

Development and Future Prospects of the Sichuan Dialect

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Abstract: With the changes of the times and the development of technology, Sichuan dialect is facing countless risks and challenges, and its inheritance and uniqueness are severely impacted. At the same time, Sichuan dialect has also gained development opportunities under the support of the Internet and national policies. Based on the development context of Sichuan dialect, this paper comprehensively uses literature research method and factor analysis method to focus on its ups and downs and future development. On the basis of summarizing the development process of Chinese dialects, this paper analyzes the risks and opportunities faced by Sichuan dialect in today's environment and looks forward to its future development trend, hoping to promote social attention and attention to dialects and promote the long-term development of Sichuan dialect.

1. Introduction

Currently, with the rapid development of the Internet and the deepening of globalization, the spread of foreign languages and cultures such as Japanese, Korean, and Spanish in Sichuan has accelerated, bringing great impact on the inheritance and development of Sichuan dialect. At the same time, the comprehensive promotion of Mandarin has to some extent compressed the living space of dialects. In this situation, it is urgent to explore the development history, future development trend, and road of Sichuan dialect.

By summarizing the ups and downs of Sichuan dialect in history and exploring its future development direction, effective ways for the scientific, long-term, and healthy development of Sichuan dialect can be found, promoting the inheritance and development of local dialects in Sichuan, conforming to the national policy of protecting local dialects, and contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity in the world.

Literature research method, case analysis method, and factor analysis method are adopted. Referring to ancient poetry, contemporary literature, and national policy documents, the development context of Sichuan dialect from ancient times to the present is summarized and analyzed. Starting from the objective reality, the risks and opportunities faced by Sichuan dialect in the current environment are analyzed, and its future development trend is explored, providing a scientific basis for the protection and development of Sichuan dialect.

2. Development context of Sichuan dialect

(1) Early Shang Dynasty

Historical documents and relics indicate that there was already some contact between the Bashu region and the Central Plains region in the early Shang Dynasty. For example, there are records in Shang oracle bone inscriptions of "Wang Dengren's expedition to Shu", and wars were accompanied by communication, exchange, and integration of language and culture. In addition, "Pengzu, a Shu person, was a lord during the Yin dynasty" is recorded in "The Annals of Chu" in "Records of the Grand Historian". Pengzu, a Shu person, worked for the Shang Dynasty, and their languages must have been mutually intelligible in order to carry out their work. This shows that there must have been some fusion between Bashu and the Central Plains in terms of language.

(2) Pre-Qin period

After the Qin people entered Sichuan, Sichuan dialect and the Central Plains dialect infiltrated each other due to changes in policies and culture. According to "Huayang Guozhi", "Ten thousand Qin households were moved to Sichuan to settle, and the people began to speak Qin language", which provides strong evidence for the integration of pre-Qin Sichuan dialect and Central Plains dialect. Sichuan dialect absorbed and integrated elements of Qin language and continued to develop.

(3) Qin and Han Dynasties

The "Shudu Fu" records that "the Shu people began to communicate with China, and their language was somewhat similar to that of the Central Plains." During the Qin and Han dynasties, the construction of roads such as the "Straight Road" gradually improved transportation, and a large number of people from the Central Plains migrated to the Sichuan region, bringing the Central Plains language into Sichuan and effectively promoting the formation of the Sichuan dialect in the late Western Han Dynasty.

(4) Three Kingdoms Period

During the Three Kingdoms period, the division of Wei, Shu, and Wu led to a large number of people from other regions migrating to Sichuan to take refuge, which promoted the fusion of language between Sichuan and other regions^[1].

(5) Tang and Song Dynasties

Many Tang Dynasty poets had experiences of going to Sichuan. For example, Wang Wei went to Shu to take office and wrote down the rainy night scenery of Shu, "one night in the mountains, one hundred springs in the trees". In addition, Li Bai mostly lived in Shu when he was a teenager, writing down the Lushan waterfall "flying down three thousand feet, suspected to be the Milky Way fell nine days" through the ages^[2]. From the numerous descriptions of Shu in the Tang Dynasty poets, it is not difficult to see that the Central Plains and Shu personnel and language and cultural exchanges are very close; then, "the Tang capital of Chang'an, every bandit, often run, rely on Shu". Therefore, after rushing to the north before the subjugation, it was also lucky to have Shu. Just as Yu Shenxing said in the Ming Dynasty, in the later "An and Shi rebellion". Chang'an, the capital of the Tang Dynasty, every time there are thieves, they are always running out, relying on Shu. Therefore, if you run north again without subjugating the country, you are lucky to have Shu. In the Tang Dynasty, whenever there were bandits in Chang'an, people would flee, relying on Shu. Thus, even if they fled again and again to the north, they did not perish, thanks to Shu. Tang Xuanzong and others took refuge in Shu, which triggered a huge wave of immigration. In the Song Dynasty, there were frequent disputes between the ethnic minorities and the Han nationality, and the "change of Jingkang" appeared, and the population flow in Shu intensified. The war and migration of the Tang and Song Dynasties accelerated the integration of the Shu dialect and the languages of the Central Plains. During the Song Dynasty, Sichuan dialect gradually became more distinct from the

