

Examining Use of Dialects in Cinema: The Role of Movies in the Spread and the Maintenance of Chinese Dialects

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of the use of dialects in films, highlighting the extent to which films play a role in the spread and the maintenance of dialects in modern-day China. The researcher adopts a multi-method approach (literature review, interview and observation) to collect and analyze the data. The research findings confirm two positive correlations: the interdependent relationship between the number of the productions of television series (and films) which employ particular Chinese dialects and the distribution of the dialect in question, as well as the number of dialectal speakers and the maintenance of the dialect under investigation.

Keywords: Chinese dialects, Cantonese, Shaan'Xi, language maintenance, dialectal television series, dialectal films

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษาการใช้ภาษาถิ่นในภาพยนตร์ โดยให้ความสำคัญกับบทบาทของภาพยนตร์ในการเผยแพร่และรักษาภาษาถิ่นในประเทศไทยใหม่ ผู้จัดใช้วิธีจัดทำแบบ (การทบทวนวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้อง การสัมภาษณ์ และการสังเกต) เพื่อร่วบรวมข้อมูลในการวิเคราะห์ ผลการวิจัยยืนยันสัมพันธภาพเชิงบวก สองประการ กล่าวคือ ความสัมพันธ์ที่อาศัยซึ่งกันและกันระหว่างจำนวนการผลิตละครชุดทางโทรทัศน์ (และภาพยนตร์) ซึ่งมีการใช้ภาษาถิ่น และ ความแพร่หลายของภาษาถิ่น ตั้งกล่าว และรวมถึง จำนวนผู้พูดภาษาถิ่น และการอนุรักษ์ภาษาถิ่นดังกล่าว

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาถิ่นจีน, ภาษากว่างตุ้ง, ส่านซี, การอนุรักษ์ภาษา, ละครชุดทางโทรทัศน์ที่ใช้ภาษาถิ่น,

ภาพยนตร์ที่ใช้ภาษาถิ่น

INTRODUCTION

Definitions and Terminology Utilized in the Present Study

In the multidisciplinary field of language maintenance (henceforth LM), there is a growing concern about the vitality of smaller speech communities and language-user groups. The present study traces the roots of this concern and examines the sustainability status of the more dominant Chinese varieties of speech—also known as Chinese dialects (*fāngyán*)—vis-à-vis less the powerful ones spoken on Mainland China.

Objectives of the Study

An analysis of language variation in the polyglot nation-state of China will help understand the reasons behind LM. The researcher aims to illustrate the role of mass media (major factor) played in the maintenance of the relatively more powerful Chinese dialects (e.g., Cantonese) as well as the less-maintained Chinese dialects (e.g., Shaan'Xi). The specific objectives of the study are as follows: (1) to compare and examine the extent of the Cantonese dialect vis-à-vis the Shaan'Xi dialect, focusing on the role of mass media's influence on the distribution, spread and maintenance of the two dialects in question; and (2) to identify social variables other than the mass media which also influence the maintenance of the aforementioned dialects. Note that the scope of the present study focuses on media influence in the distribution and the maintenance of Chinese dialects. Despite the key role played by politics on the distribution and the maintenance of Chinese dialects, it is beyond the scope of the present study to address such a correlation.

Background of the Study: Powerful and Less Powerful Chinese Dialects

First and foremost, “power” is defined in terms of the present research context. What is meant by power (e.g., who are the people with the power or who are the ones who receive the power)? In today’s modern society, the concept of power and the manipulation of power are prevalent. Fundamentally, power is a social construct, and one which piques the interest of contemporary scholarship.

An explicit definition of power and how it is related to language can be found in a study titled *Language and Power* (D’amico, Simmons-Mackie & Hawley, 2005) in the text, *Clinical Sociolinguistics*, edited by Martin. J. Ball. According to D’amico et al. (2005), the following interrelated sociological variables, such as social status, social class, social hierarchy and in-group identity, are associated with the concept of power; that is, who has the

power and how s/he manipulates this power. Similarly, among and across human communication and interactions, the underlying social forces are correlated with power and solidarity. As a result, in order to accomplish social action and to navigate the complexity of communication and interactions, one has to understand the power relation in order to function under its tremendous influence and, in turn, to appreciate the power which influences one's language (D'amico et al., 2005).

