

AIEA 2017

Students of Chinese Background: Characteristics and Possibilities for Greater Success

Agnes Weiyun He, AAAS & MIC, Stony Brook University, April 12, 2017



from a WeChat group

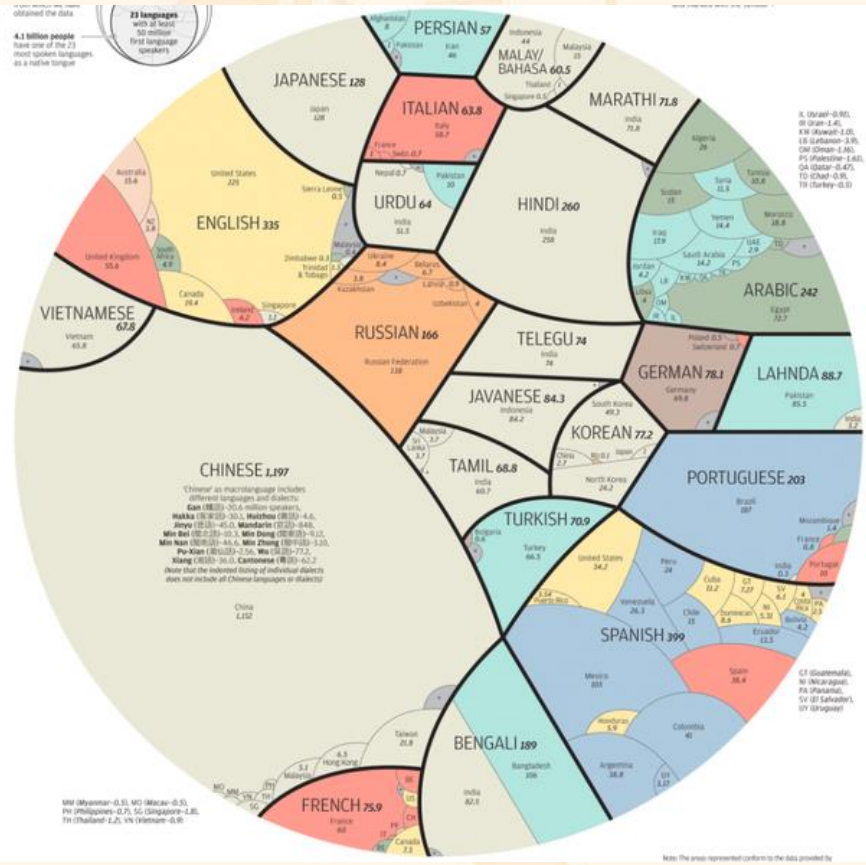
Outline

- Students of Chinese background: unpacking heterogeneity
- Linguistic repertoires: complexity in bilingualism
- Learning styles: culture and cognition
- Instructional strategies: suggestions
- Institutional policies: ??

