

of fate in “the final battle.” Backstage rituals and prayer go hand in hand with front-stage secularism in high schools. In fact the *gaokao* is even referred to as a “magnet for magic” (p. 187). At the end of the day, in spite of all of the belief in meritocracy and the value of diligence and character-building, many Chinese feel that it is impossible to completely account for the inherent uncertainty of this fateful event. According to Howlett, a belief in cosmic reciprocity stemming from popular religion is a common way of attempting to master this unbearable anxiety. He writes, “[a]lthough the exam presents itself as an objective, scientific form of selection, it actually represents a hegemonic negation of particular social interests. This contradiction results in a gap between ideal and reality – a gap that is simultaneously personal and social. The gnawing awareness of this incoherence produces tremendous anxiety, which magic helps to salve” (p. 190). In other words, although from the perspective of the Marxist party-state rhetoric such actions are regarded as feudal superstition, it is a widespread “open secret” that many teachers and even school principals take part in temple pilgrimages before the big event – seeing the *gaokao* as pronouncing not only the universalistic judgement of the national community but also the verdict of transcendental powers.

The final intriguing epilogue centres on the discontents of (the belief in) meritocracy. He ponders what the future may look like if the *gaokao* – and by extension also Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream of economic progress through individual diligence – loses its appeal. What will happen when social mobility diminishes and it becomes obvious that China is a “hereditary meritocracy”? The current trend among young people to “lie down flat” and reject the hamster wheel of endless striving is a new phenomenon which makes his book timely and significant. While providing no final answers, Howlett reminds us that it would be a failure of political imagination to see hereditary meritocracy as the end of history. This is an important book that will stay with me for years to come.

SUSANNE BREGNBÆK
subr@kp.dk

Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860–1960

GINA ANNE TAM

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020

275 pp. £22.99

ISBN 978-1-108-74569-7 doi:10.1017/S0305741022001151

Gina Tam’s book *Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860–1960* is an outstanding work that provides crucial historical insights for understanding language in contemporary China. Tam has already been awarded the 2020 Berkshire Conference of Women Historians Book Prize for a first book in any field of history, and there will hopefully be more accolades to follow for this important book.

Dialect and Nationalism’s central question concerns the role of *fangyan* in Chinese nationalism. Tam examines how *fangyan* came to be defined as “dialects” in the making of the Chinese nation, and the complex, fluctuating tensions between authenticity and standardization that accompanied this process.

This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the role that language plays in Chinese nationalism, from the mid-19th century until today. A

great deal of scholarly and media attention is currently given to the assimilatory drive behind the promotion of Mandarin to national minorities in China, such as its teaching in the “re-education” camps in Xinjiang. Tam’s work provides crucial historical insights for understanding this situation and fitting it within global circulations of key concepts of modernity such as race, nation and (standard, national) language.

The book’s narrative proceeds in linear fashion, with some fuzziness and overlap between the periods under discussion. Chapter one covers from the end of the Opium Wars until the late nineteenth century. Chapter two examines the final years of the Qing, from the Hundred Days Reform (1898), up to the early Republican period, extending to the mid-1920s. Chapter three begins with the May Fourth movement (1919), and focuses particularly on academic debates. Chapter four again takes us back to the 1920s, this time looking at the treatment of *fangyan* by the emerging Communist movement as it swept to power. Chapter five looks at language ideologies and policies under the CCP in power, especially during the Great Leap Forward and early years of the Cultural Revolution. An epilogue brings us to the present day.

Two elements give this narrative flow and coherence, and support a compelling and integrated analysis. First, Tam looks at the continuities in terms of ideas, practices and personalities that stitch these diverse historical moments and regimes together, and examines how tensions between standardization and authenticity pervaded contestations around *fangyan* throughout the period. Secondly, in doing so, Tam consistently shows how China’s language politics, and the role of *fangyan* within them, were informed by global circuits of knowledge production that included debates about historical linguistics, racial theories, and Marxist ethnology.

