

China's Fluctuating English Education Policy Discourses and Continuing Ambivalences in Identity Construction



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Abstract Foreign language education policies constitute an important aspect of China's reconstruction of its linguistic and cultural identities in an increasingly globalized world. China's English language education policies in the past three decades have undergone fluctuations, which can be roughly categorized into the following stages: (1) the *opening up* of English education from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, and related to this, the euphoria for learning English. (2) The *speeding up* of English education from the mid-1990s to the first decade of the new millennium, and related to this, the anxiety regarding "too much time and too little effect." (3) The *slowing down* or *losing direction* as shown in a recent debate over a proposed English education policy reform from 2013 to 2014. Related to this is the fear that English education will have a negative effect on Chinese language proficiency and cultural identity. These changes have been reflected in and constructed by policy related discourses, including those of the national policy makers, education institutions and experts, and ordinary learners and netizens. The above policy and attitudinal fluctuations over 30 years can be contextualized and interpreted as being emblematic of issues in China's history over the last 150 years. An ambivalent psychological complex towards self and "the West" is revealed, situated in China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal history, beginning with the Opium Wars in 1840, when China faced foreign invasions and was forced to open its markets and partially give up sovereignty. It was in that context that the ambivalence was developed, i.e., the strong desire for the English language through which new technologies can be learned to strengthen the nation, and the fear that this foreign language will threaten Chinese identity. A brief historical analysis shows that the status of English in China has been fluctuating for the past 150 years. Such ambivalences and fluctuations have become a "*habitus*" (Bourdieu, P. *Language and symbolic power*: (J. B. Thompson Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson Trans.). Cambridge: CUP, 1991), i.e., durable "structuring structures" of the collective mind. English has become a screen with two sides: on one side is projected the Chinese dream of becoming strong; and on

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the other side is projected the nightmare of losing national identity. This self-perpetuating ambivalence helps to explain the fluctuations of China's English language education policies. In the context of increased globalization, when English is becoming a de-territorialized resource, the habitual defense mechanism is no longer effective, and it may well hinder national and individual development. The durable yet not eternal *habitus* can be transformed, and alternative strategies are to be conceived. Instead of a screen, English can be taken as a mirror, from which we can perceive our complex needs, desires, and emotions. With a clear self-perception, we can probably be free from compulsory policy and mood swings, feel more confident about our native cultural identity, and be ready to take on the identity of a "dialogical communicator" (Gao, *Lang Intercult Commun* 14(1):1–17, 2014) in intercultural communication.

1 Introduction

To meet an increasingly globalized world, China's English education policies face some emerging and continuing challenges. As an integral part of China's reconstruction of its linguistic and cultural identities, English education policies involve interaction between different forces, including the "hard" increases like those of the economy and internationalization, and "soft" language ideologies. A crucial challenge comes from the incompatibility of two beliefs about language and cultural identity: (1) English is the key to individual success and national prosperity; (2) English is an invading force that will hamper the maintenance of the Chinese language and cultural/national identity.

The struggle between these two competing ideologies can be seen from the changes of China's English education policies over the past three decades, and related to this, the very evident emotions that loom large in society. These changes can be roughly divided into three phases: (1) the *opening up* of English education from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, characterized by the *euphoria* for learning English; (2) the *speeding up* of English education from the mid-1990s to the first decade of the new millennium, marked by an *anxiety* regarding "too much time and too little effect" in achieving the expected results; (3) the *slowing down* or *losing direction*, as shown in a recent debate between 2013 and 2014 over a proposed English education policy reform. Related to this is the *fear* that English education will hamper Chinese language proficiency and cultural identity.

Previous studies on foreign language policies have already categorized the key stages of historical development, and identified some general themes. Shen (2012) and O'Regan (2014) provided overviews of the development of foreign language education policies in contemporary east Asia, especially Japan, Korea and China. The changes of foreign language education policies are mostly associated with the nations' political history, international relations, and economic development. Typically, governments realized the need for English education when their countries

faced Western military, political and economic threats in the nineteenth century, and the need was accelerated in the process of globalization. Descriptions of China's foreign language education history have been provided by a number of scholars (e.g., Adamson 2002; Cai 2006; Gao 2009; Hu 2003; Lam 2002; Wen and Hu 2007; Yang 2000; Zhao and Campbell 1995). The stages of development have been categorized, with common findings. There have been some critical reflections (e.g., Hu 2003) on existing problems, such as rapid changes of policy following political situations and over-concentration on English, accompanied by neglect of other foreign languages. In recent years, the proposed English entrance examination reform, signaling a slowing down in English language education, also attracted focused critical discussion, evaluation, and policy suggestions (e.g., Cheng 2014). However, there were a few studies from a social psychological perspective which dealt with not only the historical backgrounds but also the internalized *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991), or "structuring structures" for repeated behaviors (Gao 2009).