The article, *Language and Power*, departs from this aforementioned operational definition of language and power in order to introduce some of the stronger dialects of Mainland China referred to in the proceeding paragraphs. Currently, Mandarin is spoken in Northern and Southwestern China and makes up the largest spoken language variety in Mainland China. It is the official state language and the inter-ethnic *lingua franca* in both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China in Taiwan (ROC). Moreover, it is one of the official state languages of the island state of Singapore.

Furthermore, *Yue* (*yuèyǔ*), the focal Chinese dialect under study, is spoken in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong, Macau, parts of Southeast Asia (mainland and insular), as well as amongst overseas Chinese communities with Guangdong ancestry. The term "Cantonese" is commonly used to encompass all the *Yue* varieties, notwithstanding the fact that they are not mutually intelligible.

The current sub-section provides a selective review of the Cantonese dialect and its use by the Cantonese people. From the numerous studies that examine the maintenance and shifts amongst Chinese dialects, it has emerged that, of all the above-mentioned major Chinese dialect groups and their regional varieties of speech, Cantonese (or *Yue*) has frequently been called "the most powerful Chinese dialect" by scholars (Xu, 2012). With more than 70,000,000 speakers, the Cantonese community is one of the largest in Mainland China (People's Government of Guangdong Provence, 2007). It is believed that no other Chinese dialect parallels the extraordinary standing and achievement of the Cantonese dialect, given the massive number of its speakers and the important role played by the Cantonese speaking community members in the social and economic sectors, particularly in the mass media (in Mainland China, neighboring areas outside Mainland China and abroad).

Notably, the Cantonese dialect is viewed as an inter-ethnic *lingua franca*, engaged by the Cantonese people to communicate with other ethnic groups and vice versa within the Guangdong Province of Mainland China. Additionally, it is spoken by the majority of the population in the neighboring areas of Hong Kong (a *de facto* official language) and Macau (outside Mainland China), and amongst overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia

(e.g., Malaysia), the Asia Pacific region (e.g., Australia and New Zealand), North America (e.g., the United States of America and Canada) and Europe (e.g., Germany). Nearly all of these speakers originated from Guangdong Province of Mainland China or are of Guangdong descent. Amongst and across all the above-mentioned Cantonese speech communities, Hong Kong is regarded as the hub of Cantonese culture, inasmuch as its mass media and pop culture has been influential for nearly seventy or more years. For a review Hong Kong's linguistic variation, see Lu (2002).

In addition to the findings of previous and current investigations of the Cantonese speech communities and the language-user groups of Mainland China which can be found in the extant literature, much of the classical sociolinguistic literature on the issue of language maintenance and shift among overseas Cantonese speech communities and language-user groups is reported in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Southeast Asia. These reviews commonly include an assessment of the status (e.g., economic value) and institutional support (e.g., mass media) given to the promotion of Cantonese speech. For reviews of these reports, see Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor (1977) for the institutional support and language maintenance; Appel and Muysken (1987) for promoting the language by means of mass media; and Wang and Chong (2011) for the extensively cited report on the successful maintenance of the overseas Cantonese speech community in the nation-state of Malaysia. As a complement to previous data, this current study examines in particular the sociological variable known as institutional support, with mass media as the major factor governing the maintenance and shift of the two varieties of speech in question.

Amongst the numerous effects of the implementation of the national language policy and the language-in-education policy in Mainland China is language endangerment. In fact, it has become apparent that ethnic languages and regional varieties of speech are being replaced by the official state language in the nation-state of Mainland China. Specifically, a reexamination of endangered Chinese dialects, based upon the data of Cao (2001), Yang and Xu (2009) and Tang (2010), has found that the Han-Chinese dialect spoken by the nine-family-name fishermen (*jiǔ xìng yú mǐn*), the local Chinese vernacular of She (shē huà) and the Heilongjiang Zhan dialects (hēi long jiāng zhàn huà), among others, is extremely endangered,.

