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STANDARD LANGUAGE VARIATION IN CHINESE – SOME INSIGHTS FROM BOTH THEORY AND PRACTICE

Abstract:
In the discourse on pluricentricity, standard language variation within the Chinese language has rarely been addressed, even though it is the most widely spoken language in the world and steadily gains in popularity amongst foreign language learners. Chinese exhibits a multitude of (potential) standard varieties, yet it is a prime example of an Einbau language—a language that strives for homogeneity—, which makes research on standard language variation highly challenging and explains the lack of scientific interest until now. This paper proposes a holistic approach to Chinese standard language variation by not only scrutinizing Mandarin but also Cantonese and Hokkien. In a next step, two studies provide a glimpse into the perception of Mandarin pluricentricity in practice. The data reveal that the Mandarin learners who participated in an online questionnaire were more open to the idea of a pluricentric Chinese language than the four Mandarin teachers who were interviewed. Lastly, this paper goes into the reasons for the troublesome process of collecting data on Chinese pluricentricity but also why it is a fruitful endeavor that we need to undertake in order to improve our understanding of Chinese.

Keywords: standard language variation ◆ Einbau language ◆ Chinese ◆ Chinese as a foreign language ◆ language attitudes

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Introduction

The discussion on standard language variation has its origins in the two supposedly opposing concepts of Abstand and Ausbau. Abstand languages gain the title "language" by merely being different enough from another language, whereas Ausbau languages are not independent languages unless they have been altered through human intervention, namely language policy (Kloss 1967, 1978). Many years after the publication of the initial definitions, Fishman (2008) revisited the two concepts, pointing out that they do not lie—as previously believed—on the same dimension. Fishman suggests that Ausbau is "the concern for fostering dissimilarity-focused interventions" and its counterpart Einbau "the concern for fostering *similarity*-focused emphases" (2008: 18; emphasis in original). When observing only overt language policies, Chinese does not stand out on the continuum, neither towards Ausbau nor Einbau. Yet, when covert language policies are considered as well, it turns out that the Chinese language is a prime example for an Einbau language, which makes standard language variation within Chinese all the more difficult to research. The unique combination of Chinese being both an Einbau and a pluricentric language—that is a language with multiple standard varieties—explains the research gap regarding Chinese standard language variation. To shed light onto the oftentimes misinterpreted language Chinese, this paper provides a holistic overview on how the concept of pluricentricity can be applied to the Chinese language by not only focusing on Mandarin but also including other Fāngyán. For this purpose, Cantonese, Hokkien and Mandarin—alongside with their script and phonetization systems—are examined in regard to their linguistic de jure and de facto situations, their foreign language teaching and their power relations among each other. The theoretical discussion of Chinese pluricentricity is complemented with empirical data of a small-scale study on attitudes towards the Mandarin standard varieties of Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore by both Mandarin teachers and learners. Finally, this paper goes into the major roadblocks that researchers may encounter on their path to gaining insights on Chinese pluricentricity due to Chinese being an Einbau language.

The Origins of Standard Language Variation—Abstand, Ausbau and Einbau

Before diving into theoretical elaborations on the pluricentricity of Chinese, one needs to understand where the notion of pluricentricity stems from. Going back to the concept's roots not only helps to locate pluricentric varieties on the dialect–language continuum but also explains why Chinese pluricentricity is such a challenge to research in comparison to, for example, English pluricentricity.

Kloss' Ausbau and Abstand

Heinz Kloss is one of the first researchers who coined the term *pluricentric* and has influenced the field of linguistics for decades with his dichotomic understanding of language. Prior to Kloss, Stewart (1968) proposed the usage of the term *center* for the description of pluri*centric* languages, however, this is often overlooked (see e.g. Clyne 1992: 1). It was through Kloss, though, that the notion of pluricentricity gained momentum in academia.

Kloss' basic premise is the juxtaposition of dialect and language in that a variety can only be considered a dialect or a language, never both simultaneously (1978: 23). There are two ways for a variety to be(come) a language, that is through either Abstand or Ausbau (Kloss 1967, 1978).

The category of Abstand languages is a "predominantly linguistic concept" (Kloss 1967: 30) since it utilizes the distance between two varieties as the determining factor for defining a variety as an independent language. Hence, a language can never be defined as an Abstand language in and of itself but requires a language to which it must be compared to first before a conclusion can be drawn. Kloss' examples of typical Abstand languages always make use of comparisons across language families, such as between Lower Saxon (Germanic), Occitan (Romance) and Sorbian (Slavic) (1978: 24–25). Yet, when other languages are chosen as comparison languages, e.g. Sorbian and Polish, both of which belong to the Slavic language family, Sorbian might not be recognized as an Abstand language. This example comes to show that the concept of Abstand can easily be biased through the choice of language.

In contrast, Ausbau languages are not independent languages unless they have been altered through human intervention, namely explicit language policy—an example would be Czech and Slovak, two languages that bear the label "language" only for Ausbau reasons according to Kloss (1978: 25). This alteration is a process, hence the concept of Ausbau needs to be perceived as a continuum. In order for a variety to become an Ausbau language, it needs to be standardized. A fundamental prerequisite for this process is for the population to become literate. Subsequently, a variety has to undergo the following steps:

1. Standardization of spelling
2. Standardization of speech form (morphology, lexicon): either monodialectal or pluridialectal basis
3. Ausbau: new rhetorical devices and new fields of application

(Kloss 1978: 37; shortened and translated by author)

For an Ausbau language, the final stage—after having undergone this process—is reached when it can function as "standardized tools for literary activities" (Kloss 1978: 25; translated by author). Due to the human factor in the Ausbau process, it is a sociological concept, in contrast to the linguistic Abstand concept.

Pluricentric languages play a special role in Kloss' framework, in that they show an alternative path for varieties that have fully undergone the Ausbau process. A standardized variety may become an independent language in and of itself, yet, it may likewise become one of multiple standard varieties of the same language that differ in some "grammatical, lexical, phonological, graphemic, prosodic, and pragmatic" (Clyne 2004: 297) aspects. Even though these varieties have the same status, they are oftentimes not perceived as equal, which Clyne (2004: 297) shows in his notion of dominant and other—later coined non-dominant (Muhr 2016: 25)—varieties. This asymmetrical relationship is also reflected in Ammon's (1989) five-step scale regarding the orientation of pluricentric varieties, which covers the spectrum of full endonormativity (models and codices are entirely from within a center) to full exonormativity (models and codices are entirely from outside the center).

Fishman's Adaption: Ausbau and Einbau

Decades after Kloss' publications on Abstand and Ausbau, Fishman (2008) revisited the two concepts in his article *Rethinking the Ausbau–Abstand dichotomy into a continuous and multivariate system* and came to the acknowledgement that

> [p]erhaps our own relatively poor [knowledge of] German and the masterful reputation of Kloss, both as a typologist (with a particular fondness for dichotomies) and as a Germanist, have long misled us into not recognizing the logical inconsistency into which he misled us by stressing both *Ausbau* and *Abstand* as if they were two equally prominent and legitimately opposite ends of one and the same dimension. (Fishman 2008: 18; emphasis in original)

Kloss (1978: 63) did point out that Abstand and Ausbau are not in the same sphere due to the first being a linguistic and the latter being a sociological phenomenon. Yet, the way that Kloss presented the two concepts and the subsequent interpretation of his work led to the misconception that Abstand and Ausbau were supposedly located on the same dimension and thus forming a continuum.