This chapter will examine the above three stages of China's English education policy and related emotions in the past three decades from a social psychological perspective. This effort is meant in a sense as critical self-reflection, as I am a member in the community of Chinese educators of English, who is involved in the discussed process of history. In this chapter I will focus more on the third stage, as this is still ongoing and has been less studied. While providing my descriptive account of the three stages, I will cite sample discourses at three levels – the government (policy documents or policy makers' words), educational institutions (state-run universities and private enterprises; educational experts; mass media), and individuals (ordinary learners and teachers; netizens). I will then contextualize and reinterpret the policy and attitudinal fluctuation of the most recent 30 years in terms of the history of China over the last 150 years. An ambivalent psychological complex towards self and "the West" is revealed, situated in China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal history, beginning with the Opium Wars in the mid nineteenth century. This ambivalence involves the desire for the English language through which new technologies can be learned to strengthen the nation against foreign invasion, and the fear that this foreign language will threaten to undermine Chinese identity.

Such ambivalent attitudes, ideologies and related fluctuations have become what the French sociologist Bourdieu (1977, 1991) calls a "*habitus*", i.e., durable structuring structures of the mind that generate policy-making practices and discourses which are not necessarily rational. According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is historically acquired and embodied in the individual. "Each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all the other group or class *habitus[es]*" (1977, p. 86). *Habitus* is durable, but not eternal (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). It is far from being simply a "mechanical reproduction of the initial conditions" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 95). Such a nature provides opportunities for change.

In light of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, combined with general insights from psychoanalysis regarding the impact of early traumatic experience on later life (Mitchell and Black 1995), I will propose that English to the Chinese has been a

screen onto which ambivalent feelings carried from traumatic historical experiences have been projected and replayed. In the new context of globalization, such an old defense mechanism of self-perpetuation is no longer effective. It is suggested that English can be taken as a mirror, from which we can reflect on our multiple needs, desires and identities. With a clear self-perception, we can be relatively free from extreme ambivalences, and search for more creative solutions to the challenges of globalization. A few suggestions will be made for future lines of policy.

2 Stages of China's Foreign Language Education Policy, and Related Emotions

2.1 Opening Up with Euphoria

After a long period of isolation from the rest of the world, the opening up of China's foreign (English) education, together with its economic reform, began in the late 1970s. This opening was associated with the mastery of an instrument for economic growth and wealth, and related to this, the identity of a strong nation.

On January 18, 1978, China's Ministry of Education (MOE) issued the Protocol for 10-Year Full-Time Teaching in Elementary and Secondary Schools. It was stipulated that for schools meeting the necessary conditions, foreign (English) language classes should begin from Grade 3 in elementary school, and the total teaching hours over 8 years should amount to 1,080. On February 17, the State Council endorsed the MOE document which resumed the key university position of two foreign language institutes, in Beijing and Shanghai respectively. On March 4th, MOE made public its decision to send about 300 students and visiting scholars abroad that year.

A National Symposium on Foreign Language Education was held by the MOE from August 29 to September 10, 1978. This symposium was regarded as an event of "bringing order out of chaos". Liao Chengzhi, Vice Chairman of the NPC (National People's Congress) Standing Committee, presented a speech entitled "Speeding up the education of foreign language talents". The "uselessness of foreign languages" was criticized. The symposium called for "greater, faster, better and cheaper ways for the education of all-rounded foreign language talents. [...] Not being able to learn a foreign language well is not only a professional failure, but also a political failure" (Higher Education Research Institute, Sichuan Institute of Foreign Languages 1993, p.135).

It is interesting and important to note that "greater, faster, better, and cheaper" was a slogan which originated in China's Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1961, an economic and social campaign aimed at unrealistic rapidity of industrialization. The campaign led to a great imbalance of the national economy; it produced exaggeratedly high figures of production, and at the same time was at least partially responsible for high numbers of deaths from starvation. While the failure of the



Fig. 1 English Corner, Fudan University, Shanghai, 1984 (Source of photo: *Southern Weekend* (南方周末): <http://ndnews.oeeee.com/html/201310/31/443348.html>. Accessed on March 19, 2014.)

campaign has been recognized, the unrealistic desire for rapid growth and its discourse representation has been sustained, and were reproduced in, the *opening up* stage of FL education in China.

Euphoria, excitement, and passion permeated university campuses and society in general. “English Corner”, a special time-place for communication in English only, quickly flourished on university campuses in the 1980s (Fig. 1). As seen in this photo, the corner goers were not particularly young in age, their clothes were old-styled and reminiscent of the previous era, but the eagerness and enthusiasm on their faces were intense and new. Despite specific content talked about, that English as used in this “corner” became a symbol for the new opening.

In the 1980s and 1990s, English in formal school education increased by leaps and bounds, in the formulation of teaching guidelines, the recovery and expansion of English major programs, and English education research projects (Higher Education Research Institute, Sichuan Institute of Foreign Languages 1993). Meanwhile, private enterprises of English education began to emerge, adding to the “heat” of English learning. A representative case is Li Yang’s “Crazy English”.

Li Yang set up his “Li Yang International English Promotion Studio” in 1994. His “Crazy English” quickly swept China with its loudly shouted English sentences. At the beginning of a documentary “Crazy English” (produced and directed by Zhang Yuan 1999)¹. Li walked in the snow with a group and shouted loudly: “Crazy world! Crazy study! Crazy English! Crazy Everything! Crazy every day! I love this crazy game! Crazy! Crazy! Crazy!”. Figure 2 is an impressive advertising picture widely

¹ Access to the documentary film: <http://v.ku6.com/show/CXaHTsDMX3A7QioU.html?nr=1>.



