Language Ideologies, Chinese Identities and Imagined Futures

Perspectives from Ethnic Chinese Singaporean University Students

语言意识形态、华人身份认同、未来憧憬： 新加坡华族大学生的视野

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Abstract

Since independence in 1965, the Singapore government has established a strongly mandated education policy with an English-first and official mother tongue Mandarin-second bilingualism. A majority of local-born Chinese have inclined toward a Western rather than Chinese identity, with some scholars regarding English as Singapore's "new mother tongue." Other research has found a more local identity built on Singlish, a localized form of English which adopts expressions from the ethnic mother tongues. However, a re-emergent China and new waves of mainland migrants over the past two decades seem to have strengthened Chinese language ideologies in the nation's linguistic space. This article revisits the intriguing relationships between language and identity through a case study of Chineseness among young ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. Guided by a theory of identity and investment and founded on

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survey data, it investigates the Chinese language ideologies of university students and their agency in choosing for themselves a Chinese imagined identity and community. Our survey found that ethnic Chinese Singaporean university students still possess a strong affinity for Mandarin and a desire to develop this aspect of their identity, in the context of Singapore's multiracial national identity. There exists a high propensity for imagined futures in Chineseness, with a majority of survey respondents who claimed English-speaking and bilingual identities also expressing the desire to become more bilingual and more Mandarin-speaking. This paper also deciphers the external and internal factors contributing to this development and suggests some areas of future research.

Keywords

language ideologies – Chinese identities – imagined community – Singapore – China

摘要

自1965年独立建国以来，新加坡政府就明确了以英语为第一语言、以华语为母语的双语教育政策。本地华人也更倾向于西方文化，而非自身的华人身份，这使得一些学者认为英语才是新加坡的“新母语”。另外一些研究则发现基于一种通用于新加坡本地并融入更多各种族母语元素的英语形式，即所谓的新加坡式英文，并进而建立更为本土化的认同。然而，随着过去二十年中国的重新崛起以及新一波新移民浪潮的到来，在新加坡的国家语言空间中，华语意识形态似乎得到了强化。本文以年轻一代新加坡华人的华人性体现为个案，以身份认同及语言投资理论为指针，通过问卷调查，探讨大学生的华语意识形态，以及他们在构想华人身份认同及所属社群时所选择的媒介，并重新审视语言与身份认同之间的微妙关系。本文的调查问卷发现，在新加坡多元种族国家认同背景下，受访的华族大学生对华语仍然具有浓厚的亲近力，并希望将这一元素作为其身份认同的体现之一。大部分受访者认为自己以英语为主要沟通语言，但仍认同于双语使用者的身份，这显示出他们希望能够更多地使用华语及成为双语使用者。这表明该群体在憧憬未来时，对体现自身的华人性有很强烈的倾向。本文还进一步探讨促成这一新转向的外部及内部因素及其理论意涵，以期能对相关领域的未来研究提出一些思考方向。

关键词

语言意识形态 – 华人身份认同 – 想象的共同体 – 新加坡 – 中国

1 Introduction

While English has long been seen as the first global language, international media and academics since the late 20th century have come to appreciate the growing global role of Mandarin (*putonghua*), China's designated official language since 1956 (Ding and Saunders 2006; Gil 2011; Kamaravadivelu 2012; Sharma 2018). Such a recognition resonates with the country's rapid rise in the international political economy over the past four decades, with China becoming the second largest economy in the world and being predicted to overtake the USA as the largest in 2028, according to the December 2020 report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research, a UK-based think tank (Elliot 2020).

At the same time, Chinese diasporas have been affected by a rising China which in turn prompted a re-think of existing language ideologies and identities. Since the late 1970s, China has sought after skilled and expert Chinese professionals to return to enhance its technologically advanced industrial parks and knowledge-focused industries (Liu 2010; Liu and Van Dongen 2016). The population flow has been bi-directional. Affluent, well-educated, and mobile Chinese citizens are increasingly emigrating: 4.1 million in 1990, 5.5 million in 2000, 9.3 million in 2013, and 10.7 million in 2019 (International Organization for Migration 2019; Xiang 2015). Their numerical presence and activities in various transnational spaces have been increasingly visible, especially in the developed West (such as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe) and Japan, at 53.4 percent in 1990 and 58.6 percent in 2013 (Xiang 2015; see also Li et al. 2015; Zhou 2017). All these could potentially contest the linguistic practices of diaspora Chinese, triggering a re-positioning of their identities as interlocutors of Mandarin versus other languages, versus the languages of their host countries, since language is not merely a mirror of pre-existent identities, but also active in creating, re-creating, and changing identities (Rosa and Burdick 2018; Wang and van de Velder 2015).

Singapore has been such a destination of Chinese international migration since the nineteenth century. Prior to the 1950s, Chinese migrants arriving mainly from the southern provinces of China brought their hometown dialects of Hokkien (from southern Fujian), Teochew (from Chaoshan in northeastern Guangdong), Cantonese (from Guangdong), Hakka and Hainanese, Foochow, Henghua, Shanghaiese, Hokchia and Mandarin (Lim 2009; Kwan-Terry 2000). These diverse Chinese languages and regional language identities were sustained by Chinese clan associations, through social, cultural and business links to their hometowns (*qiaoxiang*) in the mainland (Liu 2006; Van Dongen and