As became apparent in in the elaborations above, corpus planning is the means to create new languages. Therefore, Fishman proposes that Ausbau is "the concern for fostering dissimilarity-focused interventions" and its counterpart Einbau "the concern for fostering *similarity*-focused

emphases" (2008: 18; emphasis in original). The introduction of Einbau allows for a continuum that consists of various "'degrees' of *ausbauness* and degrees of *einbauness*" (Fishman 2008: 19; emphasis in original). In contrast to Ausbau varieties that grow more distant from each other over time, Einbau varieties adopt structural and functional characteristics of each other. This way, varieties may put up a united front against outside forces—a phenomenon that Fishman (2008: 22) describes as "self-saving Einbauization toward some of [a language's] own more minor varieties". An example provides the Tibetan language, which is comprised of three heterogeneous varieties that all rely on the same written standard (Roche and Bum 2018: 418).

The occurrence of einbauization is "a much rarer phenomenon" (Fishman 2008: 22) in Europe than ausbauization. This could be connected to nation building, which oftentimes sparks Ausbau desiderata. However, a straightforward reason for finding more examples of ausbauization than einbauization (anywhere in the world) may simply be that it is easier to identify varieties which are created to contrast with other varieties than those which are adapted to maintain homogeneity.

The Chinese Language

In order to understand Chinese pluricentricity, it is essential to first define the language in question. Therefore, this section offers a brief contextualization and conceptualization of the Chinese language, a discussion of the standardization of Chinese and an explanation for why Chinese is an example of einbauization.

A Brief Contextualization and Conceptualization of the Chinese Language

Chinese is the only official language in Mainland China[1] and Taiwan, and one of several in Hong Kong (besides English), Macao (together with Portuguese) and Singapore (alongside English, Malay and Tamil)—providing a standard language for roughly 1.4 billion Mainland Chinese, 23.8 million Taiwanese, 7.5 million Hongkongers, 650,000 Macao people and

[1] Nation states play a crucial role in the theory on pluricentricity. Yet, in the case of Chinese pluricentricity, blindly clinging to these "imagined political communit[ies]" (Anderson 2006: 6) would paint a picture that does not align with the linguistic and social reality of the Chinese-speaking regions. Therefore, regions that function as self-governing entities are a more accurate means for the description of Chinese pluricentricity. If regions are self-governing entities, they can implement their own language policies and codify their varieties independently from other regions. It is for this reason that this paper differentiates between Macao, Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, without positioning itself in the ongoing debates regarding the independence of certain regions.

5.8 million Singaporeans (World Population Review n.d.). Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, in which some language groups split up into multiple branches each that in turn contain various languages. The Sinitic language family (i.e. Chinese), however, is not divided any further, thus putting Chinese on the same level as e.g. Germanic within the Indo-European language family. Therefore, the term *Chinese* functions as an umbrella term, not merely denoting a single variety but encompassing a plethora of varieties. Some researchers call for further categorization of Chinese—DeFrancis (1984: 39; emphasis in original) states that "[t]o speak of *the* Chinese language is to suggest a uniformity which is far from being the case"—yet, these voices mostly do not originate from within the language community but from without.

Even though Chinese has not been divided further into several languages, it is commonly acknowledged that Chinese has seven different varieties. These varieties are called *Fāngyán* (方言)[2]—fāng (方) meaning *region* or *local* and yán (言) *speech*. The direct translation *local speech* misled people into thinking that Fāngyán are dialects (see e.g. Mair 1991: 4), whilst at the same time assuming that this Fāngyán division is the further categorization that Chinese lacks. There have been attempts to find an English translation for the Chinese term, such as *topolect* (Mair 1991) or *regionalect* (DeFrancis 1984: 57). The disadvantage of such newly invented terms is, though, "that they do not fit into established Western schemes for the categorization of languages" (Mair 1991: 7), likewise making it a challenge to incorporate them in a pluricentric framework. Additionally, there is a very similar term within these "Western schemes", namely *regiolect*, that is used to describe yet another phenomenon that can be found on the continuum between non-standard and standard; regiolects are "standard-divergent varieties with broader regional distribution that can be located between dialects and standard varieties" (Lenz 2009: 302). To forgo any more misunderstandings, this paper refrains from using any of the aforementioned English terms but instead utilizes the Mandarin Chinese term *Fāngyán* to refer to the major varieties as commonly perceived by Chinese speakers to differentiate their language further. The following map (Figure 1) depicts the geographical distribution of Fāngyán in East and South East Asia.

[2] In this paper, in order not to advocate any particular Mandarin standard variety, the traditional script is used for writing Mandarin characters and Hànyǔ Pīnyīn for annotating the pronunciation of these characters.

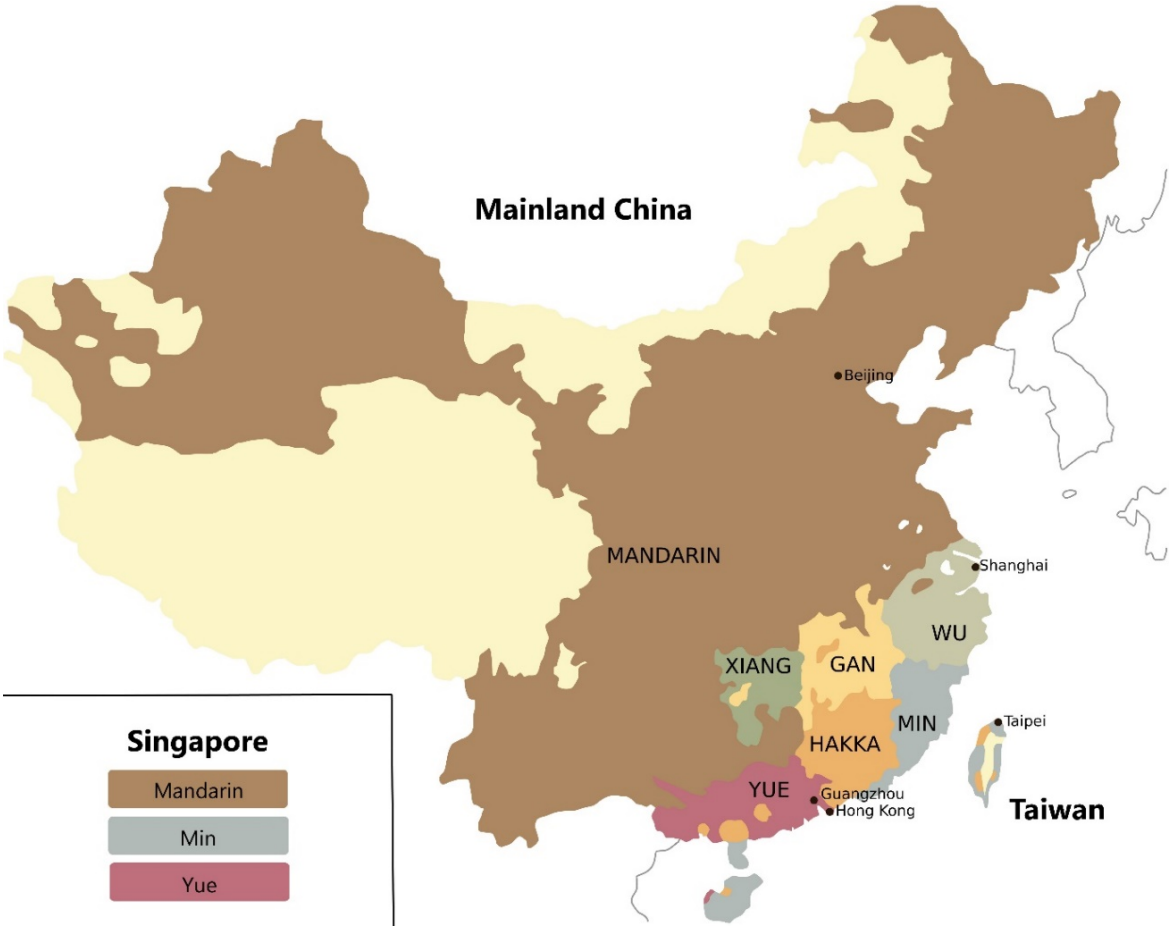


Figure 1: Speech areas of Chinese Fāngyán[3]

