

Chineseness and World Englishes

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The English used by Chinese is infused with Chineseness in its phonology, lexicology, syntax, or discourse styles. The particular characteristics make up the distinct cultural element, which in the case of China has been in idioms, phrases coined during political movements, as well as lexical connotations and semantic shifts. It also happens that in China the very act of naming the preferred variety of English for use by Chinese is likewise infused with Chineseness. In world Englishes scholarship it is customary to identify a variety by the formula of *adjective form of region/country + English*, as in German English, Indian English, or Uzbek English. However, among some Chinese educators and language specialists, the operative identifier is China English because it is believed that this formulation better captures the spirit of contemporary China. Chinese English is rejected because it is too closely associated with Chinglish and Chinese Pidgin English, both of which are associated with the “old” China and are considered inferior varieties to be avoided. The term China English not only has implications for naming practices; the work of such contemporary writers as Ha Jin, whose first language is Chinese and who is an award winning author for his fiction written in English, also raises issues regarding the status of China English as a viable construct in world Englishes studies.

Grounded in the classical World Englishes perspective, this paper explores the notion “China English” as a sociolinguistic innovation and the Chineseness of Ha Jin's recent novel, *A Free Life*, and then relates these two illustrations of linguistic creativity to one another.