

BOOK REVIEW

Chinese English: Names, Norms and Narratives

By Zhichang Xu. London: Routledge, 2023. 301 pages. Hardback, £145 GBP, ISBN: 9781138630345. Ebook, £38.99, ISBN: 9781315209463.

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Chinese English: Names, Norms and Narratives is the third major work on Chinese English by Professor Zhichang Xu, a renowned scholar in studying the globalisation of English. With the intensification of globalisation and the concomitant development of world Englishes in the new millennium, there is an increasing call for the reconstruction of world Englishes in the post-Kachruvian era (Low and Pakir 2018). By taking Chinese English as his reference point, Xu answers the call with “a new perspective for viewing, describing and classifying varieties of world English” (p. x, Foreword by Andy Kirkpatrick). The book opens up new possibilities for future research on the changing role and the nature of English both in China and worldwide. It also has important implications for language educators and policy makers who are interested in providing language education innovation for the twenty-first century.

This academic monograph consists of six chapters, along with a preface, an epilogue, and Andy Kirkpatrick's Foreword. The six main chapters constitute a complete report of Xu's recent study on Chinese English. The Introduction chapter (Chapter 1) sets a clear scene for the book by outlining the background of his study of Chinese English, the approach he adopted to researching Chinese English, and the organisation of the book. Chapter 2 reviews the extensive research literature on Chinese English and its speakers and points to the need for a renewed framework for another study of Chinese English. Chapter 3 builds upon Chapter 2 by putting forward a pentagram framework combining both Western and Chinese philosophical theses to probe Chinese English from a translanguaging perspective. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are applications of the pentagram framework to understand the use and users of Chinese English in local as well as global contexts.

The book is highly recommended for several reasons. In the first place, Xu has a keen sense of the recent development of global English in the new century and of the potentiality of Chinese English research to renew the understanding of world Englishes. In Chapter 1, Xu cites Kirkpatrick (2007) in highlighting the “most remarkable fact” underlining the new development of world Englishes is that “the majority of English speakers are now multilingual people who have learned and who use English to communicate with fellow multilinguals” (p. 1). As a speaker of both Chinese and English, Xu reflects upon his own experiences of using the two languages as a bilingual across Kachru's three circles and recognises the problem of previous research in defining Chinese English as a developing variety and the problem of adding national or regional boundaries towards world English varieties. Such reflection intrigues him to rethink of a paradigm shift in framing world Englishes in the new era and the potential contribution of researching Chinese English from a translanguaging perspective to the reconceptualisation of world Englishes. Xu's reflection on his own journey in using English and Chinese in the first Chapter serves as a live example of understanding the mutual effects between Chinese English and world Englishes in the new era.

Second, Xu has a thorough review of literature on Chinese English, in particular the recent studies relevant to names, norms, and narratives of Chinese English and its users, and thus successfully maps his current research onto the existed literature on Chinese English as well as the ongoing research on world Englishes. In Chapter 2, Xu first revisits relevant literature on Chinese English research published in domestic Chinese academic journals between 1980 and 2013. This section provides a local perspective on the construction of knowledge about Chinese English otherwise inaccessible to the majority of English readers. Apart from Chinese-language research on Chinese English, Xu also has an extensive review of up-to-date studies on Chinese English in international academic discourse and highlights through the review that contestations surrounding Chinese English in the Chinese literature centre on “what Chinese English is, who Chinese English speakers are, and how Chinese English is perceived and narrated by its speakers” (p. 14). Similar to the discourse of world Englishes in the post-Kachruvian era, answers to such questions require “a developing post-varieties framework” (p. 71). Xu suggests in the literature review that Chinese English research could be moved forward by shifting attention from taking Chinese English as a developing variety to studying Chinese speakers of English and their translanguaging practices in local and global contexts. The shift may not only bring a new understanding towards Chinese English in the new era, but also provide valuable insights into the previously varieties-based world Englishes research, whose focus could also be moved from various English varieties to translanguaging practices across Kachru’s three concentric circles.

Third, Xu has provided an innovative framework for renewed research on Chinese English. The literature review section of Chapter 2 justifies for a translanguaging approach to Chinese English. However, no study up to now has detailed how such an approach to Chinese English could be operationalised. In Chapter 3, Xu creatively puts forward a pentagram framework that combines Bourdieu’s field-habitus-capital theory of practice with the Chinese *ti-yong* philosophy. The theory of practice provides an overall guideline in understanding “how Chinese English operates among the Chinese learners and users of English in their natural habitat or sociolinguistic field, in terms of who the learners and users are, i.e., their habitus, and how and why they learn and use English, i.e., considerations of various forms of capital” (p. 76). The *ti-yong* philosophy goes a step further to provide a Chinese-specific understanding of the social, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of language, that is, “the extent to which Chinese English is, in addition to fulfilling an instrumental function of practical use, or *yong*, is also providing Chinese English speakers with some *ti*, or essence, as an integral part of their developing identity as multilinguals” (Kirkpatrick 2017, p. 278). The combination of both allows researchers to focus on the “users and use of Chinese English, as well as the contextual, ecological, ideological and philosophical dimensions of Chinese English as a translanguaging practice” (p. 77), and thus achieve a holistic and culture-specific understanding of Chinese English. Following the method of adopting a Chinese perspective can, in turn, be projected globally in the research of world Englishes. The study of other non-Chinese English may benefit by applying culture-specific dimensions to achieve localised understanding of English in those contexts.

Fourth, Xu demonstrates the power of the pentagram framework in advancing research on Chinese English with concrete exemplifications showing the applications of such a framework. In Chapter 4, the pentagram framework is employed to unpack the various Chinese English researchers’ and users’ understanding of the naming discourse of Chinese English and Chinese English speakers’ practices of having or not having English names for communication in English. In Chapter 5, the framework is adopted to understand Chinese English speakers’ perceptions of norms associated with Chinese English practices, in particular the cultural norms associated with Chinese *xiao* (filial piety) and the Chinese cultural and pragmatic norms instantiated by Chinese speakers of English for international English as a lingua franca conversations. In Chapter 6, the framework is utilised to reconstruct the narratives of Chinese speakers of English regarding their “learning and using of English in varying circumstances and contexts” (p. 205). By analysing empirical data collected from “authentic Chinese speakers of English and their reflections and narratives on their use of

English” (p. 32), the three chapters collectively present “an emic understanding of Chinese English in relation to the habitus, field, capital, *ti* and *yong* of the users and use of Chinese English” (p. 205).

In summary, this inspiring monograph introduces a theoretical and analytical framework, the pentagram framework, to unpack Chinese English as a translanguaging practice from the perspective of names, norms and narratives, making tremendous contributions to further understanding of Chinese English and a means to deepen understanding on world Englishes in specific contexts. It is a valuable resource for researchers and scholars in this field to find a new path where they can explore the nature of Chinese English by using a metaphysical methodology. For readers, including those who are non-specialised, this book is not that hard to understand for most of its discussions and debates are collected from authentic conversations between Xu and his respondents. Reading this engaging book might help Chinese speakers of English develop their identities and confidence as multilinguals. Overall, the ground-breaking work provides a new perspective to analyse Chinese English, which might provide valuable insights into the re-conceptualisation of world Englishes. We strongly recommend this book for researchers of world Englishes, educators on English language teaching, and policymakers who are concerned about language education for the future.

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