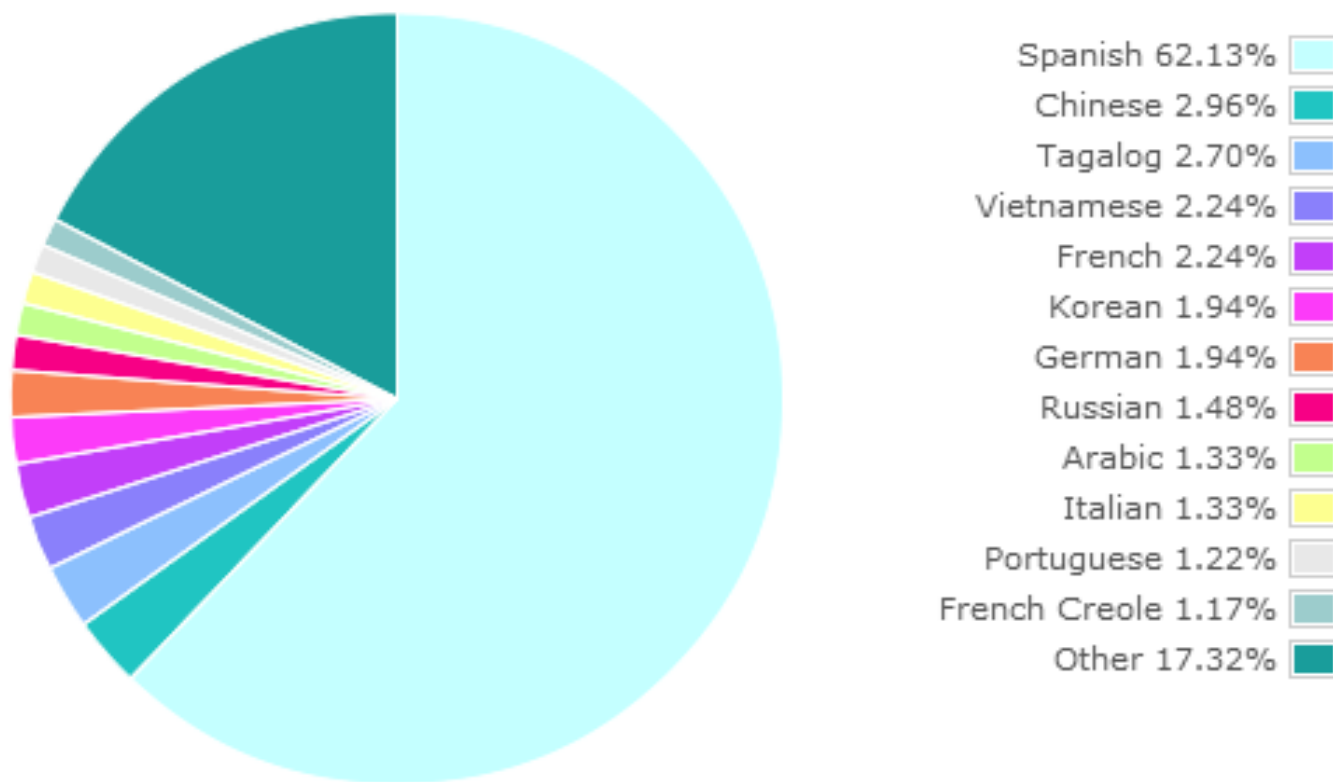
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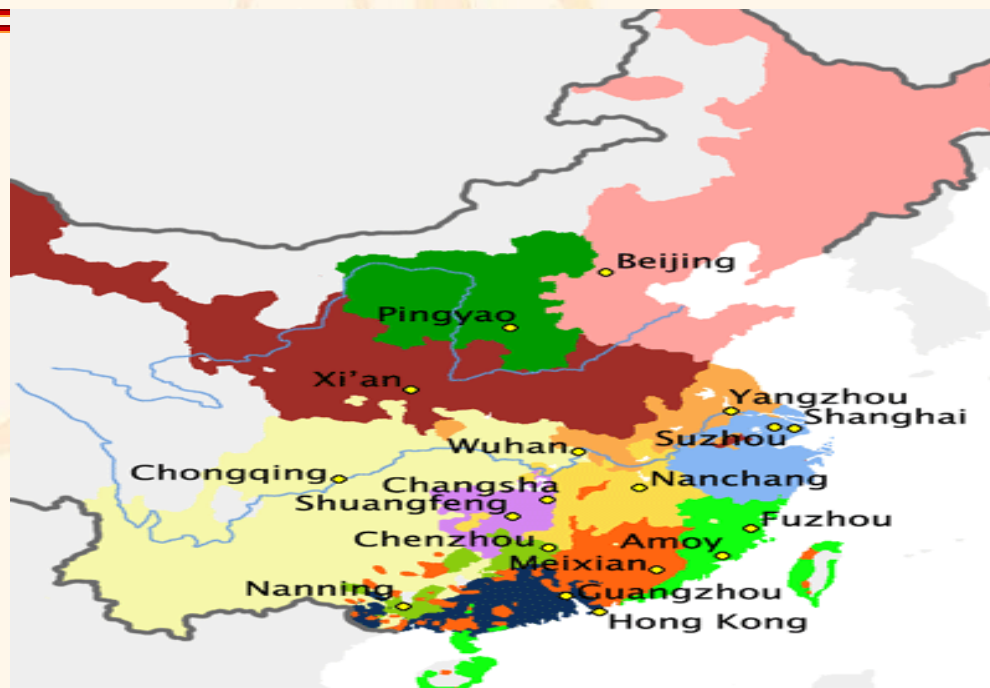
Largest language in the world















Most commonly used non-English languages in U.S.