Liu 2018). The linguistic ties played a big role in transmitting “traditional family values, clan origins and sub-ethnic loyalties, as well as symbols of a glorious Chinese past,” which Wang Gungwu (1988) recognized as amounting to a “historical identity.” This form of Chinese affinity is “traditional and past-oriented,” inclined to be social, greatly benefited the local economy and extended to the Second World War.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, local linguistic Sinification was given an added complexity by the long arm of several mainland forces tussling for the political and cultural identification of the Chinese overseas. Sinification efforts by the Qing government came through the consulates as well as Chinese cultural events and language schools, while the hometowns vied for loyalty to their own more localized needs through the circulation of newspapers and magazines. Other agents such as Chinese reformers under Kang Youwei and revolutionaries under Sun Yat-sen also tried to hold sway in newly arrived immigrants’ identity through media such as newsletters, newspapers, periodicals, and books. The homeland linkages were further strengthened by socio-economic agencies such as the *qiaopi*, a combination of family letters and remittances (Benton and Liu 2018; Van Dongen and Liu 2018). Together, they contributed to the formation of “a fragmented and networked homeland” (Chan 2018: 219). The effect of these cultural, political and socio-economic exertions, as well as the 1919 May Fourth Movement’s support for Standard Modern Chinese (simplified script) and Mandarin (the spoken form), was that local schools set up by dialect- and native-place associations (such as Hokkien schools or Teochew schools) began to use Mandarin as their medium of instruction. This replacement not only added a Mandarin ideology to the local ethnic-Chinese repertoire, but also served to add a pan-Chinese identity to the sub-ethnic identity based on the dialects (Kwan-Terry 2000). By the 1930s, events on the mainland had triggered a strong “Chinese nationalist identity,” which stemmed from Sun Yat-sen’s concepts of race and nation (Wang 1988). The Japanese occupation of China had heightened homeland sentiments in Chinese communities in Singapore, as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, and the diaspora in Singapore played a key role in supporting China. Furthermore, Chinese primary and secondary schools established locally helped to consolidate this Chinese nationalist identity.

The strong influence of mainland events, coupled with local nationalist and anti-Sinitic sentiments, contributed to conflictual loyalties, which later transmuted into a tension in the language ideologies and affinities of the Chinese dialect-speaking locals and the Mandarin-espousing state. The Harvard historian Philip Kuhn differentiates these loyalties as between the “primary community” derived from dialect, kinship and hometown affinities, and a “secondary

community” focused on a universal Chineseness (cited in Van Dongen and Liu 2018). By the 1950s, China had undergone revolutionary transformation from a nationalist to a socialist state, resulting in a significant rift between the ancestral homeland and its diasporas, and a tapering off of migrant outflows from the mainland. Communist policies had not only discouraged these outflows, but also communist ideologues’ attempts to spread their influence abroad intensified suspicion and nationalist policies in Southeast Asia (Peterson 2013; van Dongen and Liu 2018; Wang 1988).

Confronted by such a changing external environment and, more importantly, the nation-building project in the region, ethnic Chinese in Singapore gradually became assimilated and integrated in the process of post-colonialist nation-building, forming the basis for a “national (local) identity” in the Chinese diaspora (Wang 1988). Language planning and policies in the late 1960s and 1970s restructured the local language space, putting a premium on English, the language of the British colonial masters, in a pragmatic move, not only to join global progress and modernity but, more importantly, to help cement the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural structure of the new nation. Mandarin took second place as a cultural identifier, while the original ethnic Chinese languages were excised from the educational mainstream, and their socio-political, cultural and business capacities were downplayed (Bokhorst-Heng 1999; Lim 2009; Tan, C. 2006; Wee 2003, 2006).

Not all evolved along the same identity pathway, however. Many “dialect” groups and associations turned to regional overseas Chinese to further their social, cultural and business activities, and in the process maintained their sense of ethnicity through, to borrow from Kuhn, *subjective visions* of the “homeland” (*qiaoxiang*) based on “perceptions and images” derived from various media, which is to be distinguished from the *objective facts* of China’s development (cited in Liu 2012). Indeed, Wang (1988) averred to multiple identities co-existing simultaneously within the Southeast Asian Chinese. With the earlier identities such as the historical and Chinese nationalist identities still fixed as remnants within the institutional memory, if not individual imaginations, the identities of the Chinese diasporas were at least multi-layered. Bearing in mind that Wang (1988) had observed both cultural and ethnic identities developing in the later periods in Southeast Asia, this article aims to explore, after multi-layers of Chinese identities had been deposited in the local ecology, what imagined identities and communities could be precipitated, as an increasingly Sinicized global political economy acts as catalyst in the twenty-first century.

Identity has always been intimately linked with language and its daily use. Darwin and Norton’s linguistic theory of identity (2015) is useful for our

exploration as its framework combining concepts of identity, language ideologies and learners' agency as well as investments allow deeper conversations about learners' imagined identities. The theory's mapping of second-language learners' encounter with new language ideologies, when they cross borders and enter the linguistic space of a host country, has currency in explaining the linguistic experience of Chinese migrants from various parts of South China in the colonialised milieu of Singapore. From the time of Singapore's independence until the present, the government's language ideologies and policies caused these migrant-learners to subordinate their hometown Chinese languages. In other words, the colonial language has become the dominant one and has been considered as a "mother tongue" (Tan, Y. 2014), while an imposed "mother-tongue" (that is, Mandarin for ethnic Chinese), the second language, and the original Chinese mother-tongues (dialects) were nearly erased. Gradually, in this reversed language hierarchy, these migrants and their progeny began to aspire to new linguistic, social, cultural and symbolic capital³ which is valued in the new multi-racial, multi-lingual community. These events contributed to identity conflicts "between habitus [shaped by the national language policies] and desire [for the ethnic languages of their hometown], between competing ideologies [of the national languages] and [their] imagined identities" (Darvin and Norton 2015: 45). These identities are dynamic through space and time, extending horizontally in the ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans' relationship to the world (including other ethnic Chinese in the region and globally) and vertically to possibilities for the future (Darvin and Norton 2015: 36).

