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Language Attitudes of University Students in Jinan towards China English

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the perceptions of university students in Jinan, China, towards China English and how these perceptions determine the application of English by the students in various contexts. Since English remains a critical form of communication all over the world, China English has emerged as a local variety of the English language that reflects Chinese culture and identity. This study adopts a mixed design, where a questionnaire was applied to 169 students, and 15 students participated in focus group discussions. The study aims to investigate how students perceive China English and how their perceptions affect their use of China English in formal and informal settings. The results show that the participants are inclined to reserve the use of China English for casual and local conversation, despite considering China English a legitimate and culturally relevant form of English. However, the participants prefer to apply the standardized forms of English, such as American English or British English, in formal settings, including academic and professional situations. The disconnect between the recognition of China English at the ideological level and the reluctance to use it in formal settings suggests a border tension between accepting China English as a local variety of English and sticking with global norms. In terms of implications, these findings are significant to ongoing studies of World Englishes. They also suggest that English language teaching in China can benefit from adopting a more inclusive approach to embrace China English and help students balance their cultural identity with the demands of international communication.

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Keywords: China English; Language Attitudes; World Englishes; University Students in Jinan

1. Introduction

The worldwide use of English has contributed to the emergence of various linguistic forms, defined as World Englishes (WE)^[1]. These Englishes are considered different linguistic systems influenced by the cultural and social practices found in specific locales. In China, China English (CE) has been acknowledged as a newly characterized and localized variety of English, which incorporates Chinese language patterns, culture, and discourses, and preserves its grammatical correctness and international intelligibility^[2].

CE is not Chinglish. Chinglish has grammatically incorrect structures and originates from awkward translations. However, CE is bound by standard linguistic conventions and has been recognized as an efficient form of communication in informal and social contexts^[3]. However, in many educational settings in China, where only British and American English standards are adopted, CE is marginalized^[4]. This reflects more general ideological struggles between native-speaker norms and local varieties of English in English Language Teaching (ELT) throughout China.

For Chinese university students, these divergent language norms present challenges. Although students are exposed to CE in digital settings and daily conversations, they are discouraged from applying CE in academic settings. Therefore, understanding students' attitudes toward CE and how these attitudes shape their language use is crucial to addressing this ongoing tension in ELT practices in China.

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. In terms of its theoretical contribution, this study is relevant to the field of WE, as it explores the role of CE within Chinese education. Although CE has received some sociolinguistic attention, little research on its reception by Chinese university students has been done. This study contributes to linguistic diversity and language identity in ELT by examining students' attitudes toward CE and their use of CE in practice.

There is also practical significance to this study for EFL teachers, syllabus designers, and policymakers in China. The English language plays a dominant role in international communication, and hence it is important that students' atti-

tudes toward CE are understood to design effective language learning strategies. Insights from this study might motivate educators to implement educational procedures that foster variable language use while ensuring necessary linguistic precision.

In addition, the results of this study could raise the awareness of policymakers about the necessity to acknowledge CE as a legitimate variety of English in educational policies. Identifying the potential of CE as an instrumental communicative aid can assist students in gaining confidence in social and professional communication. Furthermore, the incorporation of CE activities into language study programs could help students better communicate when interacting across cultures, especially with other non-native speakers of English^[5].

Some of the earlier studies on China English and World Englishes have mainly focused on the ideological and pedagogical implications of these local varieties of English, especially in Chinese education. Kachru's^[1] Three Circles Model preconceived the realization of the dispersion of English in the world with the classification of China English as a type of English in the Expanding Circle. It has been noted in the studies that CE is frequently marginalized within the formal learning environment, subject to native-speaker ideals, even though its status as a valid variety is rising from an informal point of view^[3]. Both Fu^[4] and Christou et al.^[6] note that, although there has been some awareness of the communicative agency of CE, its application has generally remained limited to academic contexts due to the fear of examinations and professional reputation. The linguistic research on CE, including a recent contribution by Albrecht^[7], has revealed certain phonological, lexical, and syntactical characteristics of CE that imply its nativization and codification in various Chinese dialects. Nevertheless, CE is highly resisted in institutions, especially in formal academic settings, where students are not encouraged to integrate CE features for fear of damaging their academic records^[8].

Moreover, studies on language attitudes have pointed to the strong influence of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements of language attitudes in determining the level of involvement by learners in the non-native form of English.

The research by Liu et al.^[9] and Christou et al.^[6] demonstrates that attitudes toward CE affect language use in both informal and formal contexts among students. The current conflict between localization and global intelligibility symbolizes ideological issues at large when teaching languages. The work of recent studies by Wang and Wen^[10] and Lee and Kim^[11] leads to the perception of the shift in the paradigm of English pronunciation teaching in China, as teaching focused purely on native-like pronunciation expands to the view of intelligibility. Such discoveries indicate why an inclusive linguistic atmosphere, respecting the legitimacy of CE, as well as other non-standard varieties, should be promoted through both educational policies and classroom practices.

Although several previous studies have examined CE in terms of language attitudes, classroom practices, and ideological tensions, most of them were confined to macro-level policies and general perceptions. However, there is little research on how college students view CE and how their attitudes affect the application of their English in both academic and social communication.

To address these gaps, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What language attitudes do select Chinese university students have towards China English?
2. How do these attitudes influence their use of the English language?

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the relevant literature on language attitudes and their effect on English use, especially in the case of CE. The literature review is structured around three major themes: World Englishes, Language Attitudes, and Language Attitudes toward CE, since the purpose of the study is to understand students' perceptions of CE, which affect their usage of the language. These themes offer a rich background on social, cultural, and educational contexts that influence students' attitudes and language use in China.

2.1. World Englishes

The World Englishes paradigm established by Kachru^[1] has disrupted the uniformity of native-speaker norms by acknowledging the legitimacy of multiple vari-

eties of English. Kachru's^[1] Three Circles Model divides English users into three groups: the Inner Circle, including English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom; the Outer Circle, where English has an institutionalized status as a second language, such as in India and Singapore; and the Expanding Circle, referring to countries like China, where English is used mainly for international communication. Under this model, China English is viewed as belonging to the Expanding Circle and is acknowledged as an acceptable localized variety that bears Chinese linguistic and cultural features but is still mutually intelligible in international communications^[3].

Even though there have been many theoretical arguments about the applicability of WE, CE has faced challenges in educational settings. Fu^[4] found that, although Chinese secondary school teachers recognized the communicative potential of CE, they did not allow the use of CE features in any of their language classes. Teachers raised concerns about CE conflicting with exam requirements and affecting students' performance in high-stakes exams like the College English Test (CET) and IELTS. Similarly, Christou et al.^[6] found that Chinese pre-service teachers reported that while they had positive attitudes toward WE as a concept, they did not promote CE in their practice. This resistance reflects the influence of native-speaker norms in Chinese education, where British and American English are still primarily considered the ideal English varieties.