Chinese Dialects



the Sinitic Languages

	Wu		Cantonese (Yue)
	Jianghuai		Ping & Xiangnan
	Gan		Huguang (Xinan)
	Xiang		Jin
	Hokkien (Min)		East Mandarin
	Hakka (Kejia)		West Mandarin

Chinese Scripts: "dragon"

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唐·顏真卿 唐·顏真卿 宋徽宗 宋徽宗 鄧石如

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唐·懷素 唐·孫過庭 唐·虞世南 唐·張旭 東晉·王羲之

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漢·西狹頌 北魏·孫秋生 宋·蘇軾 吳昌碩 武則天

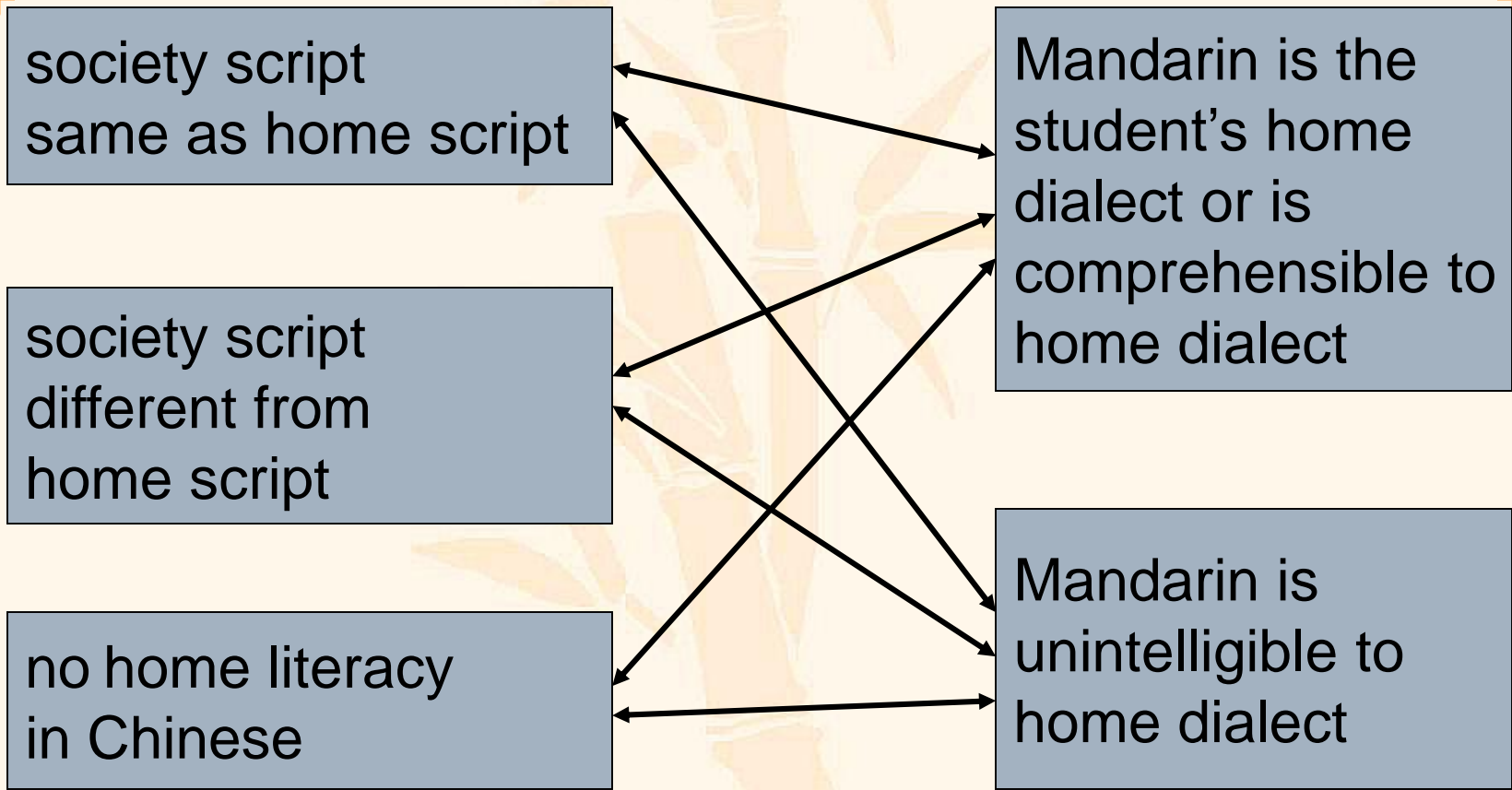
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Chinese Scripts: simplified and traditional

