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## **Family language policy and the design of homescape in transnational families:**

### **initiating children's Chinese literacy development**

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#### **Abstract**

Building upon previous research on family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen & Palviainen, 2023; King et al., 2008), this study explores the homescape (Boivin, 2021; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022) pertinent to the Chinese home literacy environment (Burgess, 2011; Sénéchal et al., 1998) within Chinese transnational families. It categorizes various forms of Chinese literacy homescape and examines parental perspectives and agency (Ahearn, 2001; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006) in the design, creation, and adaptation of the homescape within their households. The study draws on ethnographic data from four Chinese-speaking families residing in France and Germany. Data includes sound recordings of family interactions, photographs capturing the families' homescape, in-depth interviews and field notes from informal discussions with family members. Adopting the lens of ethnographic linguistic landscape (Blommaert, 2013; Pennycook, 2017), the study categorizes the Chinese literacy homescape into four sensory modalities: highly visible, semi-visible, soundscape, and digital and interactive. Findings reveal that parents employ highly strategic and agentic approaches when designing the Chinese literacy homescape, demonstrating their keen awareness of the unique characteristics of the Chinese writing system and the specific challenges their children face when learning to read Chinese.

**Keywords:** family language policy, homescape, home literacy environment, Chinese transnational families

#### **Introduction**

Chinese immigration to Europe, which began in the early 20th century, has evolved significantly over the past century. In recent decades, Chinese migration to Europe has diversified through multiple channels, including labour migration, student mobility, family reunification, and investment migration (Favell, 2008; Pieke, 2012). Among European countries, France and Germany are home to some of the largest Chinese-speaking communities, ranking in the top five after Italy, the UK, and Spain. France hosts approximately 149,550 citizens of the People's Republic of China, while Germany is home to about 105,400 (Statista, 2024). A significant portion of this migration consists of Chinese students, who have become a dominant group among new Chinese residents in these countries. For example, in France, students make up 64% of all Chinese citizens admitted for residence (Attané, 2022).

Chinese transnational families in France and Germany have been extensively studied within sociolinguistics from various perspectives. In France, research has primarily focused on language practices and the (non)transmission of cultural and linguistic heritage. Saillard and Boutet (2008) specifically examined the Wenzhou community in Paris, highlighting the construction of their unique linguistic repertoires. More recent work by Wang (2019, 2022) delves into the motivations and aspirations of Chinese parents to transmit Mandarin while exploring the reasons behind the non-transmission of parental dialects. In Germany, Li-Gottwald (2022) investigated how Chinese migrant parents collaborate within a Mandarin complementary school, emphasizing the importance of social interactions in relation to the parents' socioeconomic

backgrounds and migration histories. Wang (2014) discussed German-Chinese families' positive attitudes toward bilingual education, focusing on child-oriented parenting styles that support language learning. These European studies align with research conducted in English-speaking countries, which explore the unique dynamics of Chinese immigrant families, including a strong emphasis on education, the influence of Confucian values, and the intergenerational transmission of language and culture (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Zhu, 2008).

Chinese immigrant families in France and Germany navigate a complex landscape shaped by social frameworks, immigration policies, and cultural acculturation. France's integration model, grounded in *laïcité* (secularism) and republican values, emphasizes assimilation into French culture and language (Simon, 2012). In contrast, Germany's immigration approach has shifted from rigidity to recognizing multiculturalism, influenced by its history of labor migration (Esser, 2006). Both countries' monolingual educational systems offer limited access to formal Chinese language instruction, often introduced at the secondary level and typically only in major metropolitan areas (Bellassen, 2015). Consequently, Chinese parents in France and Germany face similar challenges in fostering early Chinese literacy, often resorting to homeschooling, complementary schools, or online learning platforms. In these contexts, the home learning environment plays a crucial supplementary role. This study observes shared management among Chinese families in France and Germany in fostering children's literacy development, despite the differing social contexts. Rather than a comparative analysis, the study focuses on the common approaches and management practices employed by these families in initiating heritage language literacy.

Family Language Policy (FLP) studies have shown that children's language and literacy abilities are profoundly impacted by parents' language and literacy management and investment (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Spolsky, 2004, 2012; Stavans, 2012). The design of the family's literacy environment has been regarded as an important part of the family language policy and parental strategies for the upbringing of multilingual and multiliterate children (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Said, 2021). Numerous large-scale studies from Home Literacy Environment (HLE) research have shown that rich literacy-related resources, activities, and interactions available within the home environment contribute greatly to children's language development and literacy skills (Burgess et al., 2002; Sénéchal et al., 1996, 1998; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). However, despite some preliminary findings, there is little systematic knowledge about the specific forms of heritage language literacy environments in transnational families and how parents construct these environments to support their children's heritage language and literacy learning in the context of migration. Focused on Chinese transnational families in France and Germany, this study addresses this knowledge gap by drawing on longitudinal ethnographic data from four selected transnational families from the broader research.

Through the lens of ethnographic Linguistic Landscape (LL) (Blommaert, 2013) in home environment (Boivin, 2021; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022), the aim of this present study is to explore different forms of Chinese heritage literacy environments created by parents in Chinese-speaking transnational families in France and Germany. For that purpose, we engage with the following questions:

1. What forms of Chinese literacy environment are created by parents in Chinese transnational families in France and Germany?

2. What perspectives do the parents hold regarding the Chinese literacy environments they establish, and how is parental agency reflected in the processes of designing, creating, and utilizing the Chinese literacy homescape in their families?

In the following sections, we first provide a comprehensive review of parents' agency in family language policy studies, linguistic landscape in home environment and home literacy environment. Thereafter, we introduce an ethnographic analysis of findings based on visual data and interview transcripts from ethnographic studies of four Chinese transnational families. Finally, we conclude with a critical discussion of the findings in relation to current research, highlighting methodological and conceptual limitations, and suggesting future research directions.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Parents' agency in Family language policy (FLP) in the context of immigration**

Family language policy (FLP) has grown into a critical domain by studying the triplet aspects: language ideologies, family practices, and language management in families (Spolsky, 2004, 2012). While initially defined as 'explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members' (King et al., 2008), the scope of family language policy has expanded to include implicit and subconscious 'parental involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013: 57).