Albrecht^[7] reviewed the linguistic features of CE existing across Chinese dialects. The review discussed the key phonological, lexical, syntactical, and discourse features of CE. Features such as the absence of reduced vowels, vocalization of dark /ɪ/, and variation in dental fricatives are considered key features of China English. Albrecht also explored the loanwords in CE incorporated from two major varieties of Chinese, namely Cantonese and Mandarin. Moreover, he discussed syntactic features of CE, such as subject pronoun drop. These results highlight the continuity of nativization and codification of CE, implying that it is becoming a well-established variety of English used in both academic and intercultural contexts.

However, despite the growing recognition of CE as a legitimate variety, institutional and attitudinal barriers remain prevalent, particularly in academic settings. Li and Wei^[8] also explored the university level and discovered Chinese

students' awareness of CE but their reluctance to include CE features in academic writing or professional communication. Students feared that using CE in formal settings could hurt their credibility or block opportunities for their future careers. These results demonstrate an increasing incorporation of CE in informal discourse, while top-down institutional pressures maintain native-speaker norms in formal language production.

2.2. Language Attitudes

Language attitudes are important factors influencing learners' learning as well as the way they communicate and construct their identity. Characterized as speakers' mental predisposition toward a language or language variety, language attitudes are conventionally conceptualized as having three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral^[8]. The cognitive component refers to beliefs about the status, correctness, or global nature of a language, while the affective component refers to emotional reactions, such as pride, shame, or loyalty. The behavioral level is realized as visible language use, such as translanguaging, language preference, or avoidance.

Studies repeatedly emphasize the role of attitudes toward the language in language achievement. Liu et al.^[9] investigated whether university students who held positive attitudes toward non-native varieties of English were willing to speak with greater confidence and at a higher level of fluency in oral communication. These students participated in informal conversations and social interactions, which encouraged them to engage with localized features identified by CE. On the other hand, students with negative cognitive attitudes toward CE were highly resistant to its use in social and academic domains, rating it as low proficiency and unprofessional as a result^[4].

Attitudes toward language also affect the motivation of learners. Christou et al.^[6] discovered that Chinese pre-service teachers who perceived CE as an "incorrectness" of English had higher language anxiety and were reluctant to use CE terms. This avoidance strategy was also associated with exam scores, professional progression, and perceived linguistic legitimacy. The findings indicate that negative language attitudes can curb students' willingness to embrace non-native English varieties, which in turn favors British or American English norms in formal written language.

Researchers also provide strong evidence of the interconnection between language attitudes and identity formation. Sun and Wu^[3] found that the higher the degree of identification Chinese university students felt with Chinese cultural values, the more willing they were to accept CE as a communicative tool. These students saw that using CE was the culturally appropriate form of English to express their Chinese identities in international contexts. In contrast, those studying or working in foreign countries distanced themselves from CE, assuming that copying British or American English features would help them climb the social ladder and be taken more seriously by their peers.

Language attitudes not only influence language learning, but they also shape students' attitudes during the process of adaptation in intercultural communication. Li et al.^[12] investigated the perceptions and adaptation patterns of Mandarin Chinese PhD students in Manila regarding Philippine English. The analysis illustrated that students considered Philippine English a valid variant; nevertheless, they experienced pronunciation and vocabulary challenges. To address this, they learned to simplify grammatical structures, tone down intonation, and pick up local phrases. These strategies focus on the social performance skills of students in their language use in intercultural environments and highlight the significance of Communication Accommodation Theory in managing local forms of English.

Likewise, Zeng et al.^[13] examined students' attitudes toward ELF in Macao. It was found that students were more willing to adopt ELF in informal uses but were less willing to use it in formal academic or professional environments. This observation corresponds to a broader pattern of adaptation practices where learners adjust their language when communicating in non-English-speaking nations, enabling them to accommodate the communication ecology.

2.3. Language Attitudes Toward China English

The attitudes of Chinese EFL learners toward World Englishes, particularly China English, are a site of complex interaction between local identities, global communication, and educational ideology. Though the WE model encourages linguistic diversity and the validity of local Englishes^[1], empirical evidence has revealed that many Chinese learners and teachers hold ambivalent views or even resistant attitudes toward CE, particularly in academic and professional

settings.

This tension has been the subject of countless studies. For example, Wang^[14] noted how university students and teachers in China were resistant to embracing CE as a pedagogical paradigm, frequently due to entrenched native-speaker ideologies and associations with the label of “Chinglish.” While certain CE features were less favorably received, the predominant preference was for the norms of British and American English. Likewise, Huang^[15] found that Chinese university students recognized the existence of CE, but they generally held mixed or negative attitudes, particularly toward the implementation of CE in English Language Teaching. Differences in attitudes were also found to vary by academic discipline and were highly predicted by awareness of the WE landscape.

This ideological ambiguity is further explored in Pan^[16]. Analyzing university students’ storytelling, he demonstrated that national pride in CE’s cultural uniqueness meets individuals’ aspirations for upward social mobility, linked to the “effort” to achieve native-like proficiency in English. This tension leads to students considering their CE-influenced English as secondary and feeling ashamed or guilty for accepting it, even if they theoretically endorse it.

The awareness of English as a *Lingua Franca* adds to the complexity. Wang^[17] found that many Chinese learners still perceive English in terms of a monolingual native medium, rather than as one that is spoken worldwide and marked by multilingualism. Thus, language education is a key arena for the reproduction or contestation of these ideologies. Fang^[18] also suggested that students’ attitudes are strongly influenced by standard language ideology, which further manifests in resistance toward local features such as CE pronunciation.

The implications of identity within CE use are particularly clear in the work of Pan et al.^[19]. Their results showed that although students were sympathetic to the cultural expressiveness that CE offered, they were reticent to be identified with CE in international contexts, as it was considered unprofessional and linguistically illegitimate. This inconsistency—between the recognition of CE as a medium of communication and the resistance to it as a form of identity—indicates that, for many students, they live in the liminal space of conflicting ideologies.

Other sociolinguistic studies claim that cultural and

political influences also need to be considered. Fang^[20] and Pan^[21] also explored how English language policies in China reflect national state ideologies, which often promote English as a vehicle for national modernization but have little regard for other local varieties, such as CE. This top-down influence is also mirrored in the classroom, where few assessments and curricula are based on anything other than standard English.

