

**The Impacts of Linguistic Regulation in School for Civility on Chinese
Gen Z's Communication with Gen X — A Case Study of Guangxi Province of
China**



**A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Naresuan University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Thesis entitled “The Impacts of Linguistic Regulation in School for Civility on Chinese Gen Z's Communication with Gen X — A Case Study of Guangxi Province of China.”

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has been approved by the Graduate School as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Program in Social Development of Naresuan University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impacts of school-based linguistic regulation on Chinese Generation Z's (Gen Z) communication with Generation X (Gen X), the intergenerational communication challenges that faced, and Gen Z's responses to swearing in the context of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. A total of ten Gen Z participants ($N=10$, aged 24–26) were interviewed and their perspectives were compared with findings from a Gen X group ($N=6$, aged 46–69) to reveal intergenerational contrasts. Data analyzed by content analysis.

The results show that linguistic regulation in schools significantly shapes Gen Z's language practices, fostering heightened sensitivity to swear words and reinforcing habits of self-monitoring. Unlike Gen X, who interprets swearing primarily through semantic context, Gen Z tends to adopt keyword-based monitoring, classifying words as offensive regardless of intent. This divergence often leads to misunderstandings: for Gen X, habitual or filler swearing may not be perceived as profanity, whereas Gen Z regard such expressions as inappropriate. Moreover, school regulation broadened Gen Z's repertoire of "sensitive words," producing generational asymmetries in tolerance and communicative evaluation.

In response to Gen X's swearing, Gen Z frequently employ indirect strategies such as sarcastic "yinyang" discourse or psychological distancing, though these approaches often fail to bridge generational gaps. While Gen Z prioritizes rationality in conflict, Gen X's lower sensitivity reflects formative sociopolitical contexts rather than deliberate linguistic choices.

The study demonstrates that intergenerational differences in swearing are rooted not merely in language variation but in institutionalized regulation and sociohistorical experience. These findings contribute to understanding how linguistic ideologies, school policies, and cultural contexts shape communication across generations in contemporary China.

ABBREVIATIONS

Gen X	=	Generation X
Gen Z	=	Generation Z
Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages	=	Send-Down Policy Send-Down Movement



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter follows the structure as below:

1. Background of The Study
2. Rationale of The Study
3. Research Questions
4. Research Objectives
5. Research Scope
6. Key Definition
7. Expected Benefits from The Study

1. Background of the study

China's Generation Z (Gen Z) is often considered fortunate. This is because most of them enjoyed China's compulsory education policy (China Education Daily, 2019). However due to the predominantly closed educational system in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, where many Gen Z individuals attended boarding schools, they grew up somewhat isolated from the broader society (China Education Daily, 2018). This environment fostered a habit of using polite language, as emphasized within the school setting (China Education Daily, 2018). Consequently, the frequent use of swear words by Gen X might cause discomfort for Gen Z when communicating with them (Wang, 2004b).

Gen Z refers to the cohort of individuals born roughly between the 1995 and the 2010 (Dolot, 2018). On January 1, 2001, the Chinese government solemnly announced

to the world that China had achieved the strategic goal of universalizing nine years of compulsory education and eradicating illiteracy among young adults. (China Education Daily, 2019). That means most young people born in the 2000s could receive free and mandatory education from primary school (6 years) to junior high school (3 years) in campus funded by the government. However, due to the strict language rules on campus, only Mandarin can be spoken (dialects are not allowed) and the use of swear words is strictly prohibited (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2004). However, students cannot find a clear list specifying which words are officially defined as "offensive." This means that every teacher and student effectively acts as a self-censor, consciously or unconsciously avoiding the use of potentially offensive language both inside and outside the classroom to maintain a "clean" linguistic environment. Consequently, students neither use nor hear swear words on campus.

It is important to note that the Ministry of Education's documents serve primarily as guideline frameworks rather than legally binding regulations. Based on these national outlines, individual schools develop their own institutional rules, and class teachers further formulate class-specific disciplinary measures according to those school policies. As a result, the degree of enforcement varies considerably across schools, and even within the same institution, different teachers may apply the language regulations with differing levels of strictness.

This uneven implementation leads to a diverse range of linguistic experiences among Gen Z students. Some may have been exposed to extremely rigid forms of linguistic regulation, while others experienced relatively lenient environments. Consequently, the sensitivity of Gen Z individuals toward swear words—and their definitions of what constitutes swearing—can differ significantly.

Due to the fact that most junior high school students (88%) in Guangxi board at school (China Education Daily, 2013), the school environment remains largely closed, and students are unable to leave except on weekends or holidays. This isolation from the broader community, when combined with varying degrees of linguistic restriction,

has led to a substantial decline in both the frequency and flexibility of swear word use among students. This makes it possible for students to be affected by the following:

Firstly, it makes students more sensitive to swearing words. Typically, the more often swearing words are used, the more their impact diminishes (Wajnryb, 2005). Since students' language is strictly controlled by language regulation on Chinese campuses, where exposure to offensive words is very low compared to the broader society, the impact of offensive words on students may be greater. The reduction in offensive language may make Gen Z youth more sensitive to sudden swearing words, even if this bad word is generally prevalent off-campus and not considered very hurtful. What boarding students consider to be hurtful swear words may simply be everyday language for someone who grew up in the broader society.

Secondly, they may find it difficult to respond effectively to the offensive language used by other people, which can lead to feelings of distress. Every offensive word invokes a myriad of uses, and every dialect has a different mix of uses. The limitations of campus language make these methods blank in the student's head. And since such offensive language usually comes out of nowhere, it needs to take a certain amount of training to be able to retaliate against the other person in a short period of time. Obviously, both the methods and training for using offensive language are blank in students' heads, which makes it difficult for them to counter offensive language off campus. The disappearance of offensive words is not just the disappearance of vocabulary; it is the disappearance of this conceptual. Words are ideas, if the offensive words are lost, people's perceptions of offensive words may become more ambiguous (Fairman, 2009). That causes students cannot clearly perceive the presence of offensive words or even determine if they are being deliberately attacked by others. Also, on campus, students use euphemisms instead of offensive language, however they don't work off-campus because euphemisms are influential among people who must use them widely that make the meaning universal (Fairman, 2009). This may impact Gen Z life in the future.

To make matters worse, Gen Z has to deal with a Chinese Generation X (Gen X) who maybe more ruthless and unethical. Gen X refers to the cohort of individuals born roughly between 1965 and 1980 (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). In China, Gen X grew up in brutal political campaigns, which led most of them to believe that the more immoral people are, the better they survive (Xiaoming , 2005). In this movement, there is no need for a court trial; it is only the words of society that can convict a person and describe him as a class enemy of the people (Wang, 2004b). In order to protect themselves, other people have to humiliate, abuse, and even torture and beat him without mercy once they find that a person has been defined as an enemy of the class to show that they are not in the same group as him. The Cultural Revolution was a war between one class and another, and class enemies were not human beings. Therefore, no matter how many people are killed and how they are killed, it is reasonable and justifiable. There was a saying circulating in the society at that time: "This is a life-or-death class struggle" and "If you don't express your anger, you may be the next person to be beaten." (Zhang, 2013) The period of the movement was full of verbal violence, and swear words appeared with very high frequency in almost every inch of people's lives. This has resulted in Gen X learning and using a wide range of swear words, often involving violence.

During the "Cultural Revolution" from 1966 to 1976, the traditional Confucian rituals (founded by Confucius) were considered "old thoughts and culture." Anyone who retained such habits or had such books at home would be considered to advocate "feudalism" (advocating the imperial system)(People Daily, 1974) and would be killed by the "Red Guards(红卫兵)" (young supporters of Mao Zedong's ideology)(Thurston, 1984; Wang, 2004a), with their belongings destroyed. This led to a severe loss of social morality and eventually devolved into retaliation between individuals, interpreting unintentional actions as harmful to "socialism," leading to violence against them. Verbal violence was the most popular method of violence at that time (Wang, 2004a). In fact, the Chinese authorities have repeatedly emphasized that "fighting should be

done with words rather than violence," which nominally indicates that the authorities hope to use more forms of verbal violence to avoid violent incidents (Yan, 2019). As a result, during this period, people's language was filled with aggressiveness, and learning verbal violence was a necessary skill to avoid being "Pi dou(批斗)" (violently attacked) by the Red Guards. After the Cultural Revolution began, even the language used by middle school girls became rude, unreasonable, wild, obscene, and full of violence (Wang, 2004b).

The following is the content of a big-character poster posted by the Red Guards in the bedroom of a victim during the Cultural Revolution: “狗恶霸，卞毒蛇、你他妈的听着，你再敢骑在劳动人民头上耀武威，我们抽你的狗筋，挖你的狗心，砍你的狗头。你他妈的别妄想东山再起，我们要断你的孙，绝你的种，砸你个稀巴烂。” (Dog bully, Bian poisonous snake, you fucking listen, if you dare to show off your power by riding on the heads of working people again, we will whip you I'll dig out your dog's tendons, dig out your dog's heart, and chop off your dog's head. Don't fucking think about coming back again, we will cut off your grandchildren, destroy your seeds – makes you cannot pregnant anymore, and smash you to pieces.) During the revolution, swear words were used frequently. "Fuck (操你妈)" began to be commonly used in schools as a "revolutionary" style at that time, and later became one of the characteristics of the Red Guard language (Wang, 2004b).

During the "Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages" movement (send-down movement) launched by the Chinese authorities between 1968 and 1980, two-thirds of urban youth were sent to the countryside to "learn about agriculture" (Xiaoming, 2005 ; Zhou & Hou, 1999). The youth were reluctant to go to the countryside due to the poor rural environment. And the impoliteness of villagers who perceived them as a threat, making it difficult for them to integrate into the rural environment. This led the youth and their parents to resort to any means to obtain qualifications to leave the countryside. Some female youths agreed to have sex with cadres for the promised that help them

leave the countryside (Bonnin, 2013). These inhumane methods had given rise to a belief in lots of individuals that the more immoral one is, the easier it is to survive in society (Xiaoming Pan, 2005). Due to various forms of resistance to the countryside policy, the overall social moral values deteriorated significantly.

Consequently, many individuals from this generation may possess sharp tongues in their language and may associate politeness with vulnerability. Different social experiences make them believe in different ideas. People usually consider their childhood experiences to be informative. That may be the reasons why Gen Z and Gen X will have communication challenges over swear words for a long time.

Politeness in speech is widely regarded as a desirable trait, often associated with higher social status (McEnery, 2004). However, this norm doesn't necessarily hold true within the Chinese Gen X demographic. Conversely, Gen X, shaped by a backdrop of political upheavals within China's ruling class (Wang, 2004a), might inadvertently cause deep offense to Gen Z with seemingly casual remarks during interactions. The ability to assert one's rights and interests in the face of verbal attacks is crucial, as instances of verbal abuse often arise when the target lacks the means to effectively retaliate. Having grown up in an environment of predominantly refined language, Gen Z may have become less resilient to coarse language and less adept at defending themselves. Therefore, gap communication challenges may arise in situations where Gen X is more likely to use profanity and Gen Z is less adept at using profanity.

In this research researcher will study the impacts of Linguistic regulation for civility on Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X and to explore the communication challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z communication with Gen X.

2. Rationale of the study

This study is not to express that it is right or wrong for school students to use offensive language, but rather to try to understand the impact of China's education policy and the boarding schools on students after graduation and how graduates feel

about communicating with Gen X due to the unique and violent political movements that Gen X has experienced, such as the Cultural Revolution and the Send Down Policy. The rationale for this study is fourfold:

First, this study was the first time focusing on the impact of language regulation by linguistic cleanliness on a social group. The use of 'clean' (polite) language is often praised, but the rapid realization of this effect may have some negative effects (greater sensitivity to offensive language than people outside the school, not being skilled enough in offensive language to fight back effectively, being perceived as a bully, etc.). The rapid spread of China's compulsory education system and the widespread use of boarding schools provide an excellent opportunity for this study.

Secondly, most of the previous literature only mentions that Chinese youth are not satisfied with their jobs but only analyses it from the perspective of the Chinese economy and their job salaries. This study will analyze the difficulties Gen Z may encounter in terms of how they feel about their communication problem and help society to better understand and help Gen Z's need.

Thirdly, this study maybe recognizes the potential intergenerational impact of this language gap. Gen X has experienced a unique socio-political environment characterized by survival tactics and verbal aggression, their interactions with Gen Z may inadvertently lead to misunderstandings and heightened emotional reactions; Gen Z is not used to this type of verbal communication and may perceive Gen X's aggressive language as being more hurtful and deliberate than they intended, which may lead to intergenerational tensions.

Fourthly, this study will analyze Gen Z's impression of Gen X, to outline the image of Gen X in Gen Z's perspective. This image may provide a more vivid picture of Gen Z's view towards Gen X. It will provide a reference for regulating the communication problems between the two generations afterwards.

By shedding light on the complex issues of Gen Z's linguistic sensitivity, ability to counter verbal aggression, and intergenerational dynamics, this study aims to shed

light on a neglected aspect of China's education policy. The findings will not only contribute to linguistic and psychological insights, but also inform educational strategies to develop emotionally resilient and effective communicators within the unique socio-linguistic structure of Gen Z in China.

3. Research Question

1. How do boarding schools and linguistic regulations affect Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region?
2. What are the challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China?
3. How do Gen Z response to Gen X when Gen X speaks swearing words in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China.

4. Research Objectives

1. To study the impacts of boarding schools and linguistic regulation on Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China.
2. To explore the communication challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z communication with Gen X in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China.
3. To explore how Gen Z response to Gen X when Gen X speaks swearing words in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China.

5. Research Scope

1. Area

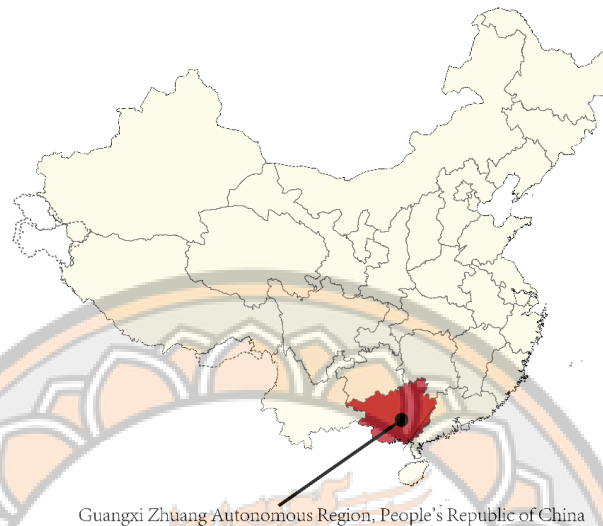


Figure 1. *Geographic Location and Boundary Map of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China*

This study investigated in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. In the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, there were cases of cannibalism during the Cultural Revolution and other movements (CK, 2016; Sutton, 1995; Yan, 2019; Zhao, 2016), which caused great damage to social morality. In the subsequent spread of the education system, boarding schools in Guangxi accounted for 80 per cent of the total, and may face a long period of isolation from the off-campus environment.