Fig. 2 “Carry forward the national spirit; Stimulate patriotic passion” (“Crazy English” in the Forbidden City, Beijing, 1998) (Source of photo: “Li Yang’s Crazy English”, accessed on March 19, 2014. The same photo of lower resolution without attached caption or with other captions can be found at multiple websites on January 1, 2016, e.g., Beidu Baike: <http://baike.baidu.com/subview/5440/6535113.htm>)

seen in China, portraying Li Yang shouting English in the Forbidden City, i.e., the center of China’s traditional culture, supposedly “carrying forward the national spirit and stimulating patriotic passion”, as the Chinese caption says. While the relation between the English shouting and Chinese patriotism is curiously unclear, the passion transmitted is immediately evident and very striking.

Alongside patriotism, economic success was a practical motivation that private institutions focused on so as to attract learners, as seen in the words of another advertisement:

“Ignite your English potential immediately! Change your life like a magic!”

“Who else wants to transform from a victim of deaf and dumb English to a respected English expert, even an international bilingual elite long dreamed for?”

“The only trainer in China who can help trainees to conquer English in half a year, and turn English competence into a sizable amount of cash [...] money [...] and wealth in one year!”

Individual learners were indeed motivated and jointly contributed to the craze for English. In a qualitative study on trainees of Crazy English carried out at the turn of the millennium (Shen and Gao 2004, pp. 198–199), individual learners expressed their ideas which were highly congruent with the institution: Crazy English “was a positive word”, it “refers to the pursuit of a goal with extremely high commitment”; “only in this way can one succeed.” Those who are “crazy” are “persistent” or “fanatical”, which in turn means “rationally dedicated to one’s goals”.

As shown above, the English euphoria was pervasive and consistent at different levels of discourse in the *opening up* period – the “greater, faster, better, and cheaper” of the government, the “craziness” of educational institutions, and the fanaticism of individual learners. In this opening up of the nation to the world,

English was taken as a symbol as well as an instrument for individual success and national prosperity.

2.2 *Speeding Up with Anxiety*

The *speeding up* of English education from the mid-1990s to the first decade of the new millennium was a natural development of the *opening up*, and in the same direction. The prototypical emotion related, however, was negative rather than positive. The growth in the economy called for faster development of English education, which apparently lagged behind and generated feelings of anxiety and frustration.

“Too much time, too little effect” At a symposium on FL education reform held on June 28, 1996, Vice Premier Li Lanqing stated: “There is a common problem of spending much time and achieving only limited results. This problem requires urgent inspection and solution”. He also compared China with other nations:

Due to inappropriate teaching methods, the general FL proficiency of Chinese intellectuals has fallen behind not only developed countries such as Germany, but also many developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. This has not only become an obstacle and weakness in our learning of advanced science and technology, opening up to and having collaborative exchanges with the external world, but also made us suffer losses. (Li 1996, p.4)

Cen Jianjun, the MOE official in charge of foreign language education, echoed this evaluation:

The disparity between China's FL education and development of economy, science and technology is becoming increasingly great each year. [...] The speed of reform is seriously hampered by the overly low FL proficiency of our university students. (Cen 1998, p.13)

Vice Premier Li's negative evaluation was quickly shortened into a phrase “too much time; too little effect” (*feishi dixiao*) and became a topic for heated discussion in the mass media as well as academia. Support for this negative assessment was prevailing. In a paper published in *China Youth Daily* (March 10, 1999), a government official newspaper, University English professor Jing Shenghua portrayed English education in China as “a kettle of lukewarm water that will never boil”. A more commonly known concept was “dumb English”, meaning not being able to speak after learning English for many years. Dai Weidong (2001), president of the Shanghai Foreign Studies University, stated that a major problem of China's English education is “too much time and too little effect”. There were also different voices, though rather weak. For instance, Hu Zhuanglin (2002), a senior professor from Peking University, stressed that Chinese students learn English as a foreign rather than second language, implying the fallacy of the belief that China was “falling behind” ESL (English as a second language) countries such as India.

It is evident that the assessment and anxiety of “too much time; too little effect” at least partially resulted from the “greater, faster, better, and cheaper” expectation.

The disparity was between the gradual development in reality and the expected great leap forward.

Exam-oriented Anxiety One area where the anxiety was clearly manifested was in the national standard tests of English, particularly the “College English Test” (CET), with its two levels, Band 4 (CET-4) and Band 6 (CET-6), both targeted at university students other than those majoring in English. The development of CET-4 and CET-6 was organized by the MOE in late 1986, and the tests were formally implemented in 1987. For university students majoring in English, there is a separate national standard test called “Test for English Majors” (TEM), with its two levels Band 4 (TEM-4) and Band 8 (TEM-8). The formal implementation of TEM started from 1991. In terms of proficiency level, CET-4 is intermediate, CET-6 and TEM-4 are upper intermediate, and TEM-8 is advanced. It is claimed that these tests were “to push forward the implementation of English teaching guidelines, to objectively and accurately assess university students’ English competence, and to improve the level of English education in China”.² The impact of these tests, especially CET, which involved students of various majors, was enormous. For a long period of time, CET-4 results were tied to student graduation, university ranking, and English teacher evaluation. Only at the beginning of the new millennium, in 2005, did the MOE decide to lessen the importance of this test and stop issuing certificates showing satisfactory CET performance. Since then universities have gradually disconnected CET-4 results from student graduation, although the test has remained influential.