Pedagogically, Liu et al.^[9] advocated for the infusion of Global Englishes (GE) as part of secondary language education to more accurately reflect the multilingual landscape of China. But their interviews with high-school learners showed that English is still largely seen as a school subject rather than a language of communication, thereby denying space for identity exploration and linguistic experimentation.

The tension between English’s global use and national identity is also reflected in motivation research on language. Gu^[22], in the light of the theory of planned behavior, discovered that students’ predisposition toward native English directly affected their L2 motivation, with normative social pressure having the greatest effect. Learners’ choice to align themselves with native speaker norms was more often determined by expectations overtly or tacitly conveyed by teachers, peers, and society, rather than by individual preferences for language use.

Haidar and Fang^[23] ultimately contributed a comparative perspective, highlighting the varied constructions of English between China and postcolonial oppositional Englishes, such as that of Pakistan. However, ideological fears about losing cultural identity remain a challenge for China as an EFL user. The authors advocate for the development of context-sensitive language policies that take into account the communicative needs of learners and encourage multilingualism.

Another related dimension is the one brought up by Wang and Wen^[10] to study the changes in the teaching objectives of English pronunciation in China. The study compared the nativeness principle (native-like pronunciation) with the intelligibility principle (clear and understandable speech), indicating that previous educational programs focused on native-like pronunciation, whereas more current revisions have included the principle of intelligibility. This transition indicates an increasing awareness of English as a *Lingua Franca* and supports the balanced teaching of pronunciation, allowing students to be prepared to communicate effectively

within an international context. Similarly, Lee and Kim^[11] explored the factors explaining the intentions of Chinese international university students to use English as a Lingua Franca in intercultural communication contexts, with reference to the theory of planned behavior. In their research, they found that subjective norms (social expectations), perceived behavioral control (confidence), and attitude toward non-native English varieties were important determinants of ELF communication intentions in students. The study highlighted the significance of developing an inclusive campus culture in which different varieties of English are appreciated, underscoring the role of social pressures and individual perceptions in shaping students' use of ELF in international academic settings.

Collectively, these studies indicate that while theoretical justifications of CE and WE have gained traction, practical and attitudinal resistance still prevails, especially in high-stakes educational contexts. Localized varieties like CE and accent may be increasing in prominence in non-formal or computer-mediated arenas, but the formal use of these nonstandard varieties (classroom practices, academic writing, and professional communication) continues to be constrained by ideological, institutional, and identity-related barriers.

3. Method

This section outlines the research methodology employed to investigate students' attitudes toward China English and how these attitudes influence their English use.

3.1. Research Design

The research design used for this study was a mixed methods design consisting of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative section was carried out using a structured questionnaire covering participants' general attitudes toward English; their attitudes toward China English; and their reported language use in different contexts. To further enrich the findings, an FGD was incorporated as an adjunctive qualitative element, providing fuller views into student attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. Combining both methods provides a richer insight into the research questions.

3.2. Participants

A questionnaire survey was conducted among 169 college students from five universities in Jinan, China. The 169 students were recruited from five universities from Jinan, Shandong Province. The sample consisted of 42 students from Shandong Normal University, 34 from Shandong University, 33 from Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 30 from Shandong Jianzhu University, and 30 from Qilu Normal University (see **Figure 1**). This distribution corresponds to a fair representation across various institutions, thereby obtaining different perspectives from students in a range of study programs. The Wenjuanxing platform was used to disseminate the survey, and respondents were recruited through WeChat platform. All participants volunteered to take the survey and were informed of the purpose and confidentiality of the study.

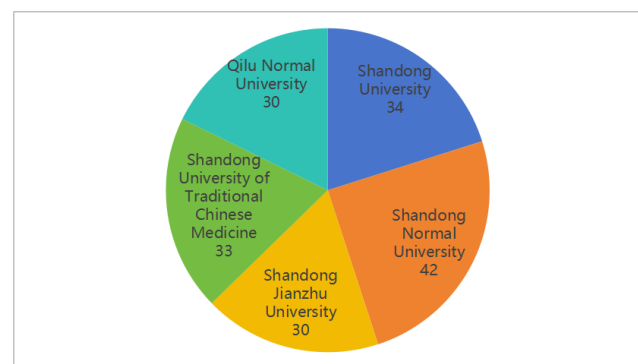


Figure 1. Distribution of Participants by University.

As a follow-up of the survey, another 15 students were selected to carry out a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) through Tencent Meeting. These participants were selected from survey respondents who were willing to share additional perspectives, to address other critical contentions. The participants were diverse in terms of their educational levels and exposure to English as learners, but their selection was more due to availability considerations than to pure sampling constraints. However, their input did add crucial qualitative richness to interpret the survey data.

3.3. Instruments

Two main data collection tools were used in this study, namely a structured questionnaire, and a semi-structured focus group discussion guide. The questionnaire was originally written in English and translated into Chinese to ensure

clarity and ease of understanding for respondents. The scale contained 26 Likert-scale items that were divided into three thematic dimensions: (1) general attitudes toward English as a global language, (2) perceptions of China English, and (3) contextual use of China English. All items were reported using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

A FGD guide was developed to elaborate on questionnaire issues. The questionnaire included a series of open-ended questions which aimed to investigate how students viewed the English spoken in China, when they used it and when they avoided it and how they felt about the native pronunciation and local Chinese style of pronunciation. The guide was written in Chinese to achieve natural and true perceptions of the participants during the online meeting. Before the actual data collection, all questions were pilot tested with a small group of students to check for clarity and relevance.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The method of data collection was based on a mixed approach, including the quantitative and the qualitative phases. For the first part, Wenjuanxing, a widely used Chinese online survey platform was used to distribute the questionnaire. The survey comprised of 169 valid participants who were selected from five universities in Jinan. The survey was disseminated using WeChat for convenience and to ensure access.

The qualitative part was an FGD through Tencent Meeting and lasted for approximately 129 minutes. In order to make the discussants have a better understanding of the World Englishes framework and China English theory, an orientation was provided at the beginning of the focus group discussion. The orientation helped them better understand related concepts and participate more effectively. The session was recorded completely on audio and subsequently transcribed into Chinese by the WPS transcription function. The transcription was manually corrected and edited to guarantee that the data was accurate and clear. The final transcript was subsequently translated into English using ChatGPT Translator, and then edited manually for fluency and accuracy.

The English translation of the transcript was uploaded

to NVivo for theme analysis. Data were coded according to the identified patterns, and responses were allocated into thematic units that corresponded with the issues addressed by the research questions. These two approaches permitted the statistical trend and qualitative depth to be complementarily drawn and provided a more holistic picture of participants' attitudes and behaviors toward China English.