Among the estimated 3,000 dying dialects (UNESCO, 2006, as cited in Lin, 2011), Shaan'Xi is perceived to be one of the endangered Chinese dialects in spite of its exceptional past. It is a truism that the Shaan'Xi Province of Mainland China is regarded as one of the

cradles of ancient and imperial Chinese civilization, due largely to the fact that it was the renowned ancient capital for 13 dynasties over a period of 1,100 years (from the Zhou to the Tang Dynasties). Despite this, substantial evidence can be marshaled to point out that the Shaan'Xi variety of speech—not only the ethnic language of the Shaan'Xi speech community but also the language used to establish the ancient Chinese civilization—is endangered in the twenty-first century. For an overview of the characteristics of the Shaan'Xi speech community, confer Peng (2013).

It is evident that studies measuring the vitality of ethnic languages encounter difficulties in demonstrating the discrepancies between relatively more powerful codes of communication (e.g., Cantonese) and less dominant ones (e.g., Shaan'Xi). This study aims to contrast these two regional varieties of speech by examining such factors as mass media (e.g., films) and the speaking population that to a greater or lesser extent play a role in the maintenance of the two dialects in question.

Taken together, the objectives of the preceding sub-sections are to sketch out the current status of the Cantonese dialect as one of the strongest Chinese dialect groups in contrast to the less powerful ones, such as the Shaan'Xi dialect. Two later sections (Results and Discussion) will trace their differential conditions and explore some of the factors behind their discrepancies.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Language and Society

Public discourse and the social sphere are arenas with never-ending interaction and transaction between languages and the societal models that created them, are created by them, are conditioned by them and are accompanied by them. The relationship between language and society has long been central to research in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, sociology of language, pragmatics and has also informed other fields of studies such as anthropology, history and sociology. This current sub-section introduces the century-long framework for the study of language and society.

Sociolinguistics/Sociology of Language

This sub-section is a straightforward introduction of the history of sociolinguistics. In the course of, approximately, the past 40 years the scholarly study of language in society has been commonly referred to as “sociolinguistics” (Dell Hymes [one of the founding

sociolinguists], as cited in Johnstone and Marcellino, 2010) and/or “sociology of language” (a term coined by Joshua Fishman). Sociolinguists are concerned with the functions and meanings of languages in social life in resistance to Chomskyan structural linguistics (Johnstone & Marcellino, 2010). The basis for such a study of language in societal use lies in the empirical observation that different members of the same speech community speak their native language differently and speech communities in different regions of the same nation-state (or different nation-states) speak regional varieties of speech styles (Vajda, n.d.). It is evident that not everyone from the same speech community and/or language-user group speaks their native language in the same way, just as each individual uses his or her language in a unique way.

Language Maintenance

In contrast to the theories and practices of sociolinguistics reviewed in the subsections above, there is a true scarcity of theoretical, empirical and methodological reflections in the study of the maintenance of dialects and in particular of Chinese dialects. The present much needed study will fill in a gap found within current research around the study of the maintenance of dialects, and in particular the Chinese dialects.

The present study is informed by numerous theories and perspectives. One approach which guides the research is language maintenance (LM). Traditionally, LM is viewed from three different perspectives (Baker & Jones, 1998, pp. 181-185). The inactive preservationist viewpoint seems to maintain the status quo of the variety of speech under consideration instead of the implementation of a measure of language development. By contrast, the evolutionist point of view argues the “survival of the fittest” (more powerful languages will survive, whereas less powerful ones will die out). Lastly, the active conservationist view is regarded as the most proactive among the three, inasmuch as it takes conscious and deliberate language planning efforts to ensure the maintenance of minority languages. It should be noted that the researcher of the current study is in agreement with the conservationist view.