The anxiety the tests generated among students was intense. The following are citations of student journals and interviews from a longitudinal study (Gao et al. 2013):

A gray April just passed, and an agonizing June is coming. From last December to this June, there were English tests one after another. I am really worried. CET-4 made my hair turn gray and turned me into a Santa Clause. TEM-4 gave me such a hard blow that I totally became an April fool. Now everyone is busy preparing for CET-6, the most important exam at university, similar to the university entrance examination. To pass these tests, I have spent a lot of time. (Xiao Tan, English Journal 11)

My (CET-4) score was one point lower than the passing line. [...] I was really upset about it. You know, as I failed CET-4, I didn’t get the scholarship. Though I was elected as an excellent class leader, this title was not conferred by the university. And then, when they were recruiting volunteers for the Olympic Games, they wouldn’t allow me to take the (recruiting) test. Oh, my god! (Xu Jiayi, Interview 5, translated from Chinese).

Although there were different voices among English educators, the anxiety of “too much time and too little effect” was dominant, and was largely consistent across social levels. The “too much and too little” anxiety and frustration, as can be

²Baidu Encyclopaedia (百度百科): [http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=DV6uqqmqwshVhaILjd3OhM1UKmBE5r8TgU5nXhlMa-K0_LI5BgpVYfJzwJbZD50OQFM24rtfQuJYVSVEkoFugK](http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=DV6uqqmqwshVhaILjd3OhM1UKmBE5r8TgU5nXhlMa-K0_LI5BgpVYfJzwJbZD50OQFM24rtfQuJYVSVEkoFugKhttp://baike.baidu.com/link?url=DV6uqqmqwshVhaILjd3OhM1UKmBE5r8TgU5nXhlMa-K0_LI5BgpVYfJzwJbZD50OQFM24rtfQuJYVSVEkoFugK). Accessed on January 1, 2015. “College English Band 4” (大学英语四级考试).

seen in its development, was generated against the expectation of “greater, faster, better, and cheaper”.

2.3 *The Slowing Down or Losing Direction with Fear*

While the “too much but too little” anxiety was still burning, a different kind of emotion was simmering, i.e., the fear (and sometimes anger) that English education would harm the maintenance of the Chinese language and Chinese national identity. Such emotions were easily ignited by international and domestic events. In reaction to NATO’s bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia in May, 1999, Peking University students put up a slogan “Say no to TOEFL and GRE; say yes to the fight against US imperialism!” (bu kao Tuo bu kao G, yixinyi da meidi!). More than a decade later, when the 6th edition of the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (2012) included some 200 “letter words”, mostly acronyms or mixed acronyms such as “DNA”, “NBA” and “T恤”(T-shirt). Over a hundred scholars wrote a joint report, accusing the compilers and publisher of destroying the purity of the Chinese language, thus violating China’s Law of National Language and Writing System. This event generated a heated social debate. When a policy reform in English college entrance examination was discussed during 2013 and 2014, the fear was highlighted all the more.

Proposed Policy Change Regarding English Exams In November 2013, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 18th CPC (the Communist Party of China) Central Committee called for further education reforms regarding entrance examinations. Following this call, local governments discussed similar plans for senior high school and college entrance examination reform, language exams being at its core. The rationale of the reform was to “let English return to its due (instrumental) position”, and to “highlight the importance of the Chinese mother tongue in education”. Specific measures included a gradual score increase for Chinese, a decrease in the score for English, and eventually moving the responsibility of running English exams from state-run institutions (schools and MOE delegated organizations) to “social institutions” (private enterprises). In December 2013, the government of Beijing Municipality released a potential plan to be implemented from 2016. According to this plan, for senior high school entrance exams, the total score for Chinese will be raised from 120 to 150; that for English will be reduced from 120 to 100. For university entrance exams, the total score for Chinese will be raised from 150 to 180; that for English will be reduced from 150 to 100. Similar policy changes were discussed in other big cities and provinces. The reform was to temper “the overheated English learning in China”, and to “emphasize the assessment of mastery of excellent Chinese cultural traditions”.³ On May 9, 2014, the announcement that

³Yesky (天极网): <http://news.yesky.com/hot/119/35496119.shtml>. Accessed on March 19, 2014. “Vigorous reforms of Senior High and College Entrance Exams in Beijing: English Scores Will Decrease and Chinese Scores Will Increase from 2016” (北京中高考大改革 2016年起降低英语分提高语文分).

“English will be removed from the university entrance exam from 2016” at the national level became explosive news for the public.⁴

However, this reform plan was not eventually adopted for implementation. On September 3, 2014, four months after the media announcements in May, “The State Council’s Views on the Implementation of Deepened Enrollment Exam Reform” was formally released. It stipulated that “the subjects of Chinese, mathematics, and foreign language in university entrance exams will remain unchanged; so will their scores. [...] Two exam opportunities will be provided for the foreign language”.⁵ So the proposed reform was aborted for the moment. The status of English in the university entrance exams fluctuated, from being taken “out of” the package altogether, to an increase from one exam opportunity to “two opportunities” each year. The temperature of English education did not cool down; the focus of policy discourse shifted, from “letting English return to its due (instrumental) position” and “highlighting the importance of the Chinese mother tongue in education”, to battling against “one test to determine the whole life, which make students overburdened”.