2. Contents

This study considered on the impact of linguistic regulation for civility on Chinese Gen Z' s communication with Gen X and the challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z' s communication with Gen X and their response.

3. Key Informants

The key informants of this study were the graduates who have been in boarding school for more than 6 years in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. In-depth interviews were conducted in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region with 10 key informants in Gen Z (4 males and 6 females) who had lived in boarding schools for more than 6 years. And 6 extras informants in Gen X also be interviewed, 3 men and 3 women. The reason for selecting Gen X samples in this experiment is to further validate the research conclusions.

6. Key Definitions

Generation Z (Gen Z)

Generation Z refers to the generation born roughly between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s (Dolot, 2018). In China, Gen Z usually grows up in a closed campus, virtually isolated from the outside world from primary to high school, but this gives Gen Z a new perspective on Gen X's behavior. Often, reflection and new choices emerge when the sense of tradition no longer sufficiently influences the thinking of a generation (Mannheim, 1952).

Generation X (Gen X)

Generation X refers to the generation born roughly between 1960 and 1980 (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). In China, Gen X's early childhood was at the end of the Cultural Revolution, and in his youth he experienced the intellectual youth movement to the countryside, which greatly undermined people's morality, and the idea that "the more immoral a person is, the more he can survive" began to be widely spread in society (Xiaoming, 2009). This has led Gen X to believe that the moral standards of the society at that time were "valuable". Generally speaking, the lessons learnt by people in their

youth are often recognized by their own tendencies as "the nature view of the world" (Mannheim, 1952).

Swear Words

According to Wajnryb, 2005, certain characteristics make words more likely to be identified as swear words by the general public. First, they must be offensive—not merely flippant but falling into the category of foul language. Second, they often break taboos by bringing private or socially restricted topics into public discourse. Third, they are typically used with the intention to shock, insult, or make others feel uncomfortable. Finally, such words are widely perceived as “slimy and disgusting things,” reflecting a strong sense of social and moral repulsion.

Linguistic Regulation

Linguistic Regulation refers to the designation of rules and systems for students and teachers to develop a sense of self-censorship through the school's rules and systems related to polite language, no use of swear words, no use of dialects, etc. as stipulated in the Code of Daily Behavior Management for Primary and Secondary School Students developed by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). Since the Ministry of Education does not give a definition of swear words and a list of swear words vocabulary different teachers and different students have different definitions of swear words, generally, offensive words are also usually considered in the list of swearing words, which may reduce the probability of conflict among students to a certain extent, but at the same time, it also reduces to a great extent the exposure of students to swear words, which may make them experience communication challenges when they are confronted with people who often speak swear words.

Clean Language

Clean language, as stipulated by the Chinese Ministry of Education in its code of practice for managing the daily behavior of primary and secondary school students, means that people should use polite words and should not use swear words, however, everyone has a different level of sensitivity to swear words and inappropriate language, and even the same person may have different sensitivities when interacting with different people. This is because language and the context behind it are often interpreted and viewed differently in different social and cultural contexts. As a result, everyone has different standards of judgement, which ultimately results in an individual self-censorship mechanism to eliminate swearing at "source", or even words that may have certain hurtful connotations.

In practice, some teachers will also associate "clean language" with "politeness" and "kindness" and will assume that any offensive word that appears in a negative mood, even words that are not offensive are considered uncivilized. For example, if a student says to another student, "*He is ugly.*" This does not in itself contain explicitly offensive words, and in most cases does not immediately lead to disorderly behavior, which is usually considered the domain of freedom of speech in the West but is usually considered uncivilized and banned in the school in China. Thus, it may become an experience for students that expressing negative views about others will be punished. While this may seem to reduce the likelihood of conflict among students, it may also result in a near-abandonment of students' exposure to and use of negative vocabulary, such as swear words, and the communication challenges that may arise when they encounter Gen X, who frequently use swear words.

7. Expected benefits from the study

Through this study, the researcher may get the following research results:

1. The study aims to reveal the impacts of linguistic regulation for civility on Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X.
2. The study seeks to explore the challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X.
3. The findings are expected to provide a better understanding of the feelings between Gen Z and Gen X during communication, helping society to be more intuitive and reduce the generation gap.



CHAPTER II

REVIEW LITERATURE

In this chapter, relevant literature was discussed as per the following subtitles:

1. Communication and Language concept
2. Impact and Coping concept
3. Education Policy and Regulation Related to Language Restriction
4. Gen Z, Gen X and Their Growth Environment
5. Relevant Study
6. Research Conceptual Framework

The purposes of this research are to study the impacts of Linguistic Regulation for civility and the communication challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z's communication and Chinese Gen X. The reasoning of this paper is that people's sensitivity to the swearing words becomes desensitized as the frequency with which people are exposed to the swearing words increases (Fairman, 2009; Wajnryb, 2005), and that the restriction of the swearing words vocabulary leads to the disappearance of related ideas (Fairman, 2009), and make people do not know how to fight back when they encounter each other's use of swearing words. Gen-Z in China was rarely exposed to the swear words while growing up because of the boarding school regulations(China Education Daily, 2013, 2019; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2004). Therefore, this may make the Chinese Gen-Z feel more sensitive to the swearing words and do not know how to fight back. On the other hand, China's Gen X grew up in the environment of the Cultural Revolution and the send-down policy (Bonnin, 2013; Thurston, 1984; Wang, 2004; Xiaoming, 2005, 2009; Zhou & Hou, 1999), which made them believe that the more immoral a person is, the more he or she can survive in society

(Bonnin, 2013; Pan, 2009). The period of the movement was full of verbal violence, and swear words appeared with very high frequency in almost every inch of people's lives. This has resulted in Gen X learning and using a wide range of swear words, often involving violence. Now that China's Gen Z has graduated from school and is facing the Gen X's "high level" of profanity, there is bound to be a communication challenges.

1. Communication and Language concept

a) Communication Challenges

In this paper the different perspectives of the two generations on the use of swearing words are dealt with, and the reason for this difference in perspectives is most likely due to the different experiences that the two generations had during their youth. The researcher will discuss the intergenerational aspects of the issue.

The method of grouping ages as a means of observing the significance of social change for social groups can be traced back as far as the ancient Greek philosopher Nash (Nash, 1978; Pilcher, 1994). But Mannheim's "The Problem of Generations" is considered to be the most systematic sociological explanation. Mannheim and other sociologists in intergenerational studies refer to "generations" as people in a specified group of people who have experienced a significant event at a specified time (Pilcher, 1994). Individuals should never forget that even though people come from different age groups, every individual in the same age group is also very different (Steinerowska-Streb, 2016). However, perhaps the researcher can use this approach to better understand why individuals of different age groups exhibit varying behavioral traits. In other words, it enables us to consider how different societal events in one's life can shape distinct behavioral characteristics in people from an alternative perspective (Dolot, 2018).

In this dissertation, both Gen-X and Gen-Z have experienced significant social change, and almost every one of them has been personally involved in generating the experience. In Gen-X 's experience, the Cultural Revolution and the Send-Down Policy led them to believe that they had to learn to be immoral to survive in society (Bonnin, 2013), where as in Gen-Z's experience, the rapidly spreading compulsory education system made it necessary to prioritize "civilized" problem solving, with as little violence as possible. Both major societal changes lasted throughout their childhood experiences (about 10 years, from 1966 to 1980).

There may be two reasons why Gen Z and Gen X will have communication challenges over swear words for a long time.

Firstly, different social experiences make them believe in different ideas. People usually consider their childhood experiences to be informative. According to Mannheim (1952), the experiences accumulated in the environment during youth usually turn out to be the most important realizations of a lifetime, and people often use these experiences to "stabilize" themselves, just like their "worldview" is "natural". According to Schuman & Scott (1989), people of all ages tend to think that the events and changes that happened when they were young are important and very helpful to them.

That's may be the reason why Gen-X may have a hard time understanding Gen-Z and feel hard to integrate Gen-Z; according to Mannheim (1952), true integration into a group requires not only acceptance of the group's particular values, but also the ability to "see things" in terms of those values.

In the "send-down policy", Gen-X feels a real crisis, and the use of profanity may be a kind of protection mechanism for them. According to Mannheim (1952), when a person is forced out of their social group and into a new one (e.g., Gen-X in the "Send-Down" policy, urban youths were forced

into a countryside setting), their psyche and spirit are dramatically altered. Later in their lives, highly commercialized development of China, under the capitalism based on buying and selling, the currency may have formed the idea that people measure everything in economic terms and treat everything as a commodity. In an economic system based on money and dominated by commercial trade, people tend to see everything as a commodity and take a purely profit-driven view of interpersonal interactions (Mannheim, 1980). This makes Gen-X more likely that they will combine the commercialized notion of deceit with the idea of social life and thus become more convinced that people should live "immorally" in society. For Gen-X to understand Gen-Z, it may also be a challenge for them to let go of the "sense of crisis" they have been trained to feel for decades.

Secondly, according to Mannheim (1952), the deep emotional significance of a slogan, of an expression, is that it makes us identify ourselves as a collective. In Gen-X 's almost invariable profanity, there seems to be an invariable reminder to Gen-Z that this is not our generation, which creates a mentality of exclusion. By refraining from swear words, Gen-Z may show feelings of superiority, and according to Thody (1997), we sometimes show that we are different from them by refraining from those actions that others readily indulge in, and by refraining from the use of certain words, we show that we are a class above our fellow men. The deep emotional significance of slogans and expressions is that they can shape a generation's collective identity. When a generation adopts a particular language and expression, it is not only an expression but also a symbol of identity. When swearing is common among Gen X, this linguistic phenomenon seems to invariably remind Gen Z that it is not representative of our generation, and that this phenomenon can lead to a sense of exclusion. Thus, Gen X's use of swear words may be seen as their identification with their own generational identity, while Gen Z may

emphasize their own cultural identity. This strong sense of generational identity may lead Gen Z to feel a certain degree of generational disconnect, or even rejection, from Gen X, as they believe that this is not the value they represent.

The fact that Gen Z behaves so differently from previous generations is most likely due to the development of electronics. This novel method of information acquisition, which doesn't rely on any older generations, has prompted them to start introspecting.

According to Dolot (2018), the way Gen-Z acquire knowledge has changed significantly, which means that their reliance on the knowledge of their elders is no longer as important as it used to be. ICTs all play an important role in Gen Z (Gergő, 2016). Their names are as varied as the descriptions of their characteristics, and never have the names of generations been as complex as Gen-Z, which have been referred to by many pronouns: for example, IT generation, Gen Tech, Online Generation, and so on (Dolot, 2018). They were born in the 1990s and grew up in the 2000s, during one of the most profound transformations of the century, in a world of networks, internet, smartphones, laptops, free internet and digital media (Dolot, 2018; Gergő, 2016). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z did not start adapting to the digital world at a specific stage in their lives. They were born into an ever-changing environment that offers state-of-the-art hardware and software solutions to solve everyday problems, and Marc Prensky refers to this age group as "digital natives" because of the actual transformation in their need for information (Prensky, 2001). According to Prensky (2001), today's active teachers and researchers can be regarded as "digital immigrants" because they are only now beginning to learn the new "language". Unlike Gen-X, where knowledge is passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, Gen-Z has not

learnt an 'accent' on the use of IT, and a great deal of Gen-Z's knowledge comes from search engines and social media (Gergő, 2016; Prensky, 2001).

When faced with any problem that needs to be solved, ".com" children living in virtual communities no longer rely on teachers and textbooks, which were previously regarded as the main source of knowledge, to provide answers. Instead, thanks to their innate skills in handling electronic devices, their ability to navigate the Internet well, and the ease with which they can build relationships, virtual communities and digital technologies have become the primary channels of knowledge acquisition and problem solving for a new generation. This trend is strongly supported by the interactive and information-rich nature of virtual communities, which enable young people to be more flexible in their knowledge acquisition and problem-solving. As a result, they are more inclined to seek solutions from each other or to solve problems through Internet searches. Younger generations will take a more autonomous and co-operative approach to problems rather than the traditional reliance on a single source of authority (Gergő, 2016).

This gives Gen-Z a great opportunity to start reflecting on whether the behavior of the previous generation is worth learning from. According to Mannheim (1952), it is only when traditionalist ideas are no longer sufficiently influential that the new generation will consciously reflect and thus make choices. Gen-Z in China is now faced with such a choice: should they learn from the experience of their elders and practice swearing, or should they stick to a "clean" language environment? Only Gen-Z has the experience of living with two generations, only Gen-Z has the ability and opportunity to choose, and Gen-Z must choose. Understanding Gen-Z's situation is crucial to the development of Chinese society.

Interpretation of generational consciousness is based on the socio-historical context in which it is situated. It is not the purpose of this paper to judge the rights and wrongs of the two social changes. Although these two social changes have provoked sharp confrontations on generational issues, they also reflect, to some extent, the development and evolution of society, and there is no end to the pursuit of right and wrong. The main goal of this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of the feelings of a generation. According to Dant (2013), Mannheim believes that the interpretation of meaning is a central research component of sociology. Understanding the feelings of a generation is crucial for society to better cope with intergenerational issues. This helps society to better meet the needs of people of different ages and provide more targeted support and resources. At the same time, understanding the feelings of different generations can also help reduce intergenerational conflicts and improve intergenerational communication. By understanding the perspectives and emotions of all generations, society can better coordinate relationships between people of different ages.

b) Swear words and Taboo Words

Swear words often contain cultural taboos (Fairman, 2009; Wajnryb, 2005), and according to Sigmund Freud's description of taboos, they will contain two aspects, one pure and one disgusting (Freud, 2004). Fairman argues that although the word "fuck" contains cultural taboos, it may be difficult to distinguish between purity and disgust. Our sensitivity to swear words may be due to the fact that the distinction between linguistic "cleanliness" and "obscenity" has to do with basic notions of human hygiene (Fairman, 2009). Curtis's exploration of the link between our hygienic instincts and the triggering of disgust may explain why certain words elicit such strong reactions. (Curtis, 2007)

Furthermore, Wajnryb's theory provides a nuanced understanding of the role played by the power of swear words. Repeated use reduces the impact of taboo words, while infrequent use increases their shock value (Wajnryb, 2005). And proficiency in the use of swear words may also affect the effectiveness of their use, with the power of swear words increasing as they are uttered more quickly.