Where to draw the line between the various Fāngyán and how many there actually are, is a disputed matter (see Kurpaska 2010: 25–62). The most commonly used division accounts for seven major Fāngyán groups in Chinese (taken from Kurpaska (2010: 58), including a rough estimate of the number of speakers of each Fāngyán (Ethnologue n.d.)):

Northern Fāngyán

Mandarin	官話, Guānhuà	1,117 million speakers

Southern Fāngyán

Wu	吳, Wú	82 million speakers

[3] This map is a derivative of "Map of sinitic dialect – English version" (https://bit.ly/2GOw59G) by Wyunhe, used under CC BY 3.0 (https://bit.ly/2uaO9Z8). The map has been adapted to represent Kurpaska's (2010: 58) conceptualization of Fāngyán including Singapore, most city names have been removed and the names of the self-governing entities have been added.

Yue/Cantonese	粵, Yuè	74 million speakers
Min/Hokkien	閩, Mǐn	61 million speakers
Hakka	客家, Kèjiā	49 million speakers
Xiang	湘, Xiāng	37 million speakers
Gan	贛, Gàn	22 million speakers

As becomes apparent in its number of speakers and geographical distribution, Mandarin, also called the *Northern Fāngyán*, is by far the most dominant Fāngyán. Due to their speech areas, the other six Fāngyán are also referred to as *Southern Fāngyán*. Some Fāngyán are linguistically closer to each other than others—for instance, there is a non-standard continuum between Pekingese Mandarin and Shanghainese Wu (Ramsey 1987: 7)—, however, the differences between the various Fāngyán "amount, very roughly, to 20 percent in grammar, 40 percent in vocabulary, and 80 percent in pronunciation" (DeFrancis 1984: 63; based on Xu 1982), making them mutually unintelligible.

The Standardization of Chinese in a Nutshell

In the first half of the 20th century, Mainland China underwent turbulent times, initiated by the defeat in the Opium Wars in the mid-19th century by the British Empire. Especially after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, the nation started striving for modernization to keep up with the West—a crucial element being the reformation of the Chinese language because Chinese was perceived to be the major cause for the empire's deficits (Chen 1999: 13–14). The Chinese elite was inspired by the rapid standardization process Japanese went through, which itself was emulating Western models of standardization (Klöter 2016: 58).

As mentioned above, a new standard language may have a mono- or pluridialectal basis. In the case of Chinese, many options were discussed (Chen 1999: 13–23) but in the end, the monodialectal approach prevailed. In 1955, the new standard variety of the People's Republic of China (PRC)—namely Pǔtōnghuà (普通話, 'common language')—was defined as follows.

> *Pǔtōnghuà* is the standard form of Modern Chinese with the Beijing phonological system as its norm of pronunciation, and Northern dialects as its base dialect, and looking to exemplary modern works in *báihuà* 'vernacular literary language' for its grammatical norms. (Wang 1995, taken from Chen 1999: 24; emphasis in original)

The PRC never fully banned the usage of Southern Fāngyán but due to the continuous dominance of Mandarin, speakers of Southern Fāngyán—except for Cantonese (see Snow 2004)—never had the chance or never saw the need to develop their own writing schemes and

expand the functions of their varieties. Therefore, the degree of standardization is generally low amongst Southern Fāngyán. There are two Fāngyán, though, that stand out in regard to standardization— Cantonese in Hong Kong and to a lesser degree Hokkien in Taiwan (more on them below).

Chinese as an Einbau Language

Due to the lack of further categorization of Sinitic within the Sino-Tibetan language family, it is obvious that Chinese cannot be considered an Ausbau language. Another argument is that the de jure language policies of the 20th century were not implemented for the sake of gaining independence from another variety, but for modernization purposes. At the same time, Southern Fāngyán were not being standardized, hence there was no competition that could have caused Pǔtōnghuà to undergo ausbauization processes.

Yet, the standardization process of Mandarin does not exhibit any overt signs of einbauization either. Since Mandarin was chosen as the monodialectal basis of the new standard variety, there were no attempts of incorporating characteristics of Southern Fāngyán. In other words, no measures were taken to bring the various Fāngyán closer together. Likewise, the standard varieties of Southern Fāngyán are not deliberately fostering similarities, even though they are exposed to a strong influence of Mandarin.

This leads to the conclusion that Chinese cannot be considered an Einbau language—at least not when merely observing overt language policies. However,

> Chinese authorities insist that the many languages spoken by [the ethnic group of] Han Chinese are all 'dialects' of Chinese, despite the fact that they are all mutually unintelligible and could be considered different languages. (García 2015: 357)

Thus, overt language policies exert great influence on covert language policies, including language attitudes. In a matter of fact, in the case of Chinese this occurs to an extreme degree, since speakers of Chinese generally perceive the language as a single language, regardless of its great linguistic diversity. Therefore, Chinese can be recognized as an Einbau language. Even Fishman's (2008: 22) concept of "self-saving Einbauization" corresponds to the Chinese language situation. However, there is a significant difference in comparison to Tibetan (see the example provided above) for which einbauization acts as a protection from outside forces—the Communist Party of China utilizes einbauization to prevent inside forces from "Balkani[zing]" (Ramsey 1987: 16) Mainland China.

Chinese Pluricentricity in Theory

This section provides a holistic overview on how the concept of pluricentricity can be applied to the Chinese language by not only focusing on Mandarin but also including the two other Fāngyán, Cantonese and Hokkien, which are spoken in multiple self-governing entities (see Footnote 1 on the usage of *self-governing entities* instead of nation states as a point of departure for pluricentricity). Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the Chinese standard varieties discussed in this section. For a more in-depth discussion on the pluricentric varieties of Chinese see Kaltenegger (2018, 2020).

