Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora, by Jing Tsu. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. xiv + 300 pp. US$45.00 (hardcover).

In an era when scholars have been speaking of "Englishes", and a thousand years after Latin became first local Latins and then later the Romance languages, it should not be surprising to hear about the varieties of Chinese. "Chinese" has actually been a family of languages for millennia, but the power of the script—symbolic and political—has drawn attention from divergences and toward commonalities. The common account is that "everyone" who reads Chinese reads the same script, though they pronounce it in their own "dialects", or preferably, Victor Mair's *topolect*, and the ease of calling a language "Chinese" seems to indicate no question at all about its unitary nature. Yet, after reading this unique book, we might find ourselves asking: why has it taken so long for someone to notice all the diversity and turmoil that Jing Tsu has found? It certainly seems to be everywhere.

Tsu investigates "writers, readers, critics, language policies, bilingualism, technologies of orthography, and the materiality of writing" (p. 2), introducing the concept of "literary governance" to unify concerns over the Chinese language and diasporic literatures. One obvious divide is between simplified and traditional characters, but below this current rift lie many other struggles that have taken place over the last century or so.

The book addresses a key question: What is a "native speaker" in general, and what does this mean in the case of Chinese? Here we have to see what is usually erased: how does a language become standard? What other varieties are overlooked, suppressed, ignored? How does a writing system enter into this standardization? What are the "others" that are being challenged: north and south, local and national, China and Japan, China and the West, educated and ignorant, China and Malay, Taiwan and mainland, Taiwan and Japan, center and diaspora? Tsu analyzes the intersection of Chinese literature and script with politics and technology in the late 19th and early-to-mid-20th centuries, and then looks at the ways in which Chinese writers in the diaspora ("the West", Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia) situate themselves linguistically.

What, at the most basic level, is the national language, and is this a reasonable unit of analysis (pp. 8-14)? Tsu contrasts language as identity, especially national identity, with language as "a medium of access" (p. 13). She states clearly that her aim "is to provide a framework that compels an account of the hidden linguistic assumptions that support the governance of any literary field" (p. 14) and here the field is "Sinophone", a word that alerts us to the history and materiality of sound and script (p. 14).

The first substantive chapter ("Chinese Lessons") recounts some of the impassioned early-20th-century arguments about the proper nature of "the Chinese language". Was its linguistic diversity responsible for China's backwardness? If so, what kind of unity was required? Was it in speech or in script? If in script, which speech was to be represented? How, if at all, was nonstandard speech to be represented? Models from European nations, also standardizing, led some of the phoneticization schemes. Ultimately, Mandarin won, but not without substantial disputes. If the tones were to be represented, the specific version must be selected;

standardization and unification are required (p. 45). The project of linguistic unification accompanies modern nationalism throughout the world but, radically, Tsu claims that "[l]anguage ... is never originally native. The native speaker is realizable only as an itinerant carrier of language. What national-language unification accomplished, however, is no less than the belief in a native tongue that belongs to oneself and one's home place" (p. 47).

In the late Qing, intellectuals accepted that China lacked modernity. They suspected that the language was somehow responsible. Was it the script? In "Lin Yutang's Typewriter" we learn about the Chinese typewriter that cultural translator and writer Lin designed not only to permit modern printing at reasonable speeds but also to allow Chinese to be a plausible competitor for a global language, on a par with "Basic English", English and Esperanto. Schemes of progress and rationality intersected in fascinating ways with ideas of language. Lin's typewriter earned a US patent.

"Bilingual Loyalty" looks carefully at writers such as Lin Yutang, Eileen Chang and Ha Jin who have written in languages other than what might transparently and smoothly be considered "their own". Each has evoked admiration and hostility, even charges of betrayal, over their choice to write in English. Where, in the end, is their allegiance? Are they translators? Imposters? Traitors? What is their mother tongue, and how dare they claim authenticity?

The remaining chapters—about the peculiar case of French-Chinese writer Chen Jitong, his advocacy of "world literature", and its intersection with global politics; "The Missing Script of Taiwan"; "Look-Alikes and Bad Relations", about Malaysian Chinese literature; and "The Elephant in the Room", about southeast Asian Sinophone writers—all look from different directions at problems of standardization, unification and diversity, identities and power, from the perspective established earlier in the book.

Having grasped the central issue, readers understand afresh the current experiments with dialectal writing, especially Cantonese in Hong Kong and Taiwanese. As with any script, the variety to be recorded must first be selected, and then we are back at the beginning: who decides which variety is to be accorded official status?

Some parts of the book hold together better than others. Some chapters contain a brilliant symbolic or close reading of literary works and their specific contexts; some convey historical research; some consist of theoretical analysis. There is a unifying theme, however: the nature of language, both sound and script. Tsu's conclusion is a shock: "Language, in its attachment to native access, has become the most commonly condoned, if not fiercely defended, form of essentialism. 'Native speaker' is to language what color has been to race" (p. 197). Scholars interested in language ideologies, nationalism, Chinese modernity, the May Fourth movement, Taiwan, Diaspora studies and more will find a rich source in this unusual, complex and remarkable book.

Susan D. Blum
The University of Notre Dame

Copyright of China Journal is the property of Contemporary China Centre Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.