According to Wajnryb, 2005, certain characteristics make words more likely to be identified as swear words by the general public. First, they must be offensive—not merely flippant but falling into the category of foul language. Second, they often break taboos by bringing private or socially restricted topics into public discourse. Third, they are typically used with the intention to shock, insult, or make others feel uncomfortable. Finally, such words are widely perceived as “slimy and disgusting things,” reflecting a strong sense of social and moral repulsion.

Swear words are typically associated with taboos. According to Freud (2004), taboos generally encompass two different aspects of meaning. Firstly, there is the sublime and sacred aspect, and on the other hand, there is the mysterious, dangerous, forbidden, and impure aspect. However, according to (Fairman, 2009, pp. 25–31), we do not know whether the word "fuck" (translated into Chinese as "操,Cao", which is also a commonly used as a dirty word in Chinese) should be considered as something sacred or forbidden.

According to Fairman (2009), people's differentiation of language into "clean" and "obscene" may be related to hygiene concepts. According to Curtis (2007), our hygiene instinct is rooted in disgust. When we hear words with meanings related to vomit and pus, our hygiene response is instinctively triggered. Similarly, when we see images of bodily fluids or excretions, it can

also invoke feelings of disgust. Because disgust reactions are unconscious, they occur when we hear these words. Consequently, these words themselves become objects of disgust for people and subsequently turn into taboos (Fairman, 2009).

2. Impact and Coping concept

a) Language Sensitive

According to Wajnryb (2005), For a swear word to retain the power (shock effect) of the word, it must be kept taboo. As people talk about the word more and more, the taboo ceases to be so taboo, and people begin to be less sensitive to the word, and therefore its power (shock value) weakens (Wajnryb, 2005). When we use profanity frequently, the profanity doesn't become more hurtful; on the contrary, his effect on us begins to diminish. And as people use it less and less, the fear and disgust of the taboo grows in the imagination, thus also making the power of the swear word strong. People also become more sensitive to the swear words.

In the case of Gen-Z, the stimulus (shock effect) that swearing produces on them may be even greater when they suddenly go from an environment with very little swearing to a society where they are exposed to a high concentration of swearing. And in the case of Gen-Z, some of the swear words may be just the everyday language of Gen-Z. The damage to Gen-Z may be compounded by the fact that swearing has less of an effect on people who are accustomed to swearing. Nowadays, we may need to say "*fuck*" a thousand times to match the effect of saying "*fuck*" once a decade ago (Wajnryb, 2005). When Gen-X want to express stronger feelings, they may say what they consider to be more "*dirty*" words. Thus, Gen-Z, who is sensitive to swear words, has to endure even more "*dirty*" from Gen-X, who is not sensitive to swear words.

Another reason for Gen-Z's sensitivity to the swear words may be that swear words tends to be more powerful when uttered immediately. According to Wajnryb (2005), immediacy, at least in swear words, always strengthens the power of an expletive. Gen-Z, who seldom uses swear words, may not be able to use swear words in the same way as a "*native*" speaker, compared to someone who is proficient in using swear words, because people are always evaluating the impact of their words on the other person when they speak, which makes Gen-Z seem to be hesitant to use swearing as well. Gen-X, on the other hand, can say a lot of things off the cuff that Gen-Z has never heard before. In terms of speed, Gen-X makes swearing more powerful as well.

b) Euphemisms

According to Fairman (2009), the use of euphemisms in order to avoid swear words is an inevitable result of self-censorship. People use euphemisms in order to avoid confronting their fears and feelings about "fuck" and to avoid conveying any of the meanings of "fuck" or the emotions associated with the word. other words instead. However, the semantics of euphemisms need to be universal enough for their euphemisms to be understood correctly (Fairman, 2009).

That's the reason why individuals from two different generations, Gen-Z and Gen-X, the specific vocabulary and usage of euphemisms they employ may also differ, potentially conveying emotions differently. When Gen-Z intends to express their negative emotions, they might use sentences or words that can be challenging for the general populace to understand. For example, saying, "没事多抬头看看你妈," which is a Mandarin Chinese colloquial expression. It literally translates to "It's alright, lift your head and take a look at your mom." The subtext of this sentence is "your mother is in heaven." The more direct meaning of the phrase is "your mom is dead," which can be quite different from

the literal translation. These modes of expression not only may fail to fully convey Gen-Z's negative emotions but could also lead others to perceive it as merely a joke.

3. Education Policy and Regulation Related to Language Restriction

a) Linguistic Regulation

While it may be well-intentioned, prohibiting the use of profanity fundamentally constitutes a form of language control, even if it is aimed at benefiting students. There is no juridical basis for the purpose of purifying the language environment through the control of language. Clean language is often considered a sign of high social class (McEnery, 2004) but it is a moral imperative, which does not mean that the government can pass laws or regulations to control our speech, the law is the bottom line of morality. If an activity is sufficiently influential and pervasive, it is difficult for any ban to be powerful enough to stamp it out (Wajnryb, 2005). According to Fairman (2009), we should be concerned about the government trying to cleanse our speech, "we elect senators, not censors", "words are ideas", behind every word there are thousands of ways to use it, and if the government can control what we can say, it can also control what we think. In fact, according to the Ministry of Education's circular on the issuance of the Code for Primary and Secondary School Students (Revised in 2015), the code for primary and secondary school students no longer explicitly states that swearing is not allowed after 2015 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2015). This doesn't give Gen-Z the opportunity to re-expose itself to a swearing environment. Firstly, the Chinese government did not specify why it no longer mentions "no swearing" after it issued the new rules, nor did it state that swearing in primary and secondary school campuses is not a violation of the law. Therefore, most

schools still have strict restrictions on swearing. Secondly, since this new regulation was introduced in 2015, when most Gen-Z were already in high school, they had already experienced a clean language environment for more than ten years, and it is difficult to suddenly break this "childhood experience" in a short period of time.

In addition, although the Code of Conduct for Secondary School Students issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2004 clearly states that secondary school students need to "behave in a civilized manner and refrain from swearing", it does not list specific words for swearing (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2004). In practice, teachers and students must judge for themselves whether what they say is swearing or not, which in effect turns everyone into a censor, not only censoring each other's speech, but also self-censoring their own speech, so as to avoid uttering "non-compliant" phrases.

b) Clean language

Clean language, according to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2015) in its code of practice for managing the daily behavior of primary and secondary school students, means that people should use friendly words and should not use swear words, but according to Fairman (2009), everyone has a different level of sensitivity to swear words and inappropriate language, and even the same person may have different sensitivities when interacting with different people. This is because language and the context behind it are often interpreted and viewed differently in different social and cultural contexts. As a result, everyone has different standards of judgement, which ultimately results in an individual self-

censorship mechanism to eliminate swearing at "source", or even words that may have certain hurtful connotations.

In practice, teachers maybe will also associate "clean language" with "politeness" and "kindness" and will assume that any offensive word that appears in a negative mood (Even words that are not offensive are considered uncivilized. For example, if a student says to another student, "He is ugly. "This does not in itself contain explicitly offensive words, and in most cases does not immediately lead to disorderly behavior, which is usually considered the domain of freedom of speech in the West, according to Greenawalt (1992) that's should be protected by the constitution. But is usually considered uncivilized and banned in China. Thus, it may become an experience for students that expressing negative views about others will be punished. While this may seem to reduce the likelihood of conflict among students, it may also result in a near-abandonment of students' exposure to and use of negative vocabulary, such as profanity, and the communication challenges that may arise when they encounter Gen X, who frequently use swear words.

c) **Speech Freedom**

In this essay, profanity may not be covered by the guarantee of "freedom of speech" in some cases, but others do not have the power to control the speech of others in most cases, even if it contains profanity. The following paragraphs are a discussion of the scope of "freedom of speech" as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution with respect to profanity (although there is not much interpretation of freedom of speech in China, generally speaking, when the law is uncertain, the justices will make comparisons with the laws of other countries, and so reference to the U.S. Constitution with respect to freedom of speech is also valuable.):

In the United States, freedom of speech is usually considered a negative right, i.e., a negative freedom or negative right. This means that individuals are free to express their opinions and views without government interference, and the role of the government is primarily to not interfere with or restrict this freedom. This emphasizes the individual's right to be free from government interference, rather than the need for the government to provide some kind of service or resources to promote freedom of expression.

Freedom of speech was originally intended for the proper functioning of democratic institutions, and freedom of speech generally applies to public power over citizens (Greenawalt, 1992). In this essay, the issue of communication between Gen Z and Gen X falls more into the category of citizen-to-citizen communication, so this may not be entirely within the guarantees of the Constitution, and the consequences for the speech triggered would largely need to be borne by the individual.

Some swearing is likely to be regarded as provocative speech, especially as such speech can be prohibited if it is "directed at inciting or producing imminent lawless action" and "likely to incite or produce such action...", and such speech does not contain specific ideas of "value", such speech is likely to fall outside the scope of constitutional protection (Greenawalt, 1992).

However, in everyday life, most people may simply express their emotions, which do not pose a clear and present danger, and are not intended to cause social disorder, so such speech is clearly not subject to suppression by the government. In the situation of this essay, a government or school rule prohibiting people from swearing clearly interferes with and restricts people's freedom of speech and may well be unconstitutional. The government or school can encourage people to refrain from swearing, but it does not have the power to prohibit people from swearing. Prohibiting swearing means that

swearing will be punished; while encouraging not to swear means that not swearing will be rewarded or encouraged, but swearing will not be punished.

4. Gen Z, Gen X and Their Growth Environment

a) Gen Z and Gen X

Some articles refer to the Gen Z generation as digital natives, as they have been exposed to a lot of "digital" information from the moment they were born (Prensky, 2001). For the purposes of this article, Gen Z refers to people born from the mid-1990s to 2010. During their lives, they have enjoyed China's nine-year compulsory education.(China Education Daily, 2019) In Guangxi Province, the public schools under this education system are mostly closed boarding schools, where students are not allowed to carry mobile phones and rarely have the opportunity to go out, thus constituting an isolated environment, which allows Gen Z to have little knowledge of the language environment of the outside world. The language environment at school is very "polite", and when they leave school after graduation, many of the older generation (who have not been trained in "polite language") may not feel comfortable with the language used, thus creating a generation gap.

For the purposes of this study, Gen X refers to the generation born roughly between 1960 and 1980 (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). In China, Gen X's early childhood was at the end of the Cultural Revolution, and in his youth he experienced the intellectual youth movement to the countryside, which greatly undermined people's morality, and the idea that "the more immoral a person is, the more he can survive" began to be widely spread in society (Xiaoming, 2009). This has led Gen X to believe that the moral standards of the society at that time were "valuable". Generally speaking, the lessons learnt by people in

their youth are often recognized by their own tendencies as "the nature view of the world" (Mannheim, 1952).

b) Gen X's Growth Environment: Send Down Policy, Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution was a highly destructive political movement in Chinese history that began in 1966 and ended around 1976, initiated by Mao Zedong (Sutton, 1995). It took place against the backdrop of power struggles within the Communist Party of China (CPC), criticism of traditional culture, and the influence of the international communist movement. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong put forward the slogan "Struggle against selfishness and cultivation, and criticize bourgeois thought and culture", and encouraged mass organizations such as the Red Guards to struggle and fight in all areas of society (People Daily, 2016). The Cultural Revolution regarded traditional Chinese ceremonial culture as an old idea of feudal rites and rituals, and during the revolution it was necessary to "criticize old ideas, old culture and old customs" (People Daily, 2016). The movement led to massive social upheaval and chaos, with intellectuals, culturists and officials being labelled as "landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries and rightists", persecuted and suppressed. In fact, this movement eventually turned into a tool for people to "air their personal grievances".

According to Yan, (2019), Verbal violence was the most popular method of violence at that time. In fact, the Chinese authorities have repeatedly emphasized that "fighting should be done with words rather than violence," which nominally indicates that the authorities hope to use more forms of verbal violence to avoid violent incidents. As a result, during this period, people's language was filled with aggressiveness, and learning verbal violence

was a necessary skill to avoid being "Pi dou(批斗)" (violently attacked) by the Red Guards. According to Wang, (2004b), after the Cultural Revolution began, even the language used by middle school girls became rude, unreasonable, wild, obscene, and full of violence.

The following is the content of a big-character poster posted by the Red Guards in the bedroom of a victim during the Cultural Revolution: “狗恶霸，
 卞毒蛇、你他妈的听着，你再敢骑在劳动人民头上耀武威，我们抽你的
 狗筋，挖你的狗心，砍你的狗头。你他妈的别妄想东山再起，我们要断
 你的孙，绝你的种，砸你个稀巴烂。” (Dog bully, Bian poisonous snake,
 you fucking listen, if you dare to show off your power by riding on the heads
 of working people again, we will whip you I'll dig out your dog's tendons, dig
 out your dog's heart, and chop off your dog's head. Don't fucking think about
 coming back again, we will cut off your grandchildren, destroy your seeds –
 makes you cannot pregnant anymore, and smash you to pieces.) During the
 revolution, swear words were used a lot and frequently. "Fuck" began to be
 commonly used in schools as a "revolutionary" style at that time, and later
 became one of the characteristics of the Red Guard language. (Wang, 2004b)

According to Xiaoming (2005), in the Cultural Revolution, Guangxi Province was the worst affected by the campaign, and even the phenomenon of cannibalism occurred. This movement began to make many people believe that "the more immoral people are, the more they can survive in society"

According to Yan, (2019), Guangxi was the hardest hit area in the country during the Cultural Revolution, with many deaths. In the author's research, only the four regions of Nanning, Guilin, Yulin, and Qinzhou in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China, had

47,000 "abnormal deaths" people during the Cultural Revolution. If the remaining six prefecture-level cities and districts are included, Government agencies and units of the Liuzhou Railway Bureau, no less than 100,000 people died. The Cultural Revolution in Guangxi, the killing methods were cruel, vicious, and shocking. There were beheadings, beatings, burials alive, disembowelment, heart removal, liver removal, genital mutilation, explosions with explosives, gang rapes and then stabbings to death, tying them to the railroad tracks and being crushed by trains, etc., all kinds of extremes were used. In 1968, 38 people in Wuxuan County (the county of Laibin City in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) were dismembered and eaten human flesh, hearts and livers. There were 113 state cadres (including the former county Party committee secretary) and employees in the county who had eaten human flesh, human hearts, and human livers.