Despite being subject to a broader socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-linguistic environment (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018), parents predominantly serve as the primary decision-makers and policy-makers in multilingual families, thereby, shaping their children's multilingual and multiliteracy repertoires and life trajectories (Lanza & Gomes, 2020; Obojska & Purkarthofer, 2018; Vold Lexander, 2021; Zhu & Li, 2016). Early FLP research has emphasized that parents' beliefs about the values and prestige associated with languages drive their language practices with their children (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King & Fogle, 2006). Furthermore, studies have revealed that parents actively support the maintenance of heritage languages in minority or migratory contexts as a means of preserving identity ties, cultural roots, and family kinship (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Smith-Christmas, 2020; Torsh & Lising, 2022; Wang, 2022). The language attitudes, ideologies, and cultural dispositions of parents significantly influence whether heritage languages are maintained within the home and the strategies employed to support their maintenance, including investments in language resources and the establishment of a rich home literacy environment mentioned in few studies (Said, 2021; Stavans, 2012).

Agency can be described as the capability of individuals to 'exercise power in the sense of the ability to bring about effects and to (re)constitute the world' (Ahearn, 2001: 113). It underscores human autonomy and the ability to influence one's environment through deliberate decisions and actions which involves both cognitive engagement and motivation to accomplish goals (Bandura, 2001). An individual with agency can be defined as knowing and predicting what kind of outcome a certain action will have and initiating and guiding actions toward specific goals (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Therefore, research on parental agency within FLP highlights parental motivations to maintain minority and heritage language at home (Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; Peng & Wan, 2023) and linguistic and cultural strategies deliberately or implicitly employed by parents, for instance to react to shifts in minority languages and cultures (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018).



## **2.2. Homescape in multilingual and multicultural transnational families**

Boivin (2021) introduces the term homescape to elucidate how it serves as a site of agency for newly arrived and settled transmigrant families in framing their identities through multisensory discourse resources. Melo-Pfeifer (2022) emphasizes furthermore the significance of the homescape, defined as the languages visible in the family environment, as a subject of research, 'considering the perception of multilingualism as lived and constructed by the family through visual, acoustic, and multimodal and multisensorial means'. Inspired by these work, Yu (2022) investigates children's and parents' perspective in constructing a multilingual homescape in Chinese migrant families in Germany. Moreover, Kitsiou & Bratimou (2023) discusses the transformation of Greek 'brain drain' immigrants' homescape during the pandemic in the context of translocal im-mobility in the online-offline nexus.

## **2.3. Home Literacy Environment (HLE) and multiliteracy practices**

Research consistently indicates that children raised in environments abundant in literacy resources and conducive to literacy activities typically demonstrate heightened language development and literacy skills (Burgess et al., 2002; Sénéchal et al., 1996, 1998; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). Sénéchal et al. (1998) conceptualized the home literacy environment as a spectrum of literacy-related resources, activities and interactions available within the home environment that include both informal and formal literacy experiences. It consists of not only cultural capital such as books and reading materials in a household but also cultural praxis including literacy activities in the family such as shared reading. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping a rich home literacy environment and experiences, primarily through their investment in printed materials and books, as well as their engagement in interactive literacy activities with their children (Burgess, 2011; Farver et al., 2006). In migrant and indigenous families where heritage language literacy faces threats of erosion, parents' beliefs and attitudes toward valuing heritage language literacy significantly influence its support and encouragement within the home (Morita-Mullaney et al., 2019; Said, 2021).

In the digital age, literacy extends beyond traditional reading and writing skills and activities, encompassing a wide range of modes and media, including print, digital media, visual images, and multimedia texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), or even different channels such as computer, mathematical and visual literacy (Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). Early engagement with print and digital media fosters multiliteracy skills, enabling children to navigate complex texts and derive meaning from multiple sources (Jewitt & Kress, 2021; Marsh, 2010). Moreover, the affordances of digital technologies have revolutionized home literacy environments, providing new opportunities for interactive and participatory literacy experiences (Apperley & Beavis, 2014). Many families, especially those dealing with minority and heritage language literacy development, have embraced digital tools and multimedia as effective aids (Eisenclas et al., 2016; Little, 2019; Szecsi & Szilagyi, 2012). Digital media like games and apps promote collaborative family practices in heritage language learning, bolstering children's self-awareness as heritage language speakers (Little, 2019).

While FLP studies provide a crucial foundation for understanding heritage language development in transnational families, most do not specifically address children's heritage literacy development or deeply explore parental views on heritage literacy learning. HLE studies contribute significantly to research on home literacy environments, focusing on material resources, activities, and experiences that support language and literacy development. However, they primarily examine dominant societal and instructional languages and often rely solely on

quantitative data collected through educational institutions (Burgess, 2011; Farver et al., 2006). Moreover, existing LL studies largely focus on urban and institutional multilingualism, often overlooking family settings as a critical sociolinguistic research domain. This study addresses these gaps by examining the Chinese heritage home literacy environment in transnational families in France and Germany, emphasizing parental agency and perspectives on creating a rich literacy environment, along with a categorical analysis of the literacy homescape.

### **3. Participants and data collection**

#### **3.1. Data collection**

The data presented in this paper stem from two two-year longitudinal ethnographic studies. Families were recruited through the researchers' social networks: Nanfei Wang observed 9 Chinese-speaking families by engaging with several Franco-Chinese family associations in France, while Yin Yu accessed 10 Chinese-speaking families in Germany through her work as a Chinese heritage language teacher. Inclusion criteria for participants were families with at least one Chinese-speaking parent and children in kindergarten or the first years of primary school, as these age groups typically represent the emerging stage of literacy development in all languages.

