

Preface

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.12.preface>

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Learning Chinese in Diasporic Communities: Many pathways to being Chinese

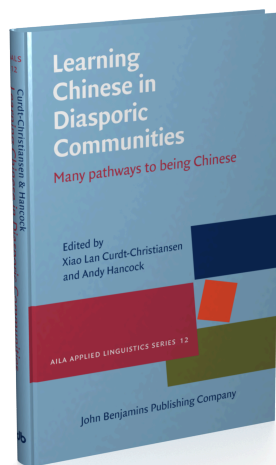
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[AILA Applied Linguistics Series, 12] 2014. xv, 243 pp.

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Preface

As a consequence of historical migration patterns and current globalization, Chinese communities can be found scattered throughout the world. These both sizeable and small diasporic communities, composed of settled and newly arrived citizens, are characterized by diversity and a dynamic interplay of variables. They include multiple places of origin, varied relationships with the host society and allegiances to several different spoken varieties of Chinese. Communities are also distinguished by an element of social cohesion through ties to a common writing system and shared cultural inheritance. The primary aim of this book is to explore these similarities and differences, the many pathways of learning 'Chinese' and being 'Chinese', in and across diasporic communities, within the influential and ever-changing socio-linguistic, educational and political landscape of dominant societies.

China's emerging position as one of the world's largest economies and leader of global trading has fuelled demands by politicians and business sectors in many countries for Chinese to be taught in state schools to support economic activity with China. This growing popularity towards mainstreaming the learning of Chinese frequently ignores how Chinese learners in diasporic communities frame their identities in relation to thoughts about cultural norms and practices and attitudes towards heritage language, including the privileging of different spoken varieties of Chinese and the opportunities and tensions when Chinese language learning is mainstreamed. This volume therefore also sets out to examine the complex nature of language acquisition; language attitudes and ideologies as well as cultural and linguistic practices and identity formation in Chinese diasporic communities.

The volume is organized around four themes: family socialization patterns in Chinese homes; community-initiated complementary/heritage Chinese schools; diverse models of bilingual Chinese education and the interwoven relationship of Chinese language; and identity construction and culture. In this way, the book attempts to provide a comprehensive account using several layers of analysis from the macro level of educational language policies in society to the micro level of parents' socialisation and language practices in the home. Each section includes chapters written by prominent scholars and researchers in the field located in a variety of countries, including Singapore, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (England and Scotland), Malaysia, the United States, and the Netherlands. Most

chapters describe different sociopolitical and cultural contexts in order to provide insights into the significance of sociocultural, educational and linguistic environments that create, enhance or limit the ways in which diasporic children and young people acquire their heritage language.

It is hoped that the book will have international appeal for researchers, educators and teacher-educators, students and practitioners in the fields of Chinese language education and bilingual education. It is also hoped that the information gained from the range of chapters will contribute to a better understanding of individual countries and their own history of Chinese diaspora as well as acting as a stimulus for readers to debate and reflect on the bilingual models, methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives. This, in turn, is intended to support further analysis, both within the countries represented in this book and also within other educational contexts.

Acknowledgments

This book is a team effort, thus, the editors wish to gratefully acknowledge the authors who have contributed to this volume. We are particularly in debt to Claus Curdt-Christiansen for his thorough reading of the entire manuscript, Jonathan Hancock for his help with the indexes and Baoqi Sun for her careful reference checking. We would also like to thank Kees Vaes, senior acquisition editor at John Benjamins, for his support in bringing this volume to publication. Finally, we would like to dedicate this book to these special individuals in our lives, Baijie, Amanda, Juliet, Jonathan and Daniel.