TURUN YLIOPISTO

The Impact of Language Policy on Chinese Usage in Education among Joseonjok Youth

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Kandidaatintutkielma

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Tiivistelmä

Tämän kandidaatintutkielman aihe on kielipolitiikan vaikutukset kiinankorealaisen vähemmistön nuoriin, ja heidän kiinan kielen käyttöönsä opetuksessa. Kandidaatintutkielma on kirjallisuuskatsaus, joka sisältää alan tutkielmia, kyselyitä ja haastatteluita. Tavoitteena on ymmärtää, kuinka kielipolitiikka on vaikuttanut kiinankorealaisten kielenkäyttöön, kielenvaihteluun ja kulttuuri-identiteettiin. Käsittelen korean ja kiinan asemaa Kiinan kansantasavallassa, sekä kiinan sosiaalista ja institutionaalista merkitystä kiinankorealaisille. Kirjallisuuskatsaus on jaettu kolmeen teemaan: opetuskieli, kielenvaihtelu ja kielivalinnat, ja jokaisessa osiossa perehdyn syvemmin aiheeseen, ja hyödynnän Betsy Rymesin luokkahuoneanalyysia, pohtimalla kielenkäytön rajoja ja sen nykyistä ja aiempaa kontekstia. Lisäksi hyödynnän Cui & Gaon diagrammia, kuinka micro-, meso- ja macro-tasot myötävaikuttavat toisiinsa.

Tarkastelu osoittaa, että kielipolitiikka on vaikuttanut kiinankorealaisten kielenkäyttöön, opetuksessa ennen vahvassa asemassa ollut korea on korvattu kiinalla, ja kiina nähdään usein välttämättömänä välineenä selviytyä yhteiskunnassa. Kiinan kielen osaaminen voi mahdollistaa kiinankorealaisille paremman sosiaalisen aseman ja tarjota mahdollisuuksia koulutuksessa ja työelämässä. Korean kieli puolestaan symboloi monelle emotionaalista yhteenkuuluvuutta ja yhteyttä korealaisiin juuriin. Useat kiinankorealaiset tasapainottelevat molempien kielten kanssa arjessaan; jotkut ylläpitävät korean kielentaitoa, mutta eivät pärjää akateemisesti kiinan kanssa, jotkut käyttävät vain kiinaa, ja jotkut vaalivat molempia kieliä. Kiinankorealaisten etnisyys korealaisena ja kansallisuus kiinalaisena ovat ristiriidassa valtion linjauksen kanssa han-kiinalaisesta kulttuuri-identiteetistä, joten useiden kiinankorealaisten kulttuuri-identiteetti vaihtelee.

Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tulokset voivat edesauttaa kiinankorealaisten opetuksen kehittymistä Kiinan kansantasavallassa, ja tuoda esille nuorten näkökulmia kielipolitiikasta ja sen suorista vaikutuksista heidän arkeensa. Tutkielmaa voisi jatkaa pohtimalla opettajien vaikutusta oppilaiden kielenkäyttöön, tai vertaamalla vähemmistökoulujen oppimismateriaaleja 2010-luvulta 2020-luvun materiaaleihin.

Key words: language policy, Putonghua, Joseonjok, bilingual education, code-switching

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1 Introduction

This dissertation is about the Korean-Chinese minority in People's Republic of China and how the standardisation of Mandarin has affected on the language usage in Korean-Chinese minority's education. I will analyse mainly eight articles' studies along other references on Korean-Chinese's language choices and Mandarin's position in education. I will use their findings to review Mandarin's role in education from a sociolinguistic point of view. My main research questions are 1) How has language policy affected Chinese usage in Joseonjok bilingual education 2) What do existing studies reveal on Joseonjok youth's language usage across educational and social contexts?

1.1 Study significance

I chose to focus on Korean-Chinese minority because I have background of Korean-language studies and I have done a study exchange in Korea, so it led me wondering how Koreans are represented in China. I decided to narrow down my topic on education since language policy is implemented most directly on education, and it shapes young people's language habits. Education plays an important role in one's growth, and to make education even better for the future generations, it should be constantly evolving. Korean-Chinese youth is the most affected party of education's rulings of Chinese and Korean, which is why it is essential to focus on their perspective.

China is not the only country with standardised language, it is a phenomenon we are able to see all around the world, which is why it is needed to understand ethnic minorities' language usage in these societies. Lingua franca is any language that allows speakers of different languages to communicate with each other (Swann et al 2024, 184). Standard language is a standardised version of the language, that is learned and accepted as correct in the community (Matthews, 2014). Putonghua happens to be both lingua franca and standard language, and researching how Korean co-exists with Putonghua, it offers information on Korean-Chinese's language usage.

1.2 Key concepts

The key concepts of this dissertation are language policy, Putonghua, Joseonjok, bilingual education and code-switching, and in this chapter, I will provide further information on these concepts. After establishing People Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the goal was to have united nation and high percent of literacy (Adamson & Feng, 2018). To achieve these, in 1956 China established language policy, which meant promoting Putonghua as a standard version of Chinese, based on Beijing's dialect called Mandarin that is the most widely spoken dialect of Chinese. The promotion of Putonghua is focused on all areas, and it is described as the following: "cities as focus, schools as a base, government offices as a priority, radio and television as a model and public service industry as a

window for communication". Since 1997, the promotion week for Putonghua has been held in the third week of September, aiming to spread awareness on language normalisation and engaging citizens to use Putonghua. (Hui & Zhongrui, 2013).

In 1986 Putonghua was decided as a principal language in education (Adamson & Feng, 2018; Rohsenow, 2004), and it became increasingly encouraged to be used in media, street signs and official documents, aiming for strengthening the national unity (Chen, 2012). The Putonghua Proficiency Test was first proposed in 1986, but it was not written in the National Law of Standard Spoken and Written Language until 2000. Completing the test with an acceptable grade could be a requirement for certain work positions, such as provincial and national broadcasters. By the middle of 21st century, the aim was to remove the dialect barriers in communication and popularise Putonghua. (Hui & Zhongrui, 2013).