Over the past years, numerous theories (along with experimental facts) have been proposed to account for the phenomenon of LM. Until recently, underlying factors influencing the process of LM are explored and documented in existing literature. The study reported in the present thesis builds on and extends the research line in the area of LM. Researchers have explored several variables that are seen as predictive of LM. The variables in question are of interest to sociolinguistic researchers and include the following: the size of population (Wang & Chong, 2011), the mode of settlement (concentration or scatter) (Wang

& Chong, 2011), enlarging or shrinking the functional domains of the language use (Kim & Starks, 2010), institutional support, similarities between the languages and cultures of the homeland and the country of resettlement, intergroup marriages and exogamous marriages (David & Dealwis, 2011), language attitude (Sallabank, 2013) and language ideology, government-determined language policy and language planning, and family language policy (Hlfearnáin, 2013).

Despite the fact that previous studies provide a long list of fundamental factors that are involved in determining the extent of LM, few of them address the following factors: (1) the role of mass media (viewed as a major factor) on the LM of dialects or regional varieties of speech; and (2) the number of the dialectal speakers (viewed as a minor factor) of the speech communities and language-user groups on the LM of dialects. This study is concerned with the two above-mentioned factors, aimed at filling the knowledge gap in the current LM literature.

Research on Chinese Dialects

A Scholarly Study of the Cantonese and the Shaan'Xi Dialects

In the early and mid-2000s, a further development in the research on the Cantonese dialect has been the investigation of Cantonese, not only viewed from the perspective of a Chinese dialect alone but also viewing its linguistic affiliation (Hakka-related). In other words, this trend has been an across-linguistic approach to survey both the Cantonese dialect and the Hakka dialect, and their historical (and prehistoric) linguistic relationship. Note that this observation is inferred from BoHui (2010).

Having outlined the history and development of Cantonese research, it is yet too early to ascertain the future development of the research on the Cantonese dialect. In the proceeding sub-section, the author will examine the extent of the early and later development of the study on the Shaan'Xi dialect.

Recently, Chinese scholars (e.g., Wei Jia, 1994) have begun to trace the history and development of the research on the Shaan'Xi dialect. The history and the development of the study on the Shaan'Xi dialect can be divided into two periods: (1) the traditional dialectal period (prior to the Qing Dynasty, 1636-1912); and (2) the descriptive dialectal period (commenced during the Qing Dynasty, 1636-1912).

The historical aspects of the Shaan'Xi dialect have mostly been discussed as its being the official state language, known as “elegant speech” (yǎyán), spoken among and across the imperial government sectors and the official domains during the period before 1046 BC (Wei Jia, 1994).

While the Shaan'Xi dialect was commonly seen as the official state language since 1046 BC, it was not until 202 BC during the Western-Han Dynasty when the Chinese linguist YangXiong (yáng xióng) published the first Chinese dialect book, consisting of an analysis of the Shaan'Xi dialect. Nonetheless, before the dawn of the Qing Dynasty (1636 AD), Chinese linguists failed to systematically analyze the Chinese dialects and, in particular, the Shaan'Xi dialect was researched for the sake of understanding the classical/literary Chinese texts.

Meanwhile, Wei Jia (1994) has also listed some breakthroughs in the study of the Shaan'Xi dialect during the descriptive dialectal period (began during the Qing Dynasty, 1636-1912). During the first phase (1920s-1940s), there was a definite focus on the analysis of the phonology of the Shaan'Xi dialect (Wei Jia). In the second phase (1950s-early 1960s), the focus shifted to the cross-linguistic contrast between the Shaan'Xi dialect and the Mandarin language (Beijing dialect), aimed to promote the teaching and the learning of the official state language, the Mandarin language (Beijing dialect). The third and final phase of recent research on the Shaan'Xi dialect (1979-present) is the most comprehensive. Chinese linguists have not only undertaken the cross-linguistic comparison between the Shaan'Xi dialect and linguistically related dialects, but they also examine the history of its development. Therefore, after 1979, Chinese linguists and researchers have been hoping to link the analysis of the macro and micro-levels of the Shaan'Xi dialect to its linguistic family members and its historical development.

