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Notes on Authors

Qing Cao is Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at Durham University, UK. Previously he taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is an elected Council Member of the British Association of Chinese Studies (2005-2008). He publishes extensively in media and cultural studies in international journals including *International Communication Gazette, Journalism Studies, European Journal of East Asian Studies, East Asia: an International Quarterly, Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, *Critical Arts, Journal of International Communication, Journal of Language and Politics*, and *American Journal of Chinese Studies*. He contributed to edited books published by Routledge, Palgrave and Sage.

Dongning Feng is presently lecturing at the University of Salford in the UK. He has taught a wide range of subjects in China, Japan and Britain. His publications range from cultural, cinematic and literary studies to translation studies. His current research interests include critical theory and translation, communication and interpreting, commercial translation and subtitling.

Linghui Jin is Deputy Dean of the School of Business, Shanghai Donghai Vocational College. Prior to teaching linguistics and business in college, Jin worked as English tour guide in China Travel Service and interpreter in Foreign Trade Bureau. With years' work experience in different enterprises in China, her current research lies in critical discourse analysis of transformation of Chinese enterprise, business communication in China, E-marketing management in Chinese business. Her main published books include: *E-marketing* (2007, co-edited), *E-marketing Practice* (2008, co-edited), *Oral English in Foreign Trade* (2009), *Practical Guide to Business English* (2009).

Jingjing Li is a PhD candidate in translation studies who also teaches Chinese at the University of Salford, UK. Her research interests include political discourse analysis, translation of political texts and cultural studies.

Rugang Lu teaches Chinese at the School of Humanities, University of Southampton, UK. He obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in language and cultural studies in the University of Southampton. Prior to coming to the UK, he was an associate professor at Ningbo University, China. His recent publications include a monograph *Chinese Culture in Globalization* (2009).

Jana S. Rošker is Professor in Chinese studies and is currently Head of the Department of Asian and African Studies at the Faculty of Arts in the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. In 1988, she obtained her PhD from the Department of Sinology at Vienna University in Austria and continued her studies and research at the Center for Chinese Studies in Taipei, Beijing University, Nankai University in Tianjin and National Hsinchu University of Education. Her research interests and publication areas are mainly in the fields of: methodology of intercultural research, traditional Chinese theory of perception, Chinese epistemology and comparative philosophy. E-mail: jana.rosker@guest.arnes.si.

Heidi Ross is Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and Director of the East Asian Studies Center and at Indiana University. She earned her B.A. in Chinese Language and Literature at Oberlin College, an M.A. in Education/Applied Linguistics at the University of Michigan, and a Ph.D. in Educational Foundations, Policy, and Administration at the University of Michigan. Dr. Ross has taught and consulted at numerous institutions in East Asia, has served as president of the Comparative and International Education Society and co-editor of *Comparative Education Review*, and served as Chair of Educational Studies and Director of Asian Studies at Colgate University. Ross has published widely on Chinese education and society, gender and schooling, and qualitative research methodology, and her books include *China Learns English* (Yale), *The Ethnographic Eye* (Garland), and *Taking Teaching Seriously* (Paradigm).

Hailong Tian is Professor of linguistics at Tianjin University of Commerce, China. He received his doctor degree in linguistics from Nankai University and worked at Lancaster University as an investigator and the network facilitator of the Leverhulme-funded project *New Discourses in Contemporary China*. He has completed research projects funded by China's national and provincial foundations of social sciences. His current research interest lies in discourse studies of China's social transformation and published extensively in both English and Chinese. He is the co-editor of the special issue of *Journal of Language and Politics* (John Benjamins, 2010, 9: 4), and the author of *Discourse Studies: Categories, Perspectives and Methodologies* (Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press, 2009). More information is available at his personal website: http://sfl.tjcu.edu.cn/tian.

Yimin Wang is a doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Indiana University. She obtained her Master's Degree in China Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, and worked as a research associate at Singapore National Institute of Education prior to coming to Indiana University. At IU, Yimin has been awarded a Proffitt Fellowship, and her current research interests include comparative and international education, social and educational reforms in contemporary China, language policy, and qualitative research methodologies.