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- 3 As conceived by Bourdieu, the various types of capital – *economic capital* (or wealth, property, and income), *cultural capital* (or information, educational qualifications and refinement through specific cultural training) and *social capital* (or socially relevant links) – can be transformed into *symbolic capital* – either as they cross time and space, or as governing principles within fields evolve – when dominant institutions of power within the specific field approve and legitimize that capital (cited in Darvin and Norton 2015). Symbolic capital is akin to "accumulated prestige or honor" (Silver 2005: 49) and relevant in the current world order where transnational contexts are potentially multiplied by virtual (online) spaces. Moving into transnational spaces, learners can acquire new physical and symbolic assets or transform what they already have into some form of prestige or honor in the new contexts (Darvin and Norton 2015). At the same time, linguistic capital in one field can be diminished in another because it "[is] measured against a value system that reflects the biases and assumptions of the larger sociocultural context" (Darvin and Norton 2015: 45). In short, learners are empowered not only by the types, amount and projection of the capital they possess but also by the value assigned by ideological structures and the various sites of struggle or *fields* in which they are deployed (Bourdieu 1986).

In this unique situation of post-independence Singapore, the host country and second-language learners' home country merge, a phenomenon not anticipated in Darwin and Norton's (2015) identity theory. More than half a century after the nation's independence, an interesting question to ask is how the language ideologies and identities of ethnic Chinese Singaporean university students are affected in the light of external factors, such as the government's language policies, the new political economy as a result of China's rise as well as the influx of large numbers of new Chinese migrants,⁴ the internal factor of the students' own evolving identities, and investment approaches in this area.

Through a survey of Chinese Singaporean university students, this paper attempts to explore the extent to which (1) state language ideologies (i.e., an English-dominant bilingualism) continue to exert a strong influence on their Chinese identities; (2) the rise of China and the influx of Chinese transnationals into the local linguistic field precipitate investment strategies toward imagined identities or communities in Chineseness, and (3) the highly digital, open and inclusive behavior of this generation of Singaporean Chinese will shape their own Chinese identities.

2 Methodology

A survey was conducted to ascertain whether the Chinese identity of the said group manifests:

- a strong disposition of state-constructed language ideologies and identities;
- an imagined identity influenced by China's regional/global rise, increased presence of mainland Chinese in the local linguistic space; and
- an openness to change through investments in new linguistic investments in Chinese languages and identities.

⁴ Between 2000 and 2010, Singapore's non-resident population increased from 18.7 percent to 25.7 percent. Over the same decade, the number of Singapore PRs increased by an average of 8.4 percent annually, rising from 8.8 percent of the total population to 14.3 percent. In 2011, Chinese made up 61.4 percent of this increased PR population (Frost 2020). According to the UN data released in early 2020, those from mainland China account for 18 percent of total migrants in Singapore, or 388,000, second only to those from Malaysia (Tan, E. 2020).

The survey respondents are ethnic-Chinese Singaporean undergraduates from across the public universities in Singapore. Born in the mid-1990s, they belong to the so-called “Generation Z.”⁵ This cohort grew up in a linguistic-ideological space occupied by Singapore’s bilingual policy and the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” launched in 1979 (Bokhorst-Heng 1999; Lee and Phua 2020). For entry into tertiary institutions, they need only ensure good grades in English or the General Paper with a minimal pass in the Mother Tongue (MT) language (45 percent–49 percent) or “higher Mother Tongue” (where the MT is also the first) language (40 percent–44 percent) in the GCE O- or A-Level examinations (Xie and Cavallaro 2016). At the tertiary level, students are no longer obliged to keep up with their MT, unless they are enrolled in Chinese Studies.

2.1 *Survey Design*

The survey was conducted between 12 December 2019 and early February 2020 on the QualtricsSM platform through one of the co-authors’ Blackboard account to previous semesters’ students and personal contacts outside of the university who were also university students. This method was not only in line with the characteristics of “Generation Z” who are digitally savvy, but also in accordance with the “friend-of-a-friend” approach, started by Milroy (cited in Leimgruber et al. 2018), which has also been used by Leimgruber et al. (2018). The anonymized survey results were collected in February 2020 and analyzed subsequently.

The survey consisted of 5 preliminary questions (Q1–Q5) on details such as discipline and year of study, home language, etc. The survey proper consisted of 21 close-ended questions with an option to express a unique answer (under “Others, please specify”). Table 1 shows the distribution of the question-items. The questions were ordered such that the nine questions on Mandarin came first (Q.6–14), exploring respondents’ ideologies (Q6–9), their investments and desires (Q.10–12) as Mandarin learners and the possibility of external events affecting imagined futures (Q.13–14). The next set of questions on the Chinese dialects (Q.15–22) observed the same flow with those testing language ideology coming first (Q.15–17), followed by investments (Q.18–20) and external

5 According to Turner (2015: 104): “With technological advances in multimedia, such as tablets, the smartphone (which combines cell phone, media player, cameras, and Internet capabilities into one device), social media, and flat-screen televisions, Generation Z youth have become accustomed to interacting and communicating in a world that is connected at all times.”

TABLE 1 Distribution of question-types

Question type	Respondents' ideologies	Internal factors	External factors		Question total/order on the survey	Respondents' identities
			China factors	Time spent with PRCs		
On Mandarin	3 (Q.6–8,12)	3 (Q.9–11)	1 (Q.13)	1 (Q.14)	9 (Q.6–14)	4 (Q.23–26)
On Chinese dialects	3 (Q.15–17)	3 (Q.19–21)	1 (Q.22)	None	8 (Q.15–22)	

influencers (Q.21–22). A question (Q.14) on the amount of time spent conversing with Chinese transnationals was included in the Mandarin (but not in the Chinese dialects) as Mandarin is a common denominator. The final group of questions (Q.23–26) were on the respondents' identity, three of which were language-related and the last one providing an opportunity to indicate other determinants of identity.