□ 华裔美国学生
以及中国国际
留学生。

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Scripts and dialects



Students of Chinese Background: unpacking heterogeneity

- Chinese **Heritage** Students
- Chinese **International** Students
- *Regarding various Chinese-background students as a homogenous group can be problematic*

Chinese Heritage Students

- Early linguistic exposure in the home
- Some proficiency in Chinese
- Bilingual to limited extent
- Dominant in English
- Ethnic/cultural connection to China

Home language

Community language

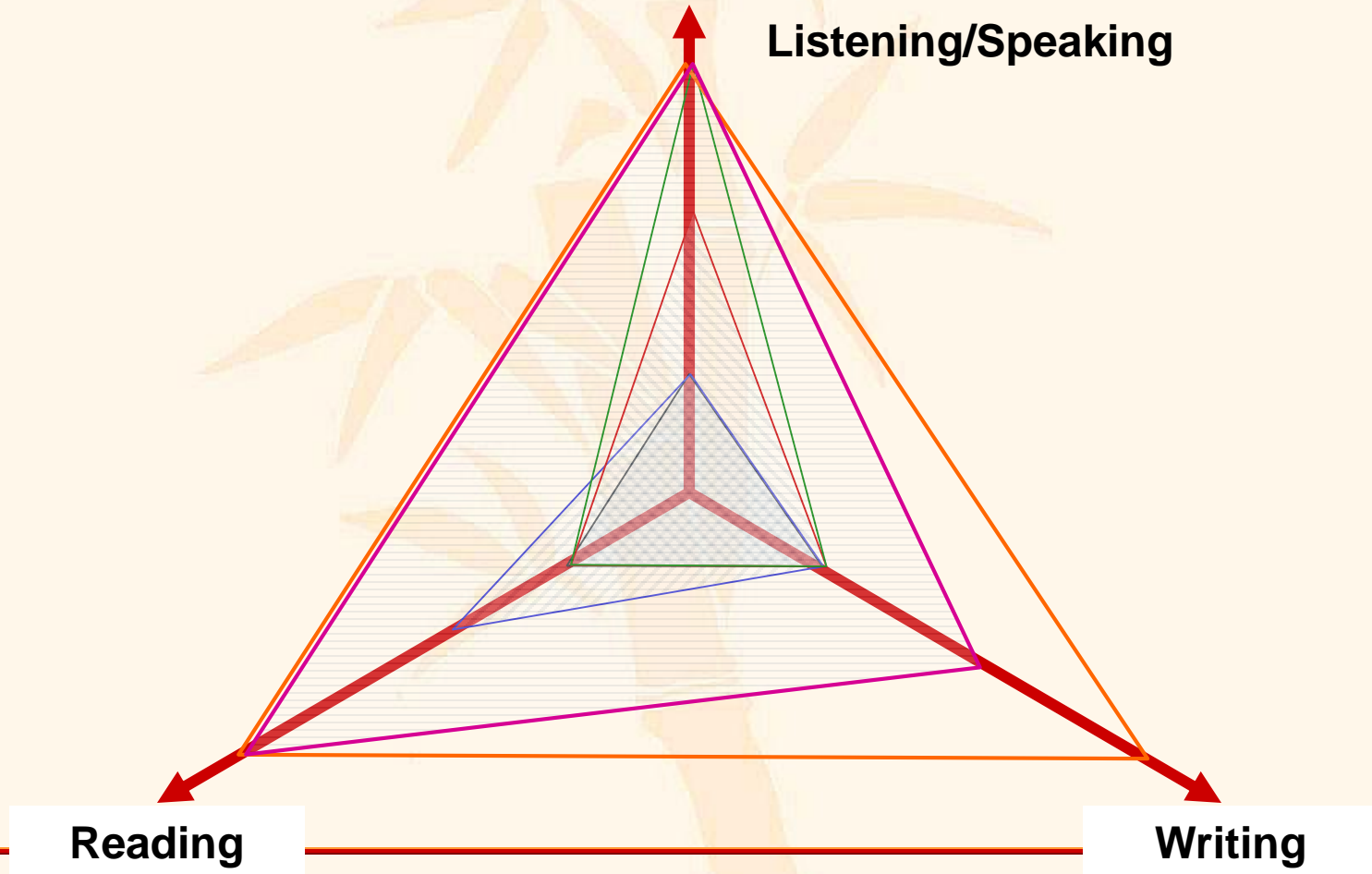
Native language

Mother tongue

	Nancy	Mark	Steve	Lucy	Henry	Tom
Birth place	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Indonesia	Mainland China	U.S.	U.S.
Age of US arrival	4	6	8	5	Parents from TW	Parents from HK
Home dialect	Cantonese	Mandarin; Southern Min	English, Mandarin, Indonesian	Mandarin	Mandarin; Southern Min	Cantonese
Prior CHL experience	home	Church sponsored classes	home	Weekend classes; visits to China	home	home; tutor; HS classes