3.5. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire responses among those who completed the quantitative survey. The mean score was calculated for each Likert-scale item to analyze the overall tendency of attitudes toward English and Chinese English. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was validated at Cronbach's alpha measure of 0.820, considered as highly reliable.

Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative portion of focus group discussion. The transcriptions were initially analyzed by identifying and coding reoccurring ideas connected to the way participants perceived and utilized China English. These codes were consolidated into overarching themes according to the research questions. Selected quotes from different speakers were employed to supplement the themes posed. Thematic categories were then compared to questionnaire response to analyse the convergence and divergence between the qualitative and quantitative data. This strategy helped to guarantee a more complex interpretation of the informants' linguistic attitudes and practices.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and data analysis derived from the questionnaire responses and focus group discussions.

As is shown in **Table 1**, participants generally expressed strong agreement with the idea that English serves as a valuable tool for global communication, with the mean score being 4.25. That English facilitates easier interaction among people from diverse linguistic backgrounds stands at a mean score of 4.31, which supports Kachru's^[1] World Englishes model, which emphasizes the global ownership of English and its role as a lingua franca.

Table 1. General Perceptions of English Use.

Item	Mean
1. English is a useful tool for communication.	4.25
2. English belongs not only to native speakers but to anyone who uses it.	4.41
3. Schools should teach English not as native speakers speak it, but to facilitate effective international communication.	3.96
4. I am not bothered about mistakes that other learners of English make as long as I understand what they want to say.	3.39
5. It is useful that so many people speak English because it enables easier communication between people.	4.31
6. Being able to speak English is mainly important because I want to interact more easily with native English speakers.	3.72
7. Being able to speak English is mainly important because I want to interact more easily with people who do not speak my language.	3.84

The highest level of agreement, with the mean score coming at 4.41, was observed for the belief that English belongs to all its users, not solely to native speakers. Such a high mean score suggests a growing awareness among university students in Jinan of the changing ownership of English, and the notion aligns with the views of Sun and Wu^[3], who argue that English in China is increasingly seen as a tool for expressing local identities rather than merely adhering to native-speaker norms.

However, a relatively lower mean, which accounts for 3.96, for the belief that English should be taught for effective international communication rather than strictly following native-speaker models indicates that traditional language ideologies still remain influential among the participants. This item echoes the findings of Fu^[4] and Christou et al.^[6], who noted that many educators and learners are inclined to stick with British and American norms, especially within formal education contexts, despite the fact that the communicative potential of China English is recognized.

Interestingly, the lowest mean, which is 3.39, came for the statement regarding tolerance of linguistic errors made by other learners. This suggests that the participants recognized

the international role of English, but they remain critical of deviations from standard forms. They reflect what Fang^[18] terms “standard language ideology.” These kinds of attitudes may hinder the acceptance of localized varieties like CE in daily communication.

Motivational aspects also serve as a guide to the communicative purposes of students. The moderate means for the desire to communicate with native speakers ($M = 3.72$) and with non-native speakers ($M = 3.84$) suggest a slightly stronger inclination toward using English as a tool for broader international interaction rather than focusing exclusively on native-speaker communication. This is in line with the global tendency of making English a lingua franca^[17] and with the growing importance of English in intercultural communication that involves non-native speakers.

It can be seen in **Table 2** that the participants generally held positive attitudes toward integrating Chinese cultural identity into English learning. The highest agreement was with incorporating Chinese norms and values into English for both local and global communication, with a mean of 4.21. The high score echoes Sun and Wu’s^[3] view that this practice enriches expression and affirms cultural identity.

Table 2. Attitudes Toward China English.

Item	Mean
8. There will be different varieties of English in China in the future.	3.52
9. Only the variety of English in China can adequately express the ideas that are specific to Chinese culture.	3.47
10. Students should learn the characteristics of China English in addition to American and British English in college English language courses.	3.62
11. Learners should learn to incorporate their Chinese norms and values into English learning for both local and international communication.	4.21
12. When I speak English, I do not mind being identified as a non-native English speaker.	4.03
13. When I speak English, I want to be identified as Chinese.	3.34
14. When I speak English, I want to sound like a native speaker.	3.84
15. College English should be taught by English teachers who are from China.	3.13
16. College English should be taught by native English speakers.	3.46
17. College English should be taught by both English teachers from China and native speakers of English.	4.04
18. The mother tongue of learners should be viewed as a resource.	4.04
19. The mother tongue of learners should be viewed as an interference.	2.37

In the same vein, students considered their first language a significant resource (Item 18, $M = 4.04$), which is in line with the finding by Liu et al.^[9] that native languages should be used to enrich communication. However, in spite of such cultural confidence, a moderate endorsement of sounding like native speakers (Item 14, $M = 3.84$) is subject to the same effect of native-speakerism^[18]. Nonetheless, an increased acceptability of non-native identity (Item 12, $M = 4.03$) indicates the priority of intelligibility over accurate pronunciation, which is close to the native accents^[17].

Responses on teaching preferences favored co-teaching by both Chinese and native English instructors, with a mean score of 4.04 shown in Item 17, reflecting a balanced view of language instruction. The low mean of 2.37 for regarding the first language as interference further supports the conclu-

sion of Fang^[20] that an increasing number of learners reject deficit perspectives on L1 use.

On the whole, these findings reflect a twofold stance: on the one hand, accepting China English and cultural identity, and on the other hand, being bound to traditional language ideologies, which Pan et al.^[19] bring up as a paradox of moving between local pride and international standards.

Table 3 results show participants' sensitivity to context and audience in using China English. The highest mean of 3.56 was for Item 20, where participants consciously imitate native speakers, reflecting the ongoing influence of native-speaker norms^[18]. However, the overall balanced responses reported in items 21–26 indicate that these attitudes toward China English are ambivalent, especially when it comes to its acceptability in formal or intercultural situations.

Table 3. Contextual Use of China English.

Item	Mean
20. I consciously try to imitate native English speakers when I speak English.	3.56
21. I use English differently when speaking to Chinese speakers compared to foreigners.	3.15
22. I feel more comfortable using China English in casual conversations than in academic or professional contexts.	3.19
23. I consciously avoid using China English in professional situations to maintain credibility.	3.20
24. I feel that using China English helps me connect better with Chinese peers.	3.23
25. I feel comfortable using China English when talking to foreigners.	3.16
26. I would feel embarrassed if I accidentally used a China English expression in a formal situation.	2.77

Respondents said that they were a little more comfortable speaking China English to other Chinese (Item 24, $M = 3.23$) than to foreigners (Item 25, $M = 3.16$). Although a few respondents said they are switching to China English in professional settings (Item 23, $M = 3.20$), they do not feel embarrassed about accidentally using it at work (Item 26, $M = 2.77$), as they report fewer language anxieties related to cultural expressions.

