

'CUV Chinese': A Transnational Liturgical Register from the Chinese diaspora to Greater China

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Abstract

Due to globalization, many religious communities and networks exist in diaspora contexts, and this comes with sociolinguistic implications. Some of these are common to all migrant settings; others are more specific to religious communities. As part of a three-year ethnographic study on Chinese Protestant churches in the Netherlands, this paper examines 'CUV Chinese', a liturgical register based on the Chinese Union Version (CUV) Bible. It is used in evangelical services for international students from Greater China, jointly operated by diasporic Chinese Protestant churches in the Netherlands and allied East Asian counterparts. This paper discusses the register's linguistic features and how it is transmitted. 'CUV Chinese' proves the norm in the diasporic churches, which differs from Modern Standard Chinese in word use and grammatical patterns, as a consequence of the CUV Bible translated by Anglo-American missionaries between the 1890s and 1910s. Current Chinese student members of these churches learn this liturgical register through religious services and written communication from the church, much of which is distributed online. Crucial factors in this diffusion are the clerics' authority and a doctrine of biblical literalism. The students actively consolidate the register when they practice it in religious meetings, but also outside such settings. The conclusions are: 1) the diasporic Chinese Protestant churches are seen as an authority on Chinese language by their adherents in a way that would not be possible in Greater China, where religious institutions do not have this norm-setting role; and 2) the CUV register, while described here in the context of a peripheral diasporic Chinese community, spreads into the center of Greater China to an extent not seen before because of the

transnationalism of its users and their online presence. Contrary to Chinese convention, the diasporic church members do not limit their use of the religious register to religious contexts.

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