According to Xiaoming (2009), shortly after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the Intellectual Youth Send-Down Policy, an important political movement during the Cultural Revolution, began in 1968 and ended around 1980. This movement was designed to promote the combination of urban and rural areas, mental and physical labor, and to promote socialist revolution. Thousands of urban intellectual youths were sent to rural and remote areas to participate in rural construction and productive labor. In the countryside, they were confronted with lifestyles and labor practices that were completely different from those of urban life, and they were subjected to the ideological and cultural influences of the peasants (Xiaoming, 2009). Although this movement has facilitated the integration of urban and rural labor and accelerated the process of modernization in the countryside, it has also caused a large number of young intellectuals to have their life and career development blocked, and at the same time brought about disruption in the social structure of the countryside.

In both movements, the idea and rhetoric that "the more immoral a person is, the more he or she can survive in society" was widely circulated in society (Xiaoming, 2009), and Gen-X, who grew up in such an environment, was inevitably influenced by this "immoral" education, which made it easier for them to believe in the "immoral" concept. This may make it easier for them to believe that being able to speak hurtfully is an ability, and that those who cannot swear with dirty language are likely to be seen as "weak".

c) Gen Z's Growth Environment:

i. Development of Electronics

The fact that Gen-Z behaves so differently from previous generations is most likely due to the development of electronics. This novel method of information acquisition, which doesn't rely on any older generations, has prompted them to start introspecting.

According to Dolot (2018), the way Gen-Z acquire knowledge has changed significantly, which means that their reliance on the knowledge of their elders is no longer as important as it used to be. ICTs all play an important role in Gen-Z (Gergő, 2016). Their names are as varied as the descriptions of their characteristics and never have the names of generations been as complex as Gen-Z, which have been referred to by many pronouns: for example, iGeneration, Gen Tech, Online Generation, and so on (Dolot, 2018). They were born in the 1990s and grew up in the 2000s, during one of the most profound transformations of the century, in a world of networks, internet, smartphones, laptops, free internet and digital media (Dolot, 2018; Gergő, 2016). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z did not start adapting to the digital world at a specific stage

in their lives. They were born into an ever-changing environment that offers state-of-the-art hardware and software solutions to solve everyday problems, and Marc Prensky refers to this age group as "digital natives" because of the actual transformation in their need for information (Prensky, 2001). According to Prensky (2001), today's active teachers and researchers can be regarded as "digital immigrants" because they are only now beginning to learn the new "language". Unlike Gen-X, where knowledge is passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, Gen-Z has not learnt an 'accent' on the use of IT, and a great deal of Gen-Z's knowledge comes from search engines and social media (Gergő, 2016; Prensky, 2001).

When faced with any problem that needs to be solved, "dotcom" children living in virtual communities no longer rely on teachers and textbooks, which were previously regarded as the main source of knowledge, to provide answers. Instead, thanks to their innate skills in handling electronic devices, their ability to navigate the Internet well, and the ease with which they can build relationships, virtual communities and digital technologies have become the primary channels of knowledge acquisition and problem solving for a new generation. This trend is strongly supported by the interactive and information-rich nature of virtual communities, which enable young people to be more flexible in their knowledge acquisition and problem-solving. As a result, they are more inclined to seek solutions from each other or to solve problems through Internet searches. Younger generations will take a more autonomous and co-operative approach to problems rather than the traditional reliance on a single source of authority (Gergő, 2016).

ii. School Environment

According to China Education Daily(2019), on January 1, 2001, the Chinese government solemnly announced to the world that China had achieved the strategic goal of universalizing nine years of compulsory education and eradicating illiteracy among young adults. That means, most young people born in the 2000s could receive free and mandatory education from primary school (6 years) to junior high school (3 years) in public schools funded by the government.

According to Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China(2004), due to the strict language rules on campus, only Mandarin can be spoken on campus (dialects are not allowed) and offensive language is strictly prohibited. But, students cannot find a list of what the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China means by offensive words, that means every student and teacher in the school is acting as a censor of speech, consciously or unconsciously actively avoiding the use of these words, both in and out of the classroom, in order to keep the school's language environment "clean".

According to China Education Daily(2013), the most junior high school students (88%) in Guangxi board at school, the school environment closed and the students can only live on campus. They are unable to leave the school except on weekends and holidays. This isolation from the outside community combined with strict language restrictions caused a dramatic decline in the students' ability and frequency to use offensive language.

According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2015) in its code of practice for managing the daily behavior of primary and secondary school students , means that people should use

friendly words and should not use swear words, but according to Fairman (2009), everyone has a different level of sensitivity to swear words and inappropriate language, and even the same person may have different sensitivities when interacting with different people. This is because language and the context behind it are often interpreted and viewed differently in different social and cultural contexts. As a result, everyone has different standards of judgement, which ultimately results in an individual self-censorship mechanism to eliminate swearing at "source", or even words that may have certain hurtful connotations.

In practice, teachers will also maybe associate "clean language" with "politeness" and "kindness" and will assume that any offensive word that appears in a negative mood (Even words that are not offensive are considered uncivilized. For example, if a student says to another student, "He is ugly." This does not in itself contain explicitly offensive words, and in most cases does not immediately lead to disorderly behavior, which is usually considered the domain of freedom of speech in the West, according to Greenawalt (1992) that should be protected by the constitution. But is usually considered uncivilized and banned in China. Thus, it may become an experience for students that expressing negative views about others will be punished. While this may seem to reduce the likelihood of conflict among students, it may also result in a near-abandonment of students' exposure to and use of negative vocabulary, such as profanity, and the communication challenges that may arise when they encounter Generation X, who frequently use swear words.

The linguistic environment within Chinese schools is characterized by stringent language policies. According to the *Code for Primary and Secondary School Students* (Ministry of Education of the People's

Republic of China, 2004), only Mandarin is permitted on campus (with dialects prohibited), and the use of swear words is strictly forbidden. However, the policy does not provide an explicit list of words officially classified as “offensive.” Consequently, both teachers and students become de facto self-censors, consciously or unconsciously avoiding potentially inappropriate expressions in an effort to maintain a “clean” linguistic environment. Within such a system, students rarely hear or use swear words on campus.

Importantly, the Ministry of Education’s policy documents function primarily as guideline frameworks rather than legally binding statutes. Following the issuance of these national outlines, individual schools interpret and implement them through localized institutional rules, while class teachers further develop class-specific behavioral regulations based on school-level policies. As a result, the actual enforcement of linguistic regulation varies substantially among schools, and even within the same school, different teachers may exhibit varying degrees of strictness in implementation.

This inconsistency produces heterogeneous linguistic experiences among Gen Z students. Some have been exposed to environments with rigorous linguistic monitoring and moralized speech codes, while others have encountered more lenient applications of the same principles. Consequently, the degree of sensitivity toward swear words, as well as the perceived boundary of what constitutes profanity, differs considerably across individuals within the same generational cohort.

Such findings echo Fairman’s (2009) and Wajnryb’s (2005) arguments that linguistic prohibitions can lead to self-censorship and individual variation in sensitivity to taboo language. In the Chinese

context, this diversity is further amplified by the structural hierarchy of policy interpretation—from national guidelines to school regulations to class-level enforcement—which shapes students' lived experiences of linguistic regulation. Moreover, as noted by *China Education Daily* (2013), approximately 88% of junior high school students in Guangxi reside in closed boarding environments, further intensifying the influence of school-level linguistic policies and limiting exposure to alternative language norms outside the institutional setting.

5. Relevant Study

In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the issues of this study, the researcher focused on reading the following books:

a) **The Sociological Problem of Generations**

"The Sociological Problem of Generations," authored by German sociologist Karl Mannheim and published in 1928, is a seminal work exploring the concept of "generations" and its impacts on society and culture. Mannheim delves into the formation of differences between generations and highlights the necessity of the emergence of new generations. He argues that exposure to new cultural experiences allows societies to have sufficient ideas and experiences for change when needed. This aligns with the aim of this paper: to deeply understand the challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z when communicating with Gen X.

According to Mannheim (1928), the social environment and historical context individuals experience during their formative years significantly influence their beliefs, values, and behaviors, culminating in a collective consciousness termed "generational spirit." Only when traditional mindsets are no longer sufficient does society consciously reflect and make choices.

Mannheim (1928) further suggests that the experiences accumulated during youth tend to become the most stable elements in society, often being perceived as immutable truths. In this study, as both Gen Z and Gen X experienced societal changes during their youth, this entrenched social consciousness may pose significant communication challenges. Understanding each other's experiences can shed light on differing perspectives, facilitating mutual comprehension. True understanding entails not only accepting differing values but also possessing the ability to view things from these distinct perspectives.

b) Fuck: Word Taboo and Protecting our First Amendment Liberties

“Fuck: Word Taboo and Protecting our First Amendment Liberties,” written by Christopher M. Fairman. In this book, the author discusses the relationship between swearing and taboos, discusses the scope of the "lexical taboo", and finally considers the legality of swearing from a constitutional perspective.

The author believes that "words are ideas" and if the government can control what we say, it can also control what we think. Each word usually does not appear alone and is connected to a series of usages and stories behind it, so every word has its value, so we should not tolerate the government restricting the words we use to express ourselves, even though those words sound Not pleasant to watch.

Additionally, the authors believe that when an individual decides not to speak a particular word, it is essentially a censorship mechanism. So no matter what the purpose, using civilized and normative methods to prevent Gen Z from swearing is essentially a kind of thought control. It controls people not to think about negative vulgar words, and in this case, he will let Gen Z is more sensitive to vulgar words. Therefore, the vulgar language used by Gen-

Z there should not be too much control over vulgar words, as their scope of influence is far less broad than some people think.

In addition, the author believes that euphemisms may not be able to accurately express one's current emotions, nor may they be able to make the other party respond as expected, because euphemisms need to be used extensively to be effective. This means that when two generations have different vocabularies of vulgar words, the effect of their expressions is often not what they expected, causing more communication problems.

c) Expletive Deleted: A Good Look at Bad Language

“Expletive Deleted: A Good Look at Bad Language”, written by Ruth Wajnryb. In this book, the author also believes that people now need to say "fuck" more to achieve the effect of saying "fuck" ten years ago. This is because people become desensitized to swear words after being exposed to them many times. When swear words are used more and more frequently, their impact will be big discount.

In addition, the author believes that the swear words someone uses cannot reflect his or her values, and the sensitivity to some people swear words may not be aversion to the swear words themselves, but to their values. There is no causal relationship between the amount of swear words used and good qualities such as kindness in a person. Banning the use of swear words may not necessarily lead to greater improvement in other aspects of students.

The author believes that explosiveness is important when swearing and suddenly swearing will be more powerful. So, from a certain perspective, using curse words requires training, and it does not mean having the vocabulary to achieve the effect. For Gen Z, being rarely exposed to swear words for a long time will not only make them more sensitive to swear words, but also make them dull when using swear words, thus losing the ability to

master swear words and thus being unable to use the effects of swear words as expected. show that it may be difficult to deal with Gen X's high frequency of sudden swear words.

The authors argue that swearing should not be banned via bans either: if the influence and ubiquity of an activity justify its necessity, then the effectiveness of the ban is questionable. Perhaps schools can create an isolated environment in a closed campus environment to achieve civilized language, but when students graduate, the government will no longer be able to pay attention to students' speech like teachers on campus, and the language environment will be relaxed. Gen Z will still be exposed to profanity outside of school, and they will still relearn this skill. But this ban lasted throughout Gen Z's youth. Not only makes it difficult for Gen Z to adapt to the swear words of the outside society for a period of time, but this experience in youth would make Gen Z think it was correct and refuse to be exposed to swear words. Refuse to interact with people who swear. This looks great, but it may also exacerbate the purchasing issues with Gen X.

d) Victims of The Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment and Murder

“Victims of The Cultural Revolution: An Investigative Account of Persecution, Imprisonment and Murder,” written by Youqin Wang. This book provides a further visual understanding of the atrocities committed during one of the darkest periods of modern Chinese history - the Cultural Revolution - through the harrowing accounts of victims who endured its horrors. It vividly depicts the suffering of countless individuals and unveils the tragic scenes of brutality perpetrated by the Red Guards. Moreover, the detailed descriptions of verbal violence contained within serve as a crucial resource for this study,

shedding light on the psychological and emotional toll inflicted upon the victims.

By meticulously documenting the horrors of persecution, imprisonment, and murder that plagued China during the Cultural Revolution, this book offers a sobering glimpse into the depths of human depravity. It narrates the tragic fate of individuals targeted for their perceived ideological impurity or political dissent, illustrating how the relentless pursuit of ideological purity pushed perpetrators beyond the bounds of morality. Through repeated sufferings, people were driven to embrace the belief that "the more immoral people are, the easier it is for them to survive in society," illuminating the insidious erosion of moral values amidst the chaos of the era. The inclusion of authentic language and rhetoric from the time period lends authenticity to the narrative, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the tumultuous atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution.