A new round of the reform effort came about in March 2017, when NPC representative Li Guangyu made a proposal at the annual NPC meeting, i.e., removing English from university entrance exams, and changing the status of English in elementary and secondary schools from required course to elective course. The reason he provided, based on his investigation, was that English learning took too much time and was a big burden for Chinese school children. This proposal triggered a new round of the old debate.⁶

Media Presentation The proposed reform of removing English from entrance exams was presented in the mass media, with interesting metaphors. One of them was a “tug of war” between Chinese and English (Fig. 3); another was “filling competing water tanks” (Fig. 4, with water in the English tank reduced, and that in the Chinese tank added). Still another one was fervently “cooling down the English fever” (Fig. 5, with the cloud and rain representing the reform plan, and the fire representing various English training classes). Commonly implied is the ideology that English and Chinese education are in conflict and involved in a win-or-lose game.

Discourses of Educational Institutions A retrospective look at the debate of the reform from the end of 2013 to the first half of 2014 shows different voices from

⁴Sina Guangduang (新浪广东): <http://gd.sina.com.cn/qy/news/2014-05-10/07461150.html>. Accessed on November 1, 2014. “English out of College Entrance Exam from 2016 Is a Rumor” (2016年英语正式退出新高考纯属网络传言).

⁵Library of Law (法律图书馆网): http://www.law-lib.com/law/law_view.asp?id=461340. Accessed on November 1, 2014. “The State Council’s Views on the Implementation of Deepened Enrollment Exam Reform” (国务院关于深化考试招生制度改革的实施意见).

⁶China Youth Online (中青在线): http://news.cyol.com/content/2017-03/08/content_15721094.htm. Accessed on May 29, 2017. “A One-Sided Opinion of Removing English from University Entrance Exam? Observation of NPC and CPPCC meetings” (一边倒支持高考取消英语?两会青观察).

Fig. 3 Tug of War between Chinese & English (Source of photo: Jinghua (精华在线): http://www.jinghua.com/exam/newsinfo_21571.html. Accessed on March 19, 2014.)



Fig. 4 Filling Competing Water Tanks (Source of photo: Tencent Education (腾讯教育): <http://edu.qq.com/a/20131023/006389.htm>. Accessed on March 19, 2014.)



educational institutions, educators, and netizens. The interaction of oppositional voices might have influenced the decision making of the government.

The New Oriental School, a representative private enterprise in English teaching, expressed a favorable attitude regarding reducing the scores of English in entrance exams. Yu Minhong, head of the New Oriental School, expressed his opinion before attending the annual meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on March 3, 2014. He believed that as long as English held a certain proportion in the university entrance exam, even if reduced to a mere 20 points, "students would work very hard for those 20 points."⁷ Yet Yu was against Li Guangyu's proposal

⁷Yinchuan News (银川新闻网): http://www.ycen.com.cn/jypd/jyzx/201403/t20140305_37344.html. Accessed on March 19, 2014. "Yu Minhong: Support for English Score Reduction in Entrance Exam; No Influence on Training Market" (俞敏洪:支持高考英语降分 不影响培训市场).

Fig. 5 Fervently Cooling Down the English Fever
 (Source of photo: Xinhua (新华网): http://news.xinhuanet.com/comments/2013-10/24/c_117853417.htm. Accessed on March 19, 2014.)



of removing English altogether, as stated during his attendance of the CPPCC in March 2017. Yu regarded Li's proposal as "too hasty" and "even reckless," as "the world now is not isolated, and it is beneficial for children to learn English."⁸

It remains interesting to observe whether commercial benefits might be part of the debate drive. While reducing the score of English in the officially implemented college entrance examination, the proposed reform (2013–2014) would make "social institutions" such as the New Oriental School responsible for standard English tests. The redistribution of testing authority would bring great economic benefit to these "social" (private) institutions.

University English educators expressed mostly negative opinions. They typically stressed the importance of English education in terms of "foreign language strategies of the nation." Cai Jigang, head of Steering Committee for College English Teaching in Shanghai, published a newspaper article in the *Wenhui Daily* on December 12, 2013, stating that the standard of English education should be raised rather than lowered from the perspective of "national strategies" in "national and international contexts." Cheng Xiaotang (2014), dean of School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Normal University, published a journal article to argue against "letting English return to its due instrumental position." On June 14, 2014, the first "Symposium on Foreign Language Entrance Exam Reform" was jointly organized by the editorial department of *Foreign Languages*, an academic journal run by Shanghai Foreign Studies University, and the School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Normal University. Participants (e.g., Chen Lin, Hu Zhuanglin and Cheng Musheng) were mostly university English educators with a high reputation. Based on the symposium consensus, the 15 participants wrote a letter to Vice Premier Liu Yandong

⁸China Youth Online (中青在线): http://news.cyol.com/content/2017-03/08/content_15721094.htm.

on July 20, 2014, arguing for the importance of “foreign language strategies of the nation.” They made several suggestions to the government, such as organizing a hearing concerning the necessity and feasibility of the proposed reform, and its possible impact.