Dermot Williamson is an honorary fellow of Lancaster China Management Centre at Lancaster University Management School. His research interests include cultural perceptions of management control, and enterprise risk management. He teaches financial accounting, management accounting and management control at Lancaster University, Glasgow University, and the German Graduate School. He has also taught at Thunderbird School of Global Management, Heriot-Watt University, and Aston Business School. He is a Scottish Chartered Accountant. Before his academic career, he was a manager with Royal Dutch Shell in the UK, Netherlands, Malaysia, Hong Kong and China.

Zongjie Wu is Professor and Director for the Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies at the School of International Studies, Zhejiang University. He holds a PhD in linguistics from Lancaster University, UK. His research began in applied linguistics, and has extended into critical/cultural studies of Chinese discourse and communication. His current interests include cultural studies of educational discourse, heritage and cultural memory, critical ethnography of Chinese traditional discourse. A common thread that runs through his work is a philosophical perspective on the relationships between being, knowing and naming in the context of cultural collision and dialogue between the East and West. He is author or editor of a number of books, including: *Teachers' Knowing in*

Curriculum Change (2005), *Cultural Diversity of Discourse: Facilitate Coexistence and Harmony* (2005, co-edited), *Curriculum and Language Teacher Development* (2005).

Lan Yang is Lecturer of Comparative Linguistics and Literature at the University of Leeds, UK. His current research interest is in linguo-stylistics and applied linguistics, focusing on the language style of contemporary Chinese literature and the learning and teaching of Chinese as a second language. He is the author of *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (1998), *A Study of Gong'an Dialect* (1992) and *The Dialects of Hubei Province* (1997), and co-author of *The Concise Encyclopedia of China* (1994).

Introduction

Language, Discourse and Identity in Globalized China

Qing Cao and Hailong Tian

The focus of the present edited volume is on the examination of various phenomena of language use in the rapidly changing Chinese society. It aims to contribute to discussions on conceptualizing a range of social issues in relation to the role of language in society, of which the issue of identity is a central concern. To achieve this, we include a variety of case studies such as the concepts of "accountability" "autonomy" and "culture" for an in-depth analysis. Theories thus merge with practice - conceptual issues are discussed in relation to practical examples. Another feature of the volume is the discourse perspective we adopt in approaching the case studies. It is natural that issues of identity are often considered from a sociological perspective as in the departments of sociology and politics. However, discourse analysis as a methodology as well as a conceptual frame is complementary to sociological and political perspectives as shown in this volume. We explore the issue of identity as a type of discursive practice in Foucault's sense of the term, and conceptualize identity as sociocultural, historical and political construction. As is to be seen in the following account, the focus of the current research arises from the current complex transformations of the Chinese society, which produce a myriad of identities and provide a fertile ground for studying the interplay of language use and formation of identities. The premises for the current research come from our consideration of a number of questions - what is a better way of relating the study of language to the current issues of society, and how could we explore social issues by applying a linguistic analytical model? Seeking answers to these questions is part of the rationales of the current volume.

1. From language to discourse

The study of language has long been confined to the structure of language itself, for example, its syntactic and morphological structures. Were there any extension, it had seldom gone beyond the generation and transformation of these structures and their relationship with the meanings they carry. This closed, isolated, stable and abstract account of language, facilitated by Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky in the twentieth century, has become a dominant view that rejects other views of language, be it language use in a situational or societal context. However, such a view has been challenged by philosophers and social scientists. Austin (1962), for instance, proposes the "speech act theory" to illustrate the fact that when a social actor speaks "I name this ship Elizabeth", he or she is at the same time performing the act of naming. Foucault examines language use in the process of knowledge formation such as the knowledge of madness (1972) and prison (1977). However, Foucault uses the term "discourse" to refer to language use in a specific historical context. For him language use is entangled with the notion of power, which in turn is exercised and resisted through language. Thus discourse is conceptualized in a much broader sense. The "turn to discourse" across social sciences, as argued by Wetherell *et.al.* (2001:3), is "practical and simply concerns the changing nature of social life and some recent radical transitions in the flow of information across societies." The turn to discourse constitutes a social view of language that takes as its priority the societal context in which power operates. Starting from this social view of language, linguists such as Kress (2001:37) realize that the social is not around discourse, nor correlated with discourse, nor as a resource to use, but rather "the

social is in the sign" (Kress 2001:37). In a society where the process of globalization is so evidently spreading, discourse in the sense of language use has become the social itself.