Because of the language policy, not only Korean-Chinese, but also others with different languages and/or dialects are obligated to learn Putonghua. For example, language policy's influence can be seen among Cantonese speakers as difficulties to adjust speaking Putonghua and Chinese government banning or restricting Cantonese usage on media and education (Adamson & Feng, 2018; Li et al, 2013). The situation could be mirrored with Korean-Chinese minority, and same kind of consequences could occur to them. In 21st century, the promotion of Putonghua and written Chinese language, pinyin, has increased rapidly (Adamson & Feng, 2018). As said, having a standard language meant "national sovereignty and national dignity" (Ministry of Education 2009, article 5).

In my dissertation I refer to the Korean-Chinese minority as the Joseonjok (조선족), also known as Chaoxianzu (朝鮮) in Chinese. Joseonjoks immigrated to China in mid-nineteenth century, making them one of the fifty-five ethnic minorities (Zhang & Li, 2015). Many being bilingual, Joseonjok parents often decide to speak Mandarin to their children in order to be able to use Putonghua in school and work situations, since often Mandarin fluency is a key to a higher education and better employment (Zheng 2025, 53). Code-switching means choosing a suitable language to use based on situation (Swann et al 2024, 40), and Joseonjoks mix Korean and Chinese in this manner.

Since most of the Korean-Chinese minority population focuses in Yanbian, located in Northern China, it has introduced a bilingual education, that uses both Korean and Mandarin. The goal for the Joseonjok students is to develop fluency in their first language, Korean, then in Mandarin and preferably even in third language, usually it being English. However, due to tensions in certain places, bilingual or trilingual education is managed weakly and often to successfully learn Mandarin, it causes students to lose their fluency in their first language. (Adamson & Feng, 2015).

1.3 Research gap

When researching the topic, I came across multiply studies of how Joseonjoks use language with their family and friends, comparing language usage at home, school/work and free-time activities. Many studies discuss how Mandarin is taught to Koreans as a second language, and how Korean is involved in education. However, I compare how individual Joseonjoks position themselves toward Chinese, and what Chinese symbolises for them in the educational and social context.

1.4 Thesis outline

First, I will go deeper into the methodology, explaining about the keywords I used to search articles, preview of the materials and what lead me to choose them. I will present the analysis method I lean on my research and put it into my study's context. I have divided the literature review in three themes; education, code-switching and language choices, each theme having two to three subheadings. Finally, I will wrap up with discussion and conclusion.

2 Methodology

2.1 Search strategy

My topic revolves around Joseonjok's Mandarin usage in education, and the literature search was conducted between January 2026 and February 2026, I used Google Scholar and UTU library catalogue. The language of my literature search was English, and my keywords were Korean-Chinese minority in China Mandarin usage, Korean-Chinese language policy Mandarin education and Mandarin teaching in China Korean minority. Mixing all the keywords in different combinations, it showed over 500 sources. However, I do not have the access to all sources due to source's own set limitations, or sometimes the article was written in different language and only the abstract was in English.

From using Google Scholar's search tools, I could break down my research by applying "includes the specific word Korean-Chinese" and "at least the word language policy", this narrowed the search down to 80 results. Since some of the articles were not available without institution's login, I had to use UTU library catalogue to search some of the articles.

2.2 Source types

This study being desktop research, it draws on published literature. Some of the literature includes original data of school learning materials from one of the bilingual schools in Yanbian and interviews and surveys of Joseonjok students, teachers and parents. These sources will help me to understand what bilingual language usage means for ordinary youth and how Chinese is used in practice in education. Rest of the literature approaches the themes analytically and includes peer-reviewed articles discussing the history of Joseonjok, China's language policy and Putonghua, and articles that analyse how Joseonjok's bilingual education appears in China. These sources paint a picture on how language policy has influenced education and changed it over the years, and I can analyze others' discussions around the topic.

2.3 Selection criteria

Articles I will review range from 2007 to 2025, out of eight halves were released in 2020s and seven in 2010s, only one released in 2007. As mentioned before, at the start of 21st century, the promotion of Putonghua and assimilation of the nation increased, which is why I wanted to focus on 21st century. Since in 2010s and 2020s we are able to see in practice how actually language policy has shaped education, I chose to mostly exclude studies before 2010s, however the study I included from 2007 offered another perspective to language usage before language policy's evolvement in 2010s. Articles

topics revolve around bilingual education, code-switching in Mandarin/Korean and the meaning of their cultural identity in China as a Joseonjok.

Since I am curious about specifically youth's language usage, studies' participants' ages range from 13 to 28. However, because parents and teachers play an important role in children's language usage, I did not exclude studies that had interviewed them along with the youth, but still my focus being on the students. Because teachers are the base of education, it would be difficult to exclude them entirely when analysing language usage in education. I decided not to include topics around English education in China since it is not part of the language policy's assimilation aims, although some of my literature briefly mention that English is also an option for Joseonjoks to study as a third language.

2.4 Analysis method

I will lean on Betsy Rymes' (2009) classroom discourse analysis, how context and discourse affect one another. This analysis examines language usage in classroom-context but takes note how classroom-context cannot be separated from its social influences outside of the classroom. In my research, I will apply this theory to other physical places or relationships as the context. Context could have physical borders, for example some speaking habits might be appropriate at home, but not at school. Rymes (2009) explains, borders could be based on discourse (language in-use), for example, without the teacher, students' speaking habits change without leaving the classroom. Classroom has certain rules for discourse, whereas outside of it the rules are more open, and distinct characteristics could be encouraged, such as using language for entertainment. For Joseonjoks, their language discourse changes based on the people they interact with, so the borders of context could depend on others. Also, in some cases, their language usage changes based on a physical place, for example home and school.