Debate Among Netizens The general public also paid great attention to the reform. For the 2013 public appraisal of “Top 10 Language Events” on [sina.com](http://www.sina.com), the English entrance exam reform ranked number one.⁹ Heated debates appeared on various Internet forums. A study on 1,023 comments posted by 804 netizens on website of Tencent News from May 18 to June 6, 2014 showed that 75.4% of the comments were negative and 24.6% were positive about English learning (Luo 2015).

The following are some opposing arguments for and against the discussed reform:

For: When English is dashing forward, the Chinese language and culture is falling behind.

Against: The Chinese language and culture has nothing to do with English. Are you prepared to trip others just because YOU are faltering?

For: Shouldn't there be a priority order when it comes to transmission of the national language and learning of a foreign language?

Against: Why should the issue between L1 and L2 be a zero-sum game? When a “national” prefix is added to the language, it surely suggests a lack of confidence.

For: Chinese children will be misled to be subservient to foreigners, and lack national awareness. Good students all hope to go abroad or even emigrate. What's the value of consuming Chinese resources for the development of foreign countries? What's the point of using one's own money to raise others' kids?

Against: Your kids went to play at your neighbor's home, and you think the problem is your kids have legs. If their legs are broken, they will then stay home. How ridiculous and short-sighted!¹⁰

In fact, similar debates among netizens had been going on a decade before. On the forum “Guantian Tea House,” for example, a netizen said “Only slaves need to learn their masters' language!”. Those who supported English proposed “Learning the enemies' strengths so as to conquer them”, and “We should learn English with clenched teeth!” (Gao 2009). Before the reform plan was released there had been already a loud outcry in the public for cooling down English education: “English exam has become a huge cancerous tumor”; “bombard the exam system of college English”; “the Chinese nation is experiencing a new round of ‘the Opium War’ brought about by the invasion of English” (Zhu and Yang 2004, pp. 11–12).

The fear and anger concerning the loss of native language and cultural identity were deeply entrenched in discourses at various levels. From the debate concerning the most recent reform plan, one can perceive English education in China vacillat-

⁹Sina Investigation (新浪调查): <http://survey.news.sina.com.cn/result/87778.html>. Accessed on November 1, 2014. “Top 10 Language Issues of Public Sentiment, 2013” (2013年语言文字舆情十大热点事件评选).

¹⁰Chinese Quora(知乎): <http://www.zhihu.com/question/22224453>. Accessed on November 1, 2014. “Why Should There Be Changes in College Entrance Exam of English, Regarding Its Form and Weight?” (为什么要改革英语高考考试形式, 并调整其在招生录取中的权重?)

ing between different directions. One can also hear more diverse voices, and the dynamism of interaction among them.

3 Sociohistorical Context: 30 years in 150 years

3.1 *English Education in China's Modern History*

As shown above, the trajectory of China's English language education in the past three decades can be roughly categorized as opening up and euphoria, from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, speeding up and related anxiety from the mid-1990s to the first decade of the new millennium, and the slowing down or losing direction and related fear in recent years. The fluctuations of these 30 years can be better understood when situated in the larger context of China's 150-year modern history. This modern history started with the two Opium Wars (1840–1842; 1856–1860) in the mid-nineteenth century, when China, a previously self-enclosed and self-centered “Central Kingdom,” was first hit by the imposition of the power of Great Britain and its allies, and was forced to cede territory, open treaty ports, and pay indemnities. Thus China underwent a transformation from a feudal society to a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. It was faced with the “strengths of the ships and cannons” of the West, so that the Chinese government realized the importance of learning from the West. A “Self-Strengthening Movement” (Yangwu Yundong) was launched from the 1860s and 1890s, aiming at learning from the West, focusing on science and technology, building up China's industries and military force, and the navy in particular. It is important that the literal name for “Self-strengthening Movement” is “Westernization Movement”, showing the instrumental rationale and tension in this lesson. While ship building and other military related industries were promoted, students were sent abroad to study. Tongwenguan (School of Combined Learning), the first institution for training translators, was established by the government in 1862, targeting at introducing Western works to the Chinese. The guiding principles of the Self-Strengthening Movement were conceptualized in two sentences: “learning the enemies' strengths in order to conquer them”,¹¹ and “Chinese learning for *ti* (essence); Western learning for *yong* (utility).”¹² Whereas the former positions the movement in relation to the foreign powers, the latter connects it to China's own cultural traditions and attempts to provide order between conflicting cultural traditions. That is, Chinese learning has priority over Western learning. The Self-Strengthening Movement ended in failure, marked by the Chinese navy's complete destruction in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The failure can be partially attributed to the superficiality of learning from the West at the technological level, without substantial reforms at the government/institutional level (Gao 2009).

¹¹“师夷长技以制夷”, from *Graphic Records of Overseas Countries* (《海国图志》) edited by Wei Yuan (魏源). The editing of the serial book started in 1842, and reached 50 volumes in 1852.

