

Sociolinguistics in China

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.914>

Published online: 15 September 2022

Summary

This article gives a brief introduction to sociolinguistics in China. Chinese sociolinguistics started with the introduction of Western sociolinguistic theories at the end of the 1970s. It did not become mature until the turn of the 21st century. After more than 40 years of development, Chinese sociolinguistics has now covered a variety of topics and themes. Among them, the most popular are “language life,” “language planning,” “language variations,” and “urban language studies.” After providing a brief introduction to the historical development of Chinese sociolinguistics, this article primarily focuses on some of the most popular topics in that field. Although Chinese sociolinguistics still relies on the introduction and incorporation of Western sociolinguistic theories, it has gradually formed its own research agenda. In the meantime, it has also attempted to adapt Western theories to the unique Chinese context and made some theoretical and methodological innovations. Especially in view of the growing urbanization and industrialization taking place in China, Chinese sociolinguistics is expected to play a growing important role in the country’s future development and lead to more breakthroughs in its theoretical and methodological developments.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, China, development, current trends, general features, future development

Subjects: Sociolinguistics

1. The Development of Sociolinguistics in China

This article provides a review of the sociolinguistic studies that have been conducted and published on the Chinese mainland. Although sociolinguistics was not introduced to China until the end of the 1970s, traditional Chinese linguistics already contained elements of sociolinguistics in areas of study such as dialectology (X. Guo, 2002). In addition, the Mandarin movement in the early 20th century, the Vernacular movement in the 1920s, and the popular language discussion in the 1930s can also be regarded as early Chinese sociolinguistic landmarks (X. Guo, 2002). After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the new government attached great importance to language reform and carried out a series of campaigns, such as the promotion of Putonghua, the standardization of Mandarin, and the simplification of Chinese characters. In order for these campaigns to be successful, they required contributions from sociolinguistics. The book *Language and Culture*, published by Luo (1950), has often been referred to as the foundational work for Chinese sociolinguistics which contributed to the future development of Chinese sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, it was not until the introduction of Western sociolinguistic theories in the 1970s and 1980s that real sociolinguistic studies began to appear in China (X. Guo, 2002).

The early development of sociolinguistics can be traced to the introduction of sociolinguistic theories from the Western world by such scholars as Xu Guozhang and Zhu Wanjin. Xu Guozhang began to introduce Western sociolinguistics as early as the late 1970s. However, the publishing of *Sociolinguistics* (Y. Chen, 1983) was long regarded as marking the beginning of Chinese sociolinguistics. However, studies from the early stages of Chinese sociolinguistics focused on applying sociolinguistic theories from the Western world in the Chinese context and did not address social reality in China (X. Guo, 2002). The “First Sociolinguistic Symposium” (Beijing) was held on December 1–5, 1987, by the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). It promoted the development of Chinese sociolinguistics by showcasing the achievements that had been made in this field since the end of the 1970s. In August 1988, the first “Bilingualism & Bidialectalism” seminar (in Shenzhen) was held by the Shenzhen–Hong Kong Language Research Institute at the Shenzhen Institute of Education. The following years witnessed the rapid development of Chinese sociolinguistics and the publishing of numerous works on the topic. Some universities on the Chinese mainland began to provide sociolinguistic courses and recruit MA and PhD students in the subject. Even though it was beginning to adapt in order to reflect the social reality of China during this period, Chinese sociolinguistics was still not fully developed due to a lack of materials and systematic analytic methods (X. Guo, 2002). However, the initial fever of interest in sociolinguistics began to cool down in the second half of the 1990s. Concerns over the future development of the discipline began to appear, and some researchers even called for sociolinguistics to be revitalized in China. However, this uncertainty also led to further reflections on the achievements, the weaknesses, and the future development of Chinese sociolinguistics (Z. Chen, 2001; Gao, 2017).