To understand someone's way of speaking, we need to look at "previous context", things that occurred in the past to shape their way of speaking, and how the past influences on word choices. Because students have different speaking habits, the language usage in classroom is constantly changing, which is why it is also important to look forward, how the communication could be shaped to be understandable to everyone. (Rymes 2009). In Joseonjoks' case, the previous context is often their ethnicity as Korean, which shapes the communication, and language policy, that influences on their current situation. Also, Joseonjoks' language usage is constantly changing at school and home, so previous contexts cannot be ignored when researching this.

My sources were first categorised by theme (education, code-switching and language identity) and by source's possible comparative approach (Joseonjok vs. Han-Chinese, Joseonjok vs. Mongols,

Joseonjok vs. South-Asians, Joseonjok vs. Yi-Chinese and non-comparative). In the articles, I first highlighted sentences that mentioned language policy, bilingual education, language usage in school and language usage with friends and family. All these concepts are essential when analysing my topic, and it helped me to put my research topic in context. Comparative approach in many of the sources gave me wider perspective on Mandarin's role in education, and how other minorities experience it.

2.5 Limitations

First, I chose articles written in English due to limitations on language skills and the lack of results in my native language Finnish. Second, I cannot access Chinese database, and it might contain even more information and different perspectives on bilingual education in China. Even though Korean databases could be easier to access, I do not have the fluency to be able to read academic articles in Korean. Third, due to the time frame and length of this dissertation, I cannot analyse the topic as profoundly as I would like to. I am not able to review all the search results and judge their suitability on my dissertation. I adapted a classroom-specific framework to non-classroom context, which also limits my analysis.

I could not analyse all the factors that influence on Joseonjoks' Chinese language usage, and I had to consciously choose to analyse some factors less, such as studying materials and teacher's language usage's effects on students. Because my research included only eight studies, it gives just a small perspective on the topic, also a limit to my analysis.

3 Literature review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a thematical analysis of existing literature of Joseonjok minority's educational experiences in basic and higher education, and their language usage in Putonghua and Korean. The analysis has been categorised into three key themes: 1) Education; how Putonghua and Korean are presented in basic education and Putonghua's teaching, 2) Code-switching; language usage with friends and family compared to free-time activity, language exposure and feeling connection to Putonghua 3) Language choices; language restrictions and cultural identity.

3.2 Policy framework

As mentioned in Methodology-chapter, my analysis will lean on Betty Rymes' classroom analysis by replacing the classroom-context by the factors mentioned in the literature I am reviewing. Rymes suggests, that previous context is inseparable when researching the current context. The borders of the context could be physical or non-physical, and these borders define language usage, based on context one decides a certain discourse.

Cui & Gao (2024) provide a diagram showing pathways how language policy affects micro-, meso- and macro-level, referencing to family, institutions and government designed top-down language policy. The diagram shows an arrow where micro-level (family) affects meso-level (institutions), meso-level on macro-level (language policy) and then macro-level pointing an arrow all the way down to micro-level. Building on this, I will apply the reviewed literature's ideas on the diagram.

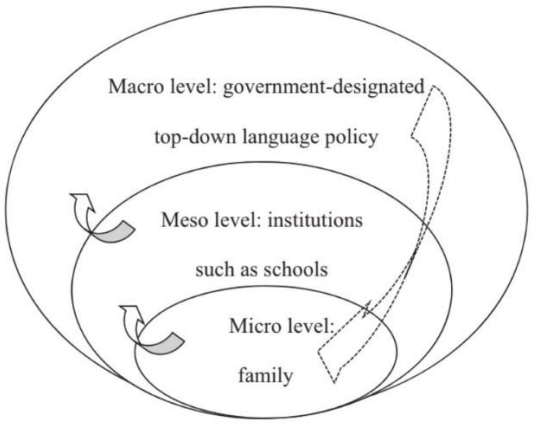

Figure 1. Cui & Gao's (2024) diagram on micro- meso- and macro-levels.

3.3 Research gap

Studies do not discuss much about the possible connection between language policy and Joseonjok's different, individual feelings towards Putonghua, it is described as just a mandatory tool to get through education and work, or a status symbol of success. I would like to address these gaps by continuing the studies' work by discussing with the studies and providing my own analysis.

3.4 Education

3.4.1 Putonghua in basic education

In this chapter I will go through how Putonghua is taught and presented in bilingual education. Cui & Gao's (2024) qualitative research focuses on interviewing sixteen families, whose children aged 7-12 are completing basic education in Yanbian. Due to new implements of language policy in 2020, Putonghua has dominated over Korean in the minority-schools (chao-schools), for instance textbooks have been changed from Korean to Putonghua, as well as the school medium of instructions (Cui & Gao, 2024). This suggests that the language policy has been effective in terms of increasing Putonghua in education.

Participant Yan says, that the "Han language" (Putonghua) is important for living in China, and it is good Joseonjok children can study the same materials as the Han-Chinese so they will not fall behind. Yan does not see Putonghua as their or other minorities language, which is why he addresses Putonghua as the Han-Chinese people's language. This word choice gives an impression Yan feels a clear gap between Joseonjoks and Han-Chinese, which could be because Chinese has stronger, encouraged status in China compared to Korean.

One of study's participants, Qing, mentions that all the schools have switched to Putonghua, but it would be good if classes like P.E and arts were taught in Korean for children to be more exposed to Korean. At the same time parents seem to worry the non-existent Korean usage at school but also feeling pressured for their children to learn Putonghua in order to survive in China. Even though Korean has official minority language status, it is not equal with Putonghua.