¹²“中学为体, 西学为用”, from “Encouraging Learning” (《劝学篇》) by Zhang Zhidong (1898).

To recapitulate, modern Chinese foreign language education, marked by the establishment of Tongwenguan, was situated in a sociohistorical context of national crisis. While setting up the objective and priority order, the “learn and conquer” and “*ti-yong*” principles highlighted the conflicting tension between the battling or competing “Self” and the “West”. The same tension can be seen in the naming of “Yangwu Yundong” (“Westernization Movement” in the sense of “Self-Strengthening Movement”). China’s loss in the first Sino-Japanese War and the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement added to its national shame, and painfully deepened the sense of national identity. Despite the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement, the *ti-yong* order has been maintained as a central principle over several generations. The specific themes varied with the sociohistorical background and international relations in different periods, as did English education policies and their implementations. A brief summary of the situations during these 150 years is presented in Table 1.

The above summary shows that the fluctuation of China’s English language education policies and emotions is deeply rooted in China’s modern history, since its contact with the West in the Opium Wars. To a great extent, the *opening up*, *speeding up*, and *slowing down* or *losing direction* in the recent 30 years are but a repetition of what had been going on since the mid-nineteenth century. A common pattern can be discerned.

3.2 *English as a Screen for Projection*

English is a screen. On each of its sides is projected a different inner perception, and language ideology. On one side are projected the angel, heaven, the Chinese dream to be strong, successful, and prosperous. Related to this is the ideology of English as a key to strong nation building. On the other side are projected the devil, hell, and the nightmare of being invaded and oppressed. Associated with this is the ideology of English as a killer of the national language and national identity. The screen itself is not altogether empty and transparent. It is color tinted, and it may enact dreams or nightmares. Yet in the development of history, English education has already become an abstract symbol, or to be more exact, a signifier with two signifieds: the dream of a strong nation, and the nightmare of national identity loss. The two ideological discourses have alternated to be in the dominant position during different historical periods. Confrontations and alternations of the discourses may also be found within the same period. The ambivalent psychological complex has been reproduced through discourses of the government, educational institutions and individual learners. The policy fluctuation and attitudinal ambivalence have become a *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991) or “structuring structures” in Chinese culture. The Opium Wars over a century ago were a historical reality. The contemporary “new Opium War” against the “spiritual Opium” of English is a discursive construction, with its own psychological reality. The psychological complex rooted in a historical trauma has continuously enacted reproduction of the imagined enemy. Self-repeating the

Table 1 The historical status of English language in China

Period	Time	Historical background	Status of english	<i>Ti-Yong</i> relation	Characteristics of english education
Late Qing Dynasty	1861–1911	The two Opium Wars (1840s–1860s) brought great challenges and humiliation to China’s ability of protecting itself against Western invasions	English as a vehicle for gaining access to Western science and technology; “Learning the enemies’ strengths in order to defeat them”	“Chinese learning for <i>ti</i> (essence); Western learning for <i>yong</i> (utility).” Technological utility only.	On the curriculum of institutions set up to facilitate transfer of scientific knowledge; after 1903, included on the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions
The New Cultural Movement	1911–1923	The New Cultural Movement (1917–1923) launched criticism of the Confucian tradition and introduced various “isms” from abroad; Linguistic reform from classical Chinese to modern Chinese	English as a vehicle for exploring Western philosophy and other ideas	Western <i>ti</i> (schools of ideas/“isms”) entered the scene of China’s sociocultural transformation.	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions
The Republican Era	1924–1949	China aligned more with the West against Japan. The ruling party Guomindang sought support from the US, and followed the model of US education system for some time.	English as a vehicle for diplomatic, military and intellectual interaction with the West	Primarily <i>yong</i> (military, diplomatic, political utilities)	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Period	Time	Historical background	Status of english	<i>Ti-Yong</i> relation	Characteristics of english education
PRC Before the Cultural Revolution	1949–1960	In the early, 1950s China was closely aligned with the Soviet Union against the West, but the Sino-Soviet relationship broke in the late 1950s.	The status of English declined while that of Russian was boosted. The trend was reversed in late 1950s.	Status of <i>yong</i> fluctuated. English fell out of favor for political reasons; later considered valuable for modernization.	On the curricula of very few secondary and tertiary institutions in 1950s. Promoted on the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions in early 1960s.
PRC During the Cultural Revolution	1966–1976	A radical political movement to re-establish class struggle. Education in general suffered greatly.	English was associated with imperialism and capitalism; Western learning was repudiated.	If any <i>yong</i> at all, as an instrument of political propaganda.	Removed from the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions; later restored, though rather sporadically
PRC Reform Era	1978 onwards	Economic reform and development; transformation from planned economy to market economy; China entered the WTO.	English seen as an essential instrument for modernization.	Great value of <i>yong</i> ; as an instrument for economic development	Strongly promoted on the curricular of secondary and tertiary institutions.

Gao in Lo Bianco, Orton and Gao (2009, pp. 61–62)

traumatic experience serves to maintain the sensitive and not strong enough national identity.

The psychological complex should be understood in this sociohistorical context, with its rationale. It is unrealistic to expect the pendulum swing discussed above to disappear in a short time. However, a historically situated understanding does not mean there are no alternatives to the pendulum swing. In the contemporary context of globalization, the old *habitus* may not be the most effective strategy for national identity building. New ways forward need to be explored.