Chinese sociolinguistics entered a new stage at the turn of the 21st century. In 2001, the First International Conference on Chinese Sociolinguistics was held in Beijing. Following the event, the Association of Chinese Sociolinguistics (ACS) was founded, and the *Journal of Chinese Sociolinguistics* was launched in 2003. Some researchers viewed the publication of a specialist journal in Chinese sociolinguistics as a sign that Chinese sociolinguistics was becoming truly established. In the same year, the Sociolinguistic Laboratory of Nanjing University (SLNU) was set up. Subsequently, the China Centre for Linguistic and Strategic Studies (CCLASS) was set up at Nanjing University in 2007. Due to the leading roles played by these organizations and institutions, Chinese sociolinguistics began to be conducted in a more organized fashion and forge its own developmental path in the following years. After 20 years’ development, Chinese sociolinguistics has established its own research agendas and developed its own theories through applying sociolinguistic theories in order to resolve language issues in a transitional and ever-changing China. The following sections will introduce in turn the current trends and key features of Chinese sociolinguistics.

2. Current Trends in Chinese Sociolinguistics

As the most populous country in the world, China boasts 14 million people and 56 different ethnic groups. The development of Chinese sociolinguistics is consistent with the fast pace of economic and sociopolitical development that has occurred in the country since the 1980s. The dynamic and

ever-changing nature of Chinese society in that period has also provided fertile ground for the rapid development of Chinese sociolinguistics. In order to identify the primary concerns of Chinese sociolinguistics since the 1990s, the largest electronic database of academic journals on the Chinese mainland, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), was searched using the keyword “sociolinguistics,” and 1,166 journal articles were found in key academic journals in the Chinese mainland in the period from 1992 to 2021. Figure 1 shows the number of articles published each year. Although this number was below 25 during the period 1993–1998, it showed a dramatic rise during the period 2003–2014, with more than 40 articles published each year. However, it also showed a gradual decline after 2014.

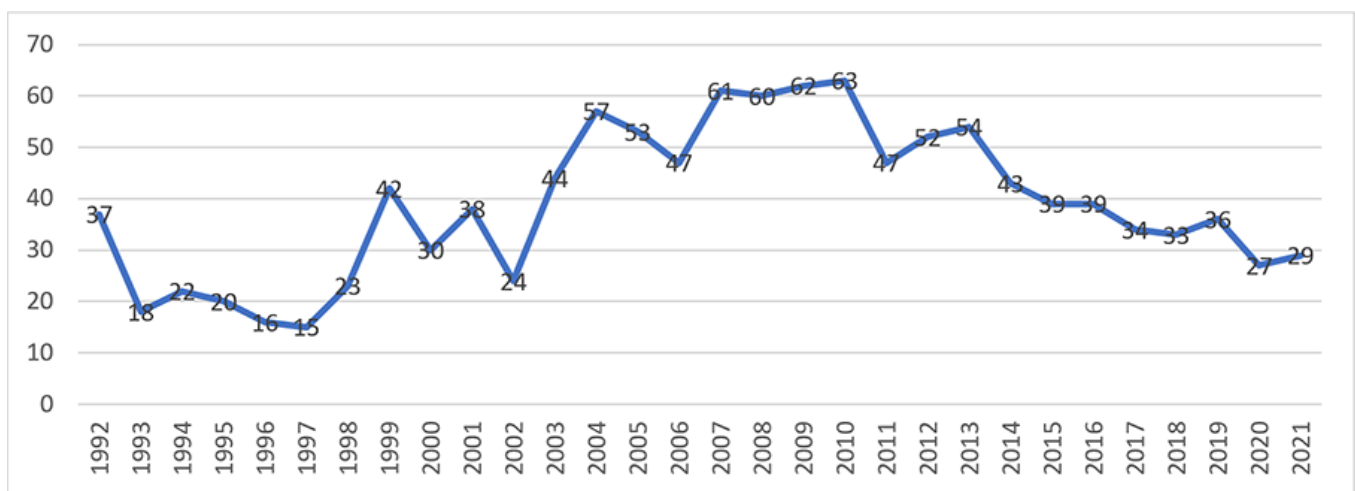


Figure 1. The distribution of articles related to keywords from 1992 to 2021.