Mass Media in China: Focus on Cinema and Dialectal Films

Having contextualized the study of the Cantonese and the Shaan'Xi dialects in the preceding sub-section, the research scope of the current study is addressed: Chinese dialects in cinema, commonly known as Chinese dialectal films. In recent years, the incorporation of Chinese dialects into Chinese cinema has become prominent. For instance, the Sichuan dialect is used in the movie *Let the bullets fly* (rang zi dan fei, 2010), the Tangshan dialect is used in the movie of *Aftershock* (tang shan Da di zhen, 2010), and the Chongqing dialect, the Qingdao dialect and the Henan dialect are used in the movie *Crazy Stone* (feng kuang de shi tou, 2006).

Below is a brief history of the development of Chinese dialectal films in Mainland China. About 80 years ago, in the 1930s, the sensational Chinese film *White-Golden Dragon* (bai jin long, 1934) was produced (Yao, 2013, p. 7). It is the first Chinese film to use a Chinese dialect (and in particular the Cantonese dialect) in Chinese film history. Co-directed by Xue Juexian and Gao Liheng, this film is about a man and three women and their modern romantic story. A decade later, the Wu dialect was used (to narrate a joke about "Crab, aircraft, floating in the air with eight feet") in the film *The Spring River Flows East* (yi jiang chun shui xiang dong liu, 1947) produced (Yao, 2013).

However, Chinese dialects were not commonly used in Chinese films after 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party took over Mainland China and *the Instructions on the Promotion of Putonghua* document was implemented by the State Council in 1956 (Yao, 2013, p. 7). It was not until 1963 that the Sichuan dialect was used in the Chinese film *Forced Recruitment* (zhua zhuang ding). The plot of this film centers on the Nationalist Party's recruitment of Chinese men into the Republic of China Army, aimed to fight against the Japanese invaders in the Sichuan-speaking and Chongqing-speaking regions of Mainland China (Yao, 2013). It is surprising to know that throughout the film, no actors and actresses spoke the Mandarin (Putonghua) language.

Both during and following the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese dialects were rarely used in Chinese films. For example, the Chinese movies *Yellow Earth* (huang tu di 1985), *The Horse Thief* (dao ma zei, 1988), *The Children's King* (hai zi wang, 1989) and *Red Sorghum* (hong gao liang, 1987) were filmed in Chinese dialect speaking regions where the Mandarin (Putonghua) language was not commonly used. However, Chinese dialects were not used in the production of these films (Yao, 2013, p. 10).

It was not until the early 1990s that Chinese dialects began to be used again in Chinese films (Yao, 2013, p. 10). For instance, the Shaan'Xi dialect was used in the production of *The Story of Qiu Ju* (qiu Ju da guan si, 1992). Moreover, in the late 1990s, a number of different Chinese dialects were used in the production of Chinese films, e.g., the Hebei dialect was used in *Xi Lian* (xi lian, 1996), the Northeastern Mandarin (a regional variety of the Mandarin language) was used in the film *Er Mo* (er mo, 1994), the Shaanxi dialect was used in *The Story of Ermei* (jing zhe, 2004) and, finally, the Henan dialect was used in *The Orphan of Anyang* (an yang ying hai, 2001).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

In crafting the Research Questions, the researcher investigated the extent to which mass media promotes the distribution of dialects and maintains the vitality of these dialects. Despite the amount of research projects carried out on the sociolinguistics of dialects and socio-dialectology, in fact, little is known about how the mass media and, in particular, dialectal television series and dialectal films have influenced the distribution, spread and maintenance of the dialects. These enigmas have perplexed and challenged the mind of the researcher of the present study. In light of this, answers to the Research Questions examined below have been pursued:

(1) What are the differences between the relatively more and less powerful Chinese dialects under study with regards to their respective LM situations? (2) What are the social factors (underlying reasons) resulting in such differences? (3) What is the role of mass media in the distribution, spread and maintenance of Chinese dialects (with a focus on the Cantonese and the Shaan'xi dialects, respectively)?