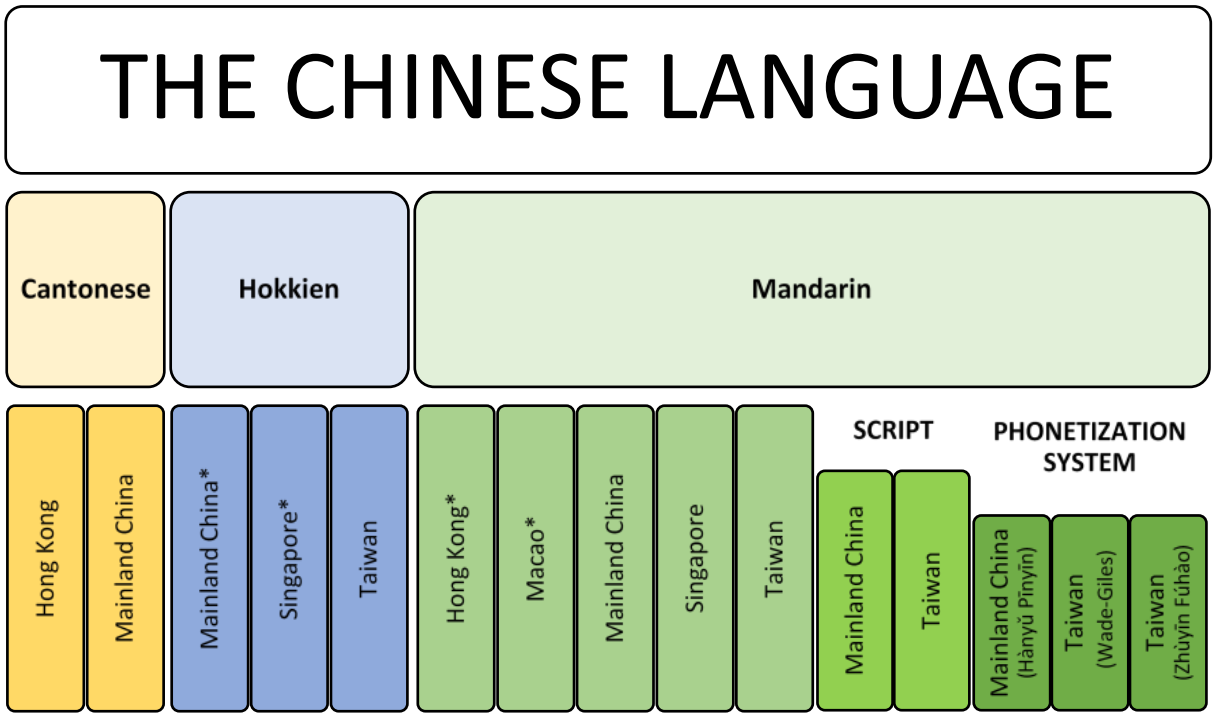


Figure 2: The pluricentric standard varieties of the Chinese language (varieties with an asterisk require more research for confirmation)

The first Fāngyán in alphabetical order is Cantonese, which can be found in four self-governing entities: Hong Kong, Macao, Mainland China and Singapore. In the prior two, Cantonese has a semi-official status (Hong Kong e-Legislation 1974; MSAR News n.d.) since the official language is *Chinese*, which leaves open the question, which Fāngyán of Chinese is declared official. In the latter two, Cantonese has no official status. No signs (developed standard, strong ethno-linguistic awareness) indicate that Macao and Singapore act as independent centers, hence they are excluded from the framework. This leaves Hong Kong and Mainland China as the two pluricentric varieties of Cantonese, of which Hong Kong is the more dominant one, as Cantonese covers a wide range of text types and functions there and has both a written (Bauer 2018) and spoken standard (Groves 2010).

Hokkien is another pluricentric Fāngyán, predominantly spoken in the province of Fujian (PRC), Singapore and Taiwan. It holds its strongest position in the latter, where it is recognized as a national language (國家語言; guójiā yǔyán) (Executive Yuan 2018). Until martial law was lifted in 1987, the use of Hokkien was harshly restricted in Taiwan (promoting Japanese and later Mandarin in its stead). However, "[i]n the changing political climate of the 1980s, official politics towards local languages shifted from oppression to toleration, and subsequently from toleration to active cultivation" (Klöter 2008: 12). The Taiwanese government is now working towards revitalizing Hokkien, providing information on, for instance, how to select characters for writing Hokkien and a standardized phonetization system (MOE 2012). Therefore, Hokkien enjoys a certain degree of standardization in Taiwan. Yet, Taiwanese Hokkien has not been elaborated to cover a wide range of functions, and prestige-wise is less esteemed than its Cantonese counterpart in Hong Kong. In Singapore, no governmental efforts are backing the use of Hokkien, however, there is significant public interest in reviving the once widespread use of it (New York Times 2017). Similar to the Mainland Chinese variety of Cantonese in the province of Guangdong, Hokkien in the province of Fujian is only used as a home language and does not cover any functions in public domains either. Tien (2012: 457) nevertheless makes out several Hokkien varieties—the aforementioned varieties of Mainland China, Singapore and Taiwan, as well as a variety encompassing several Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, and Hokkien-speaking communities in the US and other countries. The latter variety needs to be excluded from the pluricentric framework of Chinese in this paper since it does not meet any criteria of a pluricentric variety. Hence, Hokkien can be assumed to have at least three centers, all of which play a non-dominant role in the region they are spoken in: Mainland China, Singapore and Taiwan.

In the case of Mandarin, the PRC was the first to start the standardization process through de jure language policies. In the 1950s, a monodialectal basis was chosen, the new variety was codified rigorously, its script simplified, its functionality expanded, and it was (and is to this day=) diffused extensively. A plethora of codices are published on and high prestige is attributed to the standard variety of Mainland China, making it the most endonormative variety amongst the standard varieties of Mandarin. However, it is not the only one. Bradley (1992: 306–307) recognizes three different centers, namely Taiwan (with its variety Guóyǔ (國語)), Mainland China (with Pǔtōnghuà) and Singapore (with Huáyǔ (華語)). In addition, Mandarin can also be found in the two self-governing entities Hong Kong and Macao. The *Global Chinese Dictionary* (Li 2010) is the first variant dictionary of Mandarin that acknowledges the existence of several standard varieties by referring to them as 标准 (biāozhǔn; *standard*) (Chinabooks 2011). Surprisingly, it contains more entries of variants

specific to Hong Kong and Macao—that is, Mandarin varieties that have not been discussed in the context of Chinese pluricentricity so far—than Taiwanese variants, which is a variety that is more accepted in the pluricentric framework of Mandarin in comparison (Li 2016: 283). This dictionary merely suggests that there are lexical differences in the Mandarin standard varieties of Hong Kong and Macao, yet these two potentially additional Mandarin varieties cannot be fully dismissed (but instead require more research for confirmation). Therefore, this framework postulates that Mandarin has five pluricentric centers: Hong Kong, Macao, Mainland China, Singapore and Taiwan.

In addition to the pluricentricity of the various Chinese Fāngyán, it is also legitimate to speak of the Chinese script—the simplified script of Mainland China and the traditional script of Taiwan—and the phonetization system—Hànyǔ Pīnyīn of Mainland China and Wade-Giles as well as Zhùyīn Fúhào of Taiwan—as pluricentric, as Tien (2016: 50–51) suggests. An aspect that is highly important, yet not made explicit in Tien (2016), is that the varieties of the script and phonetization system are only used by the dominant Fāngyán Mandarin. The scripts and phonetization systems of Southern Fāngyán may as well show differences between the various standard varieties.

Due to the highly complex nature of Mandarin, let alone Chinese as a whole, it stands to reason that scrutinizing Chinese pluricentricity in a pedagogical context is a worthwhile endeavor. Therefore, the following section provides insight into how Chinese standard varieties are spread on a global scale and in how far both Mandarin teachers and learners perceive Mandarin as pluricentric.

Chinese Pluricentricity in Practice

The section on Chinese language teaching and learning discusses which standard varieties of Chinese are taught worldwide before offering a glimpse into language attitudes towards Chinese pluricentricity by both Mandarin teachers and learners via two studies.