Language skills	Cantonese speaking; 100 word reading literacy	Speaking, listening	Speaking, listening, reading	Fairly strong in all skills	Advanced speaking (<i>Zhanglang</i> 蟑螂 => <i>zanglang</i> 脏螂)	Speaking and listening
Stated learning goals	Learn Mandarin (<i>qing</i> (请) or <i>qin</i> (亲)?)	Reading and writing	writing	Classical and literary Chinese	Reading and writing	Culture

Hendryx, J. (2008). "The CHL Learners' existing linguistic knowledge and abilities", in A. W. He & Y. Xiao (eds.) *Chinese as a Heritage Language*, pp. 53-66. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Variability: comparing 6 profiles



Chinese International Students

- Those who hold Student Visa
- Talent
- Wealth– China's nouveau riche
- US education as symbol of status
- New arrivals vs. old timers
- Undergraduate vs. graduate students

Outline

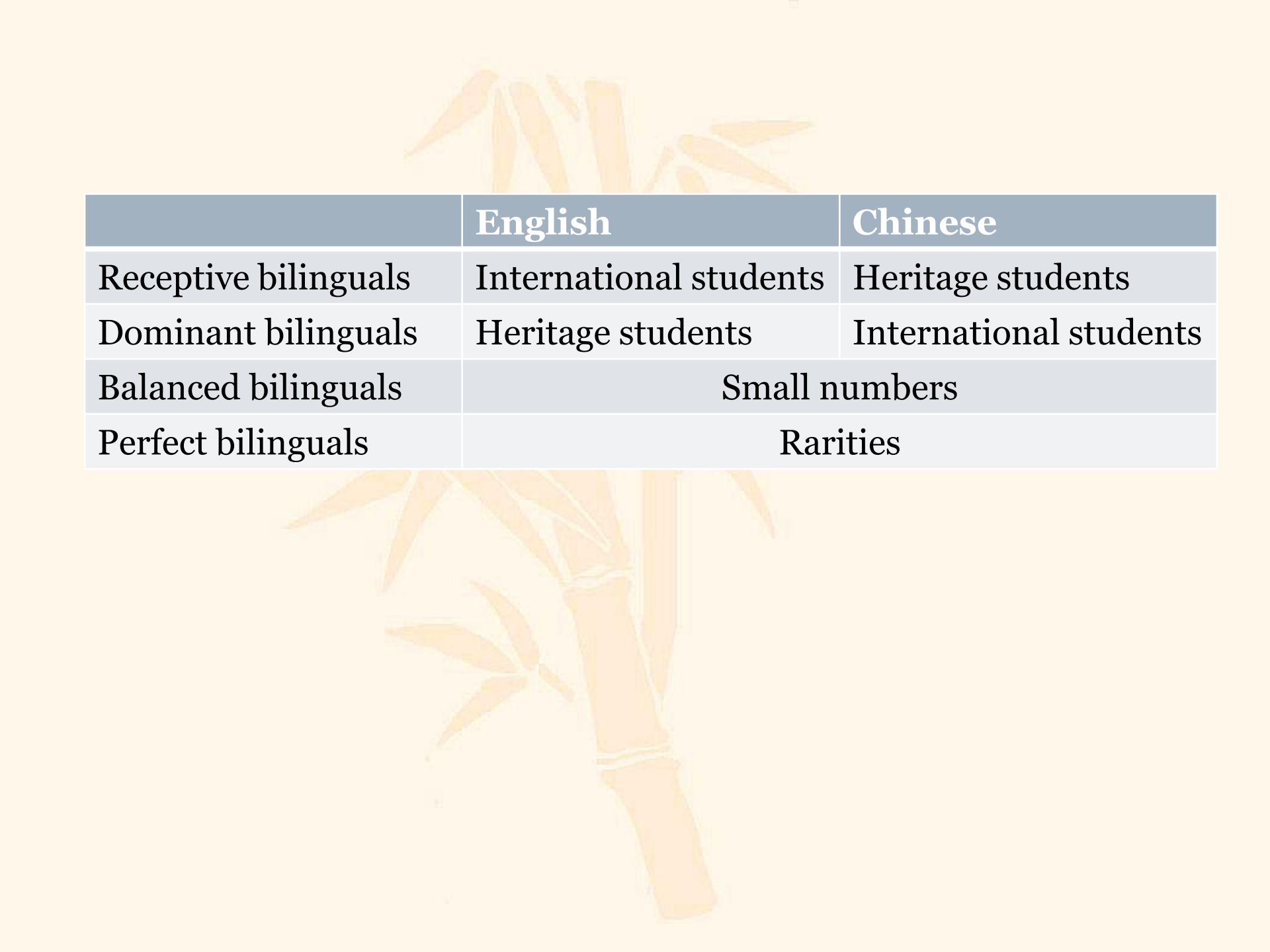
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Linguistic Repertoires

