

Book Review



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## Chinese Language Education in Small Island States

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Guojie Liang et al., *Research on the Development of Chinese Language Education in Small Island States*, China Ocean University Press (Qiangdao, China), 2025, ISBN 9787567043039 pb

The book under review is by Guojie Liang et al., titled *Research on the Development of Chinese Language Education in Small Island States* [1]. This book is a collective work of twenty-two scholars. Most authors of the book have local working experience as Chinese language lecturers in small island states, which contributes to the unique perspectives of the knowledge production within the local context. The principal author, Dr. Guojie Liang is a professor at Dalian University and the executive director of the Indian Ocean Rim Research Center for Island Countries. Professor Liang's work as the Chinese Director of Confucius Institute at the National University of Samoa inspired his inauguration of the academic Alliance of Small Island Area Studies in China and also his researches, among which *A Study of Language and Culture in Pacific Island Countries* [2] was one of the first comprehensive works in research on South Pacific language and culture.

The book is composed of sixteen chapters with 221 pages, presenting a comprehensive, multi-country examination of the development of Chinese

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language education across sixteen island states across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Each chapter focuses on a single country, examining Chinese language education along five dimensions using a consistent analytical framework: (1) a general overview of Chinese language education in the country concerned; (2) a review of the local educational environment and enabling conditions; (3) an evaluation of current provision; (4) identification of major challenges; and (5) recommendations for future development. Every chapter ends with a concise summary.

In this book, the island countries can be grouped geographically into the Pacific Ocean countries and the Indian Ocean countries; however, a more analytically useful divide is cultural-historical. As a first group, these island countries are located in the Pacific Ocean and belong to the indigenous cultural zone of Oceania, which includes Melanesia (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu), Polynesia (Samoa, Tonga, and Cook Islands), and Micronesia (Kiribati and Federated States of Micronesia), all of which have indigenous cultures and maritime societies. In the Indian Ocean world, the second group of island countries is usually regarded as the African-Arab-South Asian interface, where Madagascar exhibits Austronesian-African hybridity, the Seychelles, Mauritius and the Comoros have multiethnic colonial legacies, the Maldives are influenced by Islamic maritime culture, and Sri Lanka is part of the South Asian culture. History and economic conditions in each country result in different educational and linguistic policies.

Chapters 1 through 10 examine Chinese education in island nations situated within the indigenous cultural zone of Oceania in the Pacific Ocean. Chapters 11 through 16, in turn, are devoted to Chinese education in island countries located at the African-Arab-South Asian interface of the Indian Ocean. A discussion of Chinese education in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is presented in Chapter 2 as an illustrative example. A new era in Chinese language education in Papua New Guinea began in 2021 with the establishment of the first Confucius Institute at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology. Located in the southwestern Pacific, Papua New Guinea is a historically and culturally complex state shaped by German, British, and Australian colonial rule, along with Japanese wartime occupation, and is classified by the World Bank as a lower-middle-income country [3]. In addition to over 800 indigenous languages, English, Tok Pisin, and Hiri Motu are used as lingua francas in a functional language policy [4]. It is estimated that approximately 1,200 students are currently learning Chinese language and culture through Confucius Institute and other learning sites, including emerging Chinese vocational education programs in 2024, despite Chinese not being part of the national education framework. There continues to be a mismatch between limited teacher supplies and growing student demand, prompting proposals to establish a Chinese education alliance, standardize language course initiation procedures, and improve teaching.

The authors move on to the Indian Ocean island states after analyzing the Chinese language education landscape in Pacific island countries. As an

example, chapter 14 discusses Chinese language education in Seychelles, where the Confucius Institute has operated for more than a decade. Before gaining independence and joining the Commonwealth, the Seychelles were a small island state in the western Indian Ocean dominated by French and British colonial rule. It is currently the most prosperous country in Africa on the basis of GDP per capita (p. 159). As a multilingual country, Seychellois Creole, English, and French are the official languages. Cultural events such as the UN Chinese Language Day celebrations organized by the Confucius Institute have increased local interest in Chinese culture and language. Chinese language courses are offered at most levels of education, and Chinese vocational education is well developed in local vocational schools. Among the major challenges are limited opportunities for advanced Chinese language study and a shortage of teachers, leading to recommendations for localizing Chinese language education and training local teachers.

An examination of Chinese language education in sixteen small island states reveals both similarities and differences. Due to differences in historical backgrounds, political contexts, economic conditions, and language policies and education systems, these countries face different challenges in developing Chinese language education and address these challenges in different ways. Research on Chinese language education should take into account both regional and national contexts (p. 1).

In comparison to continental states, small island countries in the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, and Caribbean Sea have long been epistemic blind spots in Chinese public discourse and academic research. However, these countries deserve sustained attention. According to the United Nations, most of these countries are Small Island Developing States (SIDS) [5], characterized by heightened vulnerability to climate change, economic marginalization, and resource shortages, while also contributing significantly to global sustainability agendas and international cooperation frameworks. It is within this context that the International Chinese Education Program (ICE) operates not merely as a language teaching program, but also as a multidimensional vehicle for intercultural dialogue between China and these countries [6]. Current ICE research, however, is dominated by fragmented case studies and lacks a theoretical framework. The book adopts the SWIIM framework - Smallness, Wholeness, Islandness, Indigenesness, and Maritimesness - to examine the structural, cultural, and maritime logics shaping small island societies [7]. The book advances a "one-country-one-pedagogy" approach and contribute to the theoretical consolidation of the field by offering context-sensitive, country-specific analyses of current conditions and challenges in Chinese language education [8].

The book adopts a uniform chapter structure and shared analytical framework to systematize the presentation of Chinese language education across national contexts and to clarify key issues. This consistency allows readers to compare background conditions, existing practices and development prospects across cases. All chapters also include observations of local educational settings contextualized by Confucius Institute teachers

working overseas. The data source indicates that the amount of research on SIDS in Chinese academia is far from adequate, since not many studies have been published. Teachers with local experience are encouraged to participate in field-based research on SIDS, as this book highlights the potential value of doing so.

Overall, the book makes a substantive contribution to both region and country studies and the international Chinese education at the theoretical, methodological and practical levels. The book contributes to the field of Chinese language education, as well as to the broader field of island studies, by situating language education within the broader development contexts of SIDS. Educational initiatives intersect with structural concerns commonly discussed in island studies, such as governance capacity, human capital formation, sustainable development, and regional connectivity. In many small island countries, education policies are closely tied to strategies for enhancing international engagement, diversifying economic opportunities, and strengthening participation in regional and global networks. Providing empirical insights into how educational programs function as part of broader social and institutional systems in small island countries, this book examines how Chinese language education is adapted, implemented, and negotiated within different island settings.

However, the book has some limitations. Despite offering a detailed diagnosis of structural challenges, it provides relatively little discussion of policy-oriented responses to two persistent challenges: teacher shortages and teacher mobility. In this book, the focus is largely on current status and problem analysis, without sufficient consideration of institutional arrangements, incentive mechanisms, or sustainable pathways for teacher recruitment and retention. The book would have benefited from a more systematic engagement with these dimensions, potentially informed by regional governance practices or comparative perspectives. Despite acknowledging the demands of local conditions and their impact on teaching, the book only devotes a limited amount of attention to Confucius Institute teacher development, especially in areas such as pre-departure preparation, ongoing professional support, and context-specific training for small or resource-constrained schools.

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