



Undergraduate Dissertation coversheet & feedback form

PLEASE COMPLETE THE TOP SECTION OF THIS FORM AND SUBMIT ONE COPY WITH YOUR DISSERTATION

For completion by student:

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*Educational
support needs:*
No

Dissertation title:

The Remnants of Ancient Pronunciation in the Initials of the Sha County Dialect

沙縣方言聲母中的古音痕跡

Supervisor: Professor Chia-Ning Chu

*Word count:*1000

I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.

Signed Yujie Chen.....

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AI Acknowledgement

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I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

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English Review

Reasons for Writing This Dissertation

My dissertation focuses on the dialect of my hometown, Shaxian. The decision to choose this topic was deeply connected to my encounter with phonology. Before studying this subject, I had never given much thought to my hometown dialect, nor did I truly appreciate its value. Growing up, Mandarin had already become the dominant language in my hometown, with only the older generation still using the local dialect among themselves. As a result, I could understand the dialect but had little ability to speak it fluently. However, everything changed when I was introduced to phonology through the classes of my supervisor, Professor Chia-Ning Chu. As I listened to his lectures on ancient Chinese sounds, I was struck by the realisation that many of the archaic phonological features he described were still present in my own hometown dialect. This discovery fascinated me and, for the first time, made me truly aware of how precious and irreplaceable dialects are. The widespread promotion of Mandarin in my hometown has had a profound impact on the local dialect. Today, apart from the elderly, most young people can no longer speak it, and if this trend continues, the dialect may gradually disappear. Recognising both the value and the vulnerability of my hometown dialect, I felt a strong desire to study and document it more deeply. I also hope that through my research, I can share what I have learned with others and help more people appreciate the richness and significance of dialects. It was this sense of purpose, combined with a growing passion for phonology, that led me to choose this topic for my dissertation.

Challenges in Writing This Dissertation

With the topic decided, my next concern was a more practical one: the issue of linguistic data. Having read many papers on Chinese dialects, I noticed that most authors conducted fieldwork, personally recording pronunciations using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). However, I had not received formal training in fieldwork methodology, and my familiarity with the IPA was still limited at the time, making it nearly impossible for me to collect and transcribe the data myself. Fortunately, previous scholars had already documented a considerable amount of data on the Shaxian dialect. In addition, as dialect preservation has received growing attention in China in recent years, an online linguistic corpus has been established, allowing users to both read and listen to recordings of native speakers. I was relieved to find that the Shaxian dialect was included in this corpus, as it meant my research had a solid empirical foundation to build upon.

During the writing process, one of the main challenges I faced was my limited familiarity with certain concepts in phonology. When reading academic papers, I often struggled with the technical terminology and lengthy arguments, and I frequently found myself skimming through the content without truly understanding it, simply because there was too much that was

unfamiliar to me. However, as I gradually began writing section by section, the scope of what I needed to read became more focused and manageable. This made it easier to engage with the material more carefully. Through repeated reading, continuous thinking, and revisiting key concepts, I slowly moved from confusion to clarity, and began to grasp how the arguments were structured and how the ideas connected with one another. And I was also fortunate to be studying in an era where artificial intelligence is widely accessible. When I encountered concepts I could not understand or ideas I could not untangle on my own, I found it helpful to consult AI tools for further explanation.

Beyond academic challenges, psychological barriers also made the writing process difficult at times. For me, getting started has always been the hardest part. I often did not know how to write the opening of a section, and would find myself stuck before I had even begun. In those moments, I learned to remind myself that it was alright to simply write down whatever came to mind, without striving for perfection from the outset. Writing something imperfect first, and refining it afterwards, gradually became my way of moving forward. I also frequently doubted the quality of my own work and lacked confidence in what I had written. What helped me through this was the guidance and encouragement of my supervisor. Every meeting with Professor Chu felt like an opportunity to recharge. He consistently offered kind and patient feedback, and his encouragement gave me the confidence to keep going. I am deeply grateful for his support throughout this process.

What I Have Learned

Finally, I would like to reflect on the insights gained from the process of writing this dissertation. One aspect that I find particularly rewarding is my improved ability to manage time effectively. Compared with my previous tendency to procrastinate, I was able to develop a reasonable schedule and carry out my work in a more organized and systematic manner, which represents significant progress. In addition, this writing process has enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of my research topic. Prior to beginning this dissertation, I had completed an oral presentation on the same subject; however, upon entering the stage of formal academic writing, I realized that my earlier work was relatively superficial and lacked depth. Through engaging with a substantial body of literature, I have gained a more comprehensive perspective on the topic and have identified aspects that I had previously overlooked. For example, I came to understand that identifying archaic phonological features in a dialect cannot rely solely on the correspondence between a single dialect's sound system and ancient Chinese. It is equally important to consider the synchronic dimension, because some features that appear to be traces of ancient pronunciation may in fact be the result of influence from neighbouring dialects. Nevertheless, this level of analysis remains insufficiently comprehensive. There are still many issues that could not be explored in greater depth within the scope of this dissertation, and these will require further study in the future.