Gao et al (2011) conducted a comparative study on Chinese teaching between Joseonjoks in PRC and South Asians in Hong Kong, taking note of the sociocultural context and teachers' point of view. During a five-month research period, they interviewed 27 Joseonjok families, 44 Korean teachers and 27 Joseonjok students. For South Asian participants, thirty students along with their parents and teachers were interviewed, also a questionnaire was conducted in addition to interviews. Their study

suggests that Korean could be used more than Chinese at schools, because the teachers lack knowledge in their specialised areas in Chinese, this leading to using Korean as a teaching language. On the other hand, Joseonjok students aged 13-18 reported that their language usage is 81.8% Chinese at school (X. Zhang, 2025), it could be that students and teachers share different language usage habits, and the context is different; for students, school represents a place to learn and obtain skills for future, whereas for teachers it represents a work environment, for what they already have obtained a possible training.

Many teachers do not accept bilingual teaching training and consider themselves to be insufficient using bilingual framework in teaching (Gao et al 2011; Gao 2009a). Gao et al (2011) mentions that this leads to a weak form of bilingual teaching and suggests some of the Yanbian's chao-schools are examples of this. However, it is possible for teachers to obtain a certificate of their Putonghua fluency by taking the Putonghua Proficiency Test, that has been part of the national law since 2000. Already by 2005, nine million out of the seventeen million test takers were teachers. (Wang & Yuan, 2007).

3.4.2 Korean in basic education – "Little hands hold big hands, speak Putonghua together"

In this chapter, I will discuss how Korean is used in basic education through literature and analyse its' relationship with Putonghua in education. One of the studies I will reference in this chapter is Zhang (2022) study, where they research the differences of Yi and Joseonjok minority's educational experiences and language through semi-structured interviews and qualitative data. Thirteen of participants were Joseonjoks, and six participants ethnic Yi.

Due to pressure of language policy, using Korean has become non-beneficial for the children, which is why some parents try to speak more Putonghua. Participant Xiang in Zhang's study (2022) describes, they have no other choice but to adapt to language policy, and their child refuses to speak Korean, but they do not think it is necessarily bad thing. Xiang's child studies at a Han-school, and they have math problems that were not taught in the chao-school. Based on Xiang's statement, it seems even before the effects of language policy, chao-schools were lacking in teaching even though they could study in Korean. Participant Yan in Cui & Gao's study, who was mentioned earlier, was afraid of kids falling behind if they were to use Korean learning materials, and this could be another reason Joseonjok parents want their children in Han-schools. Chao-schools might have under-qualified teachers in subjects, and sometimes they must translate Chinese textbooks into Korean, the quality of teaching falters (Zhang, 2022).

Xiong et al (2016) conducted a study about minority language issues in China, drawing data by qualitative data collection approach and interviewing content area experts (CAEs), that included ethnic studies faculty members, who have Korean/Mongol roots, or have worked in a region that has big population of Koreans/Mongols. Still, some of the participants do not represent Korean/Mongol minority but are students or professors in ethnic studies or represent a related ethnicity from other world regions. Xiong et al do not mention which minority each participant represents, or if the participant is a student, professor or an expert. In the study they refer to participants with KM, and after that putting a number differing participant from others, last number indicating which of the key themes the participant refers to. I decided to remove the last coding number and only refer to participants as KM and the individual number, since their key themes differ from mine. Supporting Zhang (2022) and Cui & Gao's (2024) clauses, one of the expert participants, KM02, states in Xiong et al's study (2016), that Han-schools' teachers have higher level of education and parents believe the children will learn Putonghua and mathematics better, thus offering better opportunities for higher education. However, it cannot be ignored that compared to other ethnic groups, Joseonjoks have the highest percentage of being educated, both in higher and basic education.

As Rymes classroom discourse analysis suggests, it is important to note borders of the language usage's context. With Korean language usage, it used to not have clear physical borders for Joseonjok students, because it is used at home and school. However, based on Cui & Gao's diagram showing the percentage of Korean and Putonghua usage at home, all the participants report that 80 or more percent of language usage is Putonghua. Korean language usage's context becomes almost non-existent, because it is not a main language at home nor school, and in this case acknowledging previous context matters. In 2023 Ministry of Education published a statement, the government encourages extending Putonghua learning into families, with the sentence "Little hands hold big hands, speak Putonghua together 手拉大手 学讲普通话". The same sentence could be found in Cui & Gao's (2024) data, where a student has drawn a picture of people holding hands and has written the sentence on the top. When looking at this correlation, it is possible that the government's encouragement has influenced students' way of thinking, thus trying to speak Putonghua with their parents, like participant Xiang said his child refuses to speak Korean. Linking back to Cui & Gao's diagram, where micro-, meso- and macro-level influence one another, here macro level (government) influences directly to micro-level (family).

However, Cui & Gao's results are opposite of what Hong-Nam & Leavell's comparative study (2007) results found out, when researching Korean-Chinese in China and Koreans in South Korea. 84% of the 420 Joseonjok participants preferred using Korean at home, and 80% preferred using Korean with friends. Because of the evolving language policy in 2010s, the ratio could have changed over the years, but almost 20 years ago the ratio of using Korean at home was the majority when now it is the

minority, if looking at only these two studies. On the other hand, X. Zhang's study (2025) included advanced survey analysis of 176 Joseonjoks, and the results showed that 72.7% of the participant have high Korean usage at home, but with peers high Chinese usage was 73.9%, which is quite different from Hong-Nam & Leavell's finding about 80% of Joseonjoks using Korean with friends.

When sending Joseonjok child to a school that is for Han-Chinese, teaching is only in Putonghua, and student is not able to use Korean in their education. Before 2020, high school entrance exams and college entrance exams, *gaokao* (高考), could be done in Korean, as well as the learning materials were in Korean (Cui & Gao, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2023). This implies after 2020 gaokao is not possible to be completed in Korean. The results of gaokao define which college students can get into, and if the student is not fluent in Putonghua, it puts them in a disadvantage when doing gaokao, and rules out opportunities, that could be possibly reached if the exam was done in Korean.