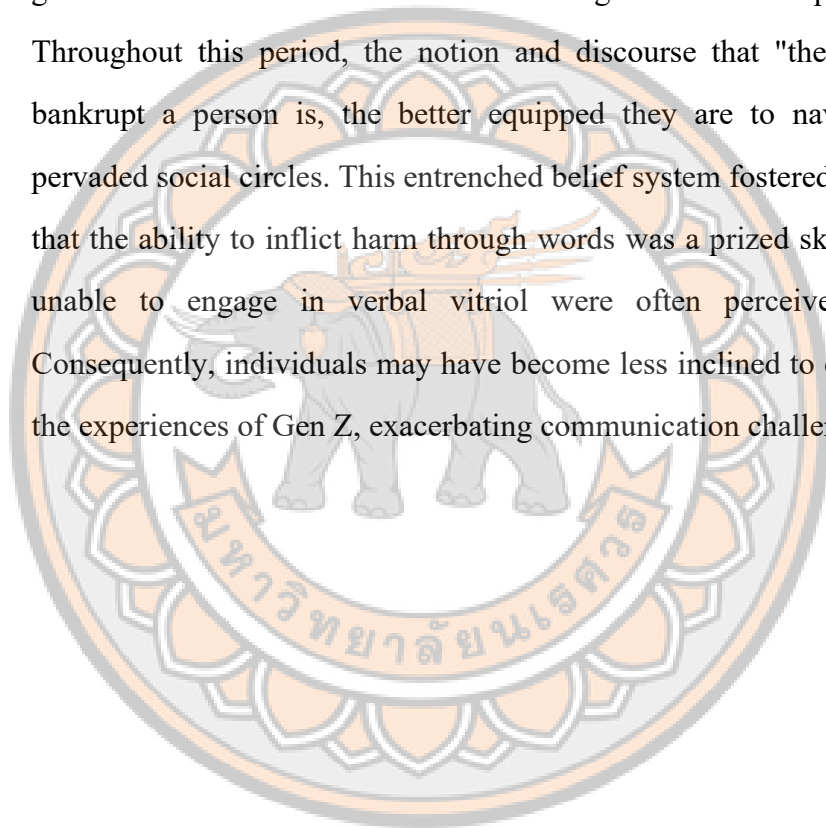
Furthermore, this book offers an intimate portrayal of the living environment experienced by Gen X, providing researchers with invaluable insights into the formative experiences that shaped their worldview during their youth. By delving into the social and cultural milieu of the time, it enriches our understanding of the cognitive and emotional development of Gen X, offering deeper insights into the complexities of their generational consciousness.

e) The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth

"The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968–1980)," written by Michel Bonnin. Through careful research, this book unveils the experiences of China's educated youth who were forcibly dispatched to rural areas amidst the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution. This social upheaval not only posed formidable hurdles to the

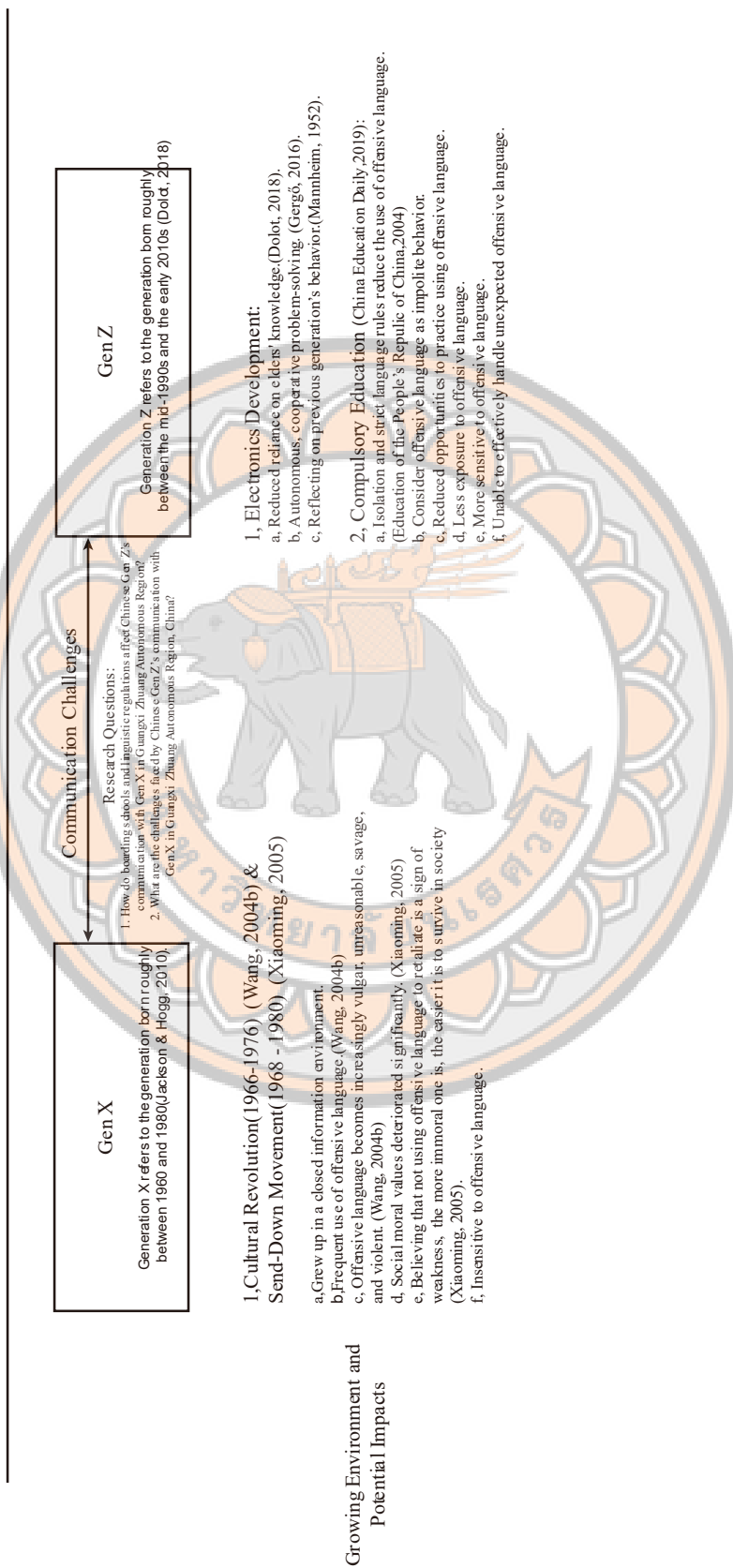
personal and professional advancement of countless young intellectuals but also plunged the countryside into disarray.

By delving into the destinies of the youth exiled to rural regions, this book effectively communicates the sentiments of displacement, disillusionment, and trauma endured by educated young individuals swept up in the maelstrom of political upheaval. It lays bare the tragic destiny of a generation ensnared in the throes of ideological fervor and political tumult. Throughout this period, the notion and discourse that "the more morally bankrupt a person is, the better equipped they are to navigate society" pervaded social circles. This entrenched belief system fostered the perception that the ability to inflict harm through words was a prized skill, while those unable to engage in verbal vitriol were often perceived as "weak." Consequently, individuals may have become less inclined to empathize with the experiences of Gen Z, exacerbating communication challenges.



6. Research Conceptual Framework

Research Conceptual Framework The Impacts Of Linguistic Regulation In School For Civility On Chinese Gen Z's Communication With Gen X — A Case Study Of Guangxi Province Of China.

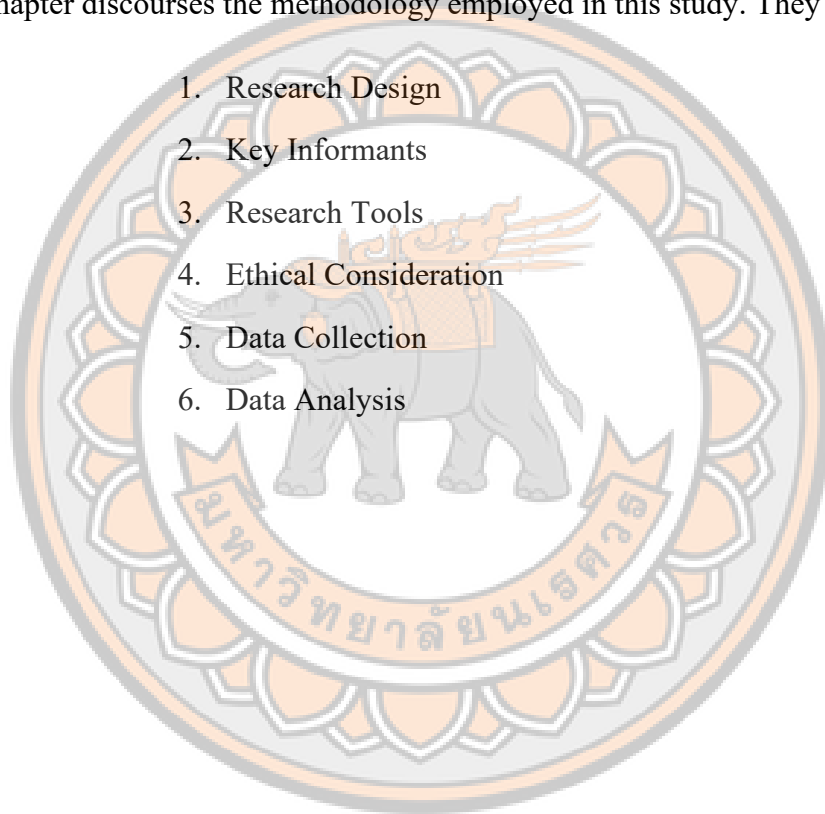


CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discourses the methodology employed in this study. They are as follows:

1. Research Design
2. Key Informants
3. Research Tools
4. Ethical Consideration
5. Data Collection
6. Data Analysis



1. Research Design

a) Content of the Study

This study will investigate the impact of linguistic regulation for civility on Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X and the challenge faced by Chinese Gen z's communication with Gen X.

The study will be able to better understand the feeling between Gen Z and Gen X when communicating with each other, so that society can be more intuitive and reduce the generation gap problem.

b) Research Design

This study will use a qualitative case study design to explore the impact of linguistic regulation for civility on Chinese Gen Z's communication with Gen X. Qualitative research is more suitable for this study than quantitative research because respondents have the opportunity to elaborate their feelings in more detail. And this research may make respondents prioritize ethical factors, and it is important to carefully consider each of the respondents' responses. The key informants of this study were the graduates who have been in boarding school for more than 6 years in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The reason for selecting Gen X samples in this experiment is to further validate the research conclusions.

When attempting to recruit participants, the researcher found that members of Generation X tend to be sensitive to strangers and cautious about expressing their opinions.

At the beginning, the researcher sought interviewees in a city park. He approached potential participants between approximately 4:00 and 6:00 p.m. Initially, the researcher invited them with the following introduction:

"Hello, uncle/auntie. I'm a master's student in sociology, currently conducting research related to the experiences of your generation. May I interview you? (叔叔/阿姨你好, 我是一名社会学硕士研究生, 最近在研究与你们这一代人经历相关的话题, 我能采访你一下吗?)"

This approach was often directly rejected, with reasons such as having no time, needing to pick up or care for children, or being concerned about getting home too late. However, the researcher noticed that every time the word "interview" was mentioned, the potential interviewees would avert their eyes, seemingly sensitive to the term.

As a result, the researcher changed his wording. He began to say:

"Hello, uncle/auntie. I'm a master's student in sociology. The experiences of your generation are very important to my research. May I have a chat with you? (叔叔/阿姨你好, 我是一名社会学硕士研究生, 你们这一代人的经历对我的研究非常重要, 我能和你聊一聊吗?)"

This time, although some still declined due to time constraints, a few responded more openly:

Researcher: *"Hello, uncle. I'm a master's student in sociology. The experiences of your generation are very important to my research. May I have a chat with you"*

Participant: *"I don't know how to talk about that."*

Researcher: *"It's just a casual chat."*

Participant: *(Silent)*

Researcher: *"The whole conversation is anonymous, and we won't collect any personal information."*

Participant: *"You'd better go find someone more educated. I don't know how to talk about such things."*

Researcher: *"Who do you think I should talk to, then?"*

Participant: *"Someone likes the news anchor, or experts and professors at schools know how to say the words."*

Researcher: *"But what I need is your perspective."*

Participant: *(Silence)*

Researcher: *"What are you doing here?"*

Participant: *"Nothing really. "Just watching people fish."*

Researcher: *"Do you have anything urgent to do later?"*

Participant: *"No."*

(There was a brief silence.)

Researcher: *"I've tried to invite many people to join my interview, but they all refused. Why do you think that is?"*

Participant: *"I don't know."*

In follow-up attempts with other individuals who declined, the researcher continued to ask the same question: *"I've tried to invite many people to join my interview, but they all refused. Why do you think that is?"*. Some of the responses included:

No.	Reason for Refusal	Example Quotes
1	Belief that the interview wouldn't make any difference	"Who's going to read your interview anyway?" "Who has time to read your thesis?" ...
2	Fear of getting into trouble	"Nowadays people only care about their own problems. The less trouble the better. Talking too much does no good—why bother?" ...
3	Personal life is too chaotic to engage with the researcher	"Some people's family lives are already a mess. How could they open to let you know about it?" "I've got a ton of things to deal with in my own life—who has the time to bother with you?" "Only someone who's already retired, receiving a high pension, has nothing to do all day, and doesn't talk to many people—that kind of person might agree to your interview." ...

Table 2. Summary of common reasons for interview refusal and representative participant quotes. Quotes were translated from Mandarin and slightly edited for clarity while preserving original meaning.

This may be related to the growth environment of Gen X: in their youth (the period of the Cultural Revolution and the Up to the Countryside Movement), they had to always be cautious, otherwise their unintentional actions might be understood by others as a political opinion, which might very likely bring them into trouble.

Participant (Gen X Male Born in 1965) showed the researcher a case: *“At that time, many primary school students posted slogans saying “Long Live Chairman Mao” everywhere. During the Chinese New Year, they would tear down the old slogans and replace them with new ones. However, the torn slogans were not handled properly, and they accidentally stepped on Chairman Mao’s head portrait. Passers-by saw them and they were arrested and paraded through the streets. ... The parade was not over once, but every now and then, until the struggle was over. ... At that time, those who did not dare to speak carelessly could be accused of any hat. There were many “landlords”, “rich peasants”, “counterrevolutionaries”, “leftists and rightists”, and “five black categories”. There was always a hat that could be put on your head.”*

After being rejected by approximately 30 potential interviewees in the park, the researcher changed the method of recruiting participants.

Consequently, the researcher adjusted the strategy and sought assistance from a friend. This friend maintained good relationships with members of the Gen X cohort in her residential community. The researcher and his friend finally conducted the interview in a small room originally intended for parking vehicles in the researcher’s friend’s residential community. This room was located along a path commonly used by elderly residents during their evening walks. The researcher and his friend would look for potential interviewees around the area in the evenings. Before participating, all interviewees were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded but stored anonymously.

There were three main reasons for choosing this interview set up:

1. The small room provided a psychologically safe environment for participants. During each interview, only the participant, the researcher, and the researcher's friend were present. This setting was designed to minimize participants' fear of saying something "wrong" and to encourage them to share key information more freely.

2. Since the participants were acquainted with the researcher's friend, the interviews were more open and relaxed, fostering a cheerful and comfortable atmosphere.

3. The participants did not know the researcher personally. The interviews only collected basic demographic information such as gender, date of birth, and hometown. This helped ensure that the content shared could not be traced back to any individual, thus preserving anonymity.

With the friend's support, the research proceeded smoothly. In the subsequent stages, the researcher observed that, in contrast to the previously indifferent attitudes, the Gen X participants became significantly more engaged when approached for interviews through a familiar intermediary. They were notably more willing to participate and showed enthusiasm in responding to the researcher's questions.

c) Delimitation of the Study

This study will pay special attention to the dynamics of communication between the Chinese Gen Z and Gen X within the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China. The study will not be extended to other provinces or regions in order to maintain a focus on the unique social changes in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China.

2. Key Informants

The key informants of this study were the graduated persons who have been in boarding school for more than 6 years in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Researcher collect data with 10 key informants (4 males and 6 females).