The total number of articles published by each university or institution also reflects its relative influence in Chinese sociolinguistics. The most influential universities and institutions in this regard include Nanjing University, Jinan University, Shanghai International Studies University, Beijing Normal University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Peking University, and Tsinghua University. This suggests that these universities each have a strong research team in Chinese sociolinguistics. In addition, CNKI also shows the number of articles published by each author. The most productive and influential authors in Chinese sociolinguistics include Yang Yonglin, Xu Daming, Gao Yihong, Guo Xi, Zhou Qinsheng, Zhan Bohui, Fu Yirong, Huang Guowen, You Rujie, Tian Hailong, Diao Yanbin, Wang Yan, Guo Jun, Zhou Hongying, and Zhang Maiceng.

An examination of the keywords most frequently associated with “sociolinguistics” finds that the most popular include “code-switching,” “dialectology,” “language variation,” “gender differences,” “speech community,” “linguistic landscape,” “language attitude (i.e., social attitude towards language),” “language life (i.e., life related to language),” and so on. However, in order to identify the primary concerns of Chinese sociolinguistics, the CNKI electronic database was searched again for each of these topic keywords in turn. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the most frequently examined keywords, including “language life” (629), “language planning (policies and planning related to language use)” (474), “language

variation” (295), “language attitude” (295), “social dialectics” (279), “urban language” (135), “language policy” (117), “speech community” (97), “linguistic landscape” (60), and “language and gender” (40).

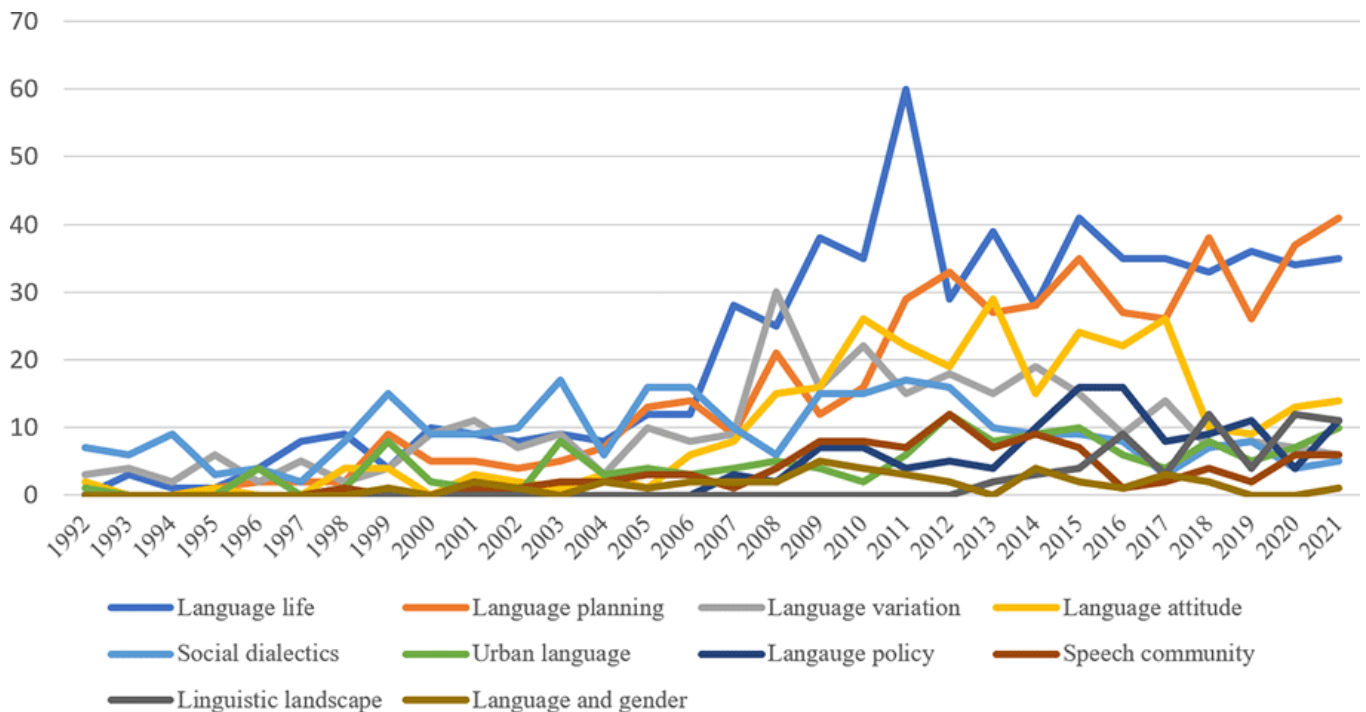


Figure 2. The distribution of articles on key topics from 1992 to 2021.