- ❑ **Receptive/passive bilinguals:** native fluency in one language, and can understand but not speak a second language
- ❑ **Dominant bilinguals:** native fluency in language one, with elementary to intermediate proficiency in language two
- ❑ **Balanced bilinguals:** use both languages but do not necessarily pass for a native speaker in either language
- ❑ **Perfect bilinguals/ “gold standards”:** speak two languages with natively like fluency, indistinguishable from native speakers of either language.
- ❑ *All are assets in today’s globalized economy as they navigate cross-cultural differences and bridge linguistic divides.*



	English	Chinese
Receptive bilinguals	International students	Heritage students
Dominant bilinguals	Heritage students	International students
Balanced bilinguals	Small numbers	
Perfect bilinguals	Rarities	

Chinese Heritage Students: challenges

- *As more Chinese International students come to American campuses, it seems easier to forget that Chinese Americans exist outside of this one subgroup of prominent international students*
- *A growing awareness of (and sometimes animus toward) Chinese International students on campuses that in turn negatively impacts Chinese American students*

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Learning Styles: Culture & Cognition

- Differences vs. Deficits
- Common cultural perceptions: modest and diligent; highly value education; respectful of authorities (elder people, teachers and scholars)
- Common (negative) perceptions: rote, silent and passive

The Western meaning of 'education'

“**Education**” is derived from the Latin *ēducātiō*:

ē- ("from, out of")

dūcō ("I lead, I conduct")

<i>Case</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<u><i>nominative</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiō</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnēs</i></u>
<u><i>genitive</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnis</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnum</i></u>
<u><i>dative</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnī</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnibus</i></u>
<u><i>accusative</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnem</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnēs</i></u>
<u><i>ablative</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōne</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnibus</i></u>
<u><i>vocative</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiō</i></u>	<u><i>ēducātiōnēs</i></u>

The Chinese meaning of 'education'

□ 教育



Cultural Foundations of Chinese Education

- the Imperial Civil Examinations (科舉, abolished 1905)
- Western Learning-- *“Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application”* (中學為體, 西學為用)
- New Culture Movement (新文化運動) – *a new Chinese culture inspired by global/western values (esp. science and democracy) (1910s-1920s)*
- reduplication of the Soviet model (1950s-1960s)
- explorations of new approaches to education since the economic reforms in the late 1970s

Education: East and West

- Confucian heritage: modesty and diligence, harmony, order, respect for authorities, and pragmatic acquisition of knowledge
- Western tradition: equalitarianism, individual development, independent and critical thinking, communication and cooperation