In addition, researcher collected data with 6 extra informants of Gen X (3 males and 3 females). These interviews were designed to gather the older generation's perceptions of changes in intergenerational communication dynamics, cultural values, and social norms over time. The inclusion of Gen X elders enriched this study by providing comparative analyses between the experiences and perceptions of different generations.

To protect participants' privacy while retaining essential demographic information, a systematic coding scheme was adopted. Each participant was labeled according to the format [*Generational Cohort*] [*Gender*] [*Birth Year and Month*] (e.g., "Gen Z M 200002"). This structure identifies the participant's generational group (Gen X or Gen Z), gender (M/F), and birth year and month, without revealing personally identifiable information.

The Background of The Participants

The study collected complete interviews from 10 Gen Z participants ($N = 10$), with 4 male and 6 female participants, born approximately between the 1998 and 2001. They are researcher's friends from different cities in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

To validate the findings, the researchers interviewed Gen X as a control group. Firstly, the researcher attempts to find participants in a public park was unsuccessful. Then by the help of a researcher's friend's introduction, completed the study with total 6 participants ($N=6$) aged 45–60 from a residential community.

The main participants were Gen Z FM 199907, Gen Z FM 199912, Gen Z FM 200010, Gen Z FM 199910, and Gen Z FM 200008. All of them experienced strict linguistic regulation throughout primary and secondary school, and they all demonstrated varying degrees of heightened sensitivity toward certain words.

The backgrounds of the key participants are as follows:

Participant	Education	Linguistic Experience	Regulation	Sensitivity to Swearing
FM 199907, FM 199912, FM 200010, FM 199910, FM 200008	Bachelor	Strict (Primary–High School)	Strict	High
M 199909	Bachelor	(Primary–High School) (Different cities)		Context-dependent
M 200002-1	Bachelor	None		Low
M 200002	Junior College	Strict (Primary only)		Slight
M 199804	Bachelor (Southern Guangxi)	Moderate (Primary–High School)		Moderate
FM 199912-1	Bachelor (Northern Guangxi)	Strict (Primary only)		High (in childhood)

Table 1. Summary of key Gen Z participants, their educational background, linguistic regulation experiences, and sensitivity to swearing.

Gen Z M 199909 served as a reference case. This participant attended schools in different cities during primary education, and his sensitivity to swearing varied according to the linguistic environment of each school. He was particularly more

sensitive in schools with stricter language regulation, which left a deep impression on him.

Gen Z M 200002-1, holding a bachelor's degree, did not experience strict linguistic regulation and showed low sensitivity to swearing.

Gen Z M 200002, with a junior college degree, experienced strict linguistic regulation only in primary school and remained slightly sensitive to swearing.

These findings suggest that sensitivity to swearing is associated more with exposure to strict linguistic regulation during childhood than with educational attainment.

Furthermore, two additional interviews with participants from other cities in Guangxi yielded consistent results:

1. Gen Z M 199804, from a southern city in Guangxi, holds a bachelor's degree, did not experience strict linguistic regulation, but rarely heard swearing at school and showed moderate sensitivity.
2. Gen Z FM 199912-1, from a northern city in Guangxi, experienced strict linguistic regulation only during primary school and recalled being more sensitive to swearing at that stage than in later schooling.

The results of the study will be presented in detail in the following chapters.

3. Research Tools

a) Research Tools

Semi-structured in-depth interviews will be employed as the primary research tool to gather in-depth insights from both Gen Z and Gen X. Interview questions were designed to explore participants' experiences,

perceptions, and attitudes regarding communication dynamics, language use, cultural values, and intergenerational relationships.

Interview guides were tailored to address specific aspects of the research, including the impact of linguistic regulation for civility on Chinese Gen z's communication with Gen x, the challenges faced by Chinese Gen z's communication with Gen x and other questions.

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the primary language spoken in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, to facilitate effective communication and understanding between the researcher and participants. Efforts were made to create a comfortable and non-threatening environment to encourage participants to express themselves openly and honestly. The interview process was audio-recorded with participants' consent to capture detailed responses accurately. Field notes were also taken during and after the interviews to document non-verbal cues, observations, and contextual information that may inform data analysis and interpretation.

b) Validation of the Instrument

The validation process of the research instrument, primarily comprising semi-structured interview guides, aimed to ensure the content validity of interview questions. Researcher provided 3 expert reviewers to ensure the effectively addressed of research objectives and finding the Index of item objective congruence. IOC.

c) **Method**

The research method employed a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing in-depth interviews as the primary data collection technique. This methodological choice allowed for a rich exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding intergenerational communication dynamics, linguistic regulation.

4. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations: Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting interviews to ensure that they were aware of the study objectives, procedures and their rights as participants. Confidentiality was assured to the participants and anonymity was maintained when reporting the results of the study. Any sensitive or potentially disturbing topics were treated with sensitivity and discretion.

Confidentiality: Participant confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. Personally identifiable information, such as name, address, and contact information, was kept confidential and stored securely. Any data collected during the course of the study was coded and anonymized to ensure that the identity of the participants was protected when reporting the results of the study.

Respect of participants: Throughout the course of the study, we insisted on respecting the autonomy, diversity, and cultural sensitivity of the participants. We endeavor to create a safe and comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences and perspectives openly and honestly. We treated any sensitive or potentially distressing topics with empathy and sensitivity and gave participants the opportunity to decline to answer any questions with which they felt uncomfortable.

Minimizing harm: we took steps to minimize any harm or discomfort that might be caused to participants. This included providing adequate support and resources for participants who may have been emotionally distressed during the interview. In addition, sensitive topics were handled with care, and participants were given the option to skip or modify questions if they felt uncomfortable.

Transparency and Integrity: Transparency and integrity were maintained throughout the research process. The researcher clearly communicated the purpose, methodology, and significance of the study to participants, ensuring transparency in all interactions. Any conflicts of interest or bias were acknowledged and managed to maintain the integrity and credibility of the research.

Institutional review: The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and standards. Any ethical considerations or concerns raised during the review process were addressed and incorporated into the study design.

Continuous monitoring: Ethical considerations were continuously monitored and addressed throughout the study. Researchers were alert to any potential ethical issues or concerns that may have arisen during data collection, analysis, or reporting, and appropriate measures were taken to mitigate or address these issues in accordance with ethical principles and guidelines.

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand on 22th, August 2025, with the approval number P2-0250-2568.

5. Data Collection

In-depth interviews will be conducted face-to-face with participants in a location conducive to open and confidential communication. The interviews will be

semi-structured, allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses while ensuring key topics relevant to the research are addressed. The interviews will be conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the primary language spoken in the region, to facilitate effective communication.

With participants' consent, the interviews will be audio-recorded to capture detailed responses accurately. Field notes were also taken during the interviews to document non-verbal cues, observations, and contextual information. Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim into written text, ensuring the preservation of participants' words and expressions.

6. Data Analysis

Content analysis will be employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews. The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the final report. Through this iterative process, patterns, meanings, and insights were identified, leading to the development of rich, nuanced findings that addressed the research objectives.

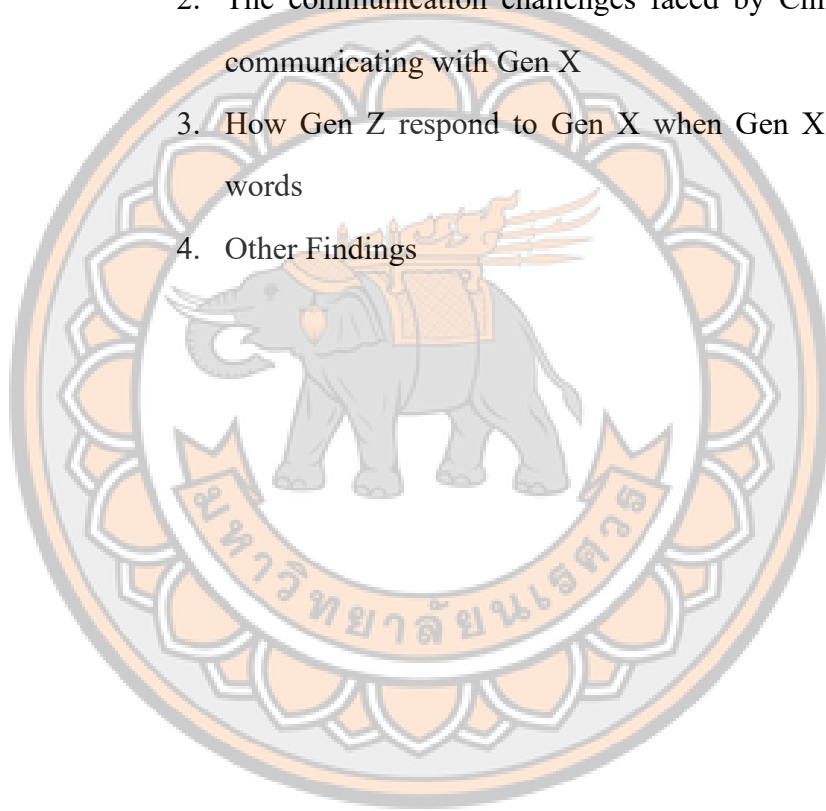
Strategies were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, including member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts, and triangulation, which involved comparing and contrasting data from multiple sources to corroborate findings. Additionally, an audit trail was maintained to document methodological decisions and ensure transparency in the research process.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter discourses the methodology employed in this study. They are as follows:

1. The impacts of boarding schools and linguistic regulation in school for civility on Chinese Gen Z
2. The communication challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z in communicating with Gen X
3. How Gen Z respond to Gen X when Gen X uses swearing words
4. Other Findings



Semi-structured online voice interviews were employed as the primary research tool to gather in-depth insights from Gen Z. Interview questions were designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding communication dynamics, language use, cultural values, and intergenerational relationships.

To ensure consistency and depth in data collection, interview protocols were developed with open-ended questions allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives freely. Probing questions were also incorporated to explore emerging themes and delve deeper into relevant topics during the interviews.

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the primary language spoken in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, to facilitate effective communication and understanding between the researcher and participants. Efforts were made to create a comfortable and non-threatening environment to encourage participants to express themselves openly and honestly. The interview process was audio-recorded with participants' consent to capture detailed responses accurately. Field notes were also taken during and after the interviews to document non-verbal cues, observations, and contextual information that may inform data analysis and interpretation.

1. The impacts of boarding schools and linguistic regulation in school for civility on Chinese Gen Z

Abstract:

d.1-1 Generation Z individuals who have experienced strict linguistic regulation tend to be sensitive to swear words based on specific keywords rather than contextual usage.

d.1-2 Linguistic regulation has made Gen Z sensitive to swear words, followed by notable desensitization after leaving the highly regulated school environment.

d.1-3 Restrictive linguistic regulation causes some Gen Z individuals to be oversensitive to specific keywords, then undergo desensitization post-school.

g.1 : Gen X is not sensitive to swearing words.

d.1-4 There is no direct impact of linguistic regulation on some Gen Z, who hold polarized views on the necessity of retaining the ability to swear as a means of self-protection.

d.1-5.1 Civility language regulations heighten Gen Z's sensitivity to key swear words, fostering a tendency toward self-censorship in speech.

g.1-2: For GenX, swearing is context-sensitive: habitual use of fuck may not offend, but sexual terms involving sexual organs are generally seen as swearing.

d.1-5.2 Heightened sensitivity implies that Gen Z not only self-monitors their own language but also internalizes surveillance of others' speech.

d.1-6 Gen Z participants differ in their assessment of whether school language regulations were strict. These regulations impose stronger constraints on students who did not previously use swear words.

d.1-7 Due to individual differences in sensitivity to profanity, varied institutional language regulations, teacher attitudes, and perceptions of rule strictness, Gen Z shows considerable variation in sensitivity to different swear words.

d.1-8 Sensitivity to profanity limits Gen Z's social circles, as they tend to associate with peers who share similar sensitivity levels toward offensive language.

d.1-9 Those who perceive themselves as subject to strict linguistic regulation view swearing as a skill that requires deliberate practice.

d-2 The enclosed boarding school environment, combined with an intense academic workload, limits Gen Z's exposure to the outside world.

d-2.1 When recalling boarding school experiences, Gen Z commonly describes the environment as oppressive, prison-like, or suffocating.

d.1-1 Generation Z individuals who have experienced strict linguistic regulation tend to be sensitive to swear words based on specific keywords rather than contextual usage.

In the interviews with members of Gen Z, 6 out of 10 participants ($N = 10$) considered the phrase “*tā mā de*” (他妈的, literally “your mother”) to be swear words, regardless of whether it was used in anger or as a joke. All of 4 participants who reported having experienced strict linguistic regulation during their primary school or/ to high school agree with that.

*“Expressions with a high frequency of “mother” references are generally perceived as swear words; for instance, *tā mā de* (“your mother”) is considered swear words regardless of how it is used. (含“妈”量极高的都算脏话, “他妈的”不管你怎么说都算是脏话)” -Gen Z FM 199910*

Notably, all participants who had undergone strict linguistic regulation regarded “*tā mā de*” as swear words in all contexts. In contrast, the remaining four

participants, who did not consider the phrase to be swear words, had not been subject to such strict linguistic regulation.

When explaining why they do not consider *tā mā de* (“your mother”) to be a swear word in certain contexts, some participants cited the lack of directiveness—that is, the absence of a specific target of the expression (e.g., “The weather is so *tā mā de* good today”)—and emphasized that it was not being used to insult anyone. Compared to participants who believe the classification of *tā mā de* as a swear word depends on context, those who have experienced strict linguistic regulation tend to identify swear words based on specific keywords. This indicates that linguistic regulation functions essentially as a form of keyword-based training, a habit of self-censorship cultivated from a young age.

In the case of participant Gen Z M 199909, who attended primary school in another province before transferring to a school in Guangxi in 6th grade, recalled a particularly vivid experience that shaped their perception of swear words: during a playful interaction with a friend on the playground, the participant jokingly said, “*brain dead*” (*nǎocǎn*). The friend showed no sign of offense. However, the teacher heard the remark and repeatedly expressed disappointment, asserting that the participant had used a swear word and was “not a good child.” Since that moment, the participant has realized *nǎocǎn* to be a swear word.