On the other hand, Zhang (2022) states, gaokao could be done in Korean if the student chooses so, and when doing gaokao in chao-school, the student gets 10 extra points added to the total score, giving them benefit when applying for college. However, in their study there is no proof if this benefits the Joseonjok students. Ministry of Education's article 10 states, that "Putonghua and standardised Chinese characters shall be used as the basic language in education and teaching in schools […] except where otherwise provided for in laws". Also, Jia et al (2012) states in their study, that all ethnic minority areas are expected to meet the same national curriculum, textbooks and examinations, with little adaptation for each ethnic minority. These references suggest, that gaokao could possibly be adapted in Korean, if "little adaption" and "where otherwise provided for in laws", mean that the national curriculum could be shaped for each ethnicity. However, even when conducting gaokao in Korean, the student may face difficulties due to different language used in teaching and examination.

Since Cui & Gao (2024) refer to PRC's Ministry of Education's website, I could access the Chinese and English website, however the English version does not include the same statements and reports as the Chinese one has, therefore I cannot read the statement that Cui & Gao referred to without translating. To get a better idea, I used Grammarly's translator to get the statement in English. Education should be taught in "the national, common language," and all young people of ethnic groups should master it. Ministry of Education (2023) also refers to an idea "one ability, two kinds of awareness 一种能力 两种意识", which means being fluent in national, common language, consciously using and promoting it besides Chinese culture.

3.5 Code-switching

3.5.1 Language usage at school versus in free-time activities

In this chapter I will analyse Joseonjoks' language discourse choices, how Joseonjoks are exposed to Putonghua and why part of the Joseonjoks feel more connection to Putonghua than others.
Cui et al's qualitative research (2025) focuses on 24 bilingual Joseonjoks living in metropolis located in East-China. The study draws data from interviews, participant's social media accounts (Douyin) and WeChat-messages, analysing the language usage. All the participants were born and raised in Yanbian, but for college they had moved to a metropolitan area. When the study was conducted, participants had lived in metropolitan area for 15-29 years, but in the data, they are referring to their university and work experience.

Participant Yoon had moved to Shanghai to study, and describes feeling uncomfortable using Putonghua at class, because he was not speaking Putonghua in Yanbian. Even though he had good relationship with his classmates, he felt uneasy, and Yoon needed to meet the townspeople to speak Korean with them. Later, he used Putonghua in work-related situations, and Korean when texting family and friends. (Cui et al, 2025). This is a prime example of code-switching, and Yoon's experience indicates, he did not want to give up on Korean even though Putonghua was the main language at school.

The relationship with others and classroom defined Yoon's language usage, both languages co-existing for him in different situations. If using the other language in unsuitable context, it would mess up the agreed social rules. If Yoon used Korean with his classmates, they would not understand him, and if he used Putonghua with Joseonjok townspeople, it would have a different intention than the one Yoon mentioned.

He also uses the term "the language of Han people" (*Hanzuhua*, 汉族话), also making a clear distinction between him and Han population, similar to what participant Yan said in Cui & Gao's study (2024). The word choice has power, it could be assumed that Yoon thinks Chinese only as Han people's language, not as a language that could be other ethnicities' language as well.

3.5.2 Language exposure

Since written Chinese has a long, significant history, non-native speakers have unequal access to research materials in university. Participant Guo stated, she felt like she was "lagging behind" of others, because she did not have the fluency to write academic articles in Putonghua due to her poor

writing skills. (Cui et al, 2025). Even though chao-schools have mandatory Putonghua teaching, language attitudes among other factors affect how well a student will learn Putonghua. Due to language policy's strong goal to assimilate the population, it leaves no other choice but to learn Putonghua. However, it is unrealistic to assume every Joseonjok has the same access and abilities to learn Putonghua, the expectations of Chinese fluency towards the ethnic minorities should be adaptable.

Zhang's study's (2022) participant K1 and K2 describe, how Chinese was barely used outside of school's Chinese language and literature (*Yuwen* 语文) classes. Because of majority of school's faculty and students are Joseonjoks, individuals prefer Korean over Chinese in social interactions. Thus, the exposure to Chinese is minimal, and the importance of Korean-language community to Joseonjoks increases, because they are not familiar using Chinese in social interactions. In most non-congregated regions chao-schools are not available, and the student has no other choice but go into Han-school.

Participant K12 grew outside of Yanbian, and his Chinese proficiency was much higher compared to Joseonjoks who grew up in Yanbian. Even though chao-schools offer Chinese language classes, the students have not reached the same proficiency as the students in Han-schools. Social interactions and surrounding community play a big part when adapting a language. As said, participant K12 was in Han-school outside of Yanbian and had some Korean acquaintances at school. They mention, that even outside of classes Joseonjoks used Chinese and Korean mixed (Zhang, 2022).

In Cui et al's study (2025) participant Guo joined Korean-Chinese reading club, where other Korean-Chinese members had similar experiences to her, also speaking common language, assumably Korean. In the club she could speak Korean, but at university she changed to Putonghua. To link back to Ryme's classroom discourse analysis, here the context has institutional and social borders, university = Putonghua, reading club = Korean. University has strict rules for communication and writing, whereas the reading club probably did not have as strict rules, communication and writing being more free. University and reading club have different rules and norms for discourse, so participant Guo had to make a choice based on the rules, what language to use in each situation.