Central Plains dialect, and the famous poet Su Shi once commented that "the Sichuan dialect is different from the Central Plains dialect".

(6) Ming and Qing Dynasties

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Sichuan was relatively isolated from the outside world due to its geographical location, which helped to preserve the local dialect. However, with the development of transportation and communication, the influence of the Central Plains dialect gradually increased. In the war against the Yuan Dynasty, the Song Dynasty caused a sharp decrease of the people in Sichuan, from 2.59 million households in Jiading in 16 years in the Southern Song Dynasty to 120,000 in the Yuan Dynasty in 19 years^[3], so the Ming government had to organize Huguang to fill the river. At this time, the Shu language blended with the languages of Huguang and other places, although it was still based on the Tang, Song and Shu languages, it was essentially similar to the old-school Sichuan dialect in western and southern Sichuan today.

(7) Republican Period

In the early 20th century, the New Culture Movement promoted the use of vernacular Chinese, which had a significant impact on the Sichuan dialect. The adoption of the vernacular Chinese helped to promote the standardization of the Sichuan dialect. With the development of society and economy, the influence of the Central Plains dialect has become stronger, and the Sichuan dialect has been gradually influenced by the national standard language. On February 6, 1956, in order to promote the economic and cultural exchanges among the provinces in China, the State Council promulgated the State Council Instructions on the Promotion of Putonghua^[4]. Article 19 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China revised in 1982 clearly stated that "the state promotes the national Putonghua."^[5] The Sichuan dialect was impacted, and the living space is relatively compressed.

3. Characteristics of Sichuan Dialect

The Sichuan dialect has many unique characteristics, such as:

(1) Tonal system: The Sichuan dialect has a complex tonal system, with eight tones in some areas.

(2) Vocabulary: The Sichuan dialect has many unique vocabulary words and expressions, such as "wa" (meaning "I"), "zhe" (meaning "this"), and "tou" (meaning "head").

(3) Pronunciation: The Sichuan dialect has distinct pronunciation features, such as the use of the retroflex consonants and the reduction of the final consonants.

(4) Grammar: The Sichuan dialect has its own grammar rules, such as the use of the "le" particle to indicate completed actions and the use of the "ba" particle to indicate the object of the sentence.

3.1 Importance of Sichuan Dialect

(1) The Sichuan dialect plays an important role in the local culture and communication. It is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural heritage. The Sichuan dialect is widely used in daily life, such as in family gatherings, social interactions, and local performances.

(2) The Sichuan dialect has played a significant role in literature and art. Many famous works of literature and art, such as the Sichuan Opera and the Sichuan cuisine, are closely related to the Sichuan dialect. The unique characteristics of the dialect have also been reflected in the works of many famous writers and poets, such as Ba Jin and Li Bai.

(3) The Sichuan dialect has contributed to the diversity and richness of the Chinese language. Its unique features and expressions have enriched the Chinese language and culture, and have attracted the attention and interest of people from all over the world.

3.2 Development crisis

3.2.1 Domestic

(1) Impact of Promotion of Mandarin

As the official language of China, Mandarin has been heavily promoted and supported. Laws and regulations, such as the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, promote the use of Mandarin as the national language. Mandarin is the official language of education, from kindergarten to higher education, and is the language used in mainstream media. The promotion of Mandarin has inevitably posed challenges to local dialects.