Data Collection and Analysis: Data Sources, Sites, Samples and Instruments

By and large, data collection and data analysis are continuous and simultaneous in the current research design. Collected data are presented in a manner that is intended to be both convincing as actual accounts derived from literature and participants and convincing as analysis data. The data presented in the study are derived from three sources as the researcher adopted a multi-method approach (literature review, interview and observation) to obtain data from a representative sample ($n = 155$ participants) of the Shaan'Xi speech communities and language-user groups ($n = 50$ families/approximately 130 participants) and the Cantonese speech communities and language-user groups ($n = 25$ participants).

A review of literature ($n =$ approximately 50 articles published by referred journals and websites) is another primary research method in the current study. Additionally, interviews and observations are conducted to supplement available information derived from the LM literature. Interviews and observations with Shaan'Xi speech communities and language-user groups and Cantonese speech communities and language-user groups (in Mainland China) were conducted.

Participants were recruited through a personal network and snowball sampling strategy (friends' contacts) of the researcher. It must be acknowledged that the criteria for inclusion of the sample are as follows: Essentially, the problem of the ethnic identities of the sample lies in the fact that both Shaan'Xi and Cantonese are not themselves fully homogeneous. In spite of this, the sample is recruited on the basis of linguistically heterogeneous dialect groups by the self-identification of participants (two speech groups identified as the Shaan'Xi speech community and the Cantonese speech community).

Visits were made to 50 homes to study the vitality of the Shaan'Xi dialect ($n=50$ families/approximately 130 participants). Moreover, interviews were conducted with 25 Cantonese speakers ($n=25$ participants) and these were the primary source of data for the qualitative part of the present study. The participants responded to a semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher during 11 periods from March 2013 to February 2014. The interview questions were based upon protocols developed by Lee (2011).

Furthermore, personal observations of the Shaan'Xi community interactions were made on more than 50 occasions, some located in urban areas (and semi-urban areas) and others in rural areas (and semi-rural areas). In addition to the interviews, the observations provided supplementary data to the interview data.

Further, in addition to collecting data from the literature review, interviews and observations, as noted above, the researcher also collected data from documentary materials in respect to the dialectal television series and their audience ratings, as well as dialectal films and their box office records pertaining to the two Chinese dialects under consideration. For representations of the Cantonese and ShaanXi dialectal films used as data for the present study, please refer to the following four films: the two Cantonese films were *Cold War* (*hán zhàn*) and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (*qiàn nǚ yōu hún*); while the two ShaanXi dialectal films were *Crazy Stone* (*fēng kuáng de shí tou*) and *Gao Xing* (*gāo xìng*), 1995-2012. Multiple and comparative analyses of these four Chinese dialectal films were undertaken.

These four Chinese dialectal films are included in the data of the present study as they better serve the purpose and meet the research scope of the study. The author established two criteria. First, these Chinese dialectal films are not dialectal opera. Chinese dialects have a long-standing history of incorporation into Chinese operas (e.g., Cantonese Opera, Huangmei Opera, to name but two). As well, Hong Kong in particular has been known to incorporate Cantonese Opera into films. For example, the renowned *Butterfly Lovers* (*liang shan bo yu zhu ying tai*, 1954) is one of the most watched operas and it was also the first color cinematic production of the PRC. Nevertheless, despite dialectal opera playing an important role in the

history and the development of Chinese cinema, it is beyond the scope of the current study. Second, the Chinese dialectal films explored were produced in Mainland China and the special administrative area of Hong Kong, excluding the Chinese dialectal films produced in Taiwan (e.g., *Cape No. 7*). The researcher's reason for this exclusion was because of the key aim to compare Cantonese dialectal films with Shaan'Xi dialectal films. Without the inclusion of Cantonese dialectal films produced in Hong Kong, the data for the present study would be incomplete. The particular four dialectal films have also been selected because of their excellent record at the box office. In other words, they each represent the best performance (according to the box office) of Cantonese and Shaan'Xi dialectal films.