The ethnographic investigation comprised ethnographic observation with field notes and photography, multiple in-depth interviews with parents and children, and sound and video recordings of family multilingual interactions. We explicitly explained our research objectives and questions to families, and parents consented to participate and allowed us to capture images and record interactions in their homes. Although the frequency of family visits and the intensity of contact with families varied somewhat, we visited each family two to five times, from spending from 20 minutes to 3 hours each time, depending on the families' schedules and their willingness to participate. The objective of the ethnographic observation was to observe multilingual interactions and multiliteracy practices in these families.

During family visits, we photographed all materials that we considered relevant to multiliteracy development. We inquired about literacy materials visible to our sights in the home environment during informal discussions and recorded interviews and captured more focused photographs of specific items if parents and children wanted to discuss them. In total, Nanfei Wang collected 407 photographs, while Yin Yu collected 264 photographs in their respective research fields.

Once we established mutual trust between the researchers and the families, we commenced conducting in-depth interviews in participants' homes. All parents were interviewed individually at least once, without the presence of their spouse or children. Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 75 minutes and were conducted in the parents' preferred language, primarily in Chinese for Chinese-speaking parents and in German or French for German and French-speaking parents. The researchers conducted second and third interviews with parents who demonstrated strong interest in discussing their children's multilingual and multiliteracy development. Building upon the FLP framework, the researchers engaged in discussions with parents on various topics such as parental language ideologies, management of the family's language and literacy environment, and language practices among family members (see Appendix). During these interviews, parents shared their expectations and aspirations for their children's multilingual development, as well as the efforts they put into maintaining their family language. Special emphasis was placed on parents' agency in shaping the family's literacy environment to facilitate the development of heritage language literacy in children. When interacting with children, the authors respected their language preferences and engaged in translanguaging accordingly. If parents and children

mentioned literacy learning materials, they were asked to provide more details, and data collection was supplemented with photographs.

### 3.2. Data analysis

In the initial phase, the researchers independently coded their respective photographs and interview transcripts. The transcripts were coded within the framework of FLP, focusing on practices, ideologies, and management, using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the researchers individually coded their photographs collected from families using Nvivo, employing content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) to identify home literacy resources in various languages. While coding the photographs of multiliteracy resources collected from families, the researchers observed significant similarities in the Chinese literacy home environment among Chinese families residing in France and Germany. The visual data pertaining to the Chinese literacy home environment from both contexts were amalgamated for preliminary analysis. Subsequently, four categories were identified from the visual data concerning Chinese home literacy resources: highly visible homescape, semi-visible homescape, soundscape and digital and interactive landscape. Consequently, we selected four Chinese-speaking families from the two contexts for an ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis (Blommaert, 2013). These families were chosen based on their rich Chinese literacy environment, each explicitly demonstrating at least two aspects of the four identified categories. Table 1 below presents basic information about each family discussed in this paper. All participants have been anonymized using fictional names. The interview transcripts and field notes from informal discussions were then recoded according to the established categorization. The narrative data generated from interview transcripts and observation field notes were chosen to complement and triangulate with the visual data.

Table 1: Participants' information

Family	City of residence	Children's name and age	Children's gender	Parents	
				First language	Education
A	Hannover, Germany	Lian, 7	Girl	Father: German Mother: Mandarin Chinese	Both Bachelor
B	Göttingen, Germany	Max, 7 Oskar, 4	Boy, boy	Father: Xingjian dialect Chinese Mother: Xingjian dialect Chinese	Master Doctor

C	Sarthe, France	Sophie, 4	Girl	Father: French Mother: Guilin dialect, Mandarin Chinese	High school Master
D	Strasbourg, France	Luca, 5	Boy	Father: French Mother: Guizhou dialect, Mandarin Chinese	High school Master

#### 4. Parental agency in four types of homescape of Chinese home literacy environment

Building upon previous research on parental agency in FLP (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Mirvahedi, 2020), this study explores the homescape (Boivin, 2021; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022) pertinent to Chinese home literacy environment within Chinese transnational families in Europe through the lens of linguistic landscape (Pennycook, 2017; Shohamy, 2015). The analysis scrutinizes the degree of visibility, intentional and unconscious positioning, reported usage frequency, and various forms of Chinese literacy resources within the homescape. Through this investigation, the study proposes categorizing the Chinese literacy homescape according to sensory modalities such as visual, auditory and interactive, thus dividing it into: highly visible literacy homescape, semi-visible literacy homescape, the literacy soundscape, and the digital literacy landscape.

##### 4.1. Highly visible homescape

The unique characteristic of the Chinese written language lies in its ideographic nature, where each character represents a morpheme or a meaningful unit rather than a phoneme. Furthermore, the Chinese writing system is logographic, meaning that the Chinese characters often convey meaning through visual representation rather than phonetic cues (Kane, 2006; Packard, 2000). One of the main challenges in learning to read Chinese lies in the lack of grapheme—phoneme correspondences. As a result, children have to memorize thousands of visually complex characters, adding 200-700 characters per year to their sight vocabularies to acquire about 3000 characters by the end of grade 6 (Chen & Pasquarella, 2017). Thus, acquiring proficiency in the Chinese written language demands substantial exposure to visual stimuli and input. Through ethnographic studies conducted in Chinese transnational families, we have noticed the prevalence of highly visible homescape dedicated to Chinese literacy learning. We will discuss the parental agency concerning the use of this highly visible homescape as crucial components of children's Chinese home literacy environment. We delineate two primary categories of highly visible landscapes: those actively employed within the household and those that remain visible but inactive.