This suggests that “language life,” “language planning,” “language variations,” and “language attitude” are the most frequently used keywords in Chinese sociolinguistics. It was also noted that the number of articles published for each topic did not show much variation before 2006 but that there was a dramatic increase in searches for the topics “language life,” “language planning,” “language variations,” and “language attitude.” In particular, “language planning” and “language life” have become the most popular topics in Chinese sociolinguistics. All of them are macro sociolinguistic topics. Their popularity can be attributed to the practical values associated with them and their promotion by some leading scholars, which means it is easy for them to get attention and funding support from the Chinese government. However, the topics “language variations” and “language attitude” rose dramatically in the first few years of the examined period, but have evinced a gradual decline in recent years. This can be attributed to the fact that they are the classical research topics in sociolinguistics. They have received constant attention in Chinese sociolinguistics, even though they have not been as popular as macro sociolinguistic themes like “language planning,” “language policy,” and “language life” in recent years. Since it is impossible to provide a review of all these research topics one by one in this article, this section will give a brief introduction to three prominent research topics (i.e., “language variation,” “language planning and policy,” and “language life”) and three important research areas which bring together different research topics (i.e., “urban language studies,” “rural language studies,” and “virtual language studies”).

2.1 Language Variation

The prominence of language variation can be attributed to the influence of William Labov. “Language variation” has been a key concept in Chinese sociolinguistics since its very beginning (S. Chen, 1999; D. Xu, 2006; Zhu, 1992). There was a dramatic rise in studies on language variations in the first few years of development in the field, but there has been a gradual decline since 2008 (J. Guo et al., 2013). In a review of two decades of language-variation studies in China, Jirong Guo et al. (2013) identified four primary concerns in this field: (a) the importance of language variation studies (Su, 2004); (b) language variations at different levels of language, such as phonology (H. Guo & Wang, 2010), lexis (L. Wang, 2007), syntax (X. Feng & Chen, 2010), and style (Y. Liu, 2019); (c) language variation in specific areas (C. Zhang, 2006) and comparative studies in language variation (H. Guo & Li, 2016); (d) General review of language variations (F. Guo, 2006; P. Zhao & Tian, 2021).

The application and development of language-variation theories in China has shown that each theory has its own characteristics and problems (C. Yang, 2014). Language-variation theories provide a new perspective for the examination of the nature and variation of language, and they have been creatively applied by Chinese researchers to the study of Chinese and other ethnic languages. However, these studies face a number of difficulties. First, most of these studies are qualitative, while more quantitative studies are needed. What is more, most of these studies focus on language variation in specific areas, while language variations in minority languages still fail to receive enough attention. Although a variety of topics are covered, more in-depth studies are still required in language-variation research (Z. Chen, 2002). More importantly, compared with international language-variation studies, Chinese language-variation studies are also characterized by a lack of sufficient funding, time available, and efforts (J. Guo et al., 2013). This in turn has led to a lack of sufficient linguistic evidence and materials. Therefore, although great strides have been made in language-variation studies, there is still a wide gap between Chinese and international language-variation studies.

2.2 Language Planning and Policy

Language planning and policy (LPP) has become a buzzword in Chinese sociolinguistics. However, LPP did not become popular in China until the end of the 20th century. Qingsheng Zhou (2001) collected research articles in different countries and played an important role in informing the public of the recent developments in LPP studies. Z. Chen (2005) published the first book on LLP in China. Since 2006, a number of articles and books have been published on LPP. For example, Y. Li (2006) covers language life, and language work, standards in language and writing, and regional language issues. Yao (2006) addresses the basic nature of language planning, research subjects, actors, main content, key problems, and maintasks in language planning studies. Z. Chen (2015) provides a systematic introduction of the recent developments in LPP, its basic theories and methods, and further elaborates on some important theoretical questions in Chinese LPP research. The work also promotes the development of LPP in China and has enhanced our understanding of this discipline. It has contributed to the establishment of LPP theories in China, and underlines LPP studies with Chinese characteristics.