The historical narrative and its analysis are built by drawing on a range of source materials. These include municipal and provincial archives in China (Guangdong Provincial Archives, Guangzhou Municipal Archives, Shanghai Municipal Archives and Qingdao Municipal Archives), and archives outside China (Yuen Ren Chao Papers, University of California Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California and the Chinese Gazetteer Database, University of Texas Libraries, Austin), as well as interviews with a number of scholars in China with intimate understandings of the country’s linguistic situation and language politics. Tam also draws on a variety of published materials from throughout the specific historical periods she examines. The combination of published, archival and interview materials provide a firm foundation for producing rich insights into the issue of dialect and nationalism in China.

Methodologically, Tam’s study rests on a “keyword” approach developed by cultural studies theorist Raymond Williams and applied in China by scholars such as Leon Rocha and Ruth Rogaski. Tam describes this methodology as examining the shifting meanings of terms like *fangyan*, Han, Chinese and nation over time. Beyond this, Tam also weaves a number of analytical approaches into her narrative, from history, anthropology and cultural studies.

This book is full of useful materials for the classroom. The introduction section on “The Chinese language: sound and script” should be required in any introductory course on China, or broader survey courses on Asia. The book’s epilogue would make a useful addition to courses on contemporary China, or units on Chinese pop culture, given its rich discussion of language in popular music. The individual chapters, covering the historical periods outlined above, would make useful additions to courses covering those periods, providing a unique angle on the politics, culture and society in each of those windows of time.

Beyond Chinese studies and Asian studies more broadly, Tam’s book will also make important contributions to the interdisciplinary study of language in fields

such as sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. As an anthropologist, I see Tam's work as contributing to important conversations about the circulation of language ideologies within the world system, and the ongoing political dynamics that are transforming global linguistic diversity. This book therefore also helps demonstrate the importance of understanding China for any truly global approach to an historically informed understanding of the present.

GERALD ROCHE
g.roche@latrobe.edu.au

Silencing Shanghai: Language and Identity in Urban China

FANG XU

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021

261 pp. \$105.00

ISBN 978-1-7936-3531-0 doi:10.1017/S0305741022000935

Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself." (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 2012, p. 81). Anzaldúa's powerful compilation of poetry and prose on Chicana identity asserts just how elemental language is to our sense of self. She cogently reminds us not only how the language we speak is fundamentally who we are as people, but also how full of violence and tragedy efforts to displace, diminish or suppress linguistic identities truly are.

This twinning of identity and language that Anzaldúa describes underpins the story of language loss in urban Shanghai told in Fang Xu's new book *Silencing Shanghai*. The book's focus is on the decline of both the usage of and prestige of Shanghainese, the Chinese language spoken by most of the city's residents that is quite distinct and mutually unintelligible with China's national language, Mandarin. Yet it seeks to tell a bigger story. Xu treats the decline of Shanghainese as an "aspect of broader transformations in urban China" (p. 2), placing it at the centre of the nexus of state policies, urban redevelopment and internal migration that have fundamentally reshaped the city in the past several decades. It is a thoughtful analysis of local identity in China that places questions of societal, cultural and political power at the forefront.

Xu's book joins a slate of new books and articles by authors such as Yurou Zhong, Jeffrey Weng, Uluğ Kuzuoğlu and Mariana Münning that explore the question of language politics in modern China. Hers, however, stands apart in its deft explanation of how class, indigeneity and proximity to levers of governmental power combine to affect local identity, creating a complex portrait of language loss. Similarly, her emphasis on how identity shapes and is shaped by urban change adds important thoughtfulness and depth to our overall understanding of the dizzying pace of urban transformation. It is thus a critical read for scholars not only of language, but also of urban studies, migration and class relations in contemporary China.

Xu supports her narrative of language decline primarily with interviews she conducted herself. The credibility of her work is sustained, in part, by her own positionality. She leverages her own identity as a linguistic insider, so to speak, to connect with her sources on a level of shared stakes in the stories and experiences they entrust her to tell. Her chapters are arranged thematically, each looking at a broader trajectory in Shanghai's multi-storied history that adds meaning to the usage of