2. Discourse and globalization

Discourse has become a catchword in general writing as well as a key term that attracts the attention of academics in their intellectual inquiries. This is to a large extent attributable to the emergent globalization that people experience in their daily lives. Globalization is instrumental to the creation, circulation, negotiation, recontextualization as well as contestation and refutation of a plethora of discourses. Globalization, in its simplest sense, is the complex sets of changes that occur across national boundaries. These changes embody a process or sets of processes of transformation in the spatial organizations of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental, trans-regional and transnational flow and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power. Globalization is developing in an ever deepening and condensing way. In the economic field, for example, we see the increasing flow of goods and money, finance and trading networks. What is more easily seen however is the ever increasing mobility of people as tourists, migrants, students, business representatives and diplomats. The movement of people parallels the flow of images and representations through contemporary media and communication technologies. It is in this dynamic matrix of intensified interactions that discourse is inherently intertwined with the process of globalization. So much so that Fairclough (2006) conceptualizes globalization in part as a globalization of discourses.

Globalisation of discourses entails firstly change in society that in turn produces change in discourse. The sweeping but omnipresent dynamism driven by globalisation in various forms in China – modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, commercialisation and marketization – has put enormous strain on traditional form of life and instigated an inexorable force for change. This process in China therefore amalgamates an internal aspiration and external pressure – a perfect galvanising driving dynamics that has brought about transformations in China at a scale and speed unseen in human history. The global and local, politics and economics, the rural and urban, the traditional and modern, the sacred and mundane, the internal and external have all collapsed and swept into a single logic of unrelenting swirl of change. Language use is thus most vulnerable to and inevitably swayed by the fast-moving social environment. It is not difficult therefore to see changes in the way people interact and communicate with one another. A case in point is the media report at the time of writing on China's Vice-president Xi Jinping's way of talking during his official visit to the United States during 13-18 February 2012. His way of using informal words, of telling stories, of talking while eating chocolate, is all reported as a change in discourse, which gains a fresh and perhaps welcoming image of the new generation of Chinese leaders.

Globalisation of discourses also entails changes in society generated by such variation in discourse. By discourse we mean the practical use of language in the complex milieu of power relations. Discourse is a social practice, and any change in discourse may generate more social changes, "just as designs for a new automobile engine are internalised and materialised in the engine itself" (Fairclough 2006:11). Drawing on this notion of discourse, we see a distinction between the actual process of globalisation and the globalisation of discourses. Discourses of globalisation do not merely represent the process and tendency of globalisation that happens independently – they can contribute to creating and shaping actual processes of globalisation provided that discourses are globalised by social agents or agencies with effective strategies. This involves the transmission of images, representations and other multimodal meaning-carrying symbols. The complex interactions between discourse and globalisation give rise to a dialectical-relationship between discourse and identity in the age of globalisation. We see this issue as of particular significance in China where new discourses emerge as a result of social transformation. It is significant also in the sense that change in discourse is mostly brought about by social men and women who, while adopting a new style of speaking and acting in the process of globalisation, have deliberately or unconsciously created new identities for themselves.

3. Discourse and identity

We see discourse as language in use. This definition embodies Fairclough's (1989, 1992) conceptualisation of language use as discourse or the performative aspect of language. That is, how language actually functions in society as opposed to language as a closed linguistic system. We are fully aware of the complexities concerning the term 'discourse' that has been defined in many different ways by scholars coming from different positions and disciplinary backgrounds. However, we wish to limit ourselves in the use of the term discourse in this volume, at least as an editorial position, to the formulations by Fairclough that sees discourse as 'a form of social practice'. Such understanding implies that discourse is regarded as a particular mode of social action that is in a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure (Fairclough, 1992:63). Here we see a dynamic process of an interesting sociocultural circuit – language, discourse and social structure - each exerts an impact on the other to form a mutually reinforcing circle of social practice. This is precisely what we are interested in investigating in the current volume – the intertwined though sometimes messy, entangling interrelationships between the dynamic process of language use and sociocultural transformations in post-reform China.