##### 4.1.1. Highly visible homescape in active use

Acknowledging the unique nature of the Chinese written language, as discussed previously, parents in this study often strategically place learning materials in conspicuous locations around the house to aid in their children's retention of Chinese characters. Their actions reveal their profound understanding of the crucial role played by the visibly rich literacy homescape in

nurturing their children's Chinese literacy skills. Moreover, they exercise autonomy and agency (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006) in shaping the home literacy environment through purposeful choices and actions to achieve their goal of improving their children's Chinese literacy proficiency

For instance, in Max's family (Picture 1), his mother has curated a display of 36 Chinese flashcards within a transparent plastic hanging pocket. This display not only occupies a significant portion of the living room wall but also aligns conveniently along the lower boundary, ensuring easy accessibility for children to engage with and update the flashcards. As evidenced in the interview, Max himself selected the flashcards, drawing upon his Chinese school learning experiences, intending to periodically refresh the set to align with his evolving knowledge. This deliberate incorporation of a significant language learning tool, reminiscent of those typically found in formal language classrooms, demonstrates the strategic role of his parents in seamlessly integrating Chinese literacy development into everyday life. Their approach reflects a thoughtful engagement that mirrors the structured learning activities typical of heritage language school. By utilizing the living room, a shared space by all family members, for educational purposes, parents demonstrate their proactive stance towards cultivating a tangible home literacy environment. Within this environment, children are empowered to actively participate in and reinforce their literacy skills by engaging with the characters they encounter at their heritage language school.



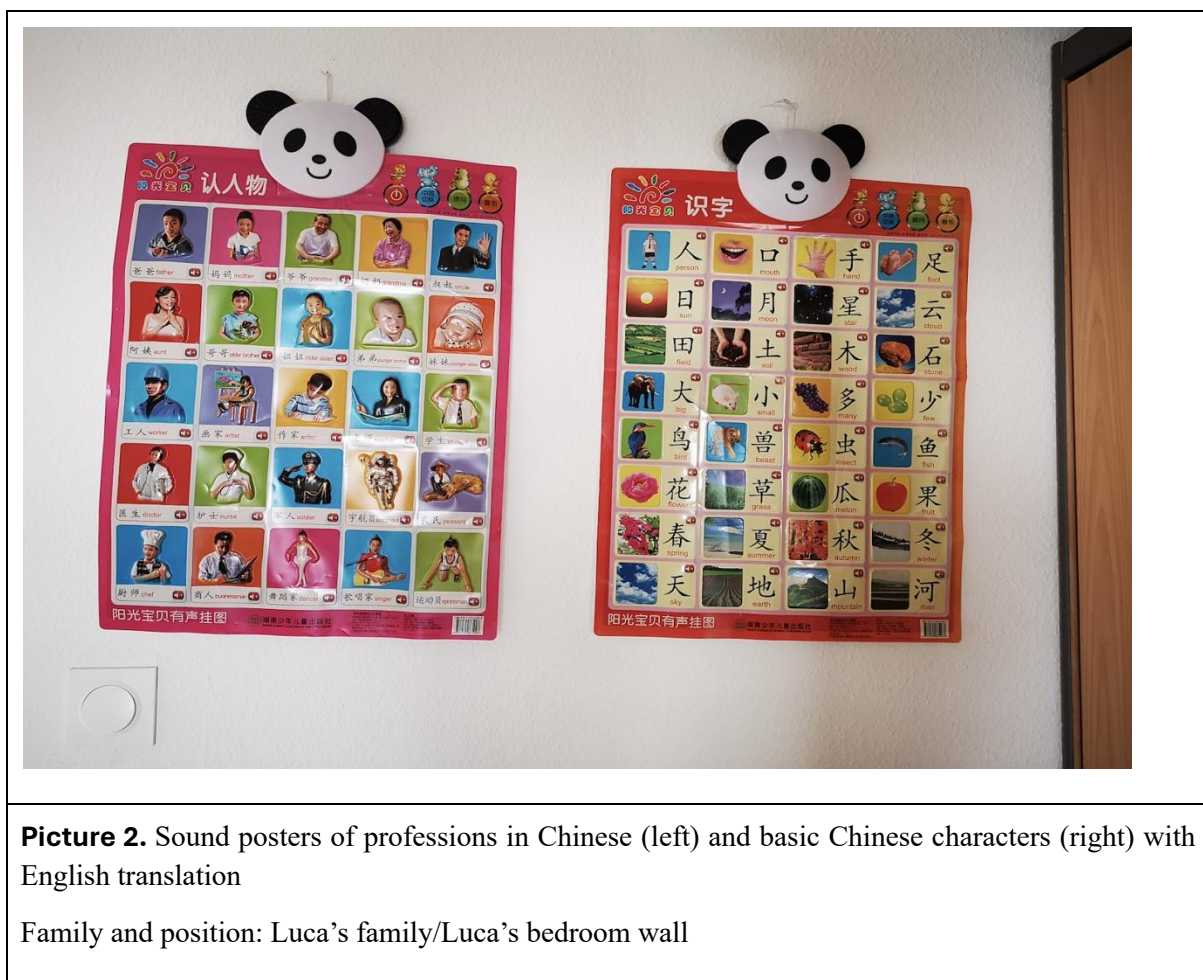
**Picture 1.** Hanging pocket of basic Chinese characters' flashcards

Family and position: Max's family/ living room wall

#### 4.1.2. Highly visible homescape not in active use

In contrast to the actively utilized literacy resources highlighted earlier, some conspicuously placed literacy materials may remain inactive for extended periods until children start to develop literacy skills. For instance, Luca's grandmother imported sound posters of basic Chinese characters from China intending to foster his literacy development when he was an infant, as depicted in Picture 2. Despite being prominently displayed beside Luca's bed, these posters remained incomprehensible images to him during his early years, as his mother observed. It's worth noting that Luca's grandmother, not his primary caregiver, procured these literacy resources. This indicates her anticipation of Luca's eventual acquisition of basic Chinese literacy skills and her perception of her role as a Chinese literacy resource as the grandmother.

In response, Luca's mother decided to display the posters in a highly visible space, despite their effectiveness being uncertain. She justified this decision by emphasizing her commitment to fostering Luca's Chinese literacy learning, considering it an integral aspect of the FLP.



Amidst the array of highly visible yet dormant literacy resources within the homescape, a distinct type stands out: calligraphy artworks. The tradition of hanging calligraphy artworks at home in Chinese families reflects a deep reverence for tradition, a commitment to cultural preservation, and an appreciation for the beauty of written language as a means of conveying profound meaning and aesthetic pleasure. By displaying calligraphy in their homes, families aim to



surround themselves with reminders of wisdom, virtue, and moral values, often choosing words with profound philosophical or poetic significance.

