

## THE STUDY OF CHINESE DIALECT CULTURE

## วัฒนธรรมภาษาท้องถิ่นในประเทศจีน

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## Abstract

China has a long history of more than 5000 years. It has rich cultural resources, such as dialects, which nourish generations of Chinese people. Because of the vast territory of China, different regions have their own customs and habits, and the languages of different regions are rich and colorful, which integrate the local cultural customs. These dialects not only reflect the diversity of traditional Chinese culture, but also reflect the prosperity of Chinese national culture. This paper mainly focuses on dialect analysis, China's region has trained a diversified dialect culture, dialects have their own characteristics, dialects have laid the foundation for economic and cultural development, now dialects have become an urgent need for our protection of intangible resources, and how to protect dialect culture. The author also has a simple analysis in this paper.

**Keywords:** Chinese dialects, regional division, cultural development

## บทคัดย่อ

ประเทศจีนมีประวัติศาสตร์ที่สืบต่อกันมาอย่างยาวนานกว่า 5,000 ปี เปี่ยมไปด้วยวัฒนธรรมอันหลากหลาย เช่น ภาษาท้องถิ่นที่สืบต่อกันมาหลายชั่วอายุคน เป็นต้น ทว่าเนื่องจากประเทศจีนมีดินแดนอันกว้างใหญ่ไพศาล แต่ละพื้นที่ของจีนจึงมีขนบธรรมเนียม ประเพณี และภาษาที่หลากหลาย อันเป็นจุดเด่นเฉพาะของแต่ละท้องถิ่น ซึ่งความแตกต่างของภาษาแต่ละท้องถิ่นไม่เพียงแต่สะท้อนความหลากหลายของวัฒนธรรมจีนเท่านั้น หากยังสะท้อนถึงความเจริญรุ่งเรืองของวัฒนธรรมจีนอีกด้วย บทความนี้มุ่งวิเคราะห์ภาษาท้องถิ่นแต่ละภูมิภาคของประเทศจีนที่ถูกทำให้กลายเป็นความหลากหลายของวัฒนธรรม อันมีลักษณะเฉพาะของตนเอง ภาษาถิ่นได้วางรากฐานสำหรับการพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจและวัฒนธรรม ปัจจุบันภาษาท้องถิ่นกลายเป็นวัฒนธรรมที่ต้องการการอนุรักษ์ให้คงอยู่จากประชาชนชาวจีน นอกจากนี้ผู้เขียนได้อธิบายวิธีการอนุรักษ์ภาษาท้องถิ่นของจีนอย่างเข้าใจง่ายในบทความนี้อีกด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** ภาษาท้องถิ่นของจีน ภูมิภาค ลักษณะเฉพาะ

Dialect is a derivative of language. With the development of society and the division of regions, it finally forms different linguistic features, and dialect is a microcosm of regional cultural habits.

### **The causes of Chinese Dialects**

Speaking of the causes of the abundant dialects in China, I think that the formation of many dialects in China is not made up of a single factor, mainly including social separation, people's migration, geographical barriers, ethnic integration and language contact. I think we can make a concrete analysis from the following points: first, because of the long-term feudal rule in ancient China, the country is not unified, so with the expansion of national territory and the increase of population, the country often has feudal separatist regimes, and the exchanges between different regions are limited. Therefore, with the accumulation of time, the language of each region gradually produces differences, gradually reduces the common elements, and forms dialects with different characteristics in each region. The dialects of North China dialect system, including some dialects of North China, Northeast, Northwest, Southwest, Central China and East China, are generally caused by this reason. Secondly, in ancient China, social unrest and war forced a large number of people to migrate, which is also one of the reasons for the formation of dialects. For example, from the Eastern Jin Dynasty to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, from the Tang and Song Dynasties to the Song Dynasty, from the end of the Song

Dynasty to the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Central Plains residents moved south three times, forming the Hakka dialect now distributed in Guam. Jiangdong, Jiangxi and Hakka ancestors settled in closed mountainous areas after moving south. On the one hand, they retained their inherent traditions, on the other hand, because of the limitations of natural conditions, they were not easily affected by external infiltration, and they had strong patriarchal consciousness and conservative ideas. Hakkas have also increased their resistance to foreign influences; Hakkas have become their own special social living areas, retained their inherent cultural customs, and formed an independent language system. Thirdly, in the case of large-scale population migration, if people move to residential areas, there will inevitably be ethnic integration, language exchange and even assimilation for foreign nationalities, which is also an important historical reason for the emergence of dialectal characteristics. For example, there are many ethnic minorities in Liangguang area, but since Zhou and Qin Dynasties, a large number of Han people have moved from north to south, gradually resulting in the "Huobin dominated" situation, in a number of indigenous populations, coupled with the economic and cultural aspects of the Han people. In terms of culture, it is more developed than the policies of indigenous people, rulers of past dynasties and national assimilation, which makes the indigenous people more and more Chinese. Of course, in the process of national assimilation and language integration, the Chinese language inevitably

