

INTERNATIONAL & TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES WORKSHOP

Co-hosted by the Bilingual & Bicultural Education Program

Building a Chinese Dream: Language Policy and Multilingual Education in China

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305 Russell Hall (Teachers College Library)



China is one of the most multilingual countries in the world. The government of the People's Republic of China promotes the country as a harmonious and unified nation with 56 distinct ethnic groups who speak more than 400 languages. The government has not only legally recognized multilingualism but also publicly encouraged a climate in which the teaching and learning of a variety of languages can flourish. Unfortunately, however statistics show that nearly 20% of China's minority languages are on the edge of extinction and another 40% are showing signs of endangerment.

This seminar aims to explore language policies and multilingual education practices in China at a time when President Xi Jinping is defining the national goal as the Chinese dream. The study is based on empirical research and a number of case studies in multilingual regions and provinces. The findings indicate that modern standard Chinese (Putonghua) continues to be a powerful factor in both consolidating and probing educational, cultural, social and political discourse, while social changes have created a linguistic hierarchy reflected in the use of languages among diversified ethnic groups, accelerating inequalities and widening tensions. China's multilingualism faces under a great challenge: it is not static and its movement in one direction or another is a result of many influences which can be at a macro or micro level and may include political, economic and social factors.

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