In Lian's family, a calligraphy piece featuring 'The Thousand Character Classic' adorns their kitchen wall as shown in Picture 3. This work has been used for centuries as a primer for teaching children to read, write and understand Chinese characters. However, the replica of the calligraphy artifact features Chinese characters written in traditional form, requiring right-to-left reading. Lian's mother explained in an interview that Lian only grasped the artwork's essence later, after developing basic literacy skills. Thus, the calligraphy piece remained purely decorative during Lian's early childhood, missing its potential as an active instructional literacy resource.

Nevertheless, Lian's mother's choice of this particular piece reflects her firm aspirations for Lian's Chinese literacy journey, encompassing both simplified and traditional characters, as well as a deep-seated desire for Lian to appreciate classical Chinese literature. By selecting the artwork and deciding where to display it, the mother shows her artistic taste in Chinese classic art and agency in shaping the child's multilingual and multicultural experiences. Beyond its instructional value, calligraphy embodies a cultural and aesthetic dimension that parents aspire to impart to their children. Exposure to multilingual artifacts like calligraphy inadvertently fosters multiliteracy skills, aligning with an integrative approach to multilingualism rooted in experiential learning rather than formal instruction.



**Picture 3.** Replica of the Calligraphy work 'Thousand Character Classic' by Yongzhen Zhi, Sui Dynasty

Family and position: Family Lian/kitchen wall

#### 4.2. Semi-visible Chinese literacy development landscape

Beyond the literacy resources conspicuously displayed throughout the household, we have observed that a considerable number of Chinese literacy materials are stored in less overt locations, thus not visually apparent or immediately accessible. We refer to these literacy resources with limited visual accessibility to family members, especially children, as the semi-visible homescape of Chinese literacy. This semi-visible homescape comprises a variety of items, including Chinese books, reading materials, literacy-oriented games, heritage school-related homework assignments, and self-created cards or letters. These materials offer valuable support for children's Chinese literacy development but may not be readily apparent without seeking them out.

Some families have invested significantly in building a diverse collection of multilingual books sourced from various countries. In Lian’s household, this investment is evident in the photographs (Picture 4 and Picture 5), showcasing an impressive bookshelf in their living room. This bookshelf not only adds visual appeal as a landscape itself but also establishes a home library conducive to literacy activities, which is a cornerstone of a nurturing home literacy environment. Lian’s mother has curated an extensive selection of Chinese, German and English books tailored for young children, procured through platforms like Taobao and shipped to Germany despite the costly shipping fees. Leveraging the assistance of her acquaintances and family members travelling from China to Germany, she avails herself of their help to bring over the Chinese books she has carefully selected. Her commitment to this endeavour, encompassing social, intellectual and financial dimensions, underscores the value she places on fostering a rich home literacy environment. In her approach, the landscape composed only by Chinese book covers and spines serves as an input and an immersive experience in Chinese literacy. She strategically positioned books with consideration for her daughter’s cognitive and physical development, ensuring that the resources remain easily accessible. This conscious effort not only enriches her daughter’s language skills but also emphasizes the importance of literature within their family dynamic.



**Picture 4.** Bookshelf

Family and position:  
Family Lian/living room

**Picture 5.** The left part of the bookshelf with children’s books

Family and position: Family Lian/living room



Another demonstration of a semi-visible homescape within the Chinese home literacy environment is the use of Chinese flashcards as important literacy learning resources. In Sophie's family, as shown in Picture 6 and Picture 7, we have captured a homescape of a collection of Chinese flashcard boxes arranged on a partially open cabinet at a child's height. These Chinese flashcards have been amassed by Sophie's mother through various means including online purchases, personal travels to China, and acquisition from second-hand sources via Franco-Chinese bilingual parent groups. She home-schooled her daughter's Chinese literacy learning, adhering to the structured learning sequence of basic Chinese characters outlined in a textbook available on the website of the Chinese Embassy in France. At the age of four, Sophie demonstrated remarkable proficiency in reading nearly all four boxes of cards featured in Picture 7, totalling approximately 200 Chinese characters.

During informal discussions, Sophie's mother explicitly articulated her deliberate decision to juxtapose the Chinese flashcards with other card games and puzzles, as opposed to integrating them with Chinese books and reading materials as shown in the Picture 6. This arrangement aimed to convey to her daughter that Chinese literacy acquisition is not solely a rigorous and daunting endeavour but can be approached with enjoyment and enthusiasm akin to playing puzzles and card games. Concerned with the pressure commonly associated with Asian education, Sophie's mother tried to infuse Chinese literacy learning seamlessly into recreational activities. By emphasizing 'learning without pressure', Sophie's mother highlighted her approach to education, where Sophie's Chinese literacy learning was self-initiated and playful. She explained that by allowing Sophie to learn naturally through play, she was able to 'learn without realizing it', thus integrating a joyful learning ethos into the homescape.



**Picture 6.** Boxes of Chinese characters' flashcards and card games and puzzles

Family and position: Family Sophie/living room shelf



**Picture 7.** Boxes of Chinese characters' flashcards

Family and position: Family Sophie/living room shelf

### 4.3. Chinese Heritage Language Soundscape

Clear auditory perception, particularly in discerning accurate pronunciation and phonology of oral language, is crucial for literacy learning, especially among young children in the early stages of language acquisition (Nelson et al., 2005). Within educational environments, a conducive classroom soundscape can optimize students' learning attitudes and outcomes (Chan et al., 2021). In this study, parents demonstrate an apparent awareness of the significance of the heritage language soundscape and invested in various strategies to support it. To enhance Chinese language exposure and facilitate literacy development, some parents in our study have invested in storytelling robots (Picture 8) to play Chinese stories and songs. Others have opted to download digital radio applications like Himalaya on their iPads or their smartphones to curate selected content according to their preferences.