To study the dynamics of language use and the sociocultural transformations in China, we inevitably face the challenge posed by the issue of identity, whether it is in the private, personal and individual sense, or in the public, group and collective sense. In contemporary Chinese society, the question of "who we are" is to a large extent the issue of discourse. In the age of globalisation, identity has no longer been a psychic self that can be found true or false to itself, as in what Benwell and Stokoe (2006) call "project of the self". On the contrary, the question "who we are" is often encountered and negotiated in everyday communication. It is affirmed, reinforced, disputed, ascribed, resisted and managed largely in and through discourse, leaving the answer (whatever the answer is) fluctuating as much as that of the changing society. In this discourse/identity complex, identity is no more than a discursive construction. As will be seen in the following chapters, we concern discursive identity at least at two levels - the transnational and national. For the former, the volume explores issues of transnational cultural power (chapter 3), institutional identity of *danwei* (chapter 4), and collective identity of a market socialism (chapter 5). For the latter, we consider the identity of the "New Era" Chinese Literature (chapter 7) and general sociocultural identities (chapter 8). Whichever level of consideration, the issue of identity is discussed in terms of its intrinsic connections with discourse, or language use in society.

4. The context of the study

This volume aims to present a diagnostic analysis and assessment of current language use as a particular form of social practice, to make a unique contribution to the on-going debate on the challenges of China's reform and opening programmes, to examine the role language plays in mediating social understanding of such key concepts as 'traditional culture', 'accountability' and 'autonomy', and to explore ways in which the relationship between language use and societal change could be better understood. In particular, this volume seeks to understand the process of language evolution through empirical evidence of case studies. For this purpose, we put together eight research articles by international and Chinese scholars to examine critically key issues surrounding the interface between language use and social environment and reflect upon radical post-reform transformations in China as mirrored in daily language practice. The current volume, through its focus on three contextual backdrops of language use, attempts to capture some of the characteristics of language change over this period of profound transformation. However, we are aware that this is only a snapshot of those transformations – the studies presented in this volume provide a broad brush of language evolution that awaits fuller and more comprehensive account and analysis. Nevertheless, we wish the volume to serve

as a tentative survey into the vast terrain of language practice in the reform era that may generate further interest in documenting the fascinating language evolution in recent decades.

The issue of language use as social action in China has attracted increasing academic attention and become a subject of focused inquiry in recent years, in particular in the bourgeoning discipline of discourse studies. The Chinese style of communication rooted in interpersonal relationships of Confucian ethics, for example, is examined from a variety of perspectives (Chen 2004; Shi-xu 2009, 2010) which creates spaces to engage Chinese intellectual traditions in a proactive fashion. Such a cultural root fused with global and contemporary perspectives offers fresh revenues to explore an indigenous scholarship that suffered a prolonged break in modern times for an externally induced modernisation campaigns. The rekindled though nascent development in coalescing with China's intellectual origins in discourse study creates the potential to underpin language study with an indigenously informed epistemological and ontological foundations that the 'non-West' has rarely achieved, due largely to the sweeping force of modernisation that have swept Western-generated academic paradigms to a dominant position.

Nonetheless, the examination of language use as a discursive practice has gradually taken on a Chinese perspective, if not using a Chinese conceptual frame. Recent examples include special issues of journals on new discourse in China and media discourse (Tian 2009a; Chilton, Tian and Wodak 2010; Wu and Mao 2011). The launch of new journals such as *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Discourse Studies* provides a platform and academic focus on a Chinese approach to discourse analysis. Meanwhile, Western approaches on language and discourse studies are seen slowly but steadily through a Chinese point of view (Shi-xu 2005; Tian 2009b). In developing a Chinese approach to linguistic study, other scholars have provided indigenously-informed conceptual perspectives (Shao 1995; Xing 2000; Pan 2002) imbedded in Chinese intellectual traditions that may facilitate a more accurate and meaningful account of the Chinese language practice. Few now doubt the validity, richness and intellectual values of Chinese traditional scholarship. However, returning to cultural roots of linguistic studies only opens up possibilities of a better appreciation of current language use. Traditional scholarship has to be creatively revamped to illuminate contemporary dynamic process of language evolution, and the often convoluted interactions with its changing environment. To do this, more empirical work need to be carried out applying a combination of perspectives and methods. What could be useful then is approaching Chinese data with a multilevel angles, conceptual frames and epistemological traditions from diverse disciplinary positions. Perhaps, the broad-minded stance of 'let a hundred flowers blossom; let a hundred schools of thoughts contend' promises the best prospect of flourishing scholarship.