Spreading the Standard Varieties

The diffusion of a standard variety is crucial for its continued existence. This becomes apparent in the three stages of implementation of a standard language, as proposed by Milroy and Milroy (1985: 27–28), in which diffusion is one of the three steps (besides selection and maintenance) for creating a standard language. Teaching the standard variety in schools and foreign language classes is an especially powerful tool to spread it. Due to the data presented in the following

sections, the focus lies on the teaching of Chinese standard varieties as a foreign language, that is, external language spread.

With Mandarin being by far the most powerful Fāngyán, it comes as no surprise that Mandarin is the Fāngyán of choice for most Chinese language learners. The single most important governmental entity for the external spread of the Mainland Chinese variety of Mandarin, namely Pǔtōnghuà, is the Confucius Institute (孔子學院, kǒngzǐ xuéyuàn). With 535 locations worldwide (as of September 30, 2019; Hanban n.d.a), the Confucius Institute is a potent apparatus for the PRC to maintain and extend its soft power on a global scale. The main tasks of the Confucius Institute are, amongst others, to teach Pǔtōnghuà, train Pǔtōnghuà teachers, offer teaching resources, conduct language exams and organize cultural exchanges between Mainland China and other countries. In addition, there are 1,134 Confucius Classrooms (孔子學堂, kǒngzǐ xuétáng) worldwide that provide support to Pǔtōnghuà language classes in primary and secondary schools. The Confucius Institutes are coordinated by the Confucius Institute Headquarters (國家漢辦, guójiā hànbàn)—also known by its shortened name Hànbàn (漢辦)—which is directly affiliated with the Ministry of Education. Only in 2004, the first Confucius Institute was opened in Seoul, South Korea (after a test run in Tashkent, Uzbekistan the same year), making it one of the youngest additions to the global stage of organizations targeting external language spread. (Hanban n.d.a; Gil 2017: 7, 9)

In 1988, a proficiency test for Pǔtōnghuà was developed at the Beijing Language University to provide a standardized tool to assess Mandarin skills of non-native Chinese speakers. The Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì (漢語水平考試, 'Chinese Proficiency Test'), or HSK for short, was revised in 2010 and its levels of HSK I to VI were adapted to correspond to the six proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Besides HSK, there are several other standardized examinations that Mandarin learners may take: HSKK (漢語水平口語考試, hànyǔ shuǐpíng kǒuyǔ kǎoshì, 'HSK speaking test'), YCT (中小學生漢語考試, zhōngxiǎo xuéshēng hànyǔ kǎoshì, 'Youth Chinese Test'), BCT (商務漢語考試, shāngwù hànyǔ kǎoshì, 'Business Chinese Test') and MCT (醫學漢語水平考試, yīxué hànyǔ shuǐpíng kǎoshì, 'Medical Chinese Test'). As of 2018, there are 1,147 test centers worldwide—349 are located in the PRC and 798 abroad—and in that year alone, 646,000 individuals attempted to gain a proficiency level in either HSK, HSKK, YCT or BCT. (Xing 2006: 23; Fachverband Chinesisch e.V. n.d.; Hanban n.d.b)

Although very dominant, the PRC is not the only player when it comes to the external spread of Mandarin. In 2005, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China (ROC) established

the Steering Committee for the Test Of Proficiency-Huayu (SC-TOP). The SC-TOP is somewhat comparable to PRC's Hànbàn, yet it works on a much smaller scale and there is no equivalent to the PRC's Confucius Institute. The focus of the Taiwanese institution lies purely on designing, promoting and conducting the Test of Chinese as a Foreign Language (TOCFL; 華語文能力測驗考試, huàyǔwén nénglì cèyàn kǎoshì). As of January 2020, TOCFL is being tested in 37 different locations. TOCFL consists of three parts (listening and reading, speaking, and writing), all in all, eight different levels can be achieved—Novice 1 and Novice 2 (Band Novice), Level 1 and 2 (Band A), Level 3 and 4 (Band B), and Level 5 and 6 (Band C)—, Level 1 to 6 correspond to the six levels of CEFR. In addition, children up to the age of 12 may gain the Children's Chinese Competency Certification (CCCC; 兒童華語文能力測驗, értóng huáyǔwén nénglì cèyàn). In contrast to HSK, which is only available in simplified characters, TOCFL examenees may choose between a traditional and a simplified version. Until 2018, over 320,000 individuals have taken the Taiwanese proficiency test—a number that fades in comparison to the aforementioned 646,000 HSK exams taken in the year 2018 alone. (SC-TOP n.d.a; SC-TOP n.d.b; SC-TOP n.d.c; Education Division of Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Los Angeles n.d.; CCCC n.d.)

Neither Hong Kong nor Singapore have taken any steps towards spreading their Mandarin varieties amongst non-Chinese speakers. Therefore, only the PRC and the ROC are taking proactive measures towards external language spread.

In the case of Cantonese, there are no governmental entities in place that strive for the diffusion of their varieties. However, multiple universities around the globe offer courses or entire programs to learn Cantonese (for a full list see Cantonese Language Association (n.d.)). According to Bauer and Wakefield (2019: 11), most learning materials of Cantonese teach the variety of Hong Kong, demonstrating that the standard variety of Guangdong has lost its dominant position in recent decades.

Similar to Cantonese in Guangdong, there is no governmental interest in supporting the spread of Hokkien in Fujian, nor in Singapore. In Taiwan, on the other hand, resources are invested in revitalizing Hokkien and Hokkien is taught in schools. These measures are not targeting external language spread, though. The SOAS University of London is one of very few foreign universities providing Hokkien courses, which put their focus on the Taiwanese variety but also discuss the differences to and amongst the other Hokkien varieties (see Fuehrer 2016).

As becomes apparent in this section, governmental efforts are only directed towards the spread of Mandarin, neglecting the external spread of both Cantonese and Hokkien varieties. In turn, among the pluricentric varieties of Mandarin, the variety of Mainland China is taught globally

on a great scale, yet, there are also some structures in place for the diffusion of the Taiwanese variety of Mandarin.

Teaching the Standard Varieties

Language attitudes play a fundamental role in how languages and varieties are perceived, if perceived at all. Therefore, this and the following section present some insights into the attitudes towards Mandarin standard varieties by both teachers and learners of Mandarin.

In August 2015, four guided interviews were conducted by the author in Mandarin. The participants were Mandarin teachers at the National Cheng Kung University in Tainan, Taiwan at the time. The author attended a summer intensive course (20 hours per week) at this university in the month of August and approached her two teachers and two teachers of the beginner's group, who all agreed to the interview. The teachers usually conduct classes that last three months, either the main course (10 hours per week) or the elective class (5 hours per week). In the summer months, the university also provides classes that only have a duration of four weeks but are comprised of more hours (20 hours per week: 10 hours for the main course and 10 hours for the elective class). Prior to the interviews, the teachers were provided with a brief explanation of the notion of pluricentricity. The aim of these qualitative interviews was to find out, whether the interviewees perceive Mandarin as pluricentric or reject the existence of multiple standard varieties. Ten questions were part of the interview guideline (see Appendix), with additional questions asked in each interview as seen fit by the author. Due to the restricted circumstances and the small scale of this data collection, sociolinguistic information of the interviewees, which might pose a relevant factor in the perception of Mandarin's pluricentric character, was not collected. In the following paragraphs, the content of each interview is briefly summarized in order to depict the range of opinions the participants expressed on Mandarin pluricentricity.

