Opponent's opinion
on Ms. Hu Wenmin's dissertation
Sociolinguistic Dynamics in Yulinese: Usage, Attitudes, and Influencing Factors
A Comprehensive Statistical and Thematic Analysis

Hu Wenmin's dissertation, *Sociolinguistic Dynamics of Yulinese: Usage, Attitudes, and Influencing Factors* provides a rigorous mixed-methods investigation into the vitality of Yulinese, a dialect spoken in Yulin City within China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The study combines statistical analysis of survey data from 406 respondents with qualitative insights from 24 interviews, offering a nuanced exploration of generational shifts, sociodemographic influences, and community perceptions shaping the dialect's trajectory.

At the beginning of my review, I would like to comment on Ms. Hu Wenmin's work, primarily as a Sinologist. Of course, I will also gloss over general linguistic and sociolinguistic issues, although my professional interest differs significantly from her direction. While the student is primarily interested in the dialectology of the modern Chinese language synchronically, I am fond of traditional Chinese philology diachronically. However, she mentions her field of research very sensitively, with a deep understanding of the whole problem.

The thesis is meticulously organized into distinct sections that systematically guide the reader through the research process, findings, implications, and it is divided into seven essential parts:

Chapter 1: "Introduction," lays the groundwork for the dissertation by providing background on Yulinese and its sociolinguistic environment. It includes definitions of key terms such as dialect and introduces Yulin City, offering an overview of the dialects spoken there. The chapter also outlines the research aims, methodology, and the study's significance.

Chapter 2: "Language Attitudes and Research Methodological Frameworks," explores theoretical concepts and previous research on language attitudes. It defines attitude and language attitude and examines the factors influencing them, such as gender, age, and education. Additionally, it reviews studies on this topic toward Cantonese using methods like the Matched-Guise Technique and questionnaires.

Chapter 3: "Methodology" The research employs a dual analytical framework: quantitative and qualitative analysis while the first assessed language proficiency, usage across domains (e.g., home, market, workplace), and attitudes via Likert-scale questions. Statistical tools

like ANOVA and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identified correlations between variables such as age, education, and language practices; the second deals with semi-structured interviews with participants, which revealed thematic patterns in identity, cultural preservation, and socio-economic pressures. Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis was applied to code and interpret narratives. It details the research strategy, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative section covers the survey design, sampling methods, pilot testing, data collection, statistical tools, and PCA. The qualitative section explains the interview design, sampling strategies, and data analysis techniques. The chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations applied to the surveys and interviews.

Chapter 4: "Statistical findings concerning the respondents' language use," presents quantitative results. This includes data on childhood language acquisition, proficiency in Yulinese, and usage patterns across settings such as home and markets. The chapter also examines variations in language use based on demographic factors like gender, age, education level, place of birth/residence, and occupation.

Chapter 5: "Statistical findings about the respondents' language attitudes," delves into respondents' relation to Yulinese. It presents statistical measures, including mean values and standard deviations, for factors such as affinity toward the dialect, its perceived practical value, and any anxiety associated with its use. The chapter also employs PCA to identify attitude clusters and explores the influence of factors like gender, age, socio-economic status, and educational background on them.

Chapter 6: "Qualitative study of interviewees' proficiency in Yulinese, language use and language attitudes towards Yulinese," presents findings from interviews, organized by age groups. Key themes explored include language proficiency, domains of use (family communication, school interactions), attitudes toward Yulinese, and concerns about its future.

Chapter 7: "Conclusions and Discussion," summarizes the key insights derived from the statistical and thematic analyses presented in the dissertation. The chapter interprets these findings in the context of relevant theoretical frameworks and prior research. Finally, it discusses the research's implications, proposing practical measures, such as policy recommendations, for preserving Yulinese.

The dissertation is organized to balance quantitative rigor and qualitative depth. Each chapter builds logically upon the previous one. The introduction sets the context for the study, while the methodological chapters describe the tools and approaches used for data collection and analysis. The results chapters systematically present the findings, beginning with statistical analyses and followed by qualitative insights. This clear and coherent structure allows the dissertation to address the complex sociolinguistic dynamics of Yulinese in a comprehensive manner.

I also want to express my satisfaction with Ms. Hu Wenmin's dissertation topic. It delves into the sociolinguistic landscape of the Yulinese dialect within the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative thematic explorations, comprehensively examine the usage patterns, attitudes, and factors influencing the vitality of Yulinese. The study explores a range of demographic and social influences, providing insights into language proficiency, practical applications, and perceptions of Yulinese among its speakers. Ultimately, the dissertation seeks to inform potential strategies for preserving and promoting the use of Yulinese in its community.

I am particularly close to those parts of the dissertation, which relate to the definitions of the terms DIALECTS (pp. 4–6), LANGUAGE ATTITUDE (pp. 10–17), and CANTONESE (pp. 18–27); furthermore, the whole Chapter 3 "Methodology" is a masterpiece that I will recommend as a compulsory reading to my students.

I find several other stimuli throughout the work, mainly because it systematically and in-depth deals with Chinese dialectology, especially from a sociolinguistic perspective, the analysis of which is always more complex. The involvement of the Chinese research context in the Euro-American context is exceptionally beneficial; unfortunately, it is also not given the attention it deserves in the West.