“Why do I have such a strong impression of swear words? When I returned to school in 6th grade, I was playing and roughhousing with friend A on the playground. ... I called him something like “brain-dead” (nǎocǎn), and our teacher overheard it. Our homeroom teacher kept talking to me about it—he said he had a very good impression of me, but after hearing me use a swear word, he felt really disappointed and upset. He said he had thought I was a good student and hadn’t expected me to use swear words to insult a classmate. ... So, I feel that the

regulation of swear words was quite strict here — teachers would always educate students whenever they heard such language. (……为什么说我对脏话印象特别深? 我回去六年级读书, 那时候我和 XXX (参与者的同学) 在操场那边在打着玩。……, 我骂了他一句脑残什么之类的, 然后被我们老师听到。 我们老师, 我们班主任就一直在说我, 他说他对我印象很好的, 但是他听到我说脏话就觉得特别伤心、特别难过。他觉得他以为我是个好学生, 然后没想到我会说脏话去骂其他同学。……, 所以我觉得对于脏话的管理还是比较严格的, 老师听到了都会对学生进行教育。)” -Gen Z M 199909

In this case, neither the researcher nor the participant considered *nǎocán* (“brain-dead”) to be a swear word, as it contains neither cultural taboos nor repulsive imagery. However, the teacher’s reaction clearly exceeded the participant’s expectations. This may help explain why some participants exhibited heightened sensitivity to swear words—each of whom reported having experienced a strict linguistic regulation system. This phenomenon will be discussed in detail in the following section.

This participant described a distinct change in their exposure to and perception of swear words across different schooling contexts. In Grade 1, while attending a primary school in Guangxi, where strict linguistic regulations were in place, they did not use any swear words. However, after transferring to a school in another province for Grades 2 to 5—where such language was not strictly regulated—they began using swear words, largely due to peer influence and a more permissive environment. The participant explicitly recalled that it was during this transition that their use of swear words began.

By Grade 6, after returning to a school in Guangxi, the participant noted a significant shift in their perception of swear words. Although students in Guangxi still used swear words, the participant reported that these expressions felt less offensive and less emotionally charged. In contrast, the swear words used in their previous school were remembered as more vulgar and aggressive, often involving sexual references and insults targeting family members, particularly one's mother. The participant described the earlier environment as "more barbaric," both in terms of the frequency and the nature of swear word usage. He explained:

"From Grade 2 to Grade 5, the school environment was generally more permissive with regard to swearing. The broader social atmosphere in that province (outside mainland China) felt more uncivilized or, one might say, less developed. I recall that I first began using swear words in Grade 2. I had attended Grade 1 in mainland China, where I didn't swear at all. It was mainly due to peer influence—when those around you use such language, you tend to follow. By Grade 2, I had transferred to XXX (another province of China), where swearing was more prevalent among students, and I started to pick it up as well.

Later, when I transferred to A School (a primary school in Guangxi), I became more aware of the types of profanity I used. I found that most of the swear words I used there were more like direct insults targeting a person's intelligence—words like 'moron' or 'meningitis'—which were personal attacks but did not involve references to family members or sexual content. In contrast, the profanity used in XXX (the previous province) often included more vulgar and sexually explicit expressions, such as those targeting the opponent's mother, like 'fuckk your mom,' which I consider to be far more aggressive and uncivilized. (小学 (二至五年级))

那时候基本上不管（不严格），那边的社会风气会比大陆这边要野蛮或者说不开化。……我记得我最开始是从二年级开始说脏话的。我一年级其实是在大陆读书的，那时候我不会说脏话。因为一般说都是周围的人先说，然后自己跟着说嘛，然后到二年级那时候就开始了。二年级那时候因为是XXX省读的，然后周围的人可能说脏话的多一些，然后那时候会说脏话。到了A学校以后，我之前留意过这个事情，我骂的人更多是骂那种脑残啊、脑膜炎啊，更多是针对他本人这种人身攻击，不是针对他家里面这种，女性这种亲属的这种攻击。在XXX省说的脏话都是一些比较更野蛮、更不文明的，比如说类似于操你妈、类似于这种性、这种和对方母亲有关的。）”

Participant Gen Z M 200002 reported that upon transferring from School A to School B in Guangxi, he clearly noticed that students at School B used swear words more frequently, likely due to the school's looser language regulation.

In these two cases, participants experienced differing levels of linguistic regulation. Comparatively, stricter language regulation significantly reduced both the frequency and variety of swear words among students. In such schools, students not only used swear words less often and knew fewer of them, but the swear words they did use were also notably milder than those used in less regulated environments.

d.1-2 Linguistic regulation has made Gen Z sensitive to swear words then, undergo a notable desensitization after leaving the highly regulated school environment.

Participants who had experienced the language standard system were sensitive to swear words and would remember their desensitization process, even if they thought the language standard system on campus was not strict at the time.

One participant, located in a southern city of Guangxi, shared his feelings about working after leaving school. He works for the local government in a county-level city in southern Guangxi and reported a noticeable sense of discomfort with the local people's language. He felt hurt by the frequent use of swear words, even though they were commonly used as colloquial expressions by the locals. It was only after working there for some time that he gradually got used to it.

“... Actually, it's quite hurtful. The villagers all think the problem is with others, not themselves. The local people here used to be quite tough, and their habit is to speak rather roughly — especially the old men and women, who start talking with “diao nan mie” (motherfucker). When I first came here, they were always “kou tu fen fang” (literally “spewing fragrance,” a sarcastic phrase meaning swearing or cursing). At first, I wasn't used to it, but after hearing it a lot, it's become more okay. (……其实很受伤，他们（村民）个个都觉得都是别人有问题而不觉得是自己有问题。这边这些人民民风以前比较彪悍，他们的习惯讲比较粗鲁的话，特别是这些老头老太太开口就是 diao nan mie (mother fucker)。刚开始来的时候我刚来这里的时候一开口就是“口吐芬芳”（“口吐芬芳”的“芬芳”一词，本来有“香气、香味”的意思，这里指的是脏话或粗口，与“芬芳”的实际含义形成反差。人们用“口吐芬芳”来反讽那些说脏话或爆粗

口的人，类似于“口臭”的说法)。……（刚开始听到）是不适应，现在听多了就还行吧。）”——Gen Z M 199804

d.1-3 Restrict linguistic regulation has made some of Gen Z over sensitive to specific keywords, then, undergo a desensitization after leaving the highly regulated school environment.

Participants in cases Gen Z FM 199907, Gen Z FM 199910, Gen Z FM 199912, and Gen Z FM 200008 all identified *wǒ kào* and *wǒ qù* as swear words. They reported feeling uncomfortable when hearing these expressions, particularly during their school years. In Mandarin, these terms are commonly used to express surprise or excitement and are roughly equivalent to “*oh my god*” in English. Although the participants did not fully understand the literal meanings of these words, they still experienced discomfort upon hearing them.

“As for “wǒ kào” and “wǒ qù,” I feel a bit uncomfortable when I hear them, so I tend to categorize them as swear words as well.” - Gen Z FM 199912

“I used to think it was a dirty word, but now it doesn't seem so dirty.” - Gen Z FM 200008

In contrast, all the other participants who reported not having undergone strict linguistic regulation during their schooling did not classify *wǒ kào* and *wǒ qù* as swear words. For example, participant Gen Z M 2002-1 stated that he was almost never subjected to linguistic discipline during his school years. For him, near the end of the interview, when the researcher mentioned that some people consider *wǒ*

kào and *wǒ qù* to be swear words, he responded with disbelief, stating that it was hard to imagine such individuals exist.

g.1 : Gen X is not sensitive to swearing words.

In this section, participants' sensitivity to swearing is examined.

Gen X generally shows low sensitivity to swearing, often failing to recognize swear words even when it is present. Their recollections of big-character posters lacking swear words—despite historical evidence to the contrary—further suggest that such language was normalized to the extent that it went unnoticed.

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked participants 3 main questions “Do you still remember the Cultural Revolution?”, “Have you ever seen a big-character poster?”, “Will there be swear words on the big-character posters?”. According to the interview participant feedback, the big-character posters of Gen X during the Cultural Revolution did not contain swear words, but only some political slogans.

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1965), “ There may not be any swear words, but "peel off your skin and pull out your tendons" will definitely be heard frequently.”

According to one participant (Gen X Male born in 1965), “... Basically there are only political slogans and political positions. ... Verbal violence may exist... Swearing maybe not exist.

However, the swear words like “*fuck*” frequently appeared in big-character posters. This may be partly due to Gen X’s vague memory, but more likely reflects their low sensitivity to swear words. As confirmed by participants’

responses, Generation X often fails to recognize or register such language as swearing, suggesting that their indifference contributes to overlooking the presence of swear words.

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1979), *“I’m not very sensitive. I don’t mind hearing it, and it doesn’t make me uncomfortable.”*

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1973), *“I’m not sensitive. I don’t always sensers who says bad words.”*

But the participants also report that they would still feel disgusted and uncomfortable when the other party used to swear words too frequently or when the emotions were particularly intense. This will be further illustrated in section (a-2).

However, 1 respondent (Gen X Male born in 1962) told the researcher that he was very sensitive to swearing. This respondent claimed that he never swears. Even when the researcher asked, *“Do you use bad language when expressing negative emotions?”* the respondent claimed, *“I’m someone who never gets angry.”* (Gen X Male born in 1962). Although the researcher found the interviewee's answer a little unbelievable, someone passed by at the time - since the community is not large, everyone knows each other - the passerby heard a short conversation and told us: He really doesn't get angry and doesn't swear. It shows that even within the same generation, personal traits and values can vary widely.

However, the use of generational theory is not intended to stereotype individuals solely based on age; even within the same generation, personal traits and values can vary widely. However, the generational lens offers a useful tool to observe patterns of behavior shaped by shared historical experiences.

Therefore, it is understandable that some cases are different from other cases. Moreover, in this case, the answers of not swearing and being sensitive to swearing are reasonable. The rules, punishments or personal rules prohibiting swearing will only affect those who do not swear, making them more sensitive to swearing.

d.1-5.1 The civility language regulations have heightened Gen Z's sensitivity to key swear words, fostering a tendency toward self-censorship in their speech.

When researcher asked: “*Do you think that because there is no clear list of these words, everyone becomes a language censor to see if you use swear words?* 你们会不会觉得由于没有清晰的列出这些词，造成每个人都变成了一种语言审查者的角色：去看你有没有说脏话？”

Among the Gen Z respondents, only four indicated that they rarely monitor themselves for the use of profanity in daily life. All 4 reported having never experienced strict linguistic regulation. In contrast, the remaining 6 respondents stated that they are consciously aware of their use of swearing—whether before, during, or after uttering it.

“Be aware of it, both before and after you say it (swearing words), especially after work. (能意识到，说之前、说之后都能意识到，尤其是在工作后。)” – Gen

Z FM 200010

Some Gen Z participants further noted that, after experiencing strict linguistic regulation in junior and senior high school, they often felt as though someone were monitoring them for the use of swearing.

“I used to feel like someone was watching over me, but after graduate school, I stopped saying it because I was so angry. I had to swear a little, otherwise I wouldn't be able to release the emotions inside. 以前有，会感觉有人在监督自己，读研之后说多了就没有了。（读研的时候）太愤怒了，必须得说点脏话，不然的话内心的情绪无法得到释放。” – Gen Z 199910

“I think I might have been more careful in junior high (checking for swearing) because the teacher had a rule that swearing would result in a point deduction, so I might have paid more attention. I would just try to restrain myself from saying it, and once I got used to it, I stopped paying much attention to it because it became a habit. (我感觉初中可能会注意一些（审查自己是否说脏话），因为班里的老师有规定说脏话扣分了就可能注意一些。会就是让自己克制一下不要说，然后适应了之后才没有特别的注意，因为成习惯了。)

“If someone suddenly swore, I might just be joking, but I did notice it. It wasn't until my second and third years of high school that I gradually got used to it (I became less sensitive to it after hearing it more often). Even now, I can still recognize when someone swears, but I don't think it's a big deal. (……如果别人突然冒了一句脏话可能只是开玩笑，但是也注意到了这一种现象，直到高二高

三逐渐适应了 (听的多了才不那么敏感) 。但是直到现在我也能意识到对方说了脏话, 但是现在觉得没什么要紧的。) ” – Gen Z FM 199907

g.1-2: For GenX, swearing is context-sensitive: habitual use of fuck may not offend, but sexual terms involving sexual organs are generally seen as swearing.

Interview responses show that participants largely judge whether a word is offensive based on context and emotional tone rather than the literal word itself. When responding to the question “*What do you define as swearing words?*”, 4 participants ($N=6$) first reaction was that whether a word counts as swearing depends largely on the speaker's intention and the listener's emotional response, rather than the word itself. In daily conversation, they generally did not consider words like “fuck” to be swear words when used casually as a habitual expression (catchphrase) without aggressive or sexual connotations.

According to one participant (Gen X Male born in 1965), “*This is not considered a swear word. ... Like those people in the factory now, the first sentence is: "Fuck you, bring a tool here." "Fuck you, what are you doing with this?" They have said it so frequently that they don't know how to speak normally (speaking without swearing words). But they are just joking, not swearing*”

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1967), “It's just a curse word, but something like “fuck” is just a catchphrase, it's said casually and it's not intended to be targeted, so it's not called a curse word.”

However, gen X would be very sensitive about words involving sexual organs, not only defining them as swear words, but also feeling uncomfortable.

“Although we were very harsh in our speech, we would not curse people so bluntly (not use words that contains sexual organs).”- Gen X Female born in 1967

d 1-5.2 Such heightened sensitivity implies that Gen Z not only self-monitors their own language use but also engages in internalized surveillance of others' speech.

In Chinese schools, learning from exemplary students is regarded as a commendable quality. “Not swearing,” as a characteristic of an “excellent student,” can thus encourage other students to emulate this behavior. Consequently, with good intentions, some students remind and monitor one another to ensure they refrain from swearing.

“I think I never used swear words in primary school or middle school. And whenever I heard people around me swearing—if they were close to me—I would always remind them. 我应该我小学初中都不说脏话。而且我身边听到说脏话的人，我亲近一点的我都会提醒他。

I feel that since the frequency of girls using swear words isn't very high, the self-censorship is less about ourselves and more about the outside world—more like outward monitoring. Because in our primary and middle school, we didn't use

swear words; it was more often people outside or nearby who were swearing. Sometimes we would even play the role of a moral judge together, saying things like, “Ah, that person really likes to swear,” or “So-and-so never swears—I think that’s great,” making comparisons like that. In other words, if someone swore, ... we would secretly look down on them in our hearts. 我觉得因为女生说脏话的那种频次不是很多，所以审查更多不是对自己的，是对外界的。就对外审查。因为我们小学初中都不讲脏话，而更多的是外面的旁边的人在说的话。我们有时候也会就是一起去扮演一个道德审判官说：“啊，那个人好喜欢说脏话，或是谁谁谁不说脏话 我觉得他好好”，就这样子进行比较。也就是说说脏话的人，……，就会心里面鄙视他。” —Gen Z FM 200008

This reflects not only the diligence and self-discipline of certain Chinese students, but also explains why Gen Z who have undergone linguistic regulation tend to develop a collective sensitivity toward swearing—since their peers would constantly supervise and remind each other. Although this practice typically occurs from primary through junior high school, it is difficult for such Gen Z individuals to fully desensitize themselves later in life, due to the intense academic pressure and the near-total isolation from the outside world in those years. (This will be discussed again in a later section.)

d 1-6 Gen Z participants hold differing standards regarding whether the language regulations they experienced during school were strict. These regulations exert a stronger constraint on students who did not previously use swear words.