The analysis from **Table 1** to **Table 3** illustrates nuanced but consistent patterns in the participants' language attitudes. Specifically, **Table 1** demonstrates that the participants highly appreciate the importance of English as a global language and do not merely understand it as the property of the native speaker, but as a common language of communication with people from other countries. **Table 2** indicates a guarded optimism toward China English, or the integration of Chinese cultural identity into English usage. Nevertheless, students are still divided about the suitability of CE in academic or professional settings. The third table

also proves that China English is a context-sensitive variable: the students themselves do not use it in formal or high-stakes cases, but are willing to use it where informality or cultural relevance can be tolerated.

The above tendencies, summed up in **Table 4**, indicate that students preserve linguistic diversity in principle and value China English as a cultural identity marker; nevertheless, they are very conservative in actual use because of their concerns about issues of clarity, credibility, and intelligibility on a global scale.

The results of **Table 5** showed strong agreement with the legitimacy of China English. Most of the respondents, such as Participants 3, 6, and 8, considered CE to be a localized and natural version of English that has evolved in the Chinese cultural environment. They also stressed that CE successfully integrates Chinese patterns of grammar and cultural expressions, thus being an efficient and culturally contextual way of communication, rather than a deficient version of English.

Table 4. Overview of Student Attitudes Based on Three Thematic Dimensions.

Table	Thematic Focus	Representative Items	Overall Attitude Trend	Notes
Table 1	Attitudes Toward English as a Global Language	Items 1–7	Predominantly positive (Means mostly > 4.0)	Students value English as a global, communicative tool beyond native ownership.
Table 2	Attitudes Toward China English and Identity	Items 8–19	Mixed-positive (Wide range: 2.37–4.21)	Students support CE’s role in cultural identity, but hesitate on issues like who should teach English.
Table 3	Contextual Use of China English	Items 20–26	Cautiously moderate (Means around 3.1–3.5)	CE use is context-dependent; students prefer avoiding it in formal/professional settings.

Table 5. Perceptions of the Legitimacy of China English.

Theme	Excerpt
Perceived Legitimacy of China English	Chinese people can understand China English, and even foreigners can understand 70%–80% of it. So I think it’s widely used and should be considered legitimate. (Participant 2) China English is the natural result of English developing within the Chinese cultural context. (Participant 3) I see China English as a legitimate variety that has developed through localization and translation. (Participant 6) I believe China English is a localized variant that follows Chinese grammar patterns and draws from the efficiency and clarity of Chinese expressions. It reflects Chinese cultural elements and makes communication more effective. I consider it a legitimate variety. (Participant 8) I believe China English is a legitimate variety. (Participant 10) I think China English is legitimate because the key to language is effective understanding. (Participant 11) China English is a localized product formed over time. It is widely used in China and helps us convey cultural content to the world. It’s a powerful tool for cultural exchange. (Participant 12) I also believe China English is legitimate. It represents how English has been localized in China. (Participant 14)

The responses to the questionnaire support this point of view: a large proportion of participants agreed with the idea that China English will continue to develop as a distinct variety (Item 8, $M = 3.52$), and is particularly well suited to convey ideas peculiar to Chinese culture (Item 9, $M = 3.47$). This evidence can substantiate the argument made by Sun and Wu^[3], who believe that localized types of English are significant in shaping the culture and identity of the groups of people who speak them.

Some of the participants, including Participants 8 and 12, highlighted the practical communicative benefits of CE, stating that it is useful not only in general conversations but also in cultural exchange. This corresponds to the World Englishes framework created by Kachru^[1], which acknowledges that successful communication in terms of both communicative success and cultural pertinence validates the use of English beyond native-speaker norms.

Table 6 also showed that China English is mostly applied in informal and culturally congruent contexts, including

talking to Chinese friends, family events, and social gatherings of people conversant with Chinese culture. As Participants 2, 3, and 5 emphasized, when it comes to such situations, the application of CE is easier and allows for building mutual understanding. This practice conforms to the quantitative data in **Table 3**, where the participants reported relative ease with the use of CE in informal conversations (Item 22, $M = 3.19$) as well as with Chinese peers (Item 24, $M = 3.23$).

The participants were also aware of the role of CE in cultural export and soft power initiatives. Participants 3, 8, and 14 mentioned that CE would be efficient in presenting Chinese traditions, festivals, or culturally specific products to other countries, especially those exposed to Chinese culture. This is in line with the argument held by Liu et al.^[24], who believe that CE is an effective instrument of cultural diplomacy that complements China’s soft power through language.

However, both focus group insights and survey results indicate that the use of CE remains cautious in formal or

professional contexts. Respondents tend to be careful about preserving credibility and avoiding possible misinterpretation during high-stakes communication, as shown by **Table 3** (Item 23, $M = 3.20$). The participants repeatedly pointed

out that CE might lack the accuracy needed in academia, law, or specialized applications, and the data from Mei^[25] found that standard language ideologies still dominate work-related contexts.

Table 6. Contexts Where China English is Used.

Theme	Excerpt
China English in Culturally Aligned and Informal Contexts	I feel more comfortable using China English when speaking with other Chinese people. (Participant 2) I think the most appropriate context for using China English is with other Chinese people. (Participant 3) I use China English when speaking with people familiar with Chinese culture. (Participant 4) I think China English works in informal social settings—like chatting with friends or during family gatherings. (Participant 5) I think I feel more comfortable using China English here in China. (Participant 11) I think in informal situations—like when chatting with foreign friends who’ve studied or worked in China for a few years—using China English feels quite natural. (Participant 14) I think using China English feels comfortable when talking to Chinese friends or family, or at gatherings in predominantly Chinese communities. (Participant 15)
China English in Cultural Export and Soft Power Contexts	It also works well in cultural exchange situations, like introducing Chinese festivals. (Participant 3) But I want to add that sometimes using China English abroad is also fine. (Participant 7) I think China English is useful when talking to foreigners living in China—it helps them integrate. (Participant 8) When I introduce Chinese culture to my foreign friends, like during Chinese New Year, I might use China English (Participant 9) Another scenario is in cultural export. For instance, when promoting a product with distinct Chinese characteristics, China English works well. (Participant 14)

In sum, these results point to the practical usage of language. Though CE is admired for its cultural emotivity and its contribution to identity formation, its use is well-controlled depending on the communicative intentions and those of the audience. By strategically navigating between cultural identification and ensuring intelligibility at a global level, participants portray a dynamic linguistic consciousness in multilingual contexts.

