

## **Dialects and Chinese Culture: Unraveling the Co-evolution of Language and Culture**



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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Claire Kramsch (2000) ever mentioned that Language is the carrier of culture, bearing rich national cultural connotations. As an important part of culture, the development and evolution of language is inseparable from the development of culture. The two are interdependent, influence and promote each other, and jointly promote new social changes. However, different countries or different regions of the same country have given birth to unique languages and cultures because of their unique historical, geographical and social backgrounds. Therefore, dialect is the product of geography and social environment. As a branch of language, it also bears rich regional culture, in other words, dialect is also an important perspective to explore national culture. Although language belongs to the category of culture, it is independent of culture. In the past, most of scholars tended to study the language itself in isolation, but neglected the exploration of the relationship between language and culture. *Dialects and Chinese Culture* (Zhou & You, 2006) puts forward the theory of "Cultural Linguistics" for the first time, and the author combines language with culture to explore their interaction in the process of historical evolution and development, so as to make up for the deficiency in the field of linguistics. This book provides a new reference for future linguistic and cultural studies.

### **2. BOOK SYNOPSIS**

*Dialects and Chinese Culture (Edition 2)* (2006) was co-authored by Zhou Zhenhe, a historical geographer and cultural linguist at Xiamen University, and You Rujie, a linguist at Fudan University. The book takes linguistics as the breakthrough point, adopts a novel cultural perspective and a unique historical and geographical analysis method, and uses rich and detailed historical materials as evidence to show readers the origin and development of dialects, history and culture in all directions through the argumentation and analysis of immigrants, cultivated plants, place names, operas and novels, folk customs and cultural exchanges. The book is divided into nine parts, The authors first analyze the relationship among dialect, language and culture in the introduction part, and briefly introduce the historical background and research history of the development of Chinese dialects. Due to the differences of dialects, the exchange of different dialects will have an impact on each other's regional cultures, which will lead to new cultural

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evolution, and the development of the changes in different regional cultures is likely to further lead to new changes in regional dialects. The following chapters explore the evolution of dialect and culture at different levels. Based on Wan Li (2021)'s book review, the main content of the book are as follows: Chapter 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the relationship between the pattern and characteristics of immigration and the evolution of dialects by studying dialectology and the history of immigration, the human geography of dialects and the division of historical administrative geography, and then explore the influence of dialects on cultural development; Chapter 4 and 5 analyze the regional cultural differences between the same name and the same name in the dialect names of crops and regions; the latter chapter show their different cultural backgrounds by discussing the differences of dialects in opera novels and folklore; at the same time, the authors discuss the relationship between language and cultural development through the study of Chinese loan words and westward expansion of Chinese culture to further demonstrate the relationship between language and cultural development. This book aims to reveal the status and value of dialects in Chinese culture studies to help readers better understand the close relationship between dialects and Chinese culture, and to provide new ideas for research in the field of linguistics.

### **3. MUTUAL REINFORCE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

The author puts forward the theory of cultural linguistics, which opens up a new perspective of Chinese linguistics research: from the traditional study of written language to the more macroscopic study of human linguistics. It no longer focuses on the study of language itself and begins to pay attention to the relationship between language and culture. The author of this book has narrowed down the research scope of Luo Changpei's 1950 book *Language and Culture*, from the ancient and modern language and culture in China to the relationship between language and culture in China. The author points out that language is the key to the emergence and development of culture, and the development of culture also makes language more diversative and more meticulous. The development of language and culture promote each other, while the development of language type and cultural type is basically parallel. In other words, although two cultures or two languages will influence each other, the interaction between two cultures will not necessarily cause changes in language patterns, and the interaction between two languages will not necessarily cause changes in cultural characteristics.

The author draws the theoretical model of the book, through which the author can better show the theoretical logic of the book to interested readers.

#### **3.1 Language's Influence on Culture: Promoting and Reflecting its Formation and Development**

Dialect is the result of the gradual differentiation of languages, and immigration is the main reason for the differentiation of languages, and the main way to promote the influence, integration and replacement of languages. The author believes that the relationship between the characteristics of immigrants and the causes of dialect types is similar to a functional relationship. In Chapter 1, he discussed how different characteristics of immigrants affect the evolution of dialects, and what kind of dialect evolution modes will be produced by different immigration modes. In the second chapter, the author used the historical administrative geography analysis method to analyze the influence of dialect evolution caused by immigration on the administrative division of human geography, and gave examples and comparisons of these evolution relations. In the fifth chapter, the author analyzes the cultural connotation behind geographical names.

