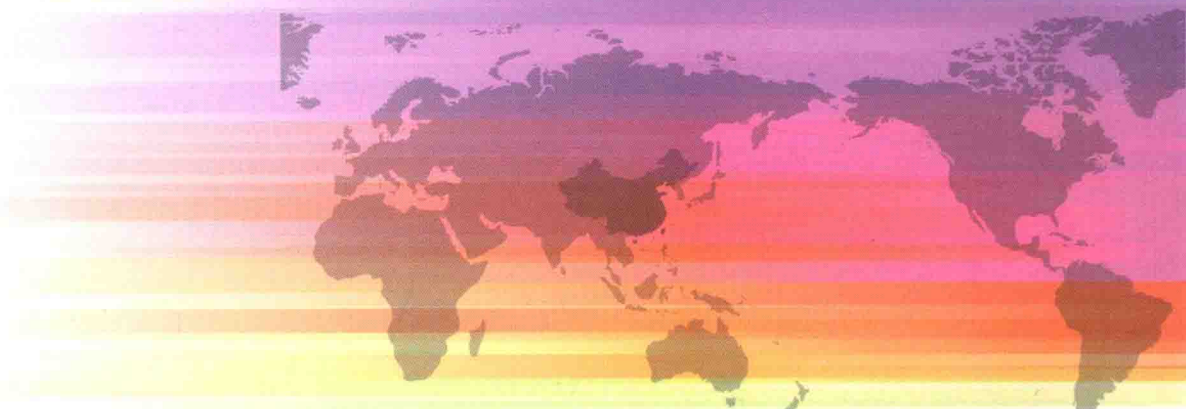


ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN CHINA: PAST AND PRESENT



英语教育在中国：
历史与现状

Edited by
Liu Daoyi
Wu Zhaoyi

English Language Education in China: Past and Present

英语教育在中国：历史与现状



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Foreword



▲ Chief Editor:
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English language education in China has experienced a series of drastic ups and downs during the past 150 years, mirroring the nation's social changes as well as changes in its educational and language policies. At its initial stage English served as a means for China to acquire "Western knowledge" for the purpose of strengthening itself as a nation, but today English forms an essential part of general education to enhance the people's intellectual development and their ability to take part in international and intercultural communication.

English Language Education in China: Past and Present provides a comprehensive survey of English language education in China from 1862 to the present, with focus particularly on the rapid development of the last three decades in response to the constantly increasing needs created by China's social reform and opening up to the outside world. The authors consider political, economic, cultural, pedagogical, and linguistic perspectives as they discuss how the tremendous progress in China's English language education has contributed significantly to the phenomenal spread of English throughout China and to the nation's integration into the global community.

The first two chapters begin with a historical overview of English language education in China. Chapters 3–10 present detailed discussions on curriculum and material development, teaching methodology, educational technology, assessment, teacher education, ELT in secondary vocational schools, research, and international communication and collaboration. The last chapter explores issues and concerns in the broader context of educational and language policies, planning, and practice, and envisions prospects for the future development of English language education in China. This book is the first attempt of its kind

to offer an in-depth study of China's English language education over the past 150 years, with a particular emphasis on the opening up and reform policies in the recent decades.

We hope the book will serve as a useful reference for educators, researchers, and English language instructors in "a world of Englishes". It is designed to be read and studied by educators as well as academic researchers. We have attempted to make the writing light and readable, and we hope that the illustrations and the Chinese translations in the index will make the subject matter easier to comprehend.

Due to limited time and resources, however, the book focuses only on primary and secondary school English education on the Chinese mainland. There is much more to be explored in this field. English language education in Chinese tertiary institutions is another research subject and would form one or more separate volumes. In this book we have, as a Chinese saying goes, "Cast a brick in order to attract jade." That is, we hope this book will serve as groundwork for future, much greater projects. We look forward to hearing readers' comments and recommendations for further studies in English language education in China.

Many people have contributed to making the publication of this book possible. We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to our consultants for their generous support and advice: John Cleverley of Sydney University, Bob Adamson of Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hu Wenzhong of Beijing Foreign Studies University, and Hu Zhuanglin of Peking University.