5. Structure of the book

The present volume is divided into three separate but logically linked sections. Each section examines language use in a specific domain – (1) comparative study, (2) global/local nexus and (3) domestic issues. Of course, this division is an analytical and therefore artificial one. In practice no language use can escape the ubiquitous force either of global or local processes of accelerating changes in the contemporary world characterised by the relentless logic of capitalism. **Part One** examines language use in a comparative perspective that highlights the socio-cultural, historical and political context that gives rise to particular meanings of some key concepts in China. Such a scrutiny in a comparative frame, would provide us with a distinctive angle to appreciate the culture-bound nature of language use that has seldom been called to question, because people tend to assume meanings reside in words, rather than socio-historically constructed, negotiated, circulated and reproduced in a complex matrix of power relations (Hall, 1997). The two chapters in Part One investigate two crucial concepts that are central to socio-cultural and political processes of contemporary China – 'accountability' and 'autonomy'. The first is a relatively new term though the second has been in use for a long time in modern China. **Chapter One** (*The Concept of Accountability in Management Control: British and Chinese Perceptions and Their Recontextualization*) delineates the formulations of the term 'accountability' in the field of management and corporate governance. Based on the findings of

grounded theory study conducted on British and Chinese managers' perceptions of the concept of accountability, Hailong Tian and Dermot Williamson discuss whether the concept of accountability is a universal concept that is equally applicable around the world, or on the contrary it is parochial as a local concept that people from some cultures assume as universal. The chapter further examines what other related concepts these managers have in their perceptions, what notions they find important in providing control assurance and what meaning these concepts have to them. These issues are discussed from a cultural and discourse perspective, and related to the notion of re-contextualisation. Throughout the chapter critical discourse analysis (CDA) informs much of the examination of how these concepts as *texts* are related to their (and other) cultural, institutional and organizational *contexts* in the UK and C   h   i   n   a   .

In **Chapter Two** (*Cultural Conditionality of Comprehension: The Perception of Autonomy in China*) Jana Rošker considers specific issues of modernization that China is confronted with in a framework of a globally structured economic and political order. The usage of abstract socio-political terms like autonomy, democracy and law, therefore is derived from specific Western and historical processes and related organisational structure of Western society that may prove to be a dangerous and misleading mechanism. Thus, the understanding and application of 'autonomy', as a product of specific Western political theory that implies an individual-based concept of political equality is of great importance for any democratisation, as it has been understood by prevailing western cognitive patterns. Chapter Two presents crucial findings of an intercultural inquiry that shows the understanding of 'autonomy' in the Central European cultural and linguistic context is closely connected to the notion of 'freedom' in the sense of non-interference, whereas the perception of its official synonym in the Chinese language (zilü) proves to be mainly linked to the semantic complex of 'self-restriction' in the sense of self-control and self-restrictions respectively, although the etymological core of both words is broadly similar. In both cultural contexts, Jana Rošker argues, 'autonomy' can be defined as a semantic construct that expresses the meaning of 'self-law', though there is discrepancy between the etymological (functional understanding) and the universal meanings. Empirical evidence about prevailing perceptions of 'autonomy' indicates that the understanding of law as a criterion of regulating human interaction cannot be separated from the political system. Jana Rošker contends finally that the relationship between the law and the society is organically linked to the specific structure and to the nature of institutionalization of the society. If we wish to find out the mode of understanding 'autonomy' in a particular society, we need first of all to investigate its historic and institutional context.

Part Two of this volume examines language use in a global context, focusing on the interactions and interconnectedness between the local and global – the so-called glocalisation (Wu, 2008) as China has embraced globalisation in recent decades. Specifically, the three chapters in Part Two explores to what extent prevailing global forces in their various forms have impacted the formation of new language use in post-reform China. The analytical focus in this part is placed upon the change of priorities in social attitude and practice as a direct result of intensification of China's involvement in the international world. Thus, Part Two delineates a curious though fascinating pattern of an externally driven trajectory of a chain of reactions – China's open door policy, global response, China's reaction, China's changing practice, China's changing language use to reflect radically changed social realities. Clearly, the transformations in post-reform China are unprecedented in human history. However, China's metamorphosis in recent decades has resulted largely from 'catching-up' with the advanced societies, or the process of modernisation. Inevitably the nature of such transmutation means that China has to adapt to the international world. Translated into daily practice, China is often compelled to operate within the confines of existing rules and conventions.