Features commonly associated with 'American' education	Features commonly associated with 'Chinese' education	
Deep learning	Surface learning	
Critical thinking	Memorization	
Participatory	Passive	
Ability	Assessment	
Self-improvement and overall growth	Accumulation of skills and facts	
Personal curiosity	Parental expectation	
Teacher as learning facilitator	Teacher as knowledge dispenser	
Kindle a fire	Fill a bucket	
Inspiration	Conclusion	

Different Views on Learning

<i>meaning of learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>A process of acquiring Truth and Skills</i>• <i>Acquire something concrete, useful</i>• <i>Acquire something accepted, recognized, legitimized, validated</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>A process of exploration, discovery and perfection</i>
<i>process of learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>To move from not knowing, not possessing, not commanding Truth and Skills to knowing, possessing and commanding them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>To verify or falsify what is given through the student's own reflection, reasoning, critique, observation, experiences or experiments.</i>
<i>optimal mode of learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>unconditionally listen to the professor and accept what the professor says.</i>• <i>participation would not be necessary or productive;</i>• <i>Premature/excessive participation could disrupt and delay the professor's transmission of 'truth' and 'skills'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>discussion and debate, between not only students and students but also students and professors.</i>• <i>Learning from the professor AND from fellow students.</i>

Different Views on Communication

<i>the role of language?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>medium of conveying information and meaning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>means to construct and discover information and meaning</i>
<i>the value of communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>what has been validated by the authorities and experts</i>• <i>What others would find valuable or interesting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Meaning emerges from interaction.</i>• <i>Communication gives shape and significance to meaning</i>
<i>the moment for participation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>when ideas and information are 'correct' and 'accepted'.</i>• <i>when others can understand me!</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Communication is a process of self-discovery, self-perfection and a process of mutual-discovery and mutual-perfection.</i>• <i>Anytime, all the time!</i>

Questions about Learning: East and West

- Q from US: how do Chinese teachers produce students who perform so well on standardized tests and international competitions (in all areas beyond math and science)?
- Q from China: how do American teachers produce students who go on to create new companies and industries that end up dominating the global economy? What is the magic for 'creativity'?

Rethinking Some Dichotomies

- Deep learning (critical thinking) without surface learning (memorization)?
- Participatory learning (collaborative, exploratory) – how and when?
- Ability-orientation (what and why of the options) vs. assessment-orientation (what's the correct answer?)
- Individual vs./in the collective?
- Confucius and “learning” (学问)
- *Are Chinese students obedient, passive and non-participative-rote-learners? Maybe, or maybe not.*

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Instructional Implications

- Understand why students of Chinese background may be different (but certainly not necessarily deficient)
- Know our students, beyond their physical appearances
- Turn students' existing features (esp. learning styles) into assets, not liabilities
- Keep in mind: *In a globally constituted university, many of our very best students were not trained the “American” way*
- Nurture the ability to combine the best from the East with the best from the West
- Encourage personal transformation -- changing aspects of the culture if they are counter-productive in the U.S.

More specifically,

- ❑ Be explicit about expectations and try to give examples or models.
- ❑ Provide options for success.
- ❑ Discuss cross-cultural challenges explicitly.
- ❑ Reinforce the student's strengths while explaining what he/she still needs to work on.
- ❑ Recognize that students may be differently acculturated to classroom situations.
- ❑ Don't assume that a student who looks "foreign/different" is an international student or that one who exhibits writing difficulties is necessarily an ESL speaker.
- ❑ <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalization>

Policy Recommendations?

- **Our mission:** global engagement; bringing talented faculty, students and scholars here from all around the world; clear and unequivocal support for all students of Chinese background, who are part of the fabric of University life.
- Develop intercultural competence for all.
- Ensure that the voices of all students of Chinese background are heard and addressed.
- Help all students of Chinese background find the resources they need -- academic, social, linguistic, or psychological.
- **Our moment:** NOW.

Thank you! 谢谢! 谢谢!

子曰：“知者不惑，仁者不忧，勇者不惧”

The cultivated know no bafflements.

The compassionate experience no agonies.

The courageous harbor no fears.

-- Confucius

[translated by AWH]