While there were comparable surveys variously investigating a similar age-group's language attitudes toward the official MTs and its relation to ethnic identity (Xie and Cavallaro 2016; Matthews et al. 2017; Leimbruger et al. 2018; Starr and Hiramoto 2018), none has explored the significance of these attitudes for the respondents' imagined identities, as demonstrated by their language-investment strategies or an openness to such investments. To help offset the limitations of the survey samples' relative small size, in addition to cross-referencing with comparable surveys in Singapore and other countries (e.g., Gunawan 2018), this paper also incorporated the authors' own participatory observations as teachers over the past decade in Singapore's public universities, whose undergraduate cohorts comprise mostly local-born ethnic Chinese.

2.2 Key Findings: Chineseness and Bilingualism

2.2.1 General Trends

Out of 133 responses collected through the survey, 99 were found to be complete and valid. Of these, Mandarin language ideologies were widely reported, compared to the Chinese dialects, in line with state language ideologies and practices. A large majority were at least willing to consider investing in their Mandarin skills in the future, if they were not already doing so. Economic

FIGURE 1 Q4.What are the predominant language(s) spoken in your home?

opportunities in China’s market brought in the largest responses, while China’s global rise and the local presence of PRC transnationals yielded the least. About half (52) of the respondents identified as bilingual Singaporeans, while over one-third (37) considered themselves as English-speaking Chinese. Finally, while results concerning the Chinese dialects were very weak in general, they shed some interesting light for an understanding of the research questions under discussion.

2.2.2.2 Demographics

Of the 99 undergraduates participating in the survey, an overwhelming majority were Singapore citizens, with a handful of Permanent Residents (PR), originally from Malaysia or China, which are the two largest source countries of Singapore’s new migrants. As for the predominant language(s) spoken at home, English had the highest responses,⁶ dialect the lowest, Mandarin sat at less than one-fifth, while less than one-third professed to code-switching between English and Mandarin (Figure 1). Survey participants’ patrilineal dialect groups showed the dominance of Hokkien, followed by Cantonese and Teochew in line with well-known distribution data of various regional dialect groups among local Chinese (Kuo 1988; Kwan-Terry 2000). Two respondents did not provide this detail.

2.2.3 The Effect of State Language Ideologies

As a demonstration of the powerful effect of state language ideologies and policies, nearly two-thirds of respondents (62) indicated a high level of Mandarin proficiency, while less than one tenth expressed a lack of ease and competency

6 The past two decades have seen a steady increase in English as the primary language spoken at home. According to Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, speaking in October 2019, 71 percent of Chinese households speak English as their main language at home, up from 42 percent two decades ago. *The Straits Times*, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/spore-must-guard-against-losing-its-bilingual-edge-pm-lee>. Accessed 23 October 2019.

in Mandarin. In contrast, only 23 had an above average to high proficiency in the Chinese dialects, while nearly half (48) could neither understand nor speak dialect. This is matched by the number who interacted in Mandarin/dialects in the given domains – social, cultural and/or academic. Mandarin obtained the highest responses (79) as students spoke it in at least one domain, with the social being the most popular. If dialect was at all spoken, the family and social circles were also the most likely domains.

In terms of the languages’ value, all respondents attributed at least one type of capital to Mandarin and the dialects. More than half (53) thought Mandarin possessed social, cultural and economic capital, compared to less than one-third (27) who felt the same of the dialects. On the other hand, the social capital of Chinese dialects, in communication with other ethnic Chinese, seemed to be above that of Mandarin (48 versus 25 respondents). Not unexpectedly, the economic value attached to Mandarin was higher (53) than that attached to the Chinese dialects (27) when economic capital was combined with social and cultural capital. Economic capital (in terms of enhanced job opportunities) on its own scored at five and six respondents for Mandarin and the Chinese dialects respectively (see Figure 2).

On support for their MT aspirations and efforts, nearly one-third of respondents specified that they had not noticed any support from their local environment. Of those who did, the strongest support was felt through relevant programs at the university. As for the visibility of the Chinese dialects, this was very low, with nearly two-thirds of respondents saying that the question was irrelevant, while the rest saw clan associations and the university as providing the main opportunities for dialect use and learning.

2.2.4 Willingness to Invest in Imagined Chinese Identities

This group of questions showed that a large majority of respondents (77) made conscious efforts to keep up their Mandarin use – with peers and tutors or through entertainment and cultural activities – and 84 were willing to invest in improving their skills at least in the future (Figure 3). Of the latter majority, 44 percent spoke English at home. On the dialect front, at least 59 respondents

FIGURE 2 Q6 and 15. What is the value of Mandarin and Chinese dialects to you?

FIGURE 3 Q9 and 18. Are you willing to invest in improving your current competency in Mandarin and Chinese dialects?

FIGURE 4 Q13. What developments could encourage you to develop your ability or competency in Mandarin?

made some effort to maintain their dialects and 79 were willing to put more effort into improving, at least in the future. The latter figure bodes well, considering that 41.7 percent of them had professed to using English as a household language and 71 of the total 99 had professed to a dialect proficiency level that is below average.

2.2.5 The Effects of External Factors on the Desire to Invest

Whether the respondents’ desire to invest in developing their Mandarin/Chinese dialect proficiency is affected by external realities is put to the test by the data here (Figure 4). While more than one-third (35) of participants felt that an overarching or nebulous Chinese presence (having chosen “all of the above”) shaped their desire, China’s economic factor garnered 24 percent of responses. By contrast, investments in the Chinese dialects were largely not externally influenced (as indicated by the 42 who specified their responses), with the cover-all reply eliciting only 22 responses. A rising China’s economic pull was captured in both the 35 as well as the 24 responses.