(2) Acceptance by the Public

The Sichuan dialect's acceptance varies in different provinces due to geographical and historical factors. The Guangdong and Hunan provinces have a high acceptance of the Sichuan dialect due to historical reasons. The Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan regions are geographically close and have similar accents, which also contributes to the higher acceptance of the Sichuan dialect in these areas. However, in some other provinces, the Sichuan dialect may be difficult for outsiders to understand due to its unique pronunciation and vocabulary. In addition, there are some unique words in dialects, such as "Longmen array" (i. e. chat), "bashi" (i. e. comfort), and "drum to" (i. e. force). It is difficult for outsiders to understand the dialect specific vocabulary, reducing the recognition of the Sichuan dialect.

(3) Large Population of Migrant Workers and Students

Due to the economic gap between eastern and western China, many people from Sichuan migrate to the eastern provinces for work or education. This large population loss has a severe impact on the inheritance and development of the local dialect. In 2021, the number of migrant workers in Sichuan province reached 16.79 million, accounting for about a quarter of the province's total population. The serious population loss has a very serious impact on the inheritance of local dialects.

3.2.2 Overseas

(1) Low Awareness and Spread

Compared to Cantonese and Mandarin, which have a high level of awareness and are widely used overseas, the Sichuan dialect is at a disadvantage. Most movies and TV shows exported overseas use Cantonese and Mandarin, with few featuring the Sichuan dialect, resulting in a smaller overseas audience for the dialect.

(2) Impact of Foreign Culture

With the development of globalization and technology, foreign languages such as English, Polish, and Japanese are spreading in Sichuan through the internet. Sichuan locals tend to learn a foreign language to enrich their spiritual life and improve their competitiveness, which may lead to a neglect of the local dialect. The impact of foreign culture is a challenge to the inheritance and development of the local dialect.

3.3 Development Opportunities

(1) Government Policy Support

The Chinese government has emphasized the importance of protecting all ethnic languages and dialects in the "National Medium and Long-Term Plan for Language and Character Work Reform and Development (2012-2020)."

(2) Inclusiveness and Development of Mandarin

Mandarin has absorbed some vocabulary from local dialects to adapt to contemporary

development. This integration has promoted the spread and understanding of local dialects, increasing their audience.

(3) Promotion through Film and Television

Sichuan dialect has appeared in many contemporary Chinese movies and TV shows, such as "Crazy Stone," "The Red," and "Crazy Racing," increasing its recognition nationwide^[6].

(4) Increased Awareness of Cultural Heritage

As hometown economies continue to develop, people from Sichuan are becoming more proud of their heritage and increasing their willingness to use and pass on the local language and culture. The increased awareness and acceptance of local dialects provide an opportunity for their long-term development.

3.4 Development Direction and Approach

(1) Integration of Dialects and Film and Television Media

In recent years, Sichuan dialect has gradually entered the public's view as a language medium in rap music, film and television works, and other cultural and creative products, such as "Tomorrow off work," "The Sun Is Out," and "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, Happy." To increase social attention and acceptance of Sichuan dialects, it is recommended to incorporate the dialect into TV and film, advertisements, and music. Encouraging Sichuan TV and radio stations to use the dialect can also help awaken pride and awareness of the local language among the Sichuan people, ultimately promoting its spread and inheritance.

(2) Integration of Dialects and Education

Some provinces have already explored and experimented with dialects in schools, such as the publication of "Fuzhou Dialect Curriculum for Primary School Students" by the Fujian Education Publishing House, and 32 schools in Fuzhou became the first batch of dialect inheritance schools in Fuzhou in 2020, offering Fuzhou dialect curriculum. The results of Fuzhou dialect entering schools have been fruitful and significant. It is recommended to learn from this case and draw on experiences from other provinces, encouraging Sichuan dialect to enter schools, letting Sichuan dialect enter Sichuan classrooms, strengthening the importance of local language and cultural inheritance, and gradually cultivating and enhancing students' confidence and pride in their local cultural language.

(3) Integration of Dialects and Digital Technology

In 2013, the "National Medium and Long-Term Plan for Language and Character Work Reform and Development (2012-2020)" was officially released, which explicitly stated the establishment of a Chinese language resource audio database. This study aims to utilize modern digital technology to preserve and protect the Sichuan dialect, while also developing and perfecting online digital resources for the dialect. By doing so, the study seeks to promote the inheritance and development of the dialect, ultimately contributing to the protection of world cultural diversity.

4. Conclusion

Sichuan dialect has experienced development and integration throughout the ages, demonstrating strong vitality and inclusiveness. In the era of great changes, great development, and great integration, the protection and development of Sichuan dialect are urgent. As one of the issues of the times, the inheritance and development of Sichuan dialects should keep pace with the times, scientifically and reasonably.

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