In **Table 7**, most participants shared the belief that CE is not appropriate in most formal academic and professional

settings. Participants 2, 3, and 13 emphasized that in general lectures at schools (academic lectures), standardized tests such as IELTS or TOEFL, writing contests, etc., CE should be actively avoided in order to satisfy linguistic precision and trustworthiness goals. This is in accordance with the quantitative results in **Table 3**, as the respondents stated that they had a moderate aversion to CE in the workplace (or in the official environment in general) (Item 23, $M = 3.20$), and also felt generally uncomfortable with the idea of such expressions being used unintentionally at work (Item 26, $M = 2.77$).

Table 7. Contexts Where China English is Avoided.

Theme	Excerpt
Formal academic settings	But when communicating with foreigners, especially during academic meetings, I think China English should be avoided. (Participant 2) However, I’d avoid using it in formal settings like speech or writing competitions where language accuracy is evaluated. (Participant 3) But in formal contexts like academic lectures, I’d avoid it. (Participant 4) However, in technical or academic fields, we should avoid China English to ensure clarity. (Participant 8) Also, during formal language proficiency tests like IELTS or TOEFL—since those have specific scoring criteria—we need to stick to more standardized, academic English to ensure accuracy and meet those expectations. (Participant 13)

Table 7. *Cont.*

Theme	Excerpt
Professional and international business contexts	I think it's better to use standard forms in professional contexts like academic writing, legal negotiations, or major exams. (Participant 5) However, in high-level international meetings or negotiations, we need to be careful due to cultural differences. (Participant 6) But in political, academic, or professional contexts, it's better to avoid it. (Participant 10) On the other hand, in formal situations—like business negotiations or international academic conferences—using China English could lead to confusion. (Participant 15)

In addition to the academic sphere, CE was also regarded as inappropriate in the workplace and global business. Participants 5, 6, and 15 stressed the importance of standard language usage during legal negotiations, business meetings, and international conferences to eliminate the chances of misunderstanding and uphold professionalism. These attitudes can be explained by the fact that, according to Fang^[18], native-speaker norms still prevail in high-stakes settings, promoting the value of standard English as the means of clarity and credibility.

It was found that there are rather complicated attitudes toward native-like English and China English expressions, as evidenced in **Table 8**. Most participants, such as Participants 4, 5, and 13, considered imitating native speakers one of the reasonable approaches to gaining clarity, fluency, and confidence, particularly during formal communication. This aligns with the quantitative result in **Table 3** (Item 20, $M = 3.56$), which corresponds to the moderate tendency to explicitly mimic in order to better their communicative competence^[9].

However, imitation was usually selective. According to Participants 3 and 16, it is not necessary to speak with

perfect native-like pronunciation, provided that the interlocutor can understand it, which is a very realistic approach to communication, rather than the goal of perfection^[14]. Such partial imitation can also lower language anxiety, as the discrete imitators accepted that paying too much attention to sounding like a native speaker was likely to cause stress, as Mei^[25] concluded regarding linguistic insecurity.

CE was also greatly regarded as an important instrument for cultural presentation. Participants 2, 3, 8, and 12 mentioned its contribution toward advertising Chinese traditions and ideas, mainly in areas such as Traditional Chinese Medicine and cultural festivals. This view supports the argument proposed by Sun and Wu^[3] that CE is enriching the world with English because it provides different cultural information and supports the soft power of China.

Meanwhile, participants such as Participants 12 and 15 acknowledged the necessity to adjust to international standards in certain situations in order to make international communication easier. This embodies the conflict reported by Pan et al.^[19], where learners balance between giving expression to their cultures and attaining international understanding.

Table 8. Attitudes toward Native-like English and China English Expressions.

Theme	Excerpt
Imitation as a Strategy for Skill Development	When I speak English, I try to imitate native pronunciation and expressions because it helps me express myself more clearly and be better understood. (Participant 4) When I speak English, I try to imitate native pronunciation and expressions because it helps me express myself more clearly and be better understood. (Participant 5) I sometimes consciously imitate native speakers' pronunciation and expressions (Participant 7) I do imitate native speakers' pronunciation and expressions to a certain degree—especially during class activities or dubbing assignments. This kind of training helps improve communication with native speakers, makes us more understandable, and boosts fluency. (Participant 9) Sometimes I also imitate native speakers' English expressions to improve my proficiency. (Participant 12) I also imitate native speakers' pronunciation and expressions because it helps me improve my speaking and communication skills. (Participant 13) I think a good accent just helps us sound more natural when talking to foreigners and reduces misunderstanding due to pronunciation. (Participant 14) Sometimes I imitate native speakers, especially in formal settings. (Participant 15)

Table 8. *Cont.*

Theme	Excerpt
Selective Imitation with Emphasis on Comprehensibility	I don't think having a slight accent is a problem, as long as it doesn't interfere with comprehension. (Participant 4) I don't aim to imitate native speakers 100%. (Participant 3) I don't think we need to try too hard to imitate native speakers' accents, because we're not from their countries. The purpose of language is communication—if our pronunciation is clear, our logic is sound, and we speak confidently, that's enough. (Participant 5)
Language Anxiety and Identity Concerns	That said, I don't think it's absolutely necessary. As previous classmates mentioned, everyone has their own characteristics. (Participant 7) However, as long as communication is clear and doesn't cause misunderstanding, having a local accent is acceptable. It just reflects our different cultural backgrounds. (Participant 8) However, it's important to note that even among native speakers, there are differences—British English and American English are not the same. There's no single standard. (Participant 10) But if someone becomes overly obsessed with achieving a native accent, it might lead to language anxiety. (Participant 14) I believe it's not necessary to strictly imitate native pronunciation. A slight accent doesn't hinder communication, and keeping some Chinese intonation is actually part of our cultural identity. (Participant 16)
China English as Cultural Expression	As for using China English expressions, I support it—especially in contexts like Traditional Chinese Medicine. (Participant 2) I believe Chinese-style expressions have unique value. First, they reflect linguistic diversity. China English breathes new life into English by reflecting our local thinking and cultural background. Second, such expressions give native English speakers a glimpse into Chinese culture, facilitating cultural exchange. (Participant 3) As for China English, I think it's a powerful form of cultural output. These unique expressions showcase our identity and foster a sense of belonging among people who share the same cultural background. (Participant 8) If the goal is to promote Chinese culture, we should use more culturally specific expressions. (Participant 12)
The Global Integration of China English	But when it comes to promoting traditional Chinese culture, I believe we should retain our own characteristics. (Participant 5) They hold unique significance. On the one hand, they reflect cultural exchange by integrating Chinese cultural elements into English, enriching the language. (Participant 9) But if we want smoother integration with native speakers, then it's better to match their speaking style more closely. (Participant 12) They enrich the English vocabulary and give foreigners a more intuitive understanding of Chinese traditions. (Participant 15) Once an expression is widely used—like some Chinese-style expressions that have become common among English users in China—then it makes sense for others to learn them too. (Participant 16)

These themes are closely supported by the questionnaire results. High agreement with incorporating Chinese cultural values into English learning (Item 11, $M = 4.21$) and viewing the mother tongue as a resource (Item 18, $M = 4.04$) indicate growing confidence in using CE expressions to express identity. Meanwhile, responses to Items 12 ($M = 4.03$) and 14 ($M = 3.84$) illustrate the balance between accepting a non-native identity and aspiring toward native-like fluency.

