language provisions in a specific school could be affected by these contextual factors and more. For example, in Liu et al.'s (2015) empirical study of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in southern Sichuan, they chose three case schools from three categories according to demographical, geographical, and economic factors as these factors would determine the model adopted by a school. In major towns, including Xichang, for example, Chinese was normally used as the medium of teaching all school subjects, with Yi being only one of the subjects. In isolated mountainous areas, schools are normally dominated by Yi, and the reverse model was adopted: that is, Yi being used as the medium of instruction for all school subjects with Chinese as a major subject. Schools with mixed students could adopt either of the two—or indeed a mixture of the two—depending on the school leadership and many key factors. Liu et al. (2015) also found at the time of their survey that access to English by Yi students was much greater than ever before, both at the primary and secondary levels in local schools. However, they reported that local secondary schools would normally start teaching English from scratch, regardless of whether students had studied English in primary schools.

Research also shows that while some local authorities in minority dominated or mixed regions and communities have actively responded to the 2001 policies, some have hardly reacted for geographical or political reasons (Adamson & Feng, 2009). As mentioned earlier, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is a clear example of the former (Zhang et al., 2015). In Yunnan, where 25 minority groups are scattered in mostly rural and mountainous regions, efforts were made by the provincial government to provide English in schools, although resources were limited (Hu, 2007). In these regions, minority students normally followed the same English curriculum as their majority counterparts, though discrepancies existed in the quality and the quantity of English provision. In Xinjiang, however, unlike their majority counterparts in the same region, Olan (2007) reported that most of her survey's respondents in a tertiary institution claimed they did not start learning English until they came to university.

It is also worth noting that, more recently, many schools and tertiary institutions in border areas offer cross-border languages instead of (or in addition to) English (Yuan et al., 2022). On the

basis of empirical evidence collected on local attitudes and perceptions in Yunnan, they pointed out that for language policy and planning in the province, cross-border languages should be studied in border regions. These languages are normally similar with the minority languages spoken in Yunnan and are relatively easy for students to learn; thus conceptually, they blur the borderline between L1 and L3. With findings from a four-month study in a border university in Yunnan, Ling (2024) presents evidence that practical models to teach cross-border languages are indeed popular in such universities. These models, when designed and used effectively, do not only bring benefits to individuals with the linguistic capital needed in the region but also stimulate regional economic and cultural development and contribute to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)[3] in the current context.

Based on the findings of a study of trilingualism-in-education carried out in nine key minority regions, Adamson and Feng (2015) identify four major models adopted by ethnic minority schools. The first two models, accretive and balanced, are effective in bringing about additive trilingualism (i.e., adding abilities in L2 and L3 to a pupil's linguistic repertoire with L1 as the strongest language). On the other hand, the other two, transitional (early exit) and depreciative, may lead to subtractive trilingualism, acquiring limited or strong competences in L2 and L3 at the expense of their L1. In terms of cognitive development, the first two models tend to bring about satisfactory school performance in general, whereas the other two could be detrimental to pupils' intellectual development.

At this point, it is important to note that increasing nationalism due to recent tensions between China and the West evidently exacerbates the unpredictability of the status of English and uncertainty of language education in general. Such nationalism likely has a huge impact on both majority and minority groups. In the post-pandemic era, Mandarin Chinese is being further emphatically promoted, impacting on linguistic diversity and multilingual education for indigenous minority groups. The accretive model formerly found in some regions in China (e.g., Dong et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015) is becoming increasingly rare in recent years, and the pendulum between diversity and uniformity seems to tilt towards the latter. While uncertainties loom large, we contend, however, that it is unlikely for minority groups to return to its traditional binary debates (i.e., *Min-Han* or *Han-Min*) as both English, the world lingua franca, and minority languages, many of which are spoken across borders (Ling, 2024; Yuan et al., 2022), have crucial roles to play in communication with people along the BRI routes.

Conclusion

Since the turn of the 21st century, mainland China has invested heavily in language education and in the society at large. First, it has intensified its efforts to promote *Putonghua* throughout the country. The supreme status of *Putonghua* for all formal domains was declared most assertively through the 2000 Language Law. At the same time, China has also initiated and

[3] The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013 as a major initiative to jointly build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to boost the trade in the region. In March 2015, China issued the *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*.

experienced significant reformation in language education due to various forces of globalization: externally, the rapid spread of English in the wider context; and, internally, the economic needs for modernizing the country with the world's lingua franca. Educational institutions at all levels responded (pro)actively to the policies issued by the Ministry of Education (2001a; 2001b; 2001c) to promote Chinese-English bilingualism. The pedagogical shift from weak forms of EFL to strong forms of language education also helped transform China's multilingual education landscape, particularly in schools and higher education institutions in economically developed areas. Even though the last few years has witnessed some official containment of English in school curriculums, the impact of English-Chinese multilingualism on language education is unlikely to wane in the foreseeable future.

From the point of view of linguistic diversity, however, what appears more certain (but worrying) than before is the detrimental effects of the strong focus on *Putonghua* and English on topolects and dialects and ethnic minority languages. While promotion of *Putonghua*-English bilingualism is widely discussed and documented, the fundamental issue on how to achieve a balance between diversity and uniformity (Fei, 1999) is under-debated or neglected in policy studies and language education research. Huang's (2013) survey reminded us sternly that, except for 6 among the 130-or-so minority languages in China, all languages are either vulnerable or endangered to a lesser or greater degree, and some have already become extinct. For the Han majority, recent research suggests that 1.1 billion people among the 1.4-billion population in China spoke *Fangyan* as their mother tongue in 2010 (Cao, 2014). However, there is a rapid decline of the number of *Fangyan* speakers due to factors including population mobility and rapid urbanization (Zhuang, 2017). Locally, policy makers, such as those in Shanghai, voiced their anxiety about the fast weakening of Shanghainese vitality and called for it to enter classrooms (Gong, 2023). Hopefully, recent efforts made by the government such as the national "language protection project" could have some genuine effects, at least, on sustaining major topolects and minority languages that still exhibit ethnolinguistic vitality.

Supporters of linguistic diversity often draw analogies of the significance of human linguistic resources to biodiversity. As Krauss (1992) states,

> Surely, just as the extinction of any animal species diminishes our world, so does the extinction of any language. Surely we linguists know, and the general public can sense, that any language is a supreme achievement of a uniquely human collective genius, as divine and endless a mystery as a living organism. Should we mourn the loss of Eyak or Ubykh any less than the loss of the panda or California condor? (p. 8)

With similar logic, Crystal (2000) argues that the entire ecosystem relies on networks of relationships and "damage to any one of the elements in an ecosystem can result in unforeseen consequences for the system as a whole" (p. 33). Surely, it is right for the government and the general public in China to spare no effort in preserving and protecting the ecosystem for lovely pandas so that they can live on for future generations to enjoy their existence. Sustaining biodiversity appears to be valued and pursued in China without any questioning. However, in a similar

way as Krauss (1992) questioned three decades ago, should we care about the increasing number of extinct languages such as Manchu, Tujia, and Hezhe and commit ourselves to preserving the diverse linguistic resources that still exist, including the topolects, dialects, and minority languages? We are constantly reminded that with the extinction of each (variety of) language, we lose an entire trove of knowledge, history, wisdom, ethical systems, and intangible cultural heritage.

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