The evolution of dialects will also be influenced by the different purposes and characteristics of immigrants. The purpose of immigrants is to avoid war (for survival) or trade (for economic development). The group living mode of the immigrants: the group

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living in a community or living in a scattered place. The way of immigration: occupying immigration, ink blot immigration, spread immigration etc. All these may lead to the integration, replacement, substitution, dilution and evolution of immigrant dialects to indigenous dialects. The characteristics of immigrants determine the geographical pattern of dialects. The emergence of new dialects after immigration will change the local dialect geography, human geography, historical administrative division, and even affect the change of political center of administrative division. As Chinese dialect divisions change over time, so do local authority dialects and administrative divisions. In addition, the geography of transportation will affect the migration characteristics of human beings and thus affect the evolution of dialect geography. When the river and the political boundary do not coincide, the river is of little importance to the dialect division, and the high mountains can obstruct traffic, so even though the mountains sometimes do not coincide with the political line, they are still of great importance to the dialect division. With the gradual development of modern science and technology, the road and railway network is increasingly dense, people communicate more frequently, and the relative concentration of dialects is accelerating.

The study of immigration history is closely intertwined with language evolution and population migration. Research on immigration history provides insights into the origins and changes of dialects, and conversely, dialect studies can trace the historical transformations of human cultural development. While there is no direct official documentation in historical records for the ancient regional divisions of Chinese dialects, the author relies on various materials, including sporadic dialect-related content in various types of literature, historical works on dialects from different dynasties, immigration records throughout history, dialect materials from local gazetteers, historical administrative divisions, and place names. Starting from modern dialect divisions, the author tentatively outlines the distinctions of ancient dialects and explores their evolution, shedding light on the differentiation of languages and the evolutionary path of dialects. This approach, utilizing disciplines such as ethnology, human geography, and local gazetteers, enhances the reliability of the research by investigating and tracing linguistics.

The naming of places reflects the cultural background and landscape of the region. For instance, place names containing "na" or "dong" indicate a thriving rice culture; names like "tonggu" suggest a presence of bronze drum culture; and the use of "jing" or "quan" in names implies arid conditions, with the distribution of springs and wells determining the distribution of settlements. When immigrants arrive in a new region, they sometimes retain the existing place names, while other times they assign new names based on their own understanding. Place names not only reflect a region's economic development, historical transportation conditions, and ethnic history, offering corroborative evidence for unresolved historical questions, but also signify the generation, development, and evolution of culture.

### **3.2 The Emergence and Development of Culture Drive the Enrichment and Refinement of Language**

The evolution of culture brings about new things, ideologies, value systems, and lifestyle within society. It is mentioned in the book that the interactions between different regions generated by immigration not only give birth to differences in phonetic characteristics, pronunciation styles, grammatical structures and vocabularies, but also lead to the evolution and fusion of existing original cultures, giving birth to new cultural. Dialects, being distinct variants of the same language, can undergo changes and transformations over time as they are influenced by the continuous influx and amalgamation of new cultural elements.

The history of the development of cultivated plants serves as a reflection of various historical periods, human lifestyles, agricultural practices, dietary habits, and so on. These cultural elements seep into language(Liu, 2023), impacting vocabulary, expressions, idioms, etc. For example, specific crops names, agricultural technology terms, and so on leave traces in language, facilitating its constant evolution with the times. The development of agricultural cultivation also affects interactions and exchanges

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between different regions, creating a social interaction that influences the spread of agricultural practices and contributes to the borrowing and evolution of language(Liu, 2015).

The historical evolution of farming culture has resulted in changes to social structure and ecological environments. Different agricultural modes have lead to distinct social divisions and relations, ultimately manifesting in language through terms of titles and expressions of social roles. The constant development of farming culture influences the ecological environment, prompting human migration and, consequently, the emergence and exchange of dialects from different regions.

Place names, serving as regional identifiers, integrate with both geographical features and cultural heritage(Cheng, 2023). By tracing their evolution, we can gain profound insights into the cultural essence of a region. The change and evolution of place names not only reflect historical development and regional traits, but also carry cultural values that directly influence and shape the development of language development. In the historical changes of place names, we can discover the derivation and origin of some words. These words are closely tied to specific geographic locations, thereby extending the precise depictions of regional characteristics. Through the evolution of place names, we catch a glimpse of how people in ancient times perceived and described their surrounding environment. This forms a historical mapping within language, and enriches the vocabulary.