The time spent speaking in Mandarin with mainland Chinese students, faculty and administrators also appeared to be of little consequence in influencing

FIGURE 5 Q23. How would you describe your identity?

FIGURE 6 Q25. If you could change your identity, what would it be?

investment strategies. More than half (56) of the respondents admitted to doing so only 10–30 percent of their communication time, while the rest either spent even less time or lacked opportunity.

2.2.6 Current Language-Related Chinese Identities

When asked about their language-related identities, a negligible number professed to being Mandarin/dialect-speaking, while more than half of the respondents (52) attested to being bilingual Chinese Singaporeans and the rest (37) regarded themselves as English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans. Of the 52 bilingual identifiers, 12 speak Mandarin, while 16 codeswitch between the Mandarin and English at home. (Details at Figure 5 and Tables 2 and 3.)

When given the opportunity to imagine a change in identity (Figure 6), the 52 bilingual identifiers seemed more stable, as nearly 60 percent (22 + 9) wanted to remain bilingual-speaking while the rest variously imagined more dialect-speaking or more Mandarin-speaking identities; a handful inclined toward more English-speaking Chinese Singaporean identities (shown in Table 2). These results compare with the less robust identities of the 37 who claimed to be English-speaking Chinese, 86.5 percent (24 more bilingual + 7 more Mandarin + 1 dialect-speaking = 32) of whom could swing to more Chineseness in future (see Table 3). The overall picture shown in Figure 6 is a positive indicator for Chineseness, with 72 respondents claiming that proclivity.

TABLE 2 Respondents with bilingual identities and their imagined identities

Resp.	Q4. Home language	Q23. Present identity	Q24. Satisfaction	Q25. Imagined identities	Q26. Other identifiers
4.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More English-speaking	Nationality
5.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Others: "Personality and morals"
6.	Dialect: [blank]	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More English-speaking	Nationality
9.	Bilingual practice	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
12.	Bilingual practice	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Nationality
14.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Nationality
15.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
17.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
19.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Migration experience
21.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Nationality
27.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Others: [blank]
28.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
30.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Ethnicity
31.	Bilingual	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
32.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More dialect-speaking	Nationality
33.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
36.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: "Not interested in changing"	Others: "My interests, educational background"
37.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Nationality
38.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Nationality

TABLE 2 Respondents with bilingual identities and their imagined identities (*cont.*)

Resp.	Q4. Home language	Q23. Present identity	Q24. Satisfaction	Q25. Imagined identities	Q26. Other identifiers
39.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
40.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Nationality
41.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
42.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
43.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: [blank]	Nationality
45.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More bilingual	Religion
46.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	All of the above
48.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
52.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Ethnicity
53.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More English-speaking	Ethnicity
54.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More English-speaking	Nationality
55.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
59.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
61.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: "No change"	Others: "Personality"
62.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Ethnicity
63.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Others: "1,2,3"
64.	English	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More dialect-speaking	Nationality
66.	English	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	More dialect-speaking	Nationality
67.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Others: "1,2"
68.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	I haven't thought	Others: "Fluent in both the English and Chinese language ... and dialect"	Religion

TABLE 2 Respondents with bilingual identities and their imagined identities (cont.)

Resp.	Q4. Home language	Q23. Present identity	Q24. Satisfaction	Q25. Imagined identities	Q26. Other identifiers
69.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
70.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
73.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
75.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: No	Nationality
77.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Nationality
80.	Codeswitching	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Others: "Nil"
81.	Mandarin	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More English-speaking	Ethnicity
89.	Bilingual practice	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Migration experience
92.	Bilingual practice	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: "I'm happy"	All of the above
94.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
98.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: [blank]	Nationality
101.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: "Will not change"	Nationality
102.	English	Bilingual Chinese	Yes	Others: "If anything, just some business acumen. Otherwise, wouldn't like to change it."	All of the above
Total	19 English 16 Codeswitching 12 Mandarin 4 Bilingualism 1 Dialect	52	44 Yes 8 haven't thought	22 More bilingual 9 Others 9 More dialect 7 More Mandarin 5 More English	27 Nationality 9 All of the above 7 Others 5 Ethnicity 2 Religion 2 Migration

TABLE 3 Respondents with English-speaking Chinese identities and their imagined identities

Resp.	Q4. Home language	Q23. Present identity	Q24. Satisfaction	Q25. Imagined identities	Q26. Other identifiers
7.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	I haven't thought	More bilingual	Others: "... my experiences and way of thinking"
10.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Ethnicity
11.	Others: "sort of codeswitch, sort of bilingual"	Others: "English-speaking, but can bust out the Mandarin when needed (talking to mom"	Yes	Others: "Trilingual?"	Others: "personality and ethical beliefs"
13.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More dialect-speaking	Nationality
16.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	Nationality
18.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Ethnicity
22.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	All of the above
23.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	I haven't thought	More bilingual	Nationality
24.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Religion
26.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More English-speaking	Nationality
29.	English	English-speaking Chinese	I haven't thought	More bilingual	Ethnicity
34.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	I haven't thought	More bilingual	Nationality
44.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking	All of the above
47.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
50.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
51.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	No	Others: "Japanese-speaking Japanese"	Others: "I do not wish to be pigeonholed"
56.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	Others: [blank]
57.	English	Others: "English-speaking Chinese ..."	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
58.	English	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	All of the above

TABLE 3 Respondents with English-speaking Chinese identities (*cont.*)