Overall, the results imply that the flexible approach of the learners is considered: they respect the native-like models of skill development while adopting CE as a way to express their cultural identities using the same language, adjusting to the communicative purpose and the interlocutor.

As **Table 9** depicts, China English is a major instrument of cultural identity, especially in cross-cultural communications and in the introduction of traditional Chinese ideas. Participants (Participants 3, 6, and 10) stressed that CE enables the correct representation of culturally specific concepts, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine terms or names of festivals, which rarely have exact equivalents in English. This is consistent with the high level of agreement shown in the questionnaire about the inclusion of Chinese cultural values in the process of English learning (Item 11, $M = 4.21$) and considering the mother tongue as a linguistic resource (Item 18, $M = 4.04$), which supports the contention by Sun and Wu^[3], who argue that cultural representation is maximized by CE in global discourse.

Table 9. Contexts Where China English Facilitates Communication.

Theme	Excerpt
Cultural Representation and Identity	First, when doing cross-cultural studies—especially about Chinese culture—China English can express unique cultural concepts more effectively. (Participant 3) When teaching Chinese or promoting Chinese culture, China English is a useful tool. (Participant 4) I believe China English can help in cultural communication—for example, in sharing concepts from Traditional Chinese Medicine, like yin, yang, and qi. These terms help convey meaning without needing full translation. (Participant 6) When promoting Chinese culture—like saying Spring Festival instead of Chinese New Year—it might reflect a more authentic or respectful choice. (Participant 10) When we’re sharing Chinese culture, I don’t think we have to cater entirely to foreign habits. (Participant 12) However, if we’re communicating with people interested in Chinese culture—for example, someone researching Dream of the Red Chamber or Confucianism—then using China English might be appropriate. (Participant 14)
Academic Relevance in China-related Fields	Second, in localized research—topics unique to China—China English naturally incorporates Chinese elements and gives the study a local flavor. (Participant 3) In academic contexts—if we’re studying Chinese-related subjects like Chinese literature or history—China English definitely helps. China English might cause misunderstandings there. (Participant 4) In discussions related to Chinese society or cultural issues—like academic conferences focused on China—terms with Chinese characteristics may actually facilitate communication. (Participant 8) In academia, for fields like Chinese language, literature, or traditional medicine, China English expressions can accurately convey meaning and aid international exchange. (Participant 9)
Informal and Social Contexts	However, in more casual social contexts, or when expressing ideas with distinct Chinese cultural elements, China English can actually be helpful. (Participant 2) In social contexts, when speaking with people familiar with Chinese culture, China English can enhance communication. (Participant 10) In social situations, China English is generally helpful. (Participant 15) I think using China English in social settings can actually facilitate communication. (Participant 16)
Localized Services and Tourism	In localized services like hotel menus, saying Kung Pao Chicken instead of spicy diced chicken with peanuts makes it easier for tourists to understand. (Participant 11)

Academically, notably among China-related studies in literature, history, and traditional medicine, the participants perceived CE as a practical medium for communicating subtle ideas. Participants 8 and 9 pointed out that CE enables communication in academic discussions related to Chinese subjects to be clearer. This endorses the World Englishes view of Kachru^[1], which acknowledges that different localizations of varieties of English in certain fields of study and distinct cultures can be cultivated legitimately.

Participants also identified the practical usefulness of CE in the informal areas of societal interaction and tourism. Participants 10 and 15 noted that using CE expressions makes a conversation easier, particularly with people who are familiar with Chinese culture. Localized services, such as hospitality and tourism services, benefit from further clarity and authenticity when using culturally recognizable terms, such as Kung Pao Chicken.

Overall, these results indicate that learners perceive CE as a versatile and useful tool to express themselves in

a cultural context, achieve academic exactitude, and become practical communicators. Although global integration is considered, participants cleverly use CE to mark their culture and shape cross-cultural understanding, balancing local pride with the necessities of international communication^[19].

The common opinion observed and expressed in **Table 10** was that China English is not appropriate in most cases of academic and professional communication, where precision, clarity, and adherence to international standards of language are expected. The participants, including Participants 2, 3, and 13, stressed that in areas like science, law, and medicine, as well as in international conferences and business negotiations, the use of CE can cause miscommunication and may have adverse effects on the credibility of professionals. This issue is consistent with the fact noted by Fang^[18], who states that native-speaker norms predominate in high-stakes contexts, as linguistic correctness directly correlates with perceived competency.

Table 10. Contexts Where China English Hinders Communication.

Theme	Excerpt
Academic and Professional Settings Require Standardized English	In formal settings like academic discussions or business negotiations with native speakers, using China English might make things harder—because such settings require professional language use, and China English is not widely accepted yet. (Participant 2) Also, in business negotiations or international academic conferences, especially when technical terms are involved, using China English may confuse others—making communication less efficient. (Participant 3) But in more technical academic fields, like explaining complex formulas or scientific principles, you need precise, standardized English. (Participant 4) But on the downside, in technical documents or contracts, or in high-level academic journals, using phrases like people mountain people sea might cause confusion. (Participant 5) But in international medical exchanges, which involve technical terms, using China English might result in unclear or inaccurate communication. (Participant 13) In academic fields, we should try to use formal English expressions. Some China English expressions aren't widely recognized or seen as standard. (Participant 14) However, in academic settings, China English may become an obstacle. (Participant 15)
High-Stakes Exams and Formal Evaluations Require Conformity	But when writing formal papers or presenting reports, such terms might cause misunderstandings. (Participant 9) But in formal academic writing or international journals, overusing non-standard English could cause miscommunication. In legal or technical fields, terminology accuracy is especially critical. (Participant 10) But in formal documents like research papers, legal contracts, or technical manuals, there are international standards to follow. (Participant 11)
Cultural Misunderstanding Due to High-Context Expressions	However, in academic conferences, terms like socialism with Chinese characteristics may require additional explanation. (Participant 6) I think if we overuse high-context Chinese expressions without explaining them, foreign listeners—especially those unfamiliar with Chinese culture—won't understand. (Participant 7)
Negative Impact on Professional Image or Communication Efficiency	In formal academic settings, overusing China English might make writing seem less rigorous and reduce a paper's acceptability. The vocabulary or sentence structure might not meet academic standards, causing misunderstandings. (Participant 3)

Aversion to CE was also evident in more test-based and assessment contexts, including standardized tests, more formal presentation styles, and academic writing. The participants emphasized that such environments require standard English phrases to fulfill institutional requirements. The survey data also support this prudent position, as the respondents reported a moderate tendency to avoid CE in professional contexts (Item 23, $M = 3.20$).