Data were analyzed with a careful reading allowing for the classification of recurring themes (and recurring sub-themes), utilizing the following two categories: (1) Research purposes, and (2) Research questions. Once a tentative scheme of categories, major themes and major findings had been derived, the researcher then proceeded to sort the data into categories.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Responses to the Research Questions

Responses to Research Question 1: What are the differences between the relatively more and less powerful Chinese dialects under study with regards to their respective LM situations?

Viewed from the perspective of the mass media, television series with relatively more powerful Chinese dialects receive higher audience ratings and receive higher revenue from their dialectal films' box offices than the less powerful ones. In addition, comparatively more powerful Chinese dialects are used among and across more functional language-use domains than the less powerful ones. '*I went to see Cold War, because it has a much higher box office review than other films [at that time.]*' "*And, Cold War is a Cantonese film, so it is more attractive to viewers than other [dialectal] films.*" These two verbalized vignettes are derived from a set of interviews in which a number of participants on the survey site of Shaan'Xi Province orally expressed their perspectives of box office reviews of various dialectal films. Their viewpoints show that the box office plays a crucial role in influencing potential viewers' choices of dialectal films and the perceived attitude toward Cantonese film is positive (in terms of the film's quality).

Answers to Research Question 2: What are the social factors (underlying reasons) resulting in such differences?

The noted difference lies in the fact that, among other factors (e.g., the economy of dialect-speaking provinces), the relatively more powerful Chinese dialects have a greater number of dialectal speaking populations than the less powerful ones.

In addition to these short answers, the researcher also provides three complementary and detailed answers to Research Questions 1 and 2 by using the following three factors. One is related to the role of mass media in the distribution, spread and maintenance of dialects (major factor), another is concerned with the number of dialectal speakers (minor factor) and the third is the language-use domain (additional factor). The evidence for the three claims is based on empirical data and secondary data (historical documentation and scholarly literature).

Media (major factor)

Prior to sketching the historical, geographical and demographical backgrounds (of the number of dialectal speakers and the language-use domains in the proceeding sub-sections), the study is also designed to shed further light on the relationship between mass media and LM. In the present sub-section, the relationship between the mass media and the Chinese dialects in question is examined. In agreement with Sha (2012), the mass media is found to be one of the most influential factors, among others, in the distribution, spread and maintenance of the more powerful Chinese dialects (e.g., Cantonese). It is a truism that the relatively powerful Chinese dialects (e.g., Cantonese) have a significantly greater number of dialectal speakers compared to their counterparts - less powerful Chinese dialects (e.g., ShaanXi). A significant amount of mass media is used to broadcast the Cantonese dialect as a result of its massive speaking population, due largely to the fact that Cantonese speakers are accustomed to watch dialectal films in the Cantonese dialect.

It should be acknowledged that this research uncovered that despite the very large number of ethnic Shaan'Xi in the younger age groups (currently living in Shaan'Xi Province), their language shift to Mandarin is the main factor why they do not support the Shaan'Xi dialectal television series and films. '*Chinese dialects are of interest to me because they are used among and across the mass media such as television series and films.*' '*The reason why I am interested in the Cantonese dialect is because Cantonese-speaking films are screened in the Shaan'Xi Province [where the interviewees reside].*' '*I am particularly interested in Cantonese films [but not other Chinese dialectal films], because the Shaan'Xi*

Province [where I reside] screened many of them in the local movie theaters.' These three responses are derived from a set of interviews in which a number of the participants in the survey site of Shaan'Xi Province verbally narrated their viewpoints about the effect of mass media on their preference of dialectal films.