For instance, Max's father noted their engagement not only with reading Chinese children's literature but also with pre-recorded Chinese stories narrated by professionals using various apps and digital devices to augment Chinese language exposure. Describing their Chinese-speaking family as a relatively isolated unit in Germany, Max's father acknowledged the limited exposure of their child to diverse Chinese contexts. To address this deficiency, the parents resorted to digital storytelling as a means to enrich language input, introducing formal language usage, what the father called 'other language systems' in the interview, alongside family interactions. In addition, the new technology relieves parents from the task of reading aloud while serving as a valuable supplementary source of language input alongside parental storytelling.

Similar practices were observed in Franco-Chinese contexts. However, unlike Max's father, whose agency lies in regulating language content and form, Sophie's mother, stressed the importance of exposing children to a large quantity of Chinese soundscape. By fostering what she termed 'a musical atmosphere at home', she shows her understanding of the significance of artistic literacy practices such as poetry reading and singing, constituting integral components of literacy and aesthetic education (Cun, 2023). In addition, she showed her knowledge in informal discussions that engaging in literacy activities like storytelling can significantly enhance children's proficiency in multilingual development. The mother positioned herself as a resource provider in soundscape design and ensured that Chinese auditory elements permeated their household.

#### **4.4. Digital interactive landscape for children's Chinese literacy development**

Upon delving deeper into families with frequent family visits, our investigation reveals that families in this study have invested in various digital interactive Chinese literacy resources. These resources include Chinese cartoons subtitled in Chinese characters, which are projected onto TV screens through smartphone apps chosen based on children's preferences, digital storybooks stocked in smartphone apps, Chinese documentaries available on online platforms, interactive exercises in Chinese language learning applications, and more. These resources are used to improve their children's literacy skills and cultural understanding of the Chinese language.

In Luca's family, the mother provides him with access to e-picture books in Chinese. She is supportive of Luca's E-picture book reading as it enables him to gain knowledge about Chinese festivals and classical culture. As a dedicated and experienced user of various language-learning apps in French, English, and Chinese, she frequently shares her recommendations and insights in parental chat groups. However, she is also mindful of the extensive screen time that children might engage in, similar to other families in this study who reported prolonged exposure to cartoons on TV screens.

Luca's accessibility of the digital landscape for Chinese literacy learning reflects his mother's knowledge and attitudes towards technology in language and literacy learning. Parents' agency in identifying appropriate apps, assessing their utility, and ultimately deciding to invest in them for Chinese language learning serves as a crucial facilitator for children's Chinese language and literacy development. Young children may be unaware of available resources until introduced by their parents.

While some parents invest in e-picture books to access the latest children's publications, which may be hard to find in Europe, others, like Max's family, invest in character reading and writing apps. The complexity of Chinese characters presents unique challenges in terms of learning and processing, as they can consist of strokes arranged in various configurations. Chinese characters are composed of strokes and radicals, forming a visually intricate system that requires precision in stroke order and placement. In the accompanying image (Picture 9), Max is seen tracing the second stroke of a Chinese character 'duo' (quantifier for flower or cloud) with his finger in a Chinese character reading and writing app (Honggen Shizi). This exposure to the app offers a unique and novel lived literacy experience for young children compared to traditional literacy activities with pencil and paper. Parents in Max's case recognize that digital writing exercises help their child better understand stroke orders in writing Chinese characters compared to traditional

tracing books. This self-awareness and reflection on app choices demonstrate parental cognitive involvement and their capacity for planning their children's literacy learning effectively.

For transnational families striving to preserve their home language, literacy, and culture in a migratory context, fostering an immersive and culturally rich environment emerges as a paramount endeavour. Such an environment cultivates children's sensibility to spoken language, literacy, and various cultural and artistic elements. Parents' agency is evident not only in designing the family's visual environment but also in creating a rich soundscape and digital landscape, which enhance children's multiliterate abilities and nurtures their interest in Chinese language and culture. As children navigate their multilingual and multisensory home environment, they are influenced by visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli, contributing to the language and literacy development.



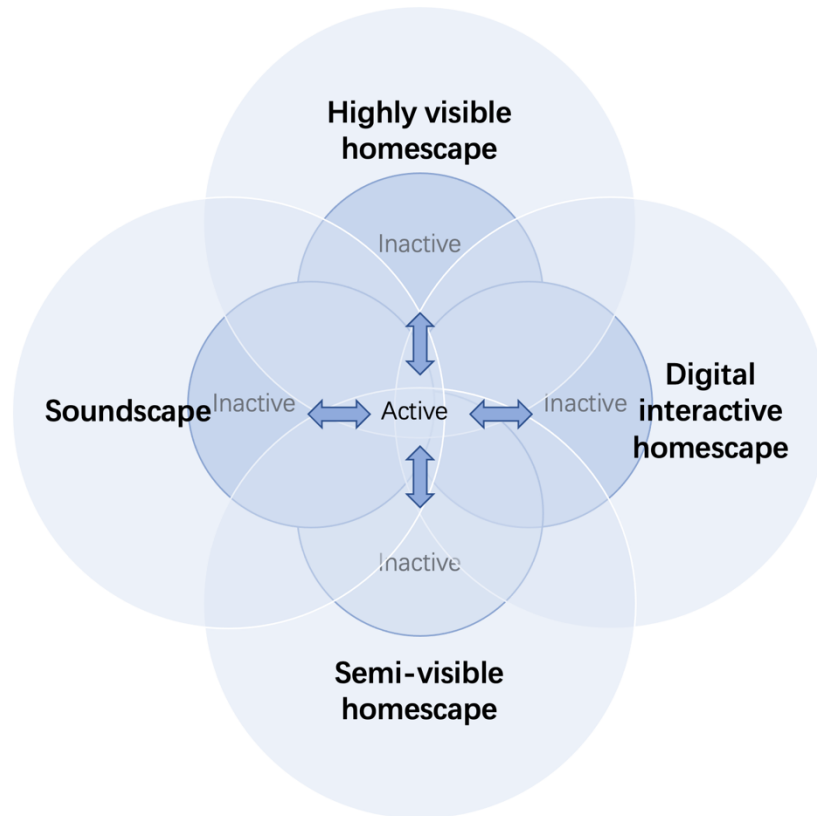
<p><b>Picture 8.</b> Storytelling robot named ‘Fire Rabbit’ with buttons labelled in Chinese characters for ‘recoding’, ‘story’, ‘characteristic’, ‘light’, and ‘song’</p> <p>Family and position: Family Sophie/Sophie’s bedroom</p>	<p><b>Picture 9.</b> Max’s Chinese interactive exercise on a Chinese learning application on a tablet</p> <p>Family and position: Family Max/living room</p>
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**5. Discussion**

In the following discussion, we revisit the research questions that guided this study, situating our findings within the existing literature on Chinese home literacy environments in the migrant context. We address the first research question by summarizing the findings related to the categorization of Chinese heritage literacy environment. Then we return to the second research question, to examine parental agency and perspectives on creating and sustaining a rich family literacy environment.