Teacher A acknowledged the differences between Pǔtōnghuà and Guóyǔ, as Mainland China and Taiwan have been separated for over 70 years, which caused the development of new words in each variety. Yet, they found the situation of Mandarin not at all comparable to the pluricentric situation of English, reasoning that Mandarin is not an "original" language of Taiwan (in comparison to Hakka, Hokkien and Austronesian languages)—this, however, neglects the fact that English is not an "original" language of most regions in the world either. The linguistic makeup of Singapore is even "更複雜" (gèng fùzá, 'more complex') because of the strong influence of English. According to Teacher A, "我們 […] 標準的語言是北京話" (wǒmén biāozhǔn de yǔyán shì běijīnghuà, 'Our standard language is the speech of Beijing').

When asked, whether the linguistic situation of Mandarin is comparable to English with its multiple centers, Teacher B stated that the situation is in fact similar. The influence from Hokkien on Mandarin in Taiwan has caused it to change in its usage, it does not hinder communication, though. They estimated that only about 10% of their Mandarin students have knowledge in Pǔtōnghuà, whereas the percentage is higher (20–30%) in the short-term summer courses offered. Teacher B reckoned that most of these students have previously studied Mandarin in non-Mandarin speaking areas and since most Mandarin teachers abroad are from Mainland China, they are not exposed to the Taiwanese variety of Mandarin.

Teacher C acknowledged differences on the lexical level but stated that the grammar of all Mandarin varieties is the same. In their perception, Pǔtōnghuà and Guóyǔ resemble the situation of English standard varieties, yet Singaporean Mandarin does not due to its strong influence from English and its distinct grammar. Later in the interview, they stated in contrast that "我們在上課的時候教的也是中國人教的那個" (wǒmén zài shàng kè de shíhòu jiào de yě shì zhōngguórén jiào de nèi gè, 'What we teach in class is what [Mainland] Chinese teach as well').

Teacher D repeatedly came back to the differences in the two scripts, simplified and traditional, as they mark the biggest difference between Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese Mandarin in their opinion. They generally agreed with Mandarin having multiple centers as English does. In the interview, they provided an insightful piece of information on the power relation between the two varieties in question. In the winter months, the language school offers short-term Mandarin courses to students from Australia. These courses do not teach Guóyǔ but Pǔtōnghuà, at request by the administration of the language school. Teacher D provided a few written examples (again, contrasting traditional and simplified script) and stated that they are able to change their pronunciation to Pǔtōnghuà since they have previously taught in Mainland China.

The language attitudes of these four Mandarin teachers showcase the multitude of ways the topic of Mandarin pluricentricity can be perceived. An issue that has already been detected in academic literature on Chinese and its pluricentricity arises in this study as well—there is no clear line drawn between standard and non-standard, making a discussion on Chinese pluricentricity challenging. When it comes to differentiating between standard varieties, the same issue emerges. Teacher C, for instance, defined identical grammatical features as the prerequisite for standard varieties to be of the same language—concluding that Pǔtōnghuà and Guóyǔ display identical grammatical features and hence are pluricentric varieties of Mandarin; Huáyǔ, the Mandarin variety of Singapore, on the other hand, differs grammatically and is thus excluded from the pluricentric framework. Two of the four teachers completely dismissed the application of pluricentricity on Mandarin, yet, they do so in different ways. Both teachers

generally acknowledged the differences between Pǔtōnghuà and Guóyǔ, but Teacher A rejected the comparison to English and its various standard varieties, whereas Teacher C embraced it. Regardless of their positioning, they came to the same conclusion—there is only one standard variety, namely Pǔtōnghuà ("Our standard language is the speech of Beijing" (Teacher A), "What we teach in class is what [Mainland] Chinese teach as well" (Teacher C)). If that was truly the case, there would be no need for the administration of a language school to request the teaching of Pǔtōnghuà instead of Guóyǔ, but this request was in fact made, as reported by Teacher D. As becomes evident, the attitudes towards the pluricentricity of Mandarin amongst Mandarin teachers are diverse, complex and oftentimes contradicting. As a next step, the following section scrutinizes the language attitudes of persons that are easily influenced by the attitudes of Mandarin teachers, namely Mandarin learners.

Learning the Standard Varieties

In order to gain insight into the attitudes of Mandarin learners regarding the two Mandarin standard varieties that have institutions for external language spread—namely Pǔtōnghuà and Guóyǔ—data were collected via an online questionnaire in June/July 2017. The questionnaire contained 30 questions—mostly with either a single or multiple-choice answer, two open-ended questions as well as one Likert scale. The questionnaire was provided in three versions: English, Mandarin in simplified characters and Mandarin in traditional characters. The target group for this study were Mandarin learners who lived in a Mandarin-speaking region at the point of data elicitation due to the assumed strong commitment to learn Mandarin. Language schools in Mainland China (21 schools) and Taiwan (38 schools) were contacted via e-mail with the request to forward the link with a short description to their language students, several personal contacts in Mainland China and Taiwan were asked to do the same. The response rate was very low, therefore, the questionnaire link was also distributed in various Facebook groups that are devoted to Mandarin language learning. By doing so, the target group was expanded to all learners of Mandarin, no matter their place of residency. Nevertheless, the participation rate remained low. The questionnaire was viewed 105 times, 43 cases remained after excluding drop-outs and empty questionnaires, which were entered into analysis.

Whereas gender was distributed equally amongst the participants (53% female, 47% male), the great majority (84%) was 30 years of age or younger. At the time of data elicitation, 42% of the participants have studied Mandarin for less than a year, 30% for one to four years and 28% for over four years. Only 18% of the participants opted to fill in the questionnaire in Mandarin (16% with traditional script, 2% with simplified script), the remaining participants chose English. Over half of the participants (51%) have studied Mandarin in Taiwan at one point in

their lives, whereas only 13% did so in Mainland China. Other study locations were Austria, Italy, Denmark, South Korea, France, Myanmar, Germany, Singapore, India and the US. Figure 1 shows the script and phonetization systems the participants have learned.

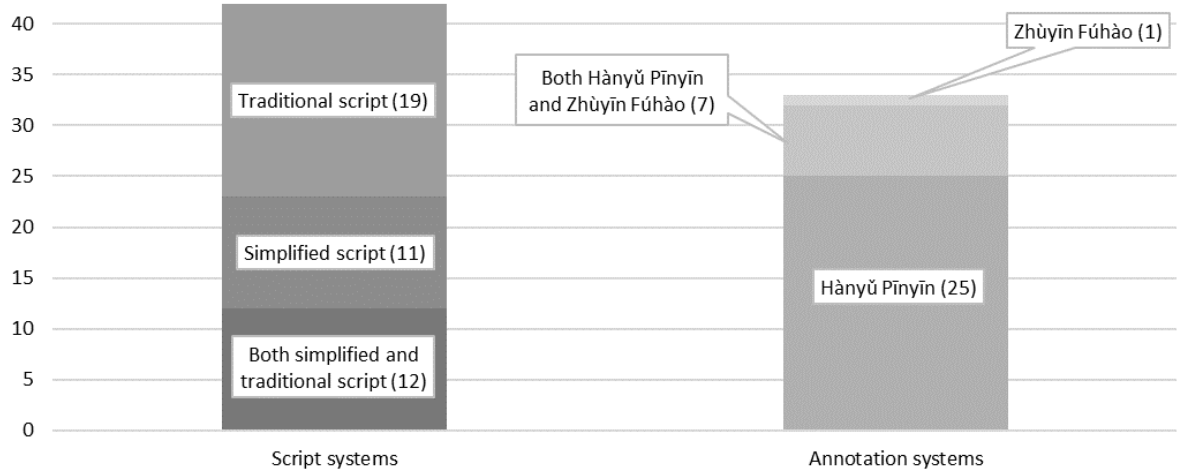


Figure 1: Learned script and phonetization systems of the participants

In the following presentation and discussion of results, the focus lies on these three research questions:

RQ1: Is Mandarin perceived as a pluricentric language by the participants?
RQ2: Which variants[4] do the participants prefer to use?
RQ3: Which variants are perceived as correct[5] by the participants?