J. Feng and Wang (2014) provide a review of the developments in language planning in the first 10 years of the 21st century. Y. Li (2013) further extends the scope and horizon of language-planning research, pointing out that China should emphasize and implement regional language planning. Shen and Xia (2013) address language planning in academic exchanges and propose a multidimensional analytic framework for such work. Hong and Zhang (2016) present a review of the studies on language planning that appeared in the second decade of the 21st century in China. They argue that great advances have been made in Chinese LPP research because it now focuses on actual language use and addresses problems related to language use in real life, e.g., the promotion of Mandarin. They underline the motivation of social demands and view language as a strategic resource for a country's social construction. Li Yuming views those who emphasize the importance of language planning as belonging to the "school of language life" and aims to build a new discipline (X. Guo, 2015). Nevertheless, language-planning research in China still has its problems, such as the lack of a solid theoretical and scientific basis for some language-planning activities. The main directions of Chinese LPP studies include macro studies on domestic and foreign language policies and planning, diachronic studies on foreign language policies, synchronic studies on foreign language policies, and those studies that combine both theoretical and practical discussions of language planning and policies. For its future development, Chinese LPP research still needs to draw insights from the theories and methods of LPP studies in Western countries and strengthen the integration of different disciplines (T. Zhang, 2016).

2.3 Language Life

Another concept related to "language planning" is "language life." "Language planning" in the 21st century includes the constructs "language management" and "language life" (D. Xu, 2020). Leading scholars like Li Yuming have introduced the concept of "language life" and made it a key idea in language planning. Their main theoretical contributions include: (a) redefining the idea of "language life," and making it a key concept of national language planning; (b) advocating the active making and implementation of language policies; (c) combining the concepts of "language management" and "language life" and arguing that what needs to be managed is not language but "language life" (D. Xu, 2020). Language life has become one of the most popular topics in Chinese sociolinguistics (Q. Zhou, 2010). The basic assumption is that language life in today's China is undergoing rapid change and development. Various contradictions in our language life have become prominent, e.g., the promotion of Mandarin and the preservation of minority languages. The examination of language life has become the unshirkable social responsibility of Chinese sociolinguistics, and the promotion of social development has become the motivation for sociolinguistic development.

Some important studies have been conducted on language life in China. Their foci have included: Examining language life in different fields; using media language to do statistical analysis; analyzing and predicting public sentiment through language use; carrying out surveys on national language use; and establishing theoretical bases for language life studies (Y. Li, 2016). Since 2006, the National Language and Writing Committee has published the report *Language Situation in China* every year. It provides a detailed analysis of the current language situation in different industries and fields of China and introduces the country's progress and achievements in

language and information management and in the standardization and informationalization of minority languages (Q. Zhou, 2010). It also proposes new policies and solutions to reflect novel language features and changes in language use and predicts new trends in language development. Y. Li (2016) also puts forward several issues worthy of further study in China's contemporary language life: (a) virtual language life; (b) language issues in the process of urbanization; (c) the relations between official languages and minority languages; (d) the protection and exploration of language resources in the information age; (e) national language power and its international influences; (f) national language rights.

2.4 Urban Language Studies

The last 30 years have witnessed large-scale and high-speed urbanization processes in China, and have provided a testing ground for new theories and methods in urban language studies (D. Xu, 2020; D. Xu & Wang, 2010). Since the beginning of the new century, surveys on the language situation in Chinese cities have attracted much attention. One group of scholars in particular, represented by Xu Daming, is committed to urban language surveys. The "Urban Language Survey" has also become a typical feature of Chinese sociolinguistics and is recognized by the international academic community (D. Xu & Wang, 2010). The main purpose of the survey is to focus on the features of urban language use and language-related problems in urban interactions. Using the basic theories and analytic methods of sociolinguistics, it collects data by means of fieldwork and uses statistical analysis as an analytic method. It has great significance in sociolinguistics in terms of theories and analytic methods. The Urban Language Survey has been around for almost 20 years in China and has achieved relatively rich results. On the one hand, a large number of cities and regions have been investigated, including Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and others. In addition, as sociolinguistics has developed, new variables have also been introduced, such as the user's language attitude, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and so on. Therefore, the survey has obtained many valuable first-hand materials and provided empirical evidence for further theoretical developments (H. Xu & Zhou, 2016).