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Liu Daoyi Wu Zhaoyi

Preface



▲ Bob Adamson

As an Englishman, I find the story of English in China a fascinating tale. Before my first visit to the country in 1983, I naively thought that the language had always been regarded as a positive contributor to national development. Over the years, I came to change that view. I learnt of the boorish behaviour of many of my countrymen in the early years of contact, which resulted in them being viewed as barbarians and confined to small cantonments in Guangzhou. I met former teachers of Russian who had been told to switch to teaching English overnight when mighty geo-political shifts occurred. I heard about the abuse and injuries suffered during the Cultural Revolution by people associated with the English language. Yet I also witnessed the incredible enthusiasm of students to learn English—rising early and taking a book to study while doing morning exercises. I worked with committed teachers, searching hard for more and more effective ways to help their students to master the language. I squashed into a crowded sitting room to watch *Follow Me* on TV and felt the electric buzz of concentration as everyone absorbed a new dialogue or a short documentary about life in the UK. I wandered around English Corners surrounded by dozens of excited conversations. I joined in boisterous karaoke renderings of *Take Me Home*, *Country Roads* and *Let It Be*. I was never lonely on a train journey, as passenger after passenger tentatively sought my permission for them to practise their English with me. I saw lines of children of all ages entering the many English tutorial schools. I stood in a Beijing department store, bemused by a device for pregnant ladies that could play a CD of English to a child in the womb.

English in China is clearly a complicated matter. How can we make sense of it? On the one hand, as a poster in Guangzhou from 1841 states, it is the language of:

English barbarians [who] have formed the habits and developed the nature of wolves, plundering and seizing things by force. ... In trade relations, you come to our country merely to covet profit. What knowledge do you have? ... You are ignorant of our laws and institutions, ignorant of right principles. ... [Y]ou treat us like enemies and do us harm. You use opium to injure our common people, cheating us of our silver and cash. ... Although you have penetrated our inland rivers and enticed fellows who renounce their fathers and their ruler to become Chinese traitors and stir up trouble among us, you are only using money to buy up their services—what good points have you? (Teng & Fairbank, 1979, p. 36)

On the other hand, as an American magazine observes:

A vast national appetite has elevated English to something more than a language: it is not simply a tool but a defining measure of life's potential. China today is divided by class, opportunity, and power, but one of its few unifying beliefs—something shared by waiters, politicians, intellectuals, tycoons—is the power of English. ... English has become an ideology, a force strong enough to remake your résumé, attract a spouse, or catapult you out of a village. Linguists estimate the number of Chinese now studying or speaking English at between two hundred million and three hundred and fifty million, a figure that's on the order of the population of the United States. English private schools, study gadgets, and high-priced tutors vie for pieces of that market. The largest English school system, New Oriental, is traded on the New York Stock Exchange. (Osnos, 2008, p. 2)

English is a foreign language in China. Indeed, it is one of the “most foreign” languages in terms of linguistic distance (Crystal, 1987, p. 371). Linguistic distance is a measure of the difficulty that speakers of one language face in learning another language, and, according to J. E. and B. F. Grimes (1993), the linguistic distance between Chinese and English is very large. (Only the distance between Japanese and English is greater.) Very few Chinese people in China use English in their daily lives, outside of classrooms, conference halls, trading places, cockpits, tourist venues, and other professional arenas—yet millions and millions are learning the language. English is pinned in place in Chinese society by institutional forces, such as examinations and job requirements, as well as social forces, such as parental dreams and popular culture.

The people involved in promoting English officially in China are mainly found in education organizations, such as the Ministry of Education or textbook publishers. They are charged with providing millions of students with an appropriate form of the language that avoids the pitfalls and sand-traps that form an integral part of the enigma of English in China. The nation's deep

and sometimes bitter experience with speakers of the language has produced a time-honoured principle to navigate a way through the complexities, thereby ensuring that China can reap the benefits while mitigating threats to her political and cultural integrity. As noted in this book, the response of the Chinese imperial government in the 1860s to the defeats at the hands of technologically-superior foreign powers was to open academies, Tongwenguan, for the study of Western scientific knowledge in order to strengthen the nation. The maxim that shaped their study was *zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*, which means that Western know-how should be grafted into indigenous cultural roots and branches so that the outcome is appropriate for the Chinese context. Viewed from a historical perspective, the English curriculum for Chinese schools mirrors the vagaries of the socio-political climate in the country. The changes in the curriculum show how the state has appropriated English to serve its different political or economic goals at different times. Curriculum developers have had to adjust the pedagogical approaches and curriculum contents to match these shifting priorities, a process that has often involved selective appropriation of innovations from overseas. It is a process that requires a high degree of circumspection, as one lesson of history is the vulnerability of foreign languages to changes in the political weather-vane, and the case of English is no different. Should an alternative international language replace English, the role and status of the latter would surely diminish.