3.5.3 Feeling connection to Putonghua – "Others can hardly tell I am from a minority"

I briefly mentioned the language exposure in the last chapter, and some Joseonjoks feel more belonging to Putonghua and China, despite their similar language exposure to Putonghua in basic

education. Participant Ran in Cui et al's study (2025) tells, how she is able to write official documents in Putonghua, and how in the Korean-Chinese reunions and reading clubs she felt like the others, "group of losers," had failed to assimilate into society. Her statement gives the impression that not being fluent in Putonghua makes you a loser, someone who has not achieved the requirements of society. Even though other Joseonjoks being professors and CEOs, fluency in Putonghua mattered more to Ran in terms of measuring success.

In her case, there was no mention of code-switching, but if assumed she used Korean with other Joseonjoks, her code-switching has a different nuance compared to participants Yoon and Guo, who clearly got comfort from speaking Korean with others, while struggling to speak/write Putonghua in their universities. Since Ran is fluent in Putonghua, she does not feel the need to speak Korean to be understood academically and emotionally. She does not highlight her Joseonjok-identity the same way as Yoon and Guo do, fluency in Putonghua seems more important to her than maintaining Korean language skills. Her monolingual language-identity differs from many Joseonjoks, who would like to maintain their bilingualism.

Ran also stated how others could not even tell she was a minority, disguising her ethnic identity (Cui et al, 2025). Rejecting her own, ethnic background, but validating her identity as a monolingual Putonghua-speaker, tells that perhaps the language policy has affected her speaking habits and identity. Overall, Cui et al (2025) give interesting aspects on her language usage, but the limited interview data does not allow for full analysis of Ran's relationship with Korean.

3.6 Language choices

3.6.1 Language restrictions

Higher education in China is mainly conducted in Putonghua, so when a Joseonjok moves out from their community to metropolitan area to study, majority of their classmates are Han-Chinese (Zhang, 2022; Zhang & Tsung, 2019). Participants K3 and K8 reported, that the lack of Putonghua proficiency affected their interactions with classmates, not being able to have "deep talks" with them, and to K3, using only one language reduced her eloquence when speaking. (Zhang, 2022). Thus, her language choice was not fully voluntarily, because she had no other choice than to use Chinese to be understood, however Chinese narrowing down her desired eloquence. Socially unacceptable word choices could lead to misunderstandings, making one's interactions with others challenging.

Even when passing gaokao with good grades, some Joseonjoks withdrew from the universities they have been accepted, due to dominated Chinese usage in colleges, and decided to apply to South Korea.

Three of the participants reported feeling anxious about adapting to fully Mandarin environment, especially K3 said she "was so anxious that she could not fall asleep." K3 struggled with the thought of communicating with Han-students and speaking in Mandarin. (Zhang, 2022). The reason minorities struggle to adapt into Han-Chinese-dominated environments, might be due to language differences and the non-existent connections with Han-population. Choosing to apply for colleges in South Korea suggests that the participant might think South Korea offers better opportunities in education since the education is in Korean. In South Korea, K3 could be surrounded by majority of ethnically Korean students, not Han-Chinese, and relate to Korean culture rather than struggling to adapt into Han-Chinese culture.

The potential culture differences between Han-Chinese and Joseonjoks, prejudice and language policy's shaped idea of one-language-nation, play a part in K3's struggles. It is likely that all Han-Chinese do not share the government's position on language policy. In fact, many Han-Chinese are supportive of ethnic minorities completing higher education in a sense that it benefits the ethnic students and the local economy and social development (Xiong et al, 2016).

3.6.2 Cultural identity – Korean as a symbol of ethnic identity

Cultural identity and mother tongue could be in a correlation with each other, but within Joseonjoks, others feel more Korean, and others relate more to Han-Chinese. Ethnicity, nationality and race play a big part in one's identity, and for Joseonjoks, ethnicity is often Korean and nationality Chinese. In this chapter I will go over how language influences on cultural identity, and one of the studies I will refer to is Piao Ehlert & Moore (2014) four-year ethnographic study interviewing Joseonjok teenagers in Beijing, that also included surveys where participants could describe their language-experiences as a Joseonjok. From a bigger data they chose to focus on six teenagers based on four criteria: 1) identifying as a Korean-Chinese (Joseonjok) and studying in high school at the time of the survey 2) speaking two or more languages 3) both of their parents also identify as Joseonjok, and both or one of them has received formal ethnic Korean education in China 4) their family has lived in Beijing for less than 12 years and owns a temporary resident permit. Five out of six participants were girls, so the study has a bit of an imbalance between the genders, but it is one of the only studies discussing Joseonjoks' experiences outside of Yanbian.

In their research, participant Ranhee states, how she feels responsibility to learn Korean to say she is part of the Joseonjok community, that it is "a proof of her ethnicity as a Korean." Other participant Mina continues, that if a person does not speak their ethnic language, they should not be able to say they are a part of that ethnic group. These statements suggest that Mina and Ranhee think language =

ethnic group, and this ties back to previously mentioned Yoon and Yan, who used the term “language of Han people,” suggesting that language is inclusive only to the ethnic group that mostly uses that language.

On the other hand, this is only the case with Chinese, when English is mentioned in the literature I am reviewing, participants do not use the term “language of English people” or “language of white people,” so why is Chinese an exception for them in this wording? China’s government does not favour “conscious ethnic identity,” other than Han-Chinese (Zhang, 2022), therefore Joseonjok’s identity being in a contradiction. This might have contributed to why Joseonjoks feel a gap with Han-Chinese, and why they use the expression “language of Han-people.” Since English does not have similar, political status in China as Chinese, Joseonjoks do not feel the need to differ themselves from English by calling it “language of X people.”

When participant Ryoung is asked why she thinks Korean as her mother tongue even though she speaks better Chinese, Ryoung just states “because she is ethnic Korean.” Later in the interview she acknowledges she is more fluent in Chinese than Korean, and that she does not feel a difference between her and her Han-classmates. (Piao Ehlert & Moore, 2014). She brings on her ethnicity differently based on the context; she justifies her native language as Korean because her ethnicity, but at the same she does not highlight her ethnicity when speaking about the possible differences with her classmates. Since she has grown up among Han-Chinese, she might not feel as big gap with them as Joseonjoks grown up with other Joseonjoks, feel.