Focusing on the role of culture in China's external communication, Qing Cao assesses China's evolving discourse about the outside world in **Chapter Three** (*Re-imagining Traditions: The Role of Culture in China's External Relations*) by establishing to what extent the notion of 'cultural security' can be said to carry discursive weight in China's attempt to develop 'soft power' capacity. Again, the analytical focus is placed upon reactive response – selective promotion of Chinese traditional culture as the core repertoire to project soft power to external audiences. Whilst significant attention is given to external implications of Chinese 'soft power' projection, this chapter explains its conceptual origins and

discursive development by focusing upon domestic factors – fresh perspective on China's cultural traditions and changing perceptions of the external world that impact China's re-assessment of external relations. Qing Cao details China's re-imagining of its own cultural roots and evaluates the implications in policy innovations. The chapter concludes that a primary interest in China's experience of rapid and profound domestic change is the self-conscious attempt by the political elites to sustain societal and political stability. Such a priority entails a perceived need to reconfigure the basis upon which China's national cultural and political identity can be reconstructed. In this regard, the nature of the Chinese reform and opening may be understood as a deliberate attempt by the political elites to search for a fresh cultural and ideological realignment to support the continuing reform agenda. It is in this context that the emergence over the past decade of the concept of 'national cultural power' is of particular significance that merits a serious academic inquiry.

Chapter Four (*Hybrid Discourses toward Globalization: A Historical Discourse Analysis of China Travel Service*) chronicles the evolutionary change of an organizational discourse in the China Travel Service over the last two decades. Zongjie Wu and Linghui Jin argue that the state-owned enterprise as a *danwei* has undergone a process of corporatization and privatization, and therefore lost its enclosed, multifunctional and self-sufficient nature. This leads to a structural change in a whole range of relations that eventually result in a radically altered pattern of tourism managerial discourse, in order to articulate new roles, functions and services of tourism industry. Most importantly, this change is ultimately instigated by the sweeping forces of globalization – it is globalisation that provides not only the catalyst but continuing imperatives that drive organisational transformations of the Chinese tourism industry. The ethnographic fieldwork reported in Chapter Four provides us with a compelling account of a managerial struggle in a matrix of power relations between global forces and local processes that produce a discoursal hybridity. The cultural appropriation of these discourses, Zongjie Wu and Linghui Jin contend, is part of the process of glocalization that constructs a new form of life for people and a new way of acting for businesses. Chapter Four concludes that various types of global discourse do not necessarily proceed with expansion of hegemony but involve a process of re-negotiation with the local indigenous culture. The Chinese tradition with its unique way of using language has brought not only vitality to its economy, but a global contest of ideas and politics - whilst the absorption of global discourses fits into the symbolic space of the local, it also enacts the ability of the Chinese discourse to resist those that are alien, and even to export Chinese discourses such as *guanxi* and *mianzi*.

In **Chapter Five** (*Discourses of the National and the Global: A Case Study of 'Crazy English'*) Heidi Ross and Yimin Wang provide a fascinating account of the rise of Li Yang's 'Crazy English' (*fengkuang yingyu*) over the last two decades that has had a tremendous influence on language learning experiences of millions of Chinese. They examine how socio-political-cultural perspectives and identities are constructed and enacted through language-in-use by looking at 'Crazy English' as a particular mode of discursive practice in a shared community of performative and communicative language learning and use inspired by the hegemonic power of English in shaping meanings and identities. Specifically, Chapter Five analyses discursive interactions between 'Crazy English' marketing and teaching strategies characterized by three thematic slogans representing both nationalistic and globally-oriented discourses. By exploring changing modes of national and global discourse in slogans, Heidi Ross and Yimin Wang critically assess tensions and opportunities of market socialism during different phases of the reform era.