4 From a Screen of Projection to a Mirror of Reflection

From a social constructivist perspective, social phenomena are discursively negotiated and constructed, without denying the existence of sociohistorical facts (Fairclough 2006). Bourdieu (1990, p. 123), who labeled his own theoretical stance “constructivist structuralism” or “structuralist constructivism”, integrated a social constructivist perspective that allowed for changes. When discussing its characteristics, Bourdieu has said that *habitus* is durable, but not eternal (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In other words, *habitus* is subject to gradual moderation and reconstruction. In light of such a perspective, the pendulum swing does not have to go on forever. Globalization has brought about not only challenges but also opportunities for breaking the cycle. In this new context, English is being de-territorialized; it has been taken as a wide range of legitimate varieties of “World Englishes” (Kachru 1992) tied up with local cultures, or a lingua franca with communicative functions but largely without “native speakers” (Seidlhofer 2011). In many parts of the world, English education has given up standards centered on “native speakers,” and has been adjusted to objectives such as communicative “capability” rather than native-speaker-centered communicative “competence” (Widdowson 2013).

If we believe that English can be de-territorialized, it no longer poses an unavoidable imperialist threat to national identities. Consequently, the habitual psychological defense mechanism and resulting policy pendulum swing do not have to be the only choice. Instead of a screen for projection, English may be taken as a mirror of reflection, from which we can perceive and examine various ambivalent needs, desires, and feelings. When our own ambivalences are clearly seen, we can take a more creative stance to education in national and global languages, to the maintenance of native cultural identity, and to the development of a global identity. A “productive orientation” (Fromm 1948) can be taken to transcend oppositions, with the two sides positively reinforcing each other, in a “1+1>2” manner to create something which is more than the sum of its parts (Gao 2001). The identity of “dialogical communicator” will then be developed (Gao 2014). Distinguished from the “faithful imitator” whose L2 use and cultural conduct are strictly modeled on the native speaker, the “legitimate speaker” who claims equal rights with native speakers in their distinct L2 use, the “playful creator” who constructs unconventional hybrid language use for their self-expression, the Bakhtinian “dialogical communicator” converses – speaks and listens – on the basis of respect and reflection, in interpersonal communication. In intra-subject communication, i.e., dialogues between different consciousness or “voices”, the “dialogical communicator” has a reflective sensitivity, ready to discern, expand, deepen and reorganize various kinds of consciousness within him- or herself.

Such productive and dialogical efforts can be made at practical levels. For example, instead of letting English be dropped from examinations to make room for Chinese, we may think of how to enhance the English expression of Chinese culture. In English teaching materials and teaching at various levels, it is desirable and feasible to guide students in describing certain aspects of their local culture, e.g.,

family food, scenic spots, historical figures, and regional cultural specialties. Practicum can be designed to relate to the local context, for example by having the students role-play as international tourist guides in local museums, or presenting exhibits on the internet for students in other parts of the world. While English competitions in recitation, speech, and debate have flourished in China for many years, other contests such as English translation of Chinese classics can also be held. Some interesting attempts have already been made. In the new college English textbook compiled by Wen Qiufang and associates, for instance, law students were invited to mount a defense from a cultural perspective for the victim in an intercultural conflict, triggered by the use of traditional Chinese “Gua Sha” treatment.¹³

In this chapter, I have roughly divided English education policies in the past three decades into three stages, each with its prominent emotion: the *opening up* with euphoria, the *speeding up* with anxiety, and *slowing down* or *losing direction* with fear. To better understand this fluctuation, I have further situated these policies in China's modern history, during the past 150 years. It is pointed out that to a great extent, the fluctuation of the last 30 years is but a repetition of what has been happening for 150 years. My view is that while similar concerns and dilemmas exist in other nations with a history of foreign invasions, China is quite distinct in its context-shaped social psychology. With its historical experience of traumatization through foreign invasions, it is not easy to develop fully open attitudes towards the “invasion” of foreign languages. On the other hand, as China has never been fully colonized and used the colonizers' language as the official language, it is not easy to develop an attitude and identity to “own” (a local variety of) the English language. China's ambivalence towards English is very deep.

Globalization has provided new opportunities for breaking the cycle. Instead of taking English education as a screen of projection, we should take it as a mirror of critical self-reflection, from which we can perceive clearly our own conflicting needs, desires, feelings and identities. The screen projection is largely unconscious and passive, whereas the mirror reflection involves conscious acts of active agents. With a clear perception of ourselves and of our environment, we can then be less “crazy”, and gradually move beyond the compulsive pendulum swing and oppositional thinking. Then our national and global identities will be constructed in peace, and in a mutually enhancing manner.

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¹³ *Gua Sha* is a treatment in traditional Chinese medicine, which commonly leaves red spots of inner bleeding on skin. The movie *The Gua Sha Treatment* is about Sino-US cultural differences, and intercultural (mis)communication. When the Chinese grandpa performed Gua Sha on his grandson in the US context, the family was sued because of “child abuse”. A chain of intercultural conflicts followed, but were eventually resolved.

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