One of the most important key findings within the frame of language use for me is that Yulinese remains dominant in informal settings (family interactions, local markets, etc.) but is retreating to formal domains like education and workplaces. In Yulinese-speaking communities, increased urbanization and higher levels of education in Mandarin are strongly associated with a decline in the intergenerational transmission of the Yulinese language. Younger generations frequently engage in code-switching between Yulinese and Mandarin or gradually abandon Yulinese altogether, primarily driven by the pursuit of socio-economic advancement and

integration into broader urban society. Respondents displayed ambivalent feelings toward Yulinese: while many took pride in the language as an important symbol of their cultural identity, they also viewed it as "rustic" or "unprofessional" within urban environments.

Additionally, anxiety about the language's impact on children's prospects was common – almost two thirds of parents actively discouraged their children from speaking Yulinese (sic!), concerned that it might interfere with learning Mandarin and limit future educational and career opportunities. Age is the strongest predictor of Yulinese usage, with older generations using the language more frequently than younger ones. Education also plays a significant role, as higher education levels correlate with negative attitudes toward Yulinese: university-educated respondents are more likely to express the view that the language is "obsolete." Moreover, there is a clear urban-rural divide: rural residents report higher daily use of Yulinese than their urban counterparts do.

The student's thorough and highly satisfactory description reveals a groundbreaking new finding that Yulinese is qualitatively measurable compared to other Chinese dialects from the perspective of general linguistics and sociolinguistics. In the context of this statement, the choice of the topic of Ms. Hu Wenmin's work can also be assessed as very wise, eliminating any doubts about the originality of the submitted work.

Therefore, the student offers the Commission high-quality professional work. Furthermore, it brings new knowledge and perspectives to Euro-American Sinology and corrects our existing expertise and knowledge complexity. Finally yet importantly, I want to point out the applicability of the presented dissertation, which has numerous interdisciplinary overlaps. Therefore, the Commission will not be surprised by my recommendation to publish the work as a research monograph.

Ms. Hu Wenmin can process a selected professional problem with an interdisciplinary approach and conclusions with the dissertation. In this sense, the present work is highly successful. As a linguist, the student had to face many complex tasks. The breadth of the author's view presented by the extensive bibliography of the thesis (p. 182–206) is respectable. In this sense, the principal and fundamental novelty that the work brings is especially the student's analysis of Chinese dialectology with the tools of sociolinguistics. At the same time, I appreciate the author's consistency and correctness concerning the research results of other colleagues.

I must underline the system's grasp and processing of the topic in terms of content. The student first determines the methodological approaches she places in a broader context. Then, she creates a solid thought framework for her work, making her interpretation logical and understandable even for non-professionals. This maximally systematic structure of the work thus also facilitates orientation in a specific, very clearly constructed text. Therefore, I have to evaluate positively even the distribution of individual parts of the work and their organic interconnectedness.

In terms of form, I do not have fundamental reservations about Ms. Hu Wenmin's work. The Commission members may find it unnecessary to emphasize this fact when defending her dissertation. However, fulfilling the formal requirements makes any dissertation much easier to read an apparent text but still quite complicated. At the same time, the correctly applied form testifies beyond any doubt about mastering the final preparation of the text, which must also be emphasized and repeatedly evaluated positively.

Finally, yet importantly, I have to appreciate how incredibly complicated it is to be acquainted with a culturally different discourse in many respects and successfully interpret it. After reading the work, one must state that Ms. Hu Wenmin dealt with honour. The presented work demonstrates a deep understanding of not only Chinese linguistics but also general linguistics, and the dissertation is written in very good English.

Based on research, using rich documentary material and scientific methods, the student demonstrates the ability and readiness for independent theoretical work and solving practical problems in her field. Therefore, I consider the work of Ms. Hu Wenmin's *Sociolinguistic Dynamics in Yulinese: Usage, Attitudes, and Influencing Factors—A Comprehensive Statistical and Thematic Analysis* to be very successful in terms of content and form and scientifically beneficial, which is, from my perspective, rarely processed with such erudition.

The dissertation underscores the complex interplay between globalization, identity, and linguistic survival. While Yulinese faces significant pressures, its cultural embeddedness in traditions and kinship networks suggests pathways for sustainable preservation. Hu Wenmin's work provides a template for studying endangered dialects through integrative methodologies.

This study contributes theoretically and practically by challenging linear models of language shift. It shows that the decline of Yulinese varies depending on context, with notable resilience in ritual and family settings. Practically, it advocates for policies that support Yulinese use in

media and education while emphasizing the importance of community-led revitalization initiatives, such as local theatre productions and oral history projects.

Furthermore, Ms. Hu Wenmin's dissertation demonstrates the ability to work on a chosen professional problem with an interdisciplinary approach and conclusions. Based on the analysis of extensive language material, the student describes the fundamental manifestations of Chinese dialectology as a system, especially but not exclusively from the perspective of sociolinguistics. Therefore, I believe this study meets the requirements for a dissertation, and I recommend it for defense in front of the Committee.

Defense questions:

- **Daily Use and Regional Trends**
  How does a dialect show up in your daily live, at home, markets, or local festivals, and how does this compare to language changes in nearby areas like Nanning or Guilin?
- **Personal Influence on Language Views**
  How do factors like your age, job, or family background shape whether you see your dialect as a source of pride or a barrier to opportunities?
- **Research Methods in Your Context**
  How did combining surveys and interviews help capture your mother tongue "story"?

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