receives the influence of foreign languages. Therefore, because of its special historical background, geographical conditions and ethnic mixed environment, Guangdong dialect inherits and develops many elements of ancient Chinese, and also absorbs some non-Chinese factors, constituting the dialectal characteristics of Guangdong dialect.

### Regionalization of Chinese Dialects

Secondly, I would like to summarize the geographical division of Chinese dialects. China is one of the countries with the richest language resources in the world today. There are more than 130 languages and 10 major Chinese dialects in the five major language families of Sino-Tibetan, Altaic, Nandao, South Asian and Indo-European languages. It is difficult to count dialects, affecting all Asian countries, from Japan and South Korea in the east to Southeast Asia in the south. There are eight major dialects in China (Pingyu, a newly discovered language, is mainly distributed in Guangxi). Some Chinese dialects are divided into nine dialects and ten main dialects. In fact, what we call “eight dialects”, “nine dialects” and even “ten dialects” are only the dialects of the Chinese Han people. If minority languages are added, Chinese dialects can be drawn more and more carefully. 1. Beijing Language Department. Use area: Beijing and surrounding areas. It’s easy to understand. It’s very common in communication, most similar to Putonghua. 2. Northeast Language Family: Three Northeast Provinces, Northeast Inner Mongolia. This is easy to understand. Very close

to Putonghua. Agent: Shenyang. 3. North China Language Family, using areas: Shandong, Hebei, Henan, northern Anhui, Lianyungang, Xuzhou, Suqian, Liaoning, Dalian and other places, easier to understand, more similar to Putonghua. Representative: Jinan and Zhengzhou. 4. Southwest Language Families: Sichuan, Chongqing, Yunnan, Guizhou, Tibet, Western Guangxi, Hunan and Hubei. It’s basically easy to understand. Similar to Putonghua, the intonation is different from Putonghua. Representative: Chengdu and Chongqing. 5. Northwest Language Family, using areas: Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Ningxia, Northwest Inner Mongolia. Basic understanding, close to Putonghua. 6. Wu language family, using areas: Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Huzhou, Jinhua, Taizhou, Shaoxing, Suzhou, Wuxi, Nantong, Changzhou, Zhoushan, basically unlike Putonghua, generally difficult to understand. Representative: Shanghai and Ningbo. 7. Cantonese family, using areas: Guangdong, Eastern Guangxi, northern Hainan, Hong Kong, Macao, and Putonghua is not at all similar, belonging to one of the representatives of the Southern Language Family. It’s hard to understand. Representative: Guangzhou and Hong Kong. 8. Hakka language family, using areas: Jiangxi, Northwest Fujian, Southwest Zhejiang, Wenzhou, and Putonghua is not similar, it is difficult to understand. Agent: Hakka people. 9. Fujian language family, using areas: Fujian, Taiwan, southern Wenzhou, Yuhuan part of Taizhou, southwestern Zhejiang. This is not like Putonghua. It’s hard to understand. Representative: Fuzhou, Taipei. 10. Wenzhou

Language Department, using areas: Wenzhou III, Ruian, Pingyang, Cangnan, Yongjia, Yueqing, Wencheng, Dongtou, Lishui Qingtian, Taizhou Yuhuan. The most dissimilar Mandarin is the most difficult to understand. Representative: Wenzhou. (Bingfen, 2014)

### The characteristics of Chinese Dialects

Third, I want to talk about the division and characteristics of dialects in different parts of China. I want to talk about Putonghua, Beijing dialect has changed from dialect to “national language”, now called Putonghua, but also a few hundred years of history, of course, strictly speaking, Putonghua is “Beijing pronunciation as the standard pronunciation, dialect based on northern dialect, to the model of modern vernacular works as a grammatical norm” of the modern Chinese common language. Thanks to the fact that Ming Chengzu moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, he also brought a large number of cultural people and books together, making Beijing a cultural center. Northeast dialect can be said to be the closest dialect to Mandarin pronunciation, and with the popularity of Zhao Benshan and other sketch actors, can be said to be household name, regardless of the elderly and children can say a few words, and Northeast dialect from the pronunciation can reflect the Northeast people’s simple and bold character, easy to be accepted by everyone. Tianjin dialect can be said to embody that kind of Tianjin people’s humor from the heart, cross talk art is often used to Tianjin dialect, in order to achieve