Resp.	Q4. Home language	Q23. Present identity	Q24. Satisfaction	Q25. Imagined identities	Q26. Other identifiers
60.	Mandarin	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Ethnicity
65.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking More bilingual	Nationality Religion
66.	English	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	Nationality
71.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
76.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
78.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking More bilingual	Ethnicity All of the above
79.	English	English-speaking Chinese	I haven't thought	More Mandarin-speaking More bilingual	Nationality
82.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking More bilingual	Nationality
83.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	I haven't thought	More bilingual	Nationality
85.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Nationality
86.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More English-speaking More English-speaking	Nationality All of the above
88.	English	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More Mandarin-speaking More bilingual	Religion Nationality
91.	English	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	Ethnicity
93.	English	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	Migration experience Nationality
96.	English	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	Ethnicity
97.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	Yes	More bilingual	Migration experience Nationality
99.	English	English-speaking Chinese	No	More bilingual	Nationality
100.	Codeswitching	English-speaking Chinese	No	More Mandarin-speaking 7 More Mandarin 3 More English 1 More Dialect 1 Japanese 1 trilingual	All of the above All of the above Ethnicity Religion Others Migration
Total	23 English 13 CodeSwitch 1 Mandarin	37	22 Yes, 9 No, 6 haven't thought	24 More Bilingual 7 More Mandarin 3 More English 1 More Dialect 1 Japanese 1 trilingual	17 Nationality 6 All of the above 6 Ethnicity 3 Religion 4 Others 1 Migration

3 Discussions: A Trajectory of Imagined Identities

This research has sought to contribute to research on the identities of Singapore's Chinese university students from the perspective of language ideologies. Instead of highlighting identities at a fixed point in time as most identity studies have done, this paper traces the trajectory of their imagined identities by exploring the outcome of the following research questions: To what extent have state ideologies shaped Chinese Singaporean university students' linguistic ideologies, practices and identities? To what extent do these students desire differently imagined identities and what are these? How do external factors, such as China's increasing global growth and the influx of migrants from the mainland, influence the respondents' imagined identities and communities?

3.1 *Effect of State Language Ideologies*

Against the background of progressive state narratives regarding Mandarin as the official MT for ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans, emphasizing first its cultural and then its economic and social capital, the results of this set of questions – on the value of the languages, respondents' proficiencies in them and the domains of use – suggest strong dispositions supporting state ideologies. More than half of the respondents imbibed all three types of capital of their MT, while over one third (4) bank on its social capital for communication with other ethnic Chinese. Nearly two-thirds (62) could use the language efficiently in more than half their Mandarin communication, and just under one third (29) speak it in all three domains. Also, in line with state language planning and policies which give the Chinese dialects little if any priority, respondents' proficiency in their Chinese dialects is much lower than their competence in Mandarin: 71 are below average in understanding and using dialect, with the bulk (48) hardly comprehending or interacting in dialects. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents (60) still obtain some social and cultural capital from the dialects. Despite the decades of state effort at erasing them from the linguistic space in Singapore, it would appear that under one third of respondents still maintain the dialects' role in all three areas, while nearly half appreciated the dialects' value, especially in the social space. This finding is in line with research in applied linguistics on the outcome of Singapore's language planning and bilingual language policies which is the assimilation of Mandarin as ethnic MT by Chinese Singaporeans. Yet there is still some emotional, visceral attachment to Chinese dialects as a part of their heritage (Lim 2009; Vaish et al. 2010), although many in the respondents' generation cannot communicate in dialects.

In line with the Singapore state's narratives since China's reform and globalization, the majority of respondents saw the economic value of Mandarin as

greater than that of the Chinese dialects, especially when the economic factor was grouped with the others, but not as a factor on its own. An explanation for this could be that the general environment of Singapore, as well as of the university campuses, provides little visibility to Mandarin and the dialects, suggesting much less economic capital than promised by the state (Tan, P. 2014). In other words, the economic gains of having Mandarin are defined within Singapore, but which have yet to be realized for Mandarin speakers, as market opportunities are largely in China, or at least outside Singapore. Responses to Questions 9 and 18 on the support respondents perceived in the various aspects of Singapore society for using the Chinese languages bolster this view. One third thought there was no evidence for support of Mandarin while 64 felt the same for the dialects. This could translate into low economic and symbolic capital for Mandarin and the Chinese dialects, in comparison to English, which is ubiquitous and highly visible in Singapore society (Tan, P. 2014). This is due to Mandarin and the dialects' role in Singapore as "identity ethnolects," whereas English performs as a type of "metalect" ("the language of maximal functionality") "for all ethnic groups, especially in economic-technical domains" (Bianco 2007: 11). Other studies have also highlighted Mandarin's lack of symbolic capital and the "fear and loathing" of government discourse vis-à-vis the dialects (Silver 2005; Lim 2009). Nonetheless, in responses to later questions on the external factors that could convince respondents to invest in their Mandarin abilities, the economic lure of China's markets had the highest vote. The reason could be that at their early age, respondents might not have encountered the influence of China tangibly, even through the arrivals of migrants. Rather, much of the influence is felt *through* the Singapore state and *by* the state (including its influential government-linked corporations), which enjoys close relations and multilateral exposure to China, including Singapore's extensive and institutionalized engagement with China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative since 2013 (Liu, Fan, and Lim 2021).

3.2 *The Making of Imagined Chinese Identities*

As discussed in the theoretical framework and literature review in this paper, the imagined Chinese identities are related to the language ideologies of ethnic Chinese Singaporeans and refer to their desire or agency to invest social, economic or cultural capital to improve their Chinese-language abilities (whether in Mandarin or the local dialects of their heritage). Guided by Ron and Darwin's (2015) theory of identity and investment, this study argues that investments in second-language acquisition (here Mandarin, but in the unique erasure of the Chinese dialects, it may also paradoxically include the latter) are likely to accrue to identities in this area. Respondents' openness to

the idea of investing in improving their linguistic abilities, if not at present but at least in the future, was very strong for Mandarin, at 84 votes, and surprisingly so for the dialects, at 79. The positive results for the dialects can be explained by their high valuation earlier, despite low proficiency through low exposure and infrequent use, as university students were no longer required to keep up their dialects at any serious proficiency level, since English is the language of instruction, administration and the general business of things. This latent state of things could in future propel identities toward ancestral roots (Lim 2009).