Number of Speakers (minor factor)

An interview protocol is engaged as one of the measurements to reveal how many dialectal speakers use the two dialects among and across numerous functional linguistic-and-communicative domains. Official demographic websites indicate that no more than half of the total population (37 million speakers) in ShaanXi Province use the ShaanXi dialect (Ding, 2012), whereas Cantonese is the most widely used medium for intra-ethnic communication in Guangdong Province (38 million speakers) (People's Government of Guangdong Province, 2007). More than 98-99 percent of the older age group (aged 70-85) in the research site of Shannxi Province state that they exclusively use the ShannXi dialect. Only (approximately) 20 percent of the middle age group (aged 50-70) of the participants state that they occasionally use some Mandarin. Conversely, ShaanXi is the dominant dialect in the linguistic-and-communicative repertoire for the middle age group (aged 50-70). In sharp contrast, the younger age group (aged 10-30) report that their dominant variety of speech is Mandarin. In some extreme cases, a limited number of participants in their early 20s only understand the ShaanXi dialect (listening comprehension) but have no or little speaking ability (performance) in it. Please see the comment on the younger age group who are undergoing a language shift away from the ShaanXi dialect towards Mandarin in the last paragraph of the preceding sub-section.

Answers to Research Question 3: What is the role of mass media in the distribution, spread and maintenance of Chinese dialects (with a focus on the Cantonese and the Shaan'xi dialects, respectively)?

Relatively more powerful Chinese dialects have a longer history of the development of their mass media sectors than the less powerful ones. Also, it can be demonstrated that the more powerful Chinese dialects have used their respective mass media sectors to produce more dialectal films than the less powerful ones. Furthermore, mass media provides more institutional support to help the distribution, spread and maintenance of the more powerful Chinese dialects than the less powerful ones.

After answering Research Questions 1 and 2 in the preceding sub-sections, a problem immediately arises: historical work and scholarly literature never formally document the view of mass media's alleged role as the underlying reason for the wide dispersal and robust maintenance of the relatively powerful Chinese dialects (notwithstanding the linkage demonstrated by Chen, 2008; Ma, 2006; & Sha, 2012). Therefore, the relationship between mass media and the spread and maintenance of the two Chinese dialects must be taken into consideration. This connection can be elucidated through a comparison of three main themes which are explored in detail: (1) the history of dialectal films; (2) the number of dialectal films being produced; and (3) the box office statistics of dialectal films.

Below are the complementary and detailed answers to Research Question 3. *'The reason why I particularly love to see Cantonese films is because they are massively produced and there are many choices [unlike other dialectal films, I have few choices], such as, horror movies and comedy movies.'* This verbalized vignette is derived from a set of interviews in which numerous participants in the research site of Shaan'Xi Province orally expressed the relationship between the number of the dialectal films manufactured and the choice of genres available for viewers. Cantonese films, on the one hand, have been massively produced. As a result, viewers have more options amongst genres of Cantonese films. Shaan'Xi films, on the other hand, are not produced in great numbers. Thus, viewers have fewer options amongst the genres of Shaan'Xi films [compared to Cantonese films].

CONCLUSION

In summary, the current study provides empirical and statistical answers to the question of the disparity between the relatively powerful and less powerful dialects from an exploration of the sociological factors at work in the role of mass media (more powerful Chinese dialects receive higher audience ratings for their television series and receive higher revenue from their box offices than the less powerful ones), the number of dialectal speakers (more powerful Chinese dialects have a larger dialectal speaking population than the less powerful ones) and the language-use domain (more powerful Chinese dialects are used among and across more functional language-use domains than the less powerful ones).

In addition, the findings of the present research deliver a wealth of hidden evidence on the distribution, spread and maintenance of dialects in public and social discourse (e.g., see the answers to Research Question 3), as follows: (1) the history of dialectal films and

integrated television series (of the dialects under consideration) shows that the more powerful Chinese dialects have a longer history of development in their mass media sectors than the less powerful ones; (2) the number of dialectal films and television series being produced (in the dialects under investigation) demonstrates that the mass media sectors of the more powerful Chinese dialects have a larger number of productions of dialectal television series and dialectal films than the less powerful ones; (3) the box office database/movie box office and audience ratings (of the dialects researched) highlight that the mass media provides more institutional support to help the distribution, spread and maintenance of the more powerful Chinese dialects than the less powerful ones.

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