Simultaneously, the human beliefs and religious culture of an area are also reflected in place names. These cultural values are vividly presented in dialects through specific terms and expressions. Place names carry people's reverence for sacred places and temples, and these emotions and beliefs are conveyed through dialects, bestowing language a profound cultural emotion. The changes in place names not only reflect the interweaving of geography, history, and culture, but also have closely related to social interaction and identity. Through place names, people can distinguish between different regional social groups, and the honorifics and titles in place names also reflect social relationships and identity status. These factors have evolved in language, prompting dialects to play a significant role in social interaction.

As cultural symbols, place names pass down the history, geography, beliefs, and social structure of a region, which deeply influence and enrich the development of language. The evolution of place names is not merely a dimension of linguistic change, but also a witness to the interweaving of culture and language, enhancing the connotation and expression of language.

Cultural elements such as drama, novels, and folk traditions play a significant role in the evolution and development of language. These forms of popular entertainment contribute to the fusion, growth, and evolution of language by influencing changes in vocabulary, grammar structures, language styles, and etc. Literary works like dramas and novels, enriched with emotional depth, character traits, and narrative plots, give rise to new vocabulary, grammar structures, expressive methods, and cultural imagery, thereby enhancing the language's expressive capabilities and contextual richness(Zhang, 2018). These works encompass diverse expressions from different ethnic groups, making language more versatile. Various types of cultural works possess distinct styles and linguistic characteristics. Drama may cultivate the ability to employ exaggeration and lyrical expressions, while novels might teach narrative and descriptive techniques. These influences may manifest as unique expressive styles within dialects, further enriching their expressive power and distinctiveness.

In dialect communities, cultural elements like drama and novels often serve as social and entertainment mediums, facilitating communication and interaction among dialect users, thus impacting the evolution of dialects(Wang & Kang, 2022). Traditional elements like folk culture also play a crucial role in language. These traditional elements intertwine with language, perpetuating historical memory. Folk traditions in different regions adapt to local conditions and are conveyed and spread through activities such as folk dramas and novels, resulting in dialect variations and diversity. These cultural inheritances are interwoven with dialect legacies, deepening the connection between dialects and regional culture.

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Drama, novels, folk traditions, and similar cultural aspects, as vital components of societal culture, enrich the expressive capabilities of dialects by influencing vocabulary, grammar, language styles, and more, thereby fostering language development and evolution. The dissemination of these cultural elements, combined with interactions within dialect communities, gives rise to the diversity and richness of dialects.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

As a supplement to the study of linguistics, *Dialects and Chinese Culture (2006)* provides a preliminary discussion on the relationship between dialects and Chinese culture. It attempts to demonstrate the impact of dialects on the development of Chinese culture from multiple perspectives through in-depth study of the relationship between dialects and Chinese culture, which is an innovative study of dialects and historical culture. There are many issues involved in the book, but the research on many issues is not in-depth enough. For example, the book mentions the issue of dialect protection and inheritance, but the discussion on the specific ways and strategies of inheritance are not discussed. In addition, the study of the relationship between minority dialects and culture in the book and the exploration of dialect protection in modern social changes are still insufficient. Thus Researchers can continue to focus on exploring issues that have not yet been thoroughly studied based on the research results of this book in the future!

### **5. VIEWS OF RECOMMENDATION**

Based on a solid knowledge of historical geography and cultural language, the author explores the complex relationship between language and culture through dialects. In fact, the content of this book is also a supplement and innovation to the field of linguistic research. This book has a relatively unique research perspective, clear analytical thinking, and unique insights, and it has significant value in academia. Therefore, the book is especially recommended to scholars in the field of linguistics research, hoping to provide them with certain academic references and new research ideas. At the same time, the book provides a large amount of historical materials and corpus, and analyzes the interaction and historical evolution of dialects and cultures from various aspects. The book involves many aspects of knowledge, such as immigration history, language geography, drama, novels, plant cultivation history, folk customs, etc. The full text language is easy to understand and full of interest. The book is rich in historical materials and covers a wide range of contents. In fact, it can be used as a reference book for inquiring information, and anyone interested in linguistics, historical and cultural studies can also have a read. However, It is not a book for purely fun leisure but involves more linguistic knowledge, so it will not be very easy to read. It is recommended that readers check the information to assist in understanding during the reading process.

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