However, participant Sang in Piao Ehlert & Moore’s study considers he has two mother tongues, *Hanyu* 汉语 (Chinese) and Korean. He explains Korean is his heritage language and because Chinese is the national language and he is Chinese, he must learn it. His thoughts align with Ranhee and Mina in the sense that he sees language as a sign of his own heritage, almost like an obligation to know as a Joseonjok. Also, Sang calls Han-population “the most ordinary ethnic group,” saying he is different from Han and proud he is not Han-Chinese. This suggests he does not wish to be ethnic majority despite the difficulties he might face as an ethnic minority. It is interesting how he chooses to say, “proud not to be a Han-Chinese” rather than “proud to be a Joseonjok,” since the said manner comes out as a loaded statement. However, when Sang’s classmates call him *HanGuoRen* (Korean), he replies he is not *HanGuoRen*, but a Chinese. He does not think being Chinese is equal to being Han-Chinese ethnicity, therefore in his way of thinking, being Chinese could include other ethnicities along with Han-Chinese.

Participant KM21 in Xiong et al’s study (2016) gives another perspective on ethnic people’s identity: confidence in education should be promoted, because ethnic people have a weak ethnic identity due to

their own prejudice about needing to change and low-level status. However, he does not provide a solution for how this confidence should be promoted, or how the current education lacks it. Previously mentioned participant Ranhee says, that during national flag raising ceremony when she had to swear an oath being Chinese, she had hard feelings. Because the flag raising ceremony is a part of promoting Putonghua (Hui & Zhongrui, 2013), it could also be a reason why it felt difficult for her as someone part of ethnic minority. Previously mentioned participant KM21's statement suggests that Han-schools typically focus only on Han-Chinese identity, therefore making it difficult for ethnic minorities to express their own identity. As Ranhee states, she thinks language and ethnic identity are strongly tied to each other, and she keeps saying that Korean is her mother tongue "because she is Korean", even though her Chinese speaking is much better.

4 Discussion

This section returns to the research questions posed in the introduction. The literature review suggests that before language policy, Korean dominated in education, from textbooks to language usage. After language policy however, Korean has been replaced with Chinese. For many participants Chinese is a language that is mandatory for survival in China's society, and Chinese fluency presents an opportunity for Joseonjoks to improve their social status. Korean represents emotional belonging and connection Korean ethnicity; however, this is slowly changing due to language policy's implements pushing Chinese into Joseonjoks' personal and family life. Participants show a spectrum adapting to Chinese: Yoon, Guo and K3 hold emotional connection to Korean, but struggle academically with Chinese, Ran does not hold belonging to Korean and has fully immersed herself with Chinese and Sang maintains both languages.

To some, proficiency in Chinese symbolises success and looking at Cui & Gao's diagram, the language policy as the macro-level ties back to family, friends and to oneself, micro-level. K3 and K8 reported not feeling emotionally connected to their classmates due to lack of Chinese proficiency, this influencing to their social relationships at university. The lack of Chinese proficiency runs much deeper in the Chinese society, where networking is seen as almost mandatory tool for success. Like Ran, who refers other Joseonjoks who cannot speak Chinese, as losers – she believes her Chinese fluency makes her successful. However, some Joseonjoks have not adapted to the society the same way: participant K3 (Zhang, 2022) reported withdrawing from Chinese university because she was struggling with Chinese and adapting to Han-Chinese culture. She decided to apply for South Korean universities, and her experiences show a different experience of Joseonjok identity; for her, South Korea felt more suitable option because she could have shared language and culture with her classmates. Even though she has grown up in China, a Korean university with other Koreans felt easier to adapt than a Chinese university with Han-Chinese.

Since my focus was on the youth, their experiences differentiate from the older generations' experiences on language policy's implements. Parent participants like Qing (Cui & Gao, 2024) is seemingly worried about minimal Korean usage at school, but at the same time he is satisfied that children can easily learn Putonghua at school. His language usage habits and identity might be different, since he was not influenced by the language policy's education implements in the 2000s and 2010s, and he did not have the same opportunities to learn Putonghua. Even though it could be assumed the language policy has influenced to him as well in some way, still, his concerns about the maintenance of Korean language skills and cultural identity might be bigger than the current youth's worries are. As mentioned before, participants Sang, Mina and Ranhee think they must know Korean because their Korean ethnicity, but they do not seem to be concerned about the situation in the

interviews. In 2023, Ministry of Education presented an ideology of being fluent in national, common language, consciously using and promoting it along with Chinese culture. This does not only pressure students but also parents to learn Putonghua, also Korean language being in contradiction with the language policy.

On the other hand, the promotion of Putonghua has had positive outcomes for China, it has brought people together and given a chance to advertise the local cultures alongside with Putonghua. For example, Jiangxi province held an exhibition competition for documentaries, Shanghai hosted an international forum on the formation of language environment for the World Expo and Huian combined the promotion with their local food culture (Hui & Zhongrui, 2013)

One of the surprising findings was how studies' participants address to Chinese. Yoon (Cui et al, 2025) and Yan (Cui & Gao, 2024) use the term "language of Han people", suggesting Chinese is Han-majority's language, not a language that is used by various ethnic minorities in China. The word choice is not completely neutral, *Zhongwen (*中文) could be more neutral way to say Chinese language since it does not include straight-up correlations with a certain ethnic group. While Putonghua is a standardised version of Chinese dialect Mandarin, it does not have a connection to a certain ethnic group in its name. Sometimes the term *Guoyu* (国语) is used, and it means literally nation language, often used as a synonym for Putonghua (普通话). *Hanyu* (汉语) is another term for Chinese language, equal to "language of Han people", *han* 汉 is the character that is used to address Han-Chinese, and *yu* 语 means language, and because of this, it ties Chinese language straight to Han-Chinese ethnic group. Besides the term "language of Han people", Joseonjok participants use the term *Zhongwen* or Putonghua, preferring Putonghua when discussing about the language policy.