After setting out a review of the existing studies on urban language surveys, Jun Guo (2013) points out some problems concerning the choice of survey objects, the analysis of survey materials, and the adoption of survey methods. Future studies should pay attention to the object pertinence of, and categorical differences between the informants. In terms of the analysis of survey materials, attention should be paid to the complex relationships between age and endangered dialects, between age and variant selection, and between language attitudes and language use. As regards survey methods, attention should be paid to the randomness of sampling, the representativeness of samples, and the integrated use of various survey methods. Shen (2021) further points out three key areas in urban language studies in China that are of particular interest: (a) the Urban Language Survey; (b) urban language service planning; (c) urban language governance capabilities. The diversity and complexity of urban language life have also provided rich opportunities for language service planning and research. Chinese researchers have taken the lead in proposing the concept, connotations, and evaluation framework of urban language services. These provide the theoretical basis for urban language service planning. In addition, there are a

growing number of case studies and field studies of urban language services with Chinese characteristics, i.e., how to provide language services to migrant workers to help them adapt to urban life. Urban language governance capabilities have gradually become a new task of urban language research.

2.5 Rural Language Studies

Compared with growing urban language studies, rural language studies in China are comparatively few, even though sociolinguistic studies on rural China started to appear in the 1980s. In a detailed review of sociolinguistic studies on rural China, Fu (2021) makes a distinction between micro and macro studies. Micro sociolinguistic studies focus on language variation and changes. Language-variation theories have been applied to the investigation of dialects in rural areas since the introduction of language-variation theories in the 1980s (X. Huang, 1990; T. Xu, 1987). Since the 21st century, the number of micro studies on language use in rural China has been growing, with some studies focusing on minority languages (Y. Wang, 2004) and some on Chinese (Y. Fu, 2008, 2020). Macro sociolinguistic studies also began to appear in the 1980s (Dai, 1987) and became popular in recent years (Y. Wang, 2010, 2013). With the launch of the national campaign to help poverty alleviation through promoting Putonghua, researchers have also turned attention to language and poverty in China (Fu, 2020). Some scholars have also focused on the linguistic landscape in rural areas (Cong & Chen, 2021).

Research has also focused on particular groups of people from rural areas, such as migrants (i.e., new urban residents), migrant workers (i.e., people living in rural areas but seeking to earn a living in cities), students, and left-behind children (i.e., those children whose parents go to earn a living in cities and leave them to their grandparents in rural areas). Migrant workers' language use has also drawn growing interest in recent years. Fu (2021) further identifies some recent trends in the studies of migrant workers. Migrant workers are no longer treated as a whole; instead, their internal differences are emphasized. For example, some studies have begun to focus on new-generation migrant workers (C. Chen, 2012; Y. Fu, 2016) and returned migrant workers (X. Wu & Yang, 2014). Recent studies have ceased to focus on describing migrant workers' language use, instead looking at their integration in cities, social identities, physical and mental health, incomes, and sense of happiness (Kang, 2020; X. Wu, 2020). Students and left-behind children in rural China also draw attention from researchers in this field. Some studies focus on left-behind children, others on preschool children (J. Li et al., 2017), and still others on primary- and high-school students (G. Fu, 2016). Most of these studies have revealed the communication problems of left-behind children in rural areas. However, as Fu (2021) summarizes, these studies still have some flaws. Micro sociolinguistic studies usually make limited contributions to linguistics. Little attention has been paid to ordinary communities and ordinary groups of people; most of them focus on particular groups of people in rural China. The analytic methods employed are also too simple. They are used to focus on one community and one group of people and to carry out sampling and statistical analysis. While focusing on the description of their findings, these studies pay little attention to theoretical development. Therefore, Fu argues for more studies to be carried out focusing on micro linguistic features and

for more attention to be centered on ordinary communities and groups of people. Future studies should draw insights from different theories and methods and contribute to further development of theories and methods in this field.