In sum, it appears that respondents do not lack a desire to invest in their Chineseness, but do not as yet see its instrumental value realized in any convincing measure within their immediate environment and in the domestic context of Singapore. Furthermore, the clear signals sent through the education system and official discourse (especially through the Speak Mandarin Campaigns) regarding the value of Mandarin, in contrast to the lower visibility of Mandarin relative to English in the public services and environment, complicates what can be read as expressions of habitus and what as imagined identity. Only the ownership of a language (Bokhorst-Heng et al., 2010; Darwin and Norton 2015; Norton and Gao 2008) enriched by meaning in the unique local historical, political, cultural and social contexts, can persuade the Chinese populace in Singapore to assume an identity endowed with value and prestige. In this regard, Xie and Cavallaro (2016) have reported that Chinese Singaporean youths do profess feelings of ownership to the Chinese languages in their linguistic range. A related recent study comparing the attitudes to varieties of Mandarin Chinese among Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals residing in the country has found that Mandarin is now “viewed more as a language of solidarity than status in Singapore” (Cavallaro et al., 2018).

3.3 *The External Factors and the Desire to Invest*

While the answer-choices in this set of questions seem to direct respondents to *objective facts* about China that could stimulate interest in imagined identities, they are free to specify other answers which could name *subjective visions* of the ancestral motherland (Liu 2012) which might have been passed on from family heritage, from participation in Chinese associations' activities, personal interactions with mainland Chinese or even online interactions. The more significant outcome of this set of questions concerning Mandarin – above one-third (35) opted for “all of the above,” while under one-third (24) opted for the expanding economic opportunities in China – suggests that the “objective facts” could account for their desire to invest in Mandarin proficiencies more than “subjective visions” – implicit in the presence of Chinese transnationals

(an option chosen by only 8 respondents). This is in line with Liu's (2012) observation that subjective visions of the motherland could be re-enacted in place of actual ties during political exigencies such as the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976. As relations with China at multiple levels have been rigorously pursued in the past decades, the likelihood of such re-enactments is curtailed. On the other hand, if or when the objective facts concerning China should bring about a prolonged slowdown in the economic, cultural, social and diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing, subjective imaginings especially among the more recent diaspora may begin again.

At the time of the on-going global COVID-19 pandemic, both China and Singapore are “keeping supply chains and trade lines open” (Aw 2020). Travel between the two countries is regulated under a “fast lane” agreement for essential business and official travel only (Tan 2020). In this climate, the Internet and social media could play a role both in maintaining real ties or establishing various nuanced versions of subjective longings (Chan 2006; Ip and Yin 2015; Kang 2017; Smart 2017).

At the same time, the latest Chinese transnationals could, by their continued presence in local society, stimulate subjective visions of Chineseness. However, as the results for the question on the amount of interaction with PRC transnationals show, respondents have little to no contact with PRC peers – more than half spent only 10–30 percent of their time communicating with mainland Chinese peers, while the rest have little to no contact with them. Research on xenophobic views among Chinese Singaporeans suggests that this factor has hindered more frequent interactions (Liu 2014; Lu, 2020; Yang 2014; Yeoh and Lin 2013). Thus, it would seem that unless relations improve between the local-born Chinese and Chinese transnationals, yearnings for the ancestral motherland are unlikely to be fulfilled via this source. Rather than highlighting the existing bigotry and dismissing this channel altogether, we would suggest that a different kind of ethnography that focuses on existing, real relationships and the nature of those relationships in terms of imagined futures, would be more fruitful.

It might be possible to view the group of 44 respondents who demonstrated some interest in investing in the Chinese dialects as those open to imagining subjective visions of homeland through engagement with regional diasporas of the same clan or business networks connecting the hometowns in the Southern provinces (Liu 2012), as well as those open to doing business and becoming transnationals themselves in China where imagined communities would play a greater role (Dahles 2004). These 44 respondents cited family, predecessors and their ethnic groups (10), the “all of the above” option (22) and “affinity between Singapore and Chinese provinces” (12) as possible pull-factors for investment in linguistic capital.

3.4 *Language-Related Chinese Identities*

Before delving into a discussion of the results in this question category, some background on language-dependent identity shifts is appropriate. As early as the 1990s, Hvitfeldt and Poedjosoedarma's study on intergenerational language practice and identity in Singapore found that the required bilingual education had inadvertently produced shifts in language practice from official ethnic language to English and from Chinese dialects to Mandarin, which paralleled the identity changes across generations (cited in Mann and Pirkhai-Illich 2007). More specifically, this meant that the dialect-speaking grandparents in their study had a "dialect-group identity," while the Mandarin-speaking parents regarded themselves merely as Chinese and the English-speaking students perceived themselves first as Singaporeans. In Mann and Pirkhai-Illich's survey of 100 participants, they found that three in five participants asserted that standard English was the most appropriate in conveying their identity. Corroborating such a trend, Leimbruger, Siemund and Terassa's (2018) investigation of the individual linguistic repertoires, patterns of language use and attitudes toward different languages of 450 students from the local universities, polytechnics and ITEs (Institutes of Technical Education) – 150 from each – noted that English seems to be accepted (43 percent) as Singaporeans' principal language of communication; and that MT knowledge and usage is not deemed (at 79 percent and 68 percent respectively) to be crucial for Singaporean identity.