better funny effect. Tianjin dialect basically has no words that people can not understand, but because the pronunciation of Tianjin dialect and Mandarin pronunciation is very different, if you speak too fast, or people can not understand. Cantonese dialect, represented by Guangzhou dialect, is distributed in most parts of Guangdong and southeastern Guangxi. Most of our compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao and overseas Chinese in Nanyang and other countries speak Cantonese, and the prevalence of dialects with a population of about 5% of the total Han population is closely related to the economic development of the region. For example, in Guangdong, where reform and opening up took precedence, Cantonese became popular all over the country and became a fashionable language. Many people would speak a few simple Cantonese dialects. Cantonese not only has its own unique pronunciation, but also has its own language, and in Guangzhou’s buses are first using Cantonese and then Putonghua stop, some Cantonese, including Hong Kong people do not even understand Putonghua, which shows that Cantonese and Putonghua are very different, and Cantonese people are very protective of their own side. They will try their best to use their dialects whenever possible. (Lin & Zhuang, 2000) Changsha is the capital of Hunan Province, the political, economic and cultural center of the province, and the population is large, convenient transportation, so Changsha dialect from ancient times to the present, distributed in most parts of Hunan Province, has been influenced by the northern

dialect, with a small distance from Putonghua. The population accounts for about 5% of the total population of the Han nationality. Therefore, it occupies an important position in Chinese dialects. (Yuna & Peng, 2017) Suzhou dialect embodies a strong sense of antique and a kind of bookish spirit. People in Suzhou say “no” is “fu”, and the modal words at the end of the sentence do not use “ou” but “Zai”. People will feel kind when they hear Suzhou dialect. Suzhou dialect has always been called “Wunong soft language”, its biggest feature is “soft”, especially for girls. In other dialects belonging to Wu dialect, they are not as soft as Suzhou dialect. Sichuan dialect has a great influence in southwest China. It belongs to a branch of southwest mandarin of northern Chinese dialect. Its pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and Putonghua have great consistency. It also has its own characteristics, and the differences in pronunciation are the biggest. The voice system of Sichuan dialect has 20 initials, 36 finals, 4 tones, and the vowel phenomenon. Because Sichuan has a large population and a large number of migrant workers, Sichuan dialect has become familiar to many people. (Rulong, 2015)

### The value of Chinese Dialects

Fourth, analyze the cultural value, social value and commercial value of Chinese dialects. First of all, the reasons for the formation of Chinese dialects are complicated, including social and historical reasons as well as physical and geographical reasons. The study of dialects

not only provides comparable language materials for the popularization of Putonghua, but also provides sufficient corpus for the study of the history of Chinese development, because dialects are the results of language and culture interaction, cultural contact and dissemination, and historical research. It is also of great parametric value to the humanities and social sciences such as ethnic cultural relations, ethnology, sociology, etc. Therefore, the study of dialects has not only linguistic value, but also great cultural value. Secondly, dialect is the carrier of China’s multi-regional culture, the simplest form of expression of Chinese folk thoughts, and the most profound meaning of sound. Dialect is the emotional precipitation of national culture. After hearing Xiamen dialect for the first time, our compatriots who came to China for the first time were very excited and deeply loved the national culture. Dialects are a way to learn from others and communicate well with other cultures. (Xiao, 2009) At the same time, for dialects, the greatest feature is the uniqueness of the language. This uniqueness has certain regional characteristics, and gradually breeds its own unique “cultural attributes” over a long period of time. This kind of “cultural attribute” becomes the intrinsic motive force of attracting audience, exchanging feelings and uniting people’s hearts. The most vivid part of the language or contained in the dialect, whether from emotional or cultural heritage, speaking dialect, learning dialect, understanding dialect, are the important content of the local cultural heritage. Thirdly, Chinese dialect can



also be used as film material. For example, Guan Hu's *Old Gun* is also a good movie in the sense of dialect film. This film shows the world of "stealing is also reasonable", but "martial arts" is not common. Feng Xiaogang breaks a person's thumb, uses this trick twice, and finally runs on the ice wearing a school uniform overcoat. It is sensational, but also harms the sense of reality. Where do robes and jackets fight, obviously for the sake of being handsome? However, the film's "literary drama" is very exciting, full of expressive authentic Beijing dialects, such as "eat stuffing tonight, cook with you", "rub it again", "you are too restrained", so the subtitles are not enough, we must give an explanation. In addition, *Old Gai* also shows the intergenerational differences of Beijing dialect. Although the old Beijing dialect is stubborn in the population of the sixth generation of masters, it has been squeezed into the metabolism of culture and talent and the rise of "New Beijing". Therefore, the Chinese government and people should cherish the heritage and protection of dialects in order to truly play its value.