Firstly, this exploratory study reveals that the forms of homescape associated with Chinese heritage literacy in the migrant context are both complex and varied. Drawing on multisensory ethnographic LL studies (Blommaert, 2013; Pennycook, 2017) we categorized the Chinese heritage literacy environments observed in the studies families into four types: highly visible literacy homescape, semi-visible literacy homescape, the literacy soundscape, and the digital literacy landscape. Based on reported usage frequency, we classify highly visible literacy resources regularly used by children as part of the active heritage literacy homescape, while those beyond the children’s cognitive or literacy abilities are categorized as inactive. As this study represents the first attempt to categorize heritage literacy homescape through the lens of ethnographic multimodal linguistic landscapes, aligning these findings with existing frameworks poses challenges.

The following figure illustrates the categorization of four types of literacy homescapes observed in Chinese transnational families, emphasizing the potential interactions between active and inactive elements. At the first level of the diagram, the homescape is divided into four types, represented by overlapping large cross circles, highlighting the interconnectedness of these elements. The most active element is positioned at the centre of the diagram. Behind these four main circles, at the second level, is a similar but smaller cross chart, representing inactive elements displayed in a less visible font. The bi-directional arrows indicate that active and inactive elements are constantly poised to transform into one another.



**Figure 1.** Four types of literacy homescape in Chinese transnational families

Regarding the division of literacy resources into active and inactive use, Feiler et al. (2007) discussed the concepts of active and passive HLE. Active involvement includes activities such as children independently watching movies or parents reading with their children, whereas passive engagement involves children observing their parents reading, watching television, or engaging in discussions. However, we conceptualize home literacy resources as active or inactive based on children’s capacity for meaning-making during the literacy acquisition process. We consider literacy resources active when children engage with them frequently in literacy practices and non-active when these resources remain dormant in meaning-making, such as calligraphy artworks. Furthermore, in contrast to previous HLE investigations, which predominantly relied on quantitative methods and institution-administered questionnaires (Burgess, 2011; Farver et al., 2006), this paper offers insights into the visual manifestations of literacy resources. These images offer a more powerful and persuasive representation of what constitutes a rich literacy environment.

Secondly, in examining parental agency and perspectives on creating a supportive Chinese literacy environment at home in a migrant context, our study reveals that parents demonstrate highly strategic and agentic approaches when designing the Chinese literacy homescape. They possess a keen awareness of the unique characteristics of the Chinese writing system and the specific challenges children face when learning to read Chinese. They place character reading materials in highly visible spaces to meet the needs for a large amount of visual input in Chinese learning due to the absence of grapheme-phoneme correspondences in Chinese and they built a rich digital interactive repertoire to assist children in learning the fixed sequences of character strokes. Moreover, parents believe that immersion in a rich literacy environment effectively fosters Chinese reading motivation and enhances lived cultural and aesthetic experiences. Our

observations also indicate that literacy homescapes in active use, such as flashcards and character hanging pockets, are often purposefully designed with strong pedagogical intentions. In contrast, elements not in active use, such as calligraphic artifacts and books that are not immediately accessible, frequently serve as tools for cultural and literacy immersion. We assume that parents' rich educational backgrounds significantly contribute to their agentic and strategic approaches to overcoming the challenges of Chinese literacy learning. Comparing our findings with previous studies, our observations of parents' strategic management of heritage and multiliteracy development are in line with other studies. For instance, Said (2021) noted that Arabic-speaking families in the UK highly value Arabic literacy, investing in small libraries and dedicating time to teaching the specific skills needed to master an additional orthographic system. Similarly, Yu (2022) highlighted that parents of bilingual Chinese-German families regard homescape elements as crucial for language and literacy development. Our study specifically emphasizes parents' strategic management of the literacy homescape, considering the distinct features of the Chinese writing system and the challenges associated with Chinese literacy acquisition.

Thirdly, the parents in our study demonstrate extensive knowledge and skilled management of existing digital media for Chinese language and literacy learning, utilizing these tools to create a rich Chinese soundscape and digital landscape at home. They actively engage with digital media resources, carefully regulating not only the screen time and quantity of language input, such as through storytelling robots, but also the form and content of these inputs. This finding resonates with the observation of Hamilton et al. (2016), who noted that parents often act as gatekeepers in the process of selecting, purchasing, downloading, and installing apps across various devices such as tablets, smartphones, and computers. Similarly, Little (2019) reported in her study on heritage language learning with apps and games on parents' ability to choose and utilize digital resources effectively, providing access to both hardware and software.

Overall, the ethnographic linguistic landscape lens applied to the home environment offers valuable insights into family language policy studies, particularly in the context of the home literacy environment. Methodologically, the use of photographic documentation as the primary data source provides powerful and self-explanatory evidence that enhances the analysis and interpretation of home literacy environments in transnational families. If the linguistic landscape of a community reflects the ethnolinguistic vitality of its languages (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006), we argue that the homescape can similarly serve as an indicator of family language policy by visually representing families' language and literacy management. Coupled with the analysis of perspectives from transnational families, the homescape provides a more holistic and nuanced understanding of multilingual and multiliteracy practices, ideologies, and management within the home environment.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the present family language policy study, we explored the Chinese literacy homescape and parental perspectives and agency in creating rich home literacy environment within Chinese-speaking families residing in France and Germany. However, it is unrealistic to expect parents, lacking professional training, to shoulder the entire responsibility for home-schooling their children's heritage literacy. Instead, there is a pressing need for systematic support from educational institutions and relevant associations to assist parents in navigating this task effectively. Drawing on the insights gleaned from our research, educational institutions and language experts can offer invaluable guidance to parents unfamiliar with language pedagogy, aiding them in creating a conducive literary environment at home.