When I worked with the People's Education Press from 1989 to 1993 as a member of the team developing the *Junior English for China* and *Senior English for China* textbook series, I noticed that the maxim of *zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* was still very much in place. For instance, in considering appropriate pedagogy to adopt for the textbook contents, a project document advised:

Audiolingualism was influential from the early 1960s to the 1990s; its incorporation of repetitious learning was akin to methods of learning Chinese characters. The increasing focus on communicative competence from the early 1990s onwards emerged from the product of greater interaction and collaboration with Western teachers and publishers that were occasioned by the Open Door Policy. However, curriculum developers were aware of the need to ensure that any imported methodology was appropriate.

We should make further research into all the pedagogic schools, rejecting the dross and assimilating the essence, and make them serve us according to our national conditions. (People's Education Press, 1989, p. 5)

The adherence of curriculum developers and textbook editors over the decades to regular features, such as structured grammatical progression, the careful quantification of vocabulary, and moral education, demonstrates a commitment to attempting to ensure that the curriculum can actually be implemented in ways that match the cultural context and pedagogical traditions of Chinese schools.

Of these aspects of English curriculum, I have particular admiration for the inclusion of moral education. These moral messages are conveyed through fables (either traditional Chinese tales or Aesop's fables), modern stories, or everyday anecdotes and dialogues, promoting a lifestyle that involves early rising and studying diligently, or participation in outdoor activities—often inculcating civic responsibility. In the 1983 textbooks, for example, two teenagers exhibit exemplary behaviour by handing in a lost watch to the police and, elsewhere, offer their seats on a bus to an old woman. Other passages offer advice on how to form an orderly queue, how to use a handkerchief, how to maintain good hygiene, and how to display good manners such as standing up when speaking to an older person and not making too much noise in public. This moral dimension reflects a Chinese view of education that can be linked to Confucianism—that a whole-person approach and role models are important. Language education, whether it is the mother tongue, English, or another language, offers an opportunity for conveying these messages of socialisation.

China's engagement with English is unprecedented in scale. Heidi Ross (2004) refers to it as “arguably ... the world's largest language engineering project”. As we enter a new phase of global development, one that sees the rise of China's own national language as a regional and international power, it is an appropriate moment to take stock of the story so far of English in China. Nobody is better placed to do so than those closely involved in the magnificent project, many of whom are authors of the chapters in this excellent book. The contents are wide-ranging in scope and deep in detail, providing insights into the many complexities and an understanding of the forces that create and sustain the phenomenon. My fascination for China's English has been greatly enhanced by reading their work.

Bob Adamson

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Chapter 1

Westernization and English language education (1862–1949)

Wu Zhaoyi

English language education in China has experienced a drastic series of ups and downs during the past 150 years, closely mirroring both the social changes within the nation and its attitude toward the rest of the world, the West in particular. Throughout that long period, China's English language education has been greatly affected by changes in the nation's educational and language policies, as well as the many changes in language planning and education methodology, which are inseparable from the broader socio-cultural context of ever-changing societal and individual needs. The author will examine China's English language education from six perspectives:

- *Socio-political aspirations*: China's shift from a closed society to a nation opening itself up to the rest of the world; the ever-changing views of the Chinese government and the general public on the learning and use of foreign languages
- *Need for economic development*: China's transformation from a self-sufficient economy to a market-oriented one; the recent move to integrate into a global economy; the increasing *use of foreign languages, particularly English, in foreign trade and international business* communication and transactions
- *Desire for Western science and technology*: China's move toward industrial, agricultural, and defense modernization; foreign languages as a means to participate in international scientific studies and collaborative research
- *Need for ideological and institutional change*: interest in democracy, human rights, and reforms in social systems and mechanisms; foreign languages as the means of introducing new concepts and practices