[4] A set of four variants was used for this questionnaire. The Mainland Chinese variants are the following: 星期 (xīngqī) for the meaning *week*, 自行車 (zìxíngchē) for the meaning *bike*, the pronunciation lājī for 垃圾 (*trash*) and the meaning *potato* for 土豆 (tǔdòu). The Taiwanese counterparts are as follows: 禮拜 (lǐbài) for the meaning *week*, 脚踏車 (jiǎotàchē) for the meaning *bike*, the pronunciation lèsè for 垃圾 (*trash*) and the meaning *peanut* for 土豆 (tǔdòu). In the evaluation, these variant pairs are referred to as "week", "bike", "trash" and "tǔdòu".

[5] It is assumed that only the spoken and written standard is perceived as correct language use by lay-persons, hence the presented data describes what the participants perceive as correct, not what is prescribed as correct.

In order to answer RQ1 (Is Mandarin perceived as a pluricentric language by the participants?), questions 9, 10 and 13 of the questionnaires were analyzed (see Figures 2–4).

FIGURE 2: "WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS APPLY TO CHINESE IN YOUR OPINION?" (Q13)

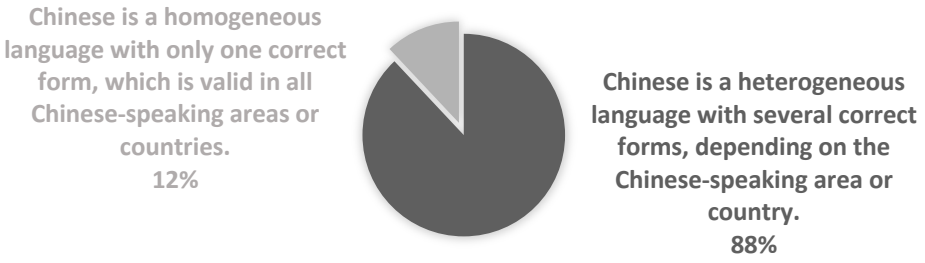


FIGURE 3: "WHERE IS MANDARIN SPOKEN CORRECTLY?" (Q9)

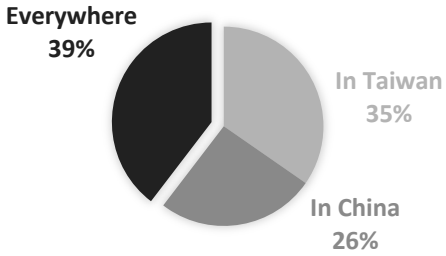
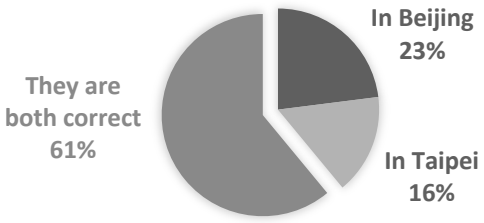


FIGURE 4: "WHICH MANDARIN IS MORE CORRECT, THE ONE SPOKEN IN BEIJING OR IN TAIPEI?" (Q10)



Figures 2–4: Evaluation of Q9, Q10 and Q13

As Figure 2 shows, the participants in this study perceived Chinese as a heterogeneous language (88%). Among the 43 respondents, a tendency towards the understanding of Mandarin as pluricentric can be identified, as 39% of participants claim that Mandarin is spoken correctly everywhere (Figure 3) and 61% state that Mandarin is spoken correctly in both Beijing and Taipei (Figure 4). Hence, there is reason to assume that Mandarin is indeed perceived as pluricentric by the participants. Nevertheless, there are some curiosities in the data that need not be ignored. When crossing questions 9 and 10 (see Table 1), the majority of the respondents stated that Mandarin is spoken correctly everywhere while both Mandarin varieties of Beijing and Taipei are correct (n=15). Another eight participants had a consistent view on the Mainland Chinese variety being the only correct one, whereas five persons viewed the Taiwanese variety as the only correct one.

		"Which Mandarin is more correct, the one spoken in Beijing or in Taipei?" (Q9)		
		In Beijing	In Taipei	They are both correct
"Where is Mandarin spoken correctly?" (Q10)	In China	(8)	-	3
	In Taiwan	2	(5)	8
	Everywhere	-	2	(15)

Table 1: Cross tabulation of Q9 and Q10

Yet, three individuals proclaimed that while Mandarin is spoken correctly only in Mainland China, both Taipei's and Beijing's Mandarin varieties are correct, the same goes for Mandarin spoken in Taiwan (n=8). Two people claimed that Mandarin is spoken correctly only in Taiwan but Beijing's variety is "more correct". Another two people stated that Mandarin is spoken correctly everywhere but the Mandarin spoken in Taipei is "more correct" in comparison. These intrapersonal contradictions make salient that some participants of this study do not have a clear-cut opinion on the pluricentric character of Mandarin.

Furthermore, the analysis uncovers that there is a connection between where the respondents have been studying Mandarin and which variety of Mandarin they perceived as correct (see Table 2). Amongst those who have studied Mandarin in Taiwan (n=31), most participants stated that Mandarin is spoken correctly only in Taiwan (n=14). Contrary to that, six of the same 31 people who have studied in Taiwan stated that Mandarin is spoken correctly only in Mainland China, revealing an orientation towards the dominant variety of Mandarin. The same goes for those who have studied Mandarin only somewhere else: Seven people stated that the Mainland Chinese variety is the only correct one, whereas only two people proclaimed the same statement for the Taiwanese variety.

		"Where is Mandarin spoken correctly?" (Q4)		
		In Taiwan	In China	Everywhere
"Where have you been studying Mandarin?" (Q9)	In Taiwan	(14)	6	11
	In China	-	(3)	5
	Somewhere else	2	7	11

Table 2: Cross tabulation of Q4 and Q9 (the latter is a multiple-choice question, therefore the sum of the responses is greater than the number of participants)

To answer RQ2 (Which variants do the participants prefer to use?), the evaluation of questions 17–20 is presented in Table 3. These questions inquire about participants' preference regarding the four lexical variants for *week*, *bike*, *trash* and *tǔdòu*. Besides choosing either the Mainland Chinese or Taiwanese variant in each question, participants were also able to choose that they use both variants, as well as that they have no opinion about it ("I don't know").