While our study gathered linguistic landscape data in Chinese-speaking families from both French and German contexts, we envision the development of a shared database capable of supporting both quantitative research and qualitative ethnographic investigations within family settings. For instance, such a database could quantify the prevalence of linguistic landscape elements within various categories of the home environment. Furthermore, future research could delve deeper into understanding how Chinese families adapt to diverse European educational systems in their efforts to facilitate multilingual and multiliteracy learning.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview questions for parents**

#### **Questions related to family language policy**

##### **1. Language use between family members**

Which languages do you speak, and how proficient are you in each language? Could you share your personal experience with language learning?

Which language(s) do you primarily use when communicating with your partner and parents at home?

What languages do you use when interacting with your children?

##### **2. Assessment of children's language skills**

What languages do your children speak, and how would you rate their proficiency in each language?

How well can they read and write in the languages you've mentioned? Could you address your children's proficiency in Chinese, both orally and in written form?

##### **3. Attitudes toward children's language development and language learning**

How do you perceive your children's language learning journey?

Do you prioritize specific languages for your children? If yes, what are the reasons behind it?

Would you like to promote your children's proficiency in Chinese? Why do you want to transmit the Chinese language to your children?

##### **4. Management and practices related to family literacy activities**

How do you support your children's Chinese language learning, considering both oral and written aspects?

Could you share any successful experiences and discuss any challenges you have faced in this regard?

How do you encourage your children to write and read in Chinese?

What kind of literacy-rich environment do you aim to create at home? How do you organize literacy activities for your children at home?

Do you incorporate specific literacy-related objects or materials into your home environment?

### **Questions for the home literacy environment:**

Could you give me a tour of your home and point out items that you believe contribute to your children's language learning?

This object has attracted my attention for this reason, can you tell me the story behind it?

What do you or your children do with this object/ how do you organize literacy activities based on this object?

Why do you place this here/what is the attention behind the setting of the object?

### **Résumé**

S'appuyant sur des recherches antérieures sur les politiques linguistiques familiales (Curdt-Christiansen & Palviainen, 2023; King et al., 2008), cette étude explore les paysages linguistiques familiaux (Boivin, 2021; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022) et l'environnement familial concernant la littéracie en chinois (Burgess, 2011; Sénéchal et al., 1998) au sein des familles transnationales chinoises en Europe. Elle examine la manière dont les parents exercent leur agentivité (Ahearn, 2001; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006) en concevant, créant et adaptant les paysages linguistiques familiaux au sein de leur famille, et catégorise les ressources littéraciques chinoises au sein de l'environnement familial multilingue. L'étude présente les résultats d'une enquête ethnographique menée auprès de quatre familles sinophones résidant en France et en Allemagne. Les données comprennent des enregistrements sonores des interactions familiales, des photographies de l'environnement familial, des entretiens approfondis et des notes de terrain issues de discussions informelles avec les membres de la famille. En adoptant une approche ethnographique des paysages linguistiques (Blommaert, 2013; Pennycook, 2017), l'analyse examine la visibilité, le positionnement intentionnel et inconscient, la fréquence d'utilisation déclarée et les diverses formes de ressources littéraciques en chinois dans les familles. Grâce à cette exploration, l'étude propose de catégoriser les paysages linguistiques domestiques de la littératie chinoise en fonction de modalités sensorielles telles que le visuel, l'auditif et l'interactif, les divisant ainsi en : paysages linguistiques familiaux de la littératie très visible, paysages linguistiques familiaux de la littératie semi-visible, paysages sonores de la littératie, et paysages de la littératie numériques et interactives. D'ailleurs, notre étude révèle que les parents font preuve d'approches hautement stratégiques et de l'agentivité dans la conception des paysages familiaux de la littératie chinoise, démontrant leur profonde conscience des caractéristiques uniques du système d'écriture chinois et des défis spécifiques auxquels les enfants sont confrontés lorsqu'ils apprennent à lire le chinois.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Aufbauend auf Forschungen zur Familiensprachenpolitik (Curdt-Christiansen & Palviainen, 2023; King et al., 2008) wird in dieser Studie die familiäre Sprachlandschaft (Boivin, 2021; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022) im chinesischen häuslichen Leseumfeld (Burgess, 2011; Sénéchal et al., 1998) von chinesischen transnationalen Familien untersucht. Verschiedene Formen der chinesischen Sprachlandschaft im familiären Umfeld werden kategorisiert, und die Perspektiven sowie die Handlungsmöglichkeiten der Eltern (Ahearn, 2001; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006) bei der Gestaltung, Schaffung und Anpassung dieser familiären Sprachlandschaft werden analysiert.

Die Studie stützt sich auf ethnografische Daten von vier chinesischsprachigen Familien, die in Frankreich und Deutschland leben. Die Daten umfassen Tonaufnahmen von Familieninteraktionen, Fotos der Sprachlandschaft im Haushalt, ausführliche Interviews und Feldnotizen aus informellen Gesprächen mit Familienmitgliedern. Im Rahmen der ethnografischen Sprachlandschaftsforschung (Blommaert, 2013; Pennycook, 2017) kategorisiert die Studie die chinesische Sprachlandschaft in vier sensorische Modalitäten: sehr sichtbar, halb-sichtbar, klanglich sowie digital und interaktiv. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Eltern bei der Gestaltung der familiären Sprachlandschaft hoch strategische und agentive Ansätze verfolgen und dabei ein ausgeprägtes Bewusstsein für die einzigartigen Merkmale des chinesischen Schriftsystems sowie die spezifischen Herausforderungen zeigen, denen ihre Kinder beim Erlernen der chinesischen Schriftsprache begegnen.

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