### **The development trend of Chinese Dialects**

Fifth, it analyses the development of Chinese dialect. The charm of Chinese dialect is gradually disappearing. Under the background of standardization and individualization, the gradual disappearance of Chinese dialect is inevitable. Of course, Putonghua also has its shortcomings. Strictly speaking, Putonghua is an artificial standard written language. Its vividness

is not as natural as dialect. Some famous modern writers, such as Lao She who writes in Beijing dialect and Shen Congwen who writes in Southwest Mandarin, will lose their charm if they remove the regional color of their own language and replace it with conventional written language. Dialect is a precious heritage left by history to everyone, and it is the information that infuses everyone's soul after the accumulation of local culture. No matter how modern civilization baptizes, the basic information of local accent will never be lost, so we must protect the precious wealth of dialects. Dialect is a unique national culture. Every place has its own unique dialect. It has inherited thousands of years and has rich cultural heritage. People have begun to consciously protect history and culture, such as the essence of Peking Opera, traditional national festivals and so on. Popularizing Putonghua is very important, but we can't abandon dialect and national art. China is a multi-ethnic country with 56 nationalities. Respect for all ethnic groups and local people are a necessary condition for ensuring the reunification of the motherland. Respect the people, first of all, respect their culture. Putonghua, as a tool of communication between people, is of course important to popularize. As a kind of culture and art, dialect, which contains strong national characteristics, should also be protected. There is no contradiction between the two. To some extent, dialect is a social phenomenon, which can represent the cultural characteristics of the region.

### Protection measures of Chinese Dialects

Sixth, how to protect and inherit dialects has become a problem that the government needs to solve. I think China can explore the protection of Chinese dialects from the following aspects: First, the protection of dialects requires Chinese “speak loudly”. Dialects are so important, but in real life they face an awkward situation, mainly because people have fewer and fewer opportunities to speak and use them. In view of this situation, in the process of protecting dialects, the Chinese government must create opportunities to build a platform for people to listen to and speak dialects. In the process of listening and speaking dialects, Chinese people feel the charm of dialects and inherit the dialect culture. Secondly, the protection of dialects must first eliminate “identity discrimination”. Speaking dialect does not mean that there is no quality, but we must pay attention to context and occasion. Indeed, the subject of discrimination against dialects is of no quality and has no impact on the local language and cultural characteristics. Some people are reluctant to speak dialect because they fear wearing colored glasses, let alone protecting dialect. Some immigrants intentionally neglect and forget their mother tongue in order to adapt to the social culture of the influx area as soon as possible, and are familiar with and learn the dialect of the influx area. The change of local accent seems to be a desire for identity change. Thirdly, the need for dialect protection is “preventive”. In recent years, the central government has designated a number of national cultural and ecological protection

pilot zones, many of which are directly related to the Hakka dialect area, such as the Hakka Culture (West Fujian) ecological protection pilot zone (2017). It is suggested that the relevant departments take the Chinese dialect and other intangible cultural heritage as a whole for comprehensive management and special protection, and establish a long-term mechanism for dialect protection, so that the protection can be put into practice, rather than mere formality. Fourthly, China needs more “Wang Han” to protect dialects. As a well-known host, Wang Han has a certain degree of public influence and appeal, and his behavior has a certain exemplary and leading role. He protects dialects as “language protectors” and disseminates the value and charm of more dialects to a wider range of areas, so that the public, especially young people, will care about dialects and develop dialects for them. Leave a cultural shadow: Putonghua and foreign languages can make China go further, and dialects can make our development rooted in soul, emotion and meaning.

Dialect is the most natural and essential expression of China’s multicultural foundation. So far, the mother tongue is the language they were born to use (or do not need to learn) most of the Han people (including Beijingers) are dialects, which means that the language they are most free to express their thoughts and feelings is dialect. If we eliminate all kinds of dialects and achieve the “unity” of language and culture, our language and culture will not be so rich and colorful. Language and culture in a region is the creation of its own soil and water,

and a contribution to human multiculturalism. But language is not only a communicative attribute, but also a cultural attribute. Each dialect or language has its own history and

culture. China has a long history and culture. Language is one of them. Each region has its own unique language and culture.

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