2.6 Virtual Language Studies

The term “Chinese netizens” refers to Chinese citizens who use the Internet for at least one hour a week on average. As of June 2021, the number of Chinese Internet users has reached 1.011 billion, an increase of 21.75 million from December 2020, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 71.6%. The large population of netizens in China and the widespread use of the Internet have also provided a fertile ground for virtual language studies. Virtual language studies have important implications for sociolinguistics in four aspects (Su, 2016). First, virtual language use has brought many new topics for sociolinguistics, such as “surveys on virtual language use,” “the compilation of cyber dictionaries,” “the social functions of Internet language,” “Internet language and national security,” and “Internet language and cultural construction” (Su, 2016). Different languages used on the Internet also provide abundant materials for language planning since Chinese is much less frequently used than English on the Internet (Su, 2016). In the meantime, micro sociolinguistic studies on Internet language also have significant theoretical implications for a variety of concepts in sociolinguistics, such as language variations, social identities, speech community, and style. The examination of these concepts in virtual language use can generate new theories in sociolinguistics. Finally, virtual language studies are also important for the construction of new Internet culture.

Therefore, the last two decades have witnessed a growing number of studies on virtual language studies. X. Zhao and Cao (2012) identify three groups of studies on Internet language: (a) studies on virtual language features; (b) the impact of virtual language use on real language life; (c) the standardization of virtual language use. Virtual language studies in China are characterized by multiple perspectives and the emphasis on micro linguistic features. However, the current virtual language studies still have some weaknesses. First, most of these studies have been descriptive rather than explanatory. Also, to date studies have tended to focus on vocabulary and the pragmatic functions of Internet language, while ignoring other important aspects of language use. D. Wu et al. (2016) also present an extensive review of sociolinguistic studies of new media in the 21st century and call for “further cross-disciplinary endeavour as well as for more study of Chinese” to “predict patterns and development of human interaction in digital times” (p. 515). L. Shi (2017) examines the use of vulgar language on the Internet and provides suggestions for purifying the network language environment.

3. General Features

After a brief introduction to the development of Chinese sociolinguistics and its research trends, this section will provide a summary of the general features of Chinese sociolinguistics. Chinese sociolinguistics has made great strides in the last three decades and has demonstrated some distinctive features in its development (Xia, 2011; R. Zhao, 2004). Since the main purpose of

sociolinguistics is to study the relationship between language and society, Chinese sociolinguistics attaches great importance to addressing social reality, serving emerging social and national needs, and theoretical and methodological development (X. Guo, 2002).

3.1 Sociolinguistics in China is Driven by Social and National Needs

An important reason for the rapid development of sociolinguistics in China is that it aims to serve national and social requirements, which had to some extent been neglected by traditional linguistics in the past. A review of the development of Chinese sociolinguistics has revealed that it has made great progress in macro sociolinguistic studies, in areas such as language planning, language policies, and language life (R. Zhao, 2004). This can be attributed to its focus on addressing national and social needs and the government's support over the last three decades. Meanwhile, the numerous language-planning activities that have taken place in China's history have also provided a wide range of research materials in these fields (R. Zhao, 2004). National and social needs have become the driving force for the further development of Chinese sociolinguistics. Although Chinese sociolinguistics still draws insights from Western sociolinguistic theories and methods, it has also demonstrated its unique development path by serving the national and social needs of China, addressing the unique language situations in China, and solving Chinese language problems (Xia, 2011).

3.2 Sociolinguistics in China Features a Multiplicity of Topics and Multi-perspectives

Over the past 30 years, Chinese sociolinguistics has evolved into a mature subject that involves varied aspects of language and society. A variety of topics and themes have been addressed in Chinese sociolinguistics, such as "language variations" (P. Zhao & Tian, 2021), "language life" (X. Guo & Zhu, 2016), "language planning" (Hong & Zhang, 2016), "language policy" (L. Chen & Li, 2021), "language attitude" (Y. Zhao, 2009), "bilingualism" (W. Liu et al., 2012), "code-switching" (He & Yu, 2001), "dialects" (Zhan, 2009), "language and culture" (J. Chen, 1992), "language and gender" (D. Shi, 2007), "linguistic landscape" (Y. Du & Liu, 2021), "social identity" (Gao, 2017), and so on. It examines different varieties of languages, such as Chinese, minority languages, social dialects, and virtual languages. Different levels of language have also been addressed, including phonetics, phonology, lexis, grammar, syntax, text, register, and genre. These are often discussed in terms of different social variables, such as gender, age, class, community, or occupation (X. Guo, 2002).