Another major issue was the potential risk of intercultural miscommunication due to high-context, culturally specific statements. Participants observed that Chinese sociopolitical and cultural terms often require further explanation, which can interfere with communication among people from international audiences who have no knowledge of what these terms mean.

A summary of the results in **Table 10** indicates that although the learners acknowledge the usefulness of CE in expressing cultural values, they take a pragmatic stance and restrict its application in situations that require a relatively

high level of professionalism and communicative accuracy.

5. Conclusions

This section presents the summary of major findings, implications and the limitation and directions for future research.

5.1. Summary of Major Findings

This study explored the language attitudes of Chinese university students in Jinan toward English as a global language and China English, examining how these attitudes shape their language use across different contexts. The findings reveal several key patterns based on both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

First, students demonstrated overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward English as a global communicative tool, supporting its role in facilitating intercultural interaction beyond native-speaker ownership. This perspective aligns with

Kachru's World Englishes framework^[1] and is reflected in their strong agreement on the global value of English (Item 1, $M = 4.25$) and its usefulness for communication across cultures (Item 5, $M = 4.31$).

Second, while students generally expressed support for integrating Chinese cultural identity into English learning, their attitudes toward CE remain cautiously optimistic. They recognized CE as a valuable resource for expressing culturally specific ideas, particularly in informal settings and fields related to Chinese culture, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine and literature. This is supported by high mean scores for incorporating Chinese cultural values into English learning (Item 11, $M = 4.21$) and viewing the mother tongue as a linguistic resource (Item 18, $M = 4.04$). However, the influence of native-speakerism persists, as shown by a moderate preference for native-like pronunciation (Item 14, $M = 3.84$), reflecting Fang's observations on standard language ideologies^[18].

Third, the practical use of CE is highly context-dependent. Students are more comfortable using CE in informal conversations and cultural exchange scenarios but consciously avoid it in formal academic and professional environments where linguistic accuracy and credibility are prioritized. This pragmatic orientation was confirmed through moderate agreement on avoiding CE in professional contexts (Item 23, $M = 3.20$) and low embarrassment over occasional CE use in formal settings (Item 26, $M = 2.77$). These findings highlight the tension between identity expression and the pursuit of global intelligibility.

Fourth, imitation of native English models remains a common language learning strategy, especially for improving pronunciation and communicative competence in formal settings (Item 20, $M = 3.56$). However, learners selectively imitate native speech, prioritizing comprehensibility over perfect accuracy to manage language anxiety and preserve cultural identity. This flexible approach reflects an adaptive understanding of language learning, where native-like models and localized expressions coexist depending on communicative needs.

Finally, while CE is appreciated for its role in cultural representation and soft power, students remain cautious about its use in high-stakes environments such as academic writing, international conferences, and professional negotiations. Concerns about cultural misunderstanding, communication

breakdowns, and negative perceptions of linguistic competence lead to the strategic avoidance of CE in these settings.

In summary, students exhibit a complex and contextually aware approach to language use, balancing the desire to assert cultural identity through CE with the practical demands of maintaining global intelligibility and professional credibility.

5.2. Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for both theory and practice.

First, the results provide empirical support for the growing legitimacy of localized English varieties, particularly China English. Participants demonstrated a generally positive attitude toward CE as a communicative and cultural resource, especially in informal or culturally embedded contexts. This echoes the observations of Pan^[16] and Sun and Wu^[3], who noted that CE enables learners to express Chinese identity in international communication. These findings align with the World Englishes paradigm^[1], which challenges native-speaker hegemony and acknowledges the sociolinguistic legitimacy of context-specific Englishes. Moreover, the ambivalence participants displayed toward using CE in academic or formal settings reflects the ideological tension documented in Pan et al.^[19] and Huang^[15], emphasizing the need for future theoretical models to better account for this duality in learner perception and usage.

Second, the study suggests a need to re-examine pedagogical practices in English language education in China. Given that students are open to incorporating Chinese cultural concepts when speaking English, especially in informal or peer settings, English curricula at the university level may benefit from explicitly addressing CE features and their communicative value. This echoes the recommendations of Liu et al.^[9], who advocate for integrating Global Englishes awareness into language teaching, and of Fang^[18], who argues that standard language ideology often prevents learners from exploring localized expressions. A more inclusive pedagogical approach could foster greater linguistic confidence and intercultural competence, helping learners navigate both global and local communicative demands.

A more comprehensive pedagogical approach may not only boost the linguistic confidence of learners but also lead to the development of intercultural competence, one that

will allow learners to adapt to the needs of global communication and the expression of local identities. To do this, teacher training might focus on the communicative functions of CE, where it plays a role in cross-cultural communication, prioritizing global understanding and cultural identity, with native-speaker norms taught second. Moreover, it would be advisable to include CE in official spheres, including academic language use and professional communication, to allow students to orient themselves within real-life language use, preparing them to take an active part in international dialogue while preserving their cultural identity.

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to university students from five institutions in Jinan, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Attitudes toward China English may differ across other regions or among different age groups, such as high school students, adult learners, or working professionals. Future research should consider expanding the geographical scope and including more diverse demographic groups to obtain a broader understanding of perceptions toward China English.

Second, while the study employed both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (FGD) methods, the focus group discussions were conducted in a single-session format, which may have limited the depth of insight. Longitudinal or follow-up interviews could be conducted in future studies to further explore how learners' attitudes evolve over time and how their perceptions influence actual language practices in various settings, such as academic writing, job interviews, or study abroad experiences.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.L. and D.H.; methodology, S.L.; software, D.Z.; validation, Y.H. and D.Z.; formal analysis, S.L.; investigation, S.L. and Y.H.; resources, D.H.; data curation, Y.H. and D.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, S.L.; writing—review and editing, S.L. and D.H.; visualization, S.L.; supervision, D.H.; project administration, D.H.; funding acquisition, D.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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