
Abstract:
From the early nineteenth century to the present, English has been loathed and embraced in dynastic China, subject to the prevailing political climate from late Qing dynasty (1644–1911) to the People's Republic (1949–). Since the heydays when Europeans were treated as ‘red-haired barbarians’, the power differential between the Middle Kingdom and the West has influenced the relative status of English and Chinese, and shaped communication patterns between their speakers. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, China has clearly emerged as a major player in world politics and the global economy. She also has the largest number of learners and users of English in the world. In an increasingly globalized world, more and more mainland Chinese find it necessary to communicate in English, mainly with people outside of China. Local, Chinese-specific meanings and lexicogrammatical features naturally arise and can no longer be dismissed categorically as non-standard, as shown in a list of data-driven ‘China English’ or ‘Chinese English’ lexicogrammatical features. This paper traces the historical background to the gradual emergence of China English, from strong resistance in late Qing dynasty to total embrace in the age of ventures to the moon. Based on the criteria for assessing the emerging of a new variety, there is strong indication that China English (CE) is truly coming of age, and that there should be no more doubt about its legitimacy as a member of the family of World Englishes. Implications for other new varieties of English will be briefly discussed.