Against this backdrop of findings, our survey results are interesting in that they yield 1.4 times as many bilingual identities (52) as English-speaking ones (37). That said, the Mandarin- and dialect-speaking identities tally at the very low end with no more than a handful each. While respondents are eager to be seen as Mandarin-speaking, it must be accompanied by an ability to speak English as well, which highlights that the latter still possesses much prestige. Nonetheless, the picture of local Chinese identities offered in this paper is more varied than the one suggested in Mann and Pirkhai-Illich's (2007) but is more akin to Leimbruger, Siemund and Terassa's (2018) survey which found that the polytechnic and ITE cohorts claimed more languages in their linguistic range than the university students. As the profile of university students in Singapore has changed gradually to include more polytechnic graduates over the years, rather than the norm of mainly junior college ones, the trend could explain the 11 respondents (at least) who code-switched among three languages and a handful who practiced trilingualism.

In the various questions in our survey on language ideologies, investment and identity, the outcome has shown Mandarin to be a stronger choice than the Chinese dialects, although the results for the latter do not lag too far behind. Starr and Hiramoto's findings (2018) among the various ethnolinguistic groups

could provide the fine details for our understanding in terms of Chinese Singaporeans' attachment to the official MT and their preferred choice of MT study, given the opportunity. Those of mixed ethnolinguistic heritage (e.g., Cantonese and Hokkien) were more likely to rate Mandarin highly as their original MT. Asked if they would have studied a different MT rather than the official one, those of mixed dialect heritage as well as those of single ethnolinguistic heritage, mainly Hokkiens, Teochews and Hakkas, expressed a greater identification with Mandarin, while those of a single ethnolinguistic Cantonese descent would have switched their choice of MT study to Cantonese. In fact, the Hokkiens, Teochews and Hakkas were even less likely than the mixed-heritage group to switch MTs. Starr and Hiramoto explain this in terms of the currency of Cantonese through its profile in Hong Kong, although Hokkien is more historically entrenched in Singapore and used to be the dominant dialect in the local Chinese community. Of those who would not switch their choice of school-learnt MTs, several expressly highlighted the pragmatic benefits of Mandarin: "I am pretty certain that I would have still learnt Mandarin ... particularly with the indisputable relevance of Mandarin today given a rising China along with an influx of mainland Chinese migrants" (Starr and Hiramoto 2018: 351).

4 Conclusion

This paper finds that among the cohort of Chinese Singaporean university students, there exists a high propensity for imagined futures in Chineseness. A majority of respondents who claimed English-speaking and bilingual identities also expressed the desire to become more bilingual, more Mandarin-speaking, *and* more dialect-speaking. Only 10 of the 99 respondents were strongly positioned to remain or become more English-speaking. This finding seems to be in line with Lim's proposition of "a fourth socio-historical era":

There is a potential shift towards a renewed, increased dominance in the Chinese languages in Singapore's ecology, in particular Mandarin and Cantonese, and this is perhaps a more effective shift where Mandarin is not just a top-down imposed Mother Tongue, but one that is perceived in reality as desirable, and where there is now a real presence of Mandarin speakers.

LIM 2010: 45

However, our findings also differ from Lim's hypothesis in that the catalyst may not come mainly from China's rising or the presence in the ecology of

transnational Chinese speakers, at least not for the moment. In their specified answers, however few these may be, respondents seemed to imply a Chineseness based on *subjective visions* of a very vague or imaginary homeland somewhere in China's historical past, of a grand civilized culture as enacted and re-enacted in past state discourse, not the *objective fact* of the globalized, consumerist, modern state that it is today (Liu 2012). If one may return to Wang's (1988) theorizing on identity categories, it would appear that identities which incline to cultural rather than political elements of identity are likely to arrive at ethnic (cultural) identities (see Figure 7).

Although these respondents selected nationality as a probable identity marker outside of language, many still recognized their heritage of Chinese languages. It remains then for each individual Chinese Singaporean to decide the configurations and expressions of this identity. Since at university there is no great compulsion to pursue Mandarin, and much less so the dialects, as English pervades all official communication and is the accepted norm, any gravitation toward Chinese imagined futures seems to be put on hold. At the same time, research has shown that digital technology, student exchanges and internships, postgraduate education and all manner of economic opportunities have multiplied the possibilities for imagined identities and communities (Darvin and Norton 2015), leading to a multiplicity of language-based identities in transnational contexts. Further research could follow any of these avenues or conduct interviews with this cohort of respondents with the aim

FIGURE 7
Diagram for Chinese identities in
Southeast Asia (Wang 1988: 7)

of supporting the evidence obtained from the survey, or, as earlier suggested, with ethnographies of abiding relationships between permanent residents of ethnic-Chinese origin for possibilities of imagined identities and communities.

Finally, more research needs to be done regarding the impact of the region's political economy on language ideologies and changing cultural identity. While the rise of China has presented opportunities for Southeast Asia and its Chinese diaspora to tap into their historical and cultural capital to engage with China, there are also significant anxieties about a more assertive China's impact in multi-ethnic nations such as Singapore (Liu 2016). The mounting US-China tensions over the past decade have reinforced this trend. As Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong wrote in the July/August 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the existence of a significant number of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia is a politically sensitive issue and an "obstacle that would prevent China from taking over the security role currently played by the United States." He highlights specifically the delicate challenges faced by Singapore:

Singapore is the only Southeast Asian country whose multiracial population is majority ethnic Chinese. In fact, it is the only sovereign state in the world with such demographics other than China itself. But Singapore has made enormous efforts to build a multiracial national identity and not a Chinese one. And it has also been extremely careful to avoid doing anything that could be misperceived as allowing itself to be used as a cat's-paw by China.

LEE 2020

The complex and intriguing interplay between language ideologies, political economy, and ethnic Chinese identities at a time of China re-emerging therefore calls for more empirical and comparative studies. It is hoped that this paper will help generate more discussions pertaining to this question at the intersections of sociolinguistics, cultural and diaspora studies, and the changing political economy of a rising Asia in an uncertain and volatile world.

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