3.3 Chinese Sociolinguistics is Noted for Its Constant Theoretical and Methodological Improvement

The development of Chinese sociolinguistics can be attributed to the continuous introduction and incorporation of Western sociolinguistic theories. Over the years, one primary concern of Chinese sociolinguistics has been to introduce the recent advances in Western sociolinguistic theories and methods into its practice (D. Wu et al., 2016; P. Zhao & Tian, 2021). In the meantime, some

researchers have also attempted to adapt Western sociolinguistic theories to address the social reality in China. For example, D. Xu and Wang (2010) adapt “speech community” theory to urban language surveys. Y. Li (2016) also redefines the concept of “language life” and makes it a key concept in language planning. Some researchers even argue that their theories and methods should be developed in order to address the unique social reality in China and focus on specific groups such as migrant workers and children (Fu, 2021). In order to contribute to more interdisciplinary studies, some researchers in China also discuss the potential of combining sociolinguistics with other disciplines, such as pragmatics (X. Chen, 2021; M. Yu, 2015), educational linguistics (L. Yu, 2018), cognitive linguistics (T. Wang & Wang, 2021; T. Zhang, 2019), natural language processing (D. Xu, 2017), second language acquisition (H. Huang & Shao, 2016), language policy and political theory (Y. Du & Zhao, 2016), and corpus linguistics (M. Liu & Chang, 2018; M. Liu & Wang, 2015; Su & Xiao, 2015). It is expected that more appropriate theories and methods will be proposed in future in order to address Chinese social reality.

4. Future Development

With the rapid process of industrialization, urbanization, and informationalization in China, the country is undergoing a historical period of transformation and development and becoming stronger than before. This has brought changes to its social structures and as a result, it is expected that a multilingual and diversified social language life will become more prominent. Since the 21st century, the language situation in China has also drawn unprecedented attention from the Chinese government. All these changes have created a good environment and favorable conditions for future sociolinguistic research in China (Xia, 2011). However, current sociolinguistic studies in China still have their weaknesses in terms of their theoretical development, unbalanced distribution, and research team building. Although some researchers have tried to adapt Western sociolinguistic theories and methods to address Chinese social reality, Chinese sociolinguistic studies are still overwhelmingly reliant on Western linguistic theories and methods. Some researchers choose to use Western sociolinguistic theories to examine Chinese unique language phenomena, without awareness of whether such theories are appropriate or not. Therefore, the future development of Chinese sociolinguistics requires not only the introduction of Western sociolinguistic theories but also the development of sociolinguistic theories with Chinese characteristics to address the unique social reality of contemporary China (C. Yang, 2018). In addition, Chinese sociolinguistics also suffers from an unbalanced distribution of sociolinguistic studies on different language phenomena and in different regions. As reviewed above, Chinese sociolinguistics shows a preference for macro sociolinguistic studies, and micro sociolinguistic studies are comparatively few. It values language use in economically developed regions over economically underdeveloped regions. This can be attributed to the differing statuses of these regions in terms of their national and social needs and to a lack of enough funding. However, with the improvement of social life, future sociolinguistic studies should pay due attention to these neglected areas and regions and contribute to the balanced and healthy development of Chinese sociolinguistics. While this field has made great achievements in the last three decades, its influence in Chinese and international linguistics is still limited. This can be attributed to the fact that research teams in the field of Chinese sociolinguistics tend to be loosely organized. Although Chinese sociolinguistics has its

subject journal now, the influence of that journal is also not very satisfactory. The future development of Chinese sociolinguistics will also require the building of a strong and well-organized research team and further expansion of its influence in domestic and international academia. With the growing importance attached to language use by the Chinese government, there will be a need for Chinese sociolinguistics to move faster in future and contribute to China's social development by proposing new theories and methods to address the language problems that appear as a byproduct of that development. The future of Chinese sociolinguistics should ideally be that of a discipline with established theoretical systems, scientific research methods, and significant practical value (R. Zhao, 2004).

Acknowledgement

The writing of this article was funded by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (#P0036347)

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