	Week	Bike	Trash	Tǔdòu	Sum
Mainland Chinese variant	15	12	**20**	**20**	**67**
Taiwanese variant	3	13	10	7	33
Both	**23**	**15**	7	2	47
I don't know	2	3	6	14	25

Table 3: Evaluation of Q17–Q20

The results in Table 3 show the following: When taking into account all four possible answers for the questions, both variants were used amongst the participants for *week* (n=23) and *bike* (n=15), whereas for *trash* (n=20) and *tǔdòu* (n=20) there was a preference of the Mainland Chinese variants. Excluding the latter two answer options, the Mainland Chinese variant of *week* (n=15) was preferred to its Taiwanese counterpart (n=3), however, both variants for *bike* (n=12 and n=13 respectively) were almost equally in usage amongst the participants.

Summing up, the results for RQ2 show a preference of the Mainland Chinese variants (n=67) over the Taiwanese variants (n=33). One should not forget that 51% of the participants have learned Mandarin in Taiwan either at the time of data elicitation or beforehand, hence the data reflects the dominance of the Mainland Chinese variety amongst Mandarin learners.

For gaining insight into which variants are perceived as correct by the participants (RQ3), Table 4 illustrates their responses (n=172) of questions 21–24. These questions ask which variant is correct, also providing the answer options "both" and "I don't know".

	Week	Bike	Trash	Tǔdòu	Sum
Mainland Chinese variant	12	9	**15**	15	51
Taiwanese variant	5	9	8	6	28
Both	**23**	**21**	14	6	**64**
I don't know	3	4	6	**16**	29

Table 4: Evaluation of Q21–Q24

Even though many participants had their personal preferences in their variant usage, the majority of participants in fact perceived both variants as correct (n=64). This indicates an openness towards the acceptance of multiple standard varieties in Mandarin.

Despite the participation rate of this study being lower than anticipated, the analysis provides valuable insight into the language attitudes of Mandarin learners concerning Mandarin standard varieties. The majority of participants perceived multiple standard varieties as correct, attesting their acknowledgement of and openness towards the pluricentric character of Mandarin. Nonetheless, the participants of this study preferred using Mainland Chinese variants over

Taiwanese variants in their own speech/writing. Various factors may have led them to this choice: As discussed above, Pǔtōnghuà has the upper hand with its Confucius Institutes when it comes to external language spread; most Mandarin teachers who teach in non-Mandarin speaking regions are originally from Mainland China, passing on "their" variety to their students; and even at a highly prestigious university in Taiwan, teachers may be asked to teach Pǔtōnghuà instead of Guóyǔ in certain courses, limiting the spread of Guóyǔ even within Taiwan. In comparison to the interviews with Mandarin teachers, the data reveals that the Mandarin learners who participated in this online questionnaire were more open to the idea of a pluricentric Chinese language than the four Mandarin teachers.

Concluding Remarks—the Many Hurdles of Researching Chinese Pluricentricity

From a Western perspective, Chinese is an under-categorized language, which causes misconceptions of how to make the various Fāngyán of Chinese fit the Western approach to language definition as it assumes mutual intelligibility to be a decisive factor. This lack of further classification stems from a political desire to stay united, on the one hand, and from the language attitudes of its speakers, on the other. Therefore, Chinese can be identified as an Einbau language, in other words, as a language in which similarities between varieties are emphasized and dissimilarities downplayed. In contrast, Chinese is also a pluricentric language, therefore exhibiting a certain degree of dissimilarities between the standard varieties in use. This unique constellation is the cause for great tensions, political as well as emotional, when discussing the pluricentric character of Chinese and is the reason why data elicitation on this research topic can be challenging.

Three major roadblocks have been identified that a researcher may face on their path to gain insights on Chinese pluricentricity. First, the topic at hand is not well understood. In the interviews with the four Mandarin teachers, it became apparent that the line between and the definition of standard and non-standard varieties is highly fluid and may shift within a conversation. This issue is not limited to the personal definition of these notions by individuals but can also be found in academic literature on Chinese. That way, arguments find their way into discussions on Chinese pluricentricity that are irrelevant for the topic at hand (e.g. the line of argument of Teacher A stating that Taiwanese Mandarin is not an independent standard variety since Mandarin is not an "original" language of Taiwan).

Secondly, the topic of Chinese pluricentricity is highly political, and therefore access to data may be restricted. This factor had great impact on the data elicitation process of the questionnaire study presented in this paper. Altogether, 59 Mandarin language schools were

contacted in Mainland China and Taiwan, only a minor fraction replied, and in the end, no school distributed the questionnaire link amongst its students to the knowledge of the author. Only much later the author of this paper learned by hearsay that her e-mails were, in fact, received and discussed in Taiwan, yet, schools decided not to distribute the questionnaire because it supposedly raised too many political questions which were not supporting Taiwan's relationship with Mainland China.

Thirdly, besides being political, the topic of Chinese linguistic variation is also emotionally charged since language is an integral part of identity construction. This becomes apparent in a private correspondence with a Mandarin language teacher in Taiwan, who was contacted for the distribution of the study's questionnaire link to their students. The first reaction of the teacher was, "Sorry, I don't understand about you're [sic] question, coz Taiwan is a part of China. As a Taiwanese, I don't know how to answer it." After a clarification sequence on what is meant by "Taiwan" and "China" in the questionnaire, the teacher went on by stating what if they were to distribute "a questionnaire which assumes that Salzburg is not a part of Austria" (alluding to the nationality of the author, who is Austrian). Lastly, they summarize that "just we Chinese (including Mainlander and Taiwanese) have [sic] ignored it for westerners' convenience. But now I just have been bothered on this issue by Europeans way too much. So I think I'm responsible to clarify it. Don't feel bad. I don't take it personally." This perceived imposition of views by an outsider may require consideration and reflection in future research.

These hurdles notwithstanding, researching Chinese pluricentricity is a fruitful endeavor that we need to undertake in order to improve our understanding of Chinese in general and the teaching of it.

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China' – On reading Article 20 of the 'Draft of the Revised Constitution']." *Wénzì Gǎigé* 2: 15–16.

Appendix—Interview Questions

1) 你覺得中國大陸和臺灣的中文有差別嗎？
[Do you think there is a difference between the Mandarin of Mainland China and that of Taiwan?]

2) 英文有很多種，有美國的，英國的，澳洲的，什麼的。德文有德國的，奧地利的和瑞士的德文。你覺得中國大陸，臺灣和新加坡的情況一樣嗎？
[English has many types, such as US-American, British and Australian. In the German language, there is German, Austrian and Swiss German. Do you think the situation of Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Singaporean Mandarin is the same?]

3) 教課的話，教那個差別給學生，對你來說重要嗎？
[When in class, is it important for you to teach these differences to your students?]

4) 教課的話，你注重一些部分嗎？
[When in class, do you emphasize any aspects?]

5) 你課的學生，百分之多少只會國語？
百分之多少只會普通話？
[What is the percentage of students in your classes that only know Pǔtōnghuà?
Guóyǔ?]

6) 如果你課的學生只會普通話，怎麼辦？
[What do you do when your students only know Pǔtōnghuà?]

7) 如果你課的學生只會國語，怎麼辦？
[What do you do when your students only know Guóyǔ?]

8) 你教A班比比較高的班有差別嗎?
[Is there a difference between teaching a beginner's class and more advanced classes?]

9) 從你的經歷來看，國語和普通話的差別可不可以導致問題嗎？
[In your experience, can the differences between Guóyǔ and Pǔtōnghuà cause problems?]

10) 對你來說，關於普通話和國語差別的研究重要不重要，特別爲了中文的學生？
[From your point of view, is the research on the differences between Guóyǔ and Pǔtōnghuà important, especially regarding Mandarin learners?]