Part Three documents and appraises the dynamic process of language use in a domestic context by considering three salient aspects of the Chinese society – language style of the 'New Era' literature, translation practice and the display of public signs. These three areas of representative discursive practice, investigated in the last three chapters, provide us not only with a snapshot of the way in which changing language use is part and parcel of rapid socio-cultural transformations, but empirical evidence of such an evolution chronicled meticulously. The central line that runs through the last three chapters is how social conditions determine the way language is used, evolved and developed. These chapters demonstrate that any language is not static, fixed and stagnant, but fluid, flexible and even volatile. It is highly susceptible and sensitive to external sociocultural, political and economic processes. We are most concerned in this volume with the intricately intertwined linkages between language use and social conditions that are not always transparent and readily discernible – that is why empirical investigation is

indispensable in moving us closer to seeing the intimate connections. Obviously such connections can take many different forms including the power structure that shapes the dynamics of language such as that used during the Cultural Revolution that is charged with violence. The studies presented in Part Three, however, deal primarily with linguistic features that reflect the progress, challenges and tensions since China has embarked on the road of reform and opening.

Chapter Six (*Innovation and Experimentation: Language Style in the "New Era" Chinese Literature*) investigates the stylistic development of the New Era literary language by focusing on the syntactic and rhetorical pattern of a new type of experimental language. Lan Yang delineates the New Era language's aesthetic and stylistic characteristics and functions, but more importantly reveals the dynamic relationship between the New Era language and the new literary development contextualised by the changing socio-political and economic environment. The conclusions that Yang Lan draws from his analysis are illuminating. First, the interplay between the 'mainstream' and 'subaltern' NE literature has indicated both a parallel and separate development of stylistic novelties, though it is the somewhat non-mainstream literature that leads experimentation with language. This could well suggest that the creative energies supressed during the Cultural Revolution and generated by the extraordinary experiences of young writers in those turbulent years found a better outlet in such literary forms as 'obscure poetry' and 'avant-garde fiction' that spearheaded language innovations. Second, the sudden burst of language creativities in the NE literature is driven, among others, by the compelling desire on the part of young writers and literary critics to 'modernise' Chinese literature, in the same way as the Chinese economy and society. Here, the spectre of catching-up mentality felt so emotively by generations of Chinese idealists has found expressions in the realm of literature – an indication that literature including the use of language is inherently intertwined with dynamics of the socio-cultural, political and economic processes. Perhaps understandably, this modernist pursuit in the NE literature innovations started to lose its momentum and popularity towards the mid-1980s when the readers began to be attracted to the lighter and more entertaining dimensions of literature as Chinese society came to embrace the onset of commercialisation. This modernist twist, Yang Lan construes, represents the third characteristic of the evolution of NE literature. Finally and most importantly, these linguo-stylistic innovations have exerted lasting impact on the Chinese language in terms of presentational style of speech and stretch of sentence that have been incorporated into a range of genres of everyday language use including the mass media.

In **Chapter 7** (*Reconstructing Contemporary Chinese Political Discourse in Translation*) Dongning Feng and Jingjing Li explores, through examining a series of selected parallel texts, the shifts of translation solutions and changes of translation strategies in English translation of official Chinese political speeches delivered by the last three generations of leadership (1970s–2010). With China continuing to pursue a more pragmatic economic and political policy, its government is gaining confidence in managing its economic and socio-political affairs over the period, and has subtly, but evidently transformed how it articulates its political thinking and visions to the outside world and takes more control and ownership in how to articulate its political discourse in translation. These shifts in translated political texts inform not only the discursive transformation in China, but also the making and reshaping of China's political discourse. Dongning Feng and Jingjing Li maintain that these translations offer a discursive space where political reality is reflected upon and political process is reconstructed in the international context.

Chapter Eight (*Public Signs and the Discursive Constructions of Socio-cultural Identities in Contemporary China*) examines the transformation of semiotic representation of signs in public places, both verbal and visual. Conceptualising public signs as 'symbolic capital', Rugang Lu traces the changing pattern of public signs used by different institutions to structure, classify and normalize the social world according to their own 'social consciousness' - their ideologies, values and meanings. Chapter Eight argues persuasively that the social world is not only interwoven with individuals and institutions, but situated in a complex temporal-spatial relationship with a whole range of other social actors. The discourse analysis in this chapter is creatively structured by drawing on four areas of semiotic studies - multimodality, social semiotics, geosemiotics and visual semiotics. Through a semiological analysis of three examples of public signs, this chapter demythologizes the socio-ideological denotation embedded

in the transformation of semiotic representations of public signs in China. The socio-ideological critique of public signs moves us closer to a better understanding of the discursive construction of socio-cultural identities in contemporary China.

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