Chinese language usually has different intentions than Korean language usage. Chinese language usage aims for better opportunities in the society and sometimes it is also tied to cultural identity, if a Joseonjok feels Chinese along their Korean identity With Korean, the usage is tied with maintaining their cultural identity and expressing emotions. For example, Ranhee felt discomfort in flag ceremony swearing to Chinese identity. Her ethnicity as a Korean is in contradiction with government's ideals of a Chinese identity, and maybe that played a part in her discomfort, but also swearing to an oath to ethnicity she actually is not. Even though her nationality is Chinese and she has grown up in China, many still see her as a Korean. For example, other participant Sang denies being *HanGuoRen*, and says he is Chinese, but also states he is proud not to be Han-Chinese. This suggests, that Sang thinks being Chinese is not only about your ethnicity, and he could be Chinese too despite his Korean ethnicity. Maybe other Joseonjoks as well, share this idea about "being Chinese", it is not black-and-white, more like a spectrum of many ethnicities and backgrounds.

5 Conclusion

To return to the first research question “How has language policy affected Chinese usage in Joseonjok bilingual education?”, the analysis suggests that language policy has affected to language discourse in education, from changing textbooks to Chinese and students increasing their Chinese usage at school and with their friends and family. Even with the increased Chinese usage, participants who completed bilingual education in Yanbian felt they do not have proficiency in Chinese, and struggled blending in after moving to a metropolitan area for college/work. Some participants outside of bilingual schools reported that they are more fluent in Chinese than Korean. Chinese is essential for Joseonjoks to survive outside of the Joseonjok community, and for some Putonghua fluency is a symbol of success, whereas Korean fluency holds a connection to their heritage and communication with friends and family. Korean is not seen as an academic asset like Chinese.

The second research question was “What do existing studies reveal on Joseonjok youth’s language usage across educational and social contexts?” and studies showed, that some Joseonjoks use Chinese mostly everywhere, whereas some Joseonjoks decided the language based on the micro- and meso-level; with friends and family Korean usage was more usual and in institutional context they preferred Chinese. This is an example of how Joseonjoks do code-switching in their everyday life. In some cases, the language usage in schools was Korean as well, due to the surrounding Korean-speaking community at school. Even though China has made effort to maintain bilingual education in China, it has had versatile results for Joseonjoks.

The lack of fluency in Chinese has affected to Joseonjoks’ ability to connect with their Han-colleagues and classmates, and they have sometimes struggled blending in with Han-population. On the other hand, Joseonjoks who did not attend to chao-school and were surrounded by Han-Chinese from an early age, seem to hold better fluency in Chinese and adapt easier to Han-Chinese society. The majority of Joseonjoks in the literature I reviewed have mixed cultural identity, even though they identify as Joseonjok, some feel more Chinese whereas some feel more Korean. In some cases, Korean fluency was a mandatory skill to have if one wanted to call themselves Korean. For further studies, one could deep dive how studying materials’ language has evolved in chao-schools in 2010s versus 2020s, or how teachers’ language usage influences on students. Because the analysis suggests language policy has affected Joseonjoks, their stance should be noted when discussing bilingual education.

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Appendix

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Mandatory AI Use Declaration

BA Dissertation Proseminar (CHIN0012) — Department of Chinese, University of Turku

Name: Olivia Karhu

Dissertation title: The Impact of Language Policy on Chinese Usage in Education Among Joseonjok Youth

Date: 17.5. 2026

☒ Brainstorming or narrowing my topic / research question
☐ Finding or summarising sources, or replacing reading I did not do
☐ Drafting paragraphs, sentences, or transitions that appear in the final text
☐ Translating my own writing between languages (Chinese / English / Finnish)
☐ Paraphrasing or rewriting passages from sources
☐ Generating or coding data, examples, tables, or quotations
☐ Proofreading grammar, spelling, and punctuation only
☐ Structuring or restructuring chapters / the argument ☐ Other (specify below)

2. List every AI tool you used (ChatGPT, Claude, DeepSeek, Gemini, Grammarly, Quillbot, DeepL Write, humanisers, etc.):
ChatGPT

3. Approximately what percentage of the final text was produced with AI assistance in any form (drafted, rewritten, translated, or substantially edited)?

☒ 0% ☐ 1–10% ☐ 11–25% ☐ 26–50% ☐ 51–75% ☐ more than 75%

4. Did you use an AI humaniser, paraphraser, or any tool designed to make AI text sound human or evade detection (e.g. Undetectable AI, StealthGPT, Quillbot humanise, manually inserting errors)?

☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, which tool and for which sections: _____

5. Can you, without AI, explain every argument, source, and analytical decision in your dissertation if I ask you in the viva?

☒ Yes, all of it ☐ Most of it ☐ Some parts I would need to revisit

6. Open response. Describe honestly how AI shaped your dissertation — what it helped you understand, where you relied on it more than you should have, and what in the final text is most clearly your own thinking. Vague answers ("only grammar") tell me nothing; specific answers build trust.

I used AI to narrow down my topic, and if my already non-AI-made research questions were suitable for the dissertation. For one Ministry of Education's website, I used Grammarly to translate, but this did not include modifying my own text etc., just the translation of already existing material.

Declaration. I confirm that the above is a complete and honest account of my AI use, and that the arguments, analysis, and critical engagement in my dissertation are my own work.

Signature:  Date: 17.5. 2026