Even when faced with the same swear words, the same linguistic regulation system, and the same punishments, for Gen Z individuals who are already sensitive to swearing, these rules appear particularly strict. By contrast, for those who are not sensitive to swearing, the same rules seem less strict—so much so that even regulations with seemingly harsher punishments may still feel lenient to them.

When researcher asked, “Do you remember what punishments you would receive if you used foul language?”

For Gen Z FM 200008, Gen Z FM 199910, Gen Z FM 199912, and Gen Z FM 199907, the language regulations in place during their school years were strict, and they were also sensitive to swearing. One type of punishment they described as part of these “strict” rules was merely verbal correction, with teachers not even scolding harshly.

Another type was *conduct point evaluation (caoxingfen pingding)*, a classroom management system in which teachers or student managers would assign points based on a student’s various behaviors. This system was generally used to curb inappropriate behavior, and a low conduct score could affect eligibility for scholarships or awards.

“It was strict in middle school—the habit of not using swear words started in middle school. At that time, I think there was some kind of point deduction system (conduct point evaluation). If you were caught swearing even once, points would be deducted, and classmates could also report each other. ... The teacher said it was possible to report classmates for swearing, but in reality, students didn’t actually report each other. Still, there was such a rule, and back then, basically everyone didn’t swear. Only a few boys in the class would say something occasionally, but basically, none of the girls in our class swore. ... But if the teacher overheard someone swearing, they would probably just deduct the points directly.

(初中的时候严格, (不能说) 脏话就是从初中的时候养成的。我们那时候不是好像是会扣分吗, 不知道是有一个什么积分的制度 (操行分评定), 然后说一次就被发现, 然后同学也可以相互举报就会扣分。……他 (老师) 是说可以这样 (举报同学说脏话) 但是实际上同学之间是不会举报的。但是有这一项规定, 但是那个时候大家都就基本上没那么说 (不说脏话), 只有班上的保有的几个男生会说一下, 基本上女孩子的话都没有说我们班的时候。……但是老师自己听到 (有同学说脏话) 的时候 可能他自己就直接扣分了。)” - Gen Z FM 199907

By contrast, for Gen Z FM 199912-1, the language regulations during her school years were not strict, and she was not very sensitive to swearing. Yet in her primary and middle school years, punishments included ruler strikes on the palm and standing penalties—measures that might appear harsher to others.

“I think it was not restricted...In primary school, teachers would hit students on the palm with a ruler or make them stand as punishment. (我觉得不算严格吧... 小学的时候老师会打手板、罚站。)” - Gen Z FM 199912

These regulations, however, exerted a stronger constraint on students who did not previously use swear words.

d 1-7 Due to variations in individuals' sensitivity to profanity, discrepancies in institutional language regulation requirements, differences in teachers' attitudes toward profanity, and divergent perceptions of the strictness of such norms, Gen Z exhibits considerable variation in their sensitivity to different swear words.

As noted in D 1–5.2, “not swearing” as a characteristic of an “excellent student” can encourage other students to adopt this trait. Achieving the standard of not swearing, however, requires a heightened sensitivity to swearing—manifested as discomfort toward a wider range of words. In the interview with Gen Z FM 199912, for example, the respondent reported feeling uncomfortable even with phrases such as “*wo qu*” and “*wo kao*”, the meaning is close to the English “Oh my God”, and was unwilling to utter these expressions directly, even during the interview.

(“Wǒ kào and wǒ qù make me feel a bit uncomfortable when I hear them, and I tend to categorize them as swear words. ... There are some words that the speaker may just be using to express strong emotions, but in my view they still get classified as swear words. This kind of situation can happen, but I can understand it. For example, if someone receives really good news today and, feeling excited, says such a (possibly swear-like) modal expression—like wǒ qù—I think I can understand that kind of situation. 我靠、我去这两个词听到后会有点不舒服，我比较倾向于归纳为脏话。……有一些对方可能只是表达的情感比较激烈的词，但是在我看来也被归到了脏话里面去，这种情况是可能发生的，但是我会对此表示理解。假如对方今天收到特别好的消息，对方很激动的说那个（可能会被定义为脏话的）语气助词（例如我去）我觉得我可以理解这样的情况。)

- Gen Z FM 199912

By contrast, in the interview with Gen Z M 200002-1, the participant expressed puzzlement and stated disbelief that such individuals could exist. And questioned

the researcher: "*Are you sure such a person really exists? Is this your theory or did you interview a real person?*"

And the fact is that Gen Z FM 199912 was in the same class at the same high school as Gen Z M 200002-1. A possible explanation for this is that people are not so aware of each person's sensitivity to swear words, and different levels of sensitivity to swear words may affect their social circles (which will be explained in the next point d 1-8).

d 1-8 Sensitivity to profanity constrains the scope of Gen Z's social circles, as they tend to associate with peers who share a similar level of sensitivity toward offensive language.

After experiencing strict language standards, Gen Z, who are highly sensitive to profanity, all mentioned that they disliked making friends with peers who used profanity. However, as discussed in points 1-7 above, everyone's sensitivity to profanity varies, so the language standards system also creates a certain degree of social barriers for Gen Z: My catchphrase has become a reason why others don't want to play with me.

More importantly, this process is quite covert. The other party will not tell you frankly, "The swear words you use make me uncomfortable" or stop the other party from swearing, but will just leave.

"I wouldn't stop someone from saying it, but I would think that person isn't very nice, and I wouldn't want to interact with them. (对别人的话不会制止他, 但会觉得那个人不太好, 不想和那个人接触)" - Gen Z FM 199912

“Back in primary school, I would think, ‘Ah, how could they say that? That’s so excessive—so uncivilized to speak that way.’ ... I just wouldn’t want to play with that person or talk to them. ... Thinking about it now, the people I spent the most time around were generally not the type to swear. Getting along with them didn’t require using any swear words, so I guess I tended to interact more often with people like that. (小学的时候就会觉得, 啊, 他怎么这么说呀? 好过分哦, 这样子讲的好不文明。……我就是不想和这个人玩, 不想理他。……我觉得其实这么说来的话, 我身边见到的频率比较高的人, 他们都不是那种说脏话的人。就跟他们相处下来, 也不需要去说什么脏话 就这一类的人可能相处的频率会比较高吧。)” - Gen Z FM 200008

d 1-9 Among those who perceive themselves as having been subject to strict linguistic regulation, the act of swearing is viewed as a skill that requires deliberate practice.

When asked, “Do you think it takes practice to make your swearing impactful? Have you ever specifically practiced this?” Gen Z respondents who experienced strict language regulations responded with strong feelings:

“Yes, it does take practice. At first, I felt that some swear words said in our dialect had more impact than when said in Mandarin. This was something I discovered through continuous practice. If you say ‘you this idiot’ in Mandarin, it’s just like that; but if you say ‘you this idiot’ in our dialect, the impact immediately

increases. ... In high school, you can practice with a classmate, going back and forth saying 'you this idiot, you this idiot' ... like a dialogue practice. (对, 这是需要练习的。像刚开始有一些脏话我觉得用我们的方言说出来会比普通话更加有杀伤力, 这也是在不断的练习中发现的。你用一个普通话说你这个哈仔, 用普通话说就是这样子; 但是如果用我们的方言来说你这个哈仔, 就一下子杀伤力就上去了。……高中你就可以和同学两个人堆着练, 你这个哈仔, 你这个哈仔……就像是对话练习。)” —Gen Z FM 200008

“... When I want to use that word to express my emotion, I might first run through it in my mind, because I'm not very familiar with that word. I think about it and decide if it's appropriate to say it, and whether it might hurt someone before I actually say it. (……就是我要用那个词表达我的那个情绪的时候, 我可能先过一遍, 因为确实对那个词不太熟, 在脑子里面过一遍, 哎, 觉得这么说合适, 可能不会伤到人了才会说。)” - Gen Z FM 199910

In contrast, Gen Z respondents who did not experience strict language regulations expressed confusion about the question and were unsure of the researcher's intent; some even questioned the premise of the question:

“... I don't think there's anyone who wouldn't swear. I feel it's like a physiological need—there's no way to completely avoid it. (……我觉得不会有人

不会说脏话, 这种东西我感觉就是那种像生理需求那种一样, 根本就不可能说能够完全避免。) ”- Gen Z M 200002

d-2 The enclosed boarding school environment, combined with an intense academic workload, limits Gen Z's exposure to the outside world.

In China, the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) is a very serious matter, and many people believe that “Gaokao determines one's destiny.” Therefore, in Chinese high schools, the academic pressure is extremely high. Students rarely have time to leave the school campus, and the intense, long hours of study leave them little opportunity to engage with the outside world.

For example, the participants in this study mostly have to get up at 6:30 a.m. for morning exercise. Some students even use the ten or so minutes before morning exercise assembly to pull out their notes or review materials to study. After morning exercise, they have about half an hour for breakfast, followed by morning self-study starting at 7:30 a.m., continuing until noon. They have a one-hour lunch break, then study again until about 10:30 p.m.

This schedule runs five days a week, with half a day of classes on Saturday and classes every other Sunday. Even on Saturday afternoons, teachers assign homework that must be completed.

“... (The high school campus) implements a closed management system. There is no option to stay off-campus, and students cannot leave... It's very rare—maybe among several hundred or over a thousand students, only one or two can stay off-campus. It's essentially closed management. So students can only go out for about half a day per week. At that time, there was a system of alternating weeks with different schedules. For example, one week only had a half-day off on Saturday—classes were held in the morning, and the afternoon and evening were off. Then Sunday was a full day of classes. The next week, the holiday would start Friday afternoon, alternating weeks like that. That was how it was. (…… (高中校园) 实行封闭式管理制度, 没有外宿的, 不能出去, ……; 就很极个例可以, 可能像几百个、一千多个人可能就一两个是可以外宿。算是封闭式管理。所以一周其实也就半天能出去看。其实那时候还应该是大小周吧, 那时候一周只放半天, 比如说只放周六半天, 周六上午上完课然后下午和晚上是放假。然后周天上午开始就上一天, 然后第二周的话就是从周五下午开始放假大小周。那时候是这样的。)” - Gen Z M 199909

The high-intensity academic pressure and long study hours forced Gen Z students to stay on campus studying almost constantly. This also explains why they never became desensitized to swear words.

d-2.1 When recalling their experiences in boarding schools, Gen Z participants commonly describe the environment as oppressive, prison-like, or suffocating.

When asked, *“Did the closed management of your boarding school make you feel disconnected from students outside the school? How would you describe that experience?”*, the participant Gen Z FM 200008 offered the following reflection:

“At that time, I had no sense of the outside world at all. I felt like I was living on an island. Then, after a while, I would take a boat off the island to go out and ‘gather supplies,’ but I had no idea what was happening in the world beyond. Especially when we couldn’t watch Xinwen Lianbo (a nationally televised news program), I felt like—even if the country had changed presidents—we probably wouldn’t have known. Let alone knowing what was going on at home or in society. We were always a few steps behind in receiving information. (我当时一点都没有校外的意识，就感觉自己在这里面就像是在一个岛上面生活，然后到了一段时间就乘船离开岛，去外面采购物资，就完全不了解外面的世界怎么了。尤其是看不到新闻联播的时候，我觉得哪怕后面换了国家主席我们都不会知道，更别说家里面又有什么变化 这边的人有什么样的事情我们都不太知道，消息都是很滞后的。)” —Gen

Z FM 200008

Metaphors such as “prison,” “isolated island,” and “suffocating environment” frequently emerged in participants’ descriptions of their campus experiences.

“For example, if you pretend to be sick and ask for sick leave or some other kind of leave to go out (off-campus) and have fun, you would feel like you’ve entered a completely different world—a sense of liberation. Although the school environment is not drastically different from the outside world in terms of physical layout, psychologically it feels like there are far fewer restrictions once you’re outside. It really feels like being released from prison. (比如说你假装生病请病假或者请什么假出去 (到校外) 玩, 然后你就会觉得感觉到了不一样的世界一样, 得到了解放。但是学校里面和外面那种很不一样也倒是没有, 只是说 (到了校外心理上感觉) 他的限制会少很多就没有人管你, 感觉出狱了一样。” —Gen Z FM

200010

“Compared to the outside environment, it felt very oppressive and suffocating. (……相比于外面的环境来说感觉很压抑, 非常的窒息, 很压抑。)” —Gen Z

FM 200010

d-4 Generation Z tends to endorse the belief that “those who behave immorally are more likely to succeed in society,” reflecting a perceived lack of clear fairness and justice in their social reality.

During this interview, when researcher asked, *“Did you believe the idea that ‘the more immoral a person is, the easier it is for them to survive in society’ while you were studying?”* 6 respondents clearly stated, *“I didn’t believe it while studying,*

but now I have to believe it, " indicating that after graduation they experienced significant unfairness and have little hope for justice.

Another respondent said, *"It's not that there will be no retribution; the time just hasn't come yet."* — Gen Z FM 199912-1 This suggests that although she experienced injustice, she believes that the wrongdoers will eventually be punished.

1 respondent expressed, *"I think moral people can also live well, and immoral people can also live well."* — Gen Z FM 199912

1 respondent said, *"I have only interned for one month, so I don't know much about the state of society."* — Gen Z M 199909

Only 1 respondent stated, *"I didn't believe it while studying, and I still don't believe it now. Most immoral people make others dislike them. Even if they seem to succeed for a while, it won't last."* — Gen Z FM 199912

The case for believing that "the more immoral people are, the easier it is for them to survive in society" is stated as follows:

"I didn't believe it while studying, especially in primary and middle school. In high school, I started to believe it a little bit. For example, things like using

connections to get ahead (going through backdoors) are also immoral because it takes someone else's spot. If you use connections to get into school, it means someone else is blocked from entering — that behavior is immoral. But you still get to enjoy studying, or if you use connections to get a job, it's basically a privilege.

(在读书的时候是不相信的，特别是在初中小学的时候（不相信），在高中可能会稍微有一点点相信吧。比如说走后门这种也是不道德的，也是去占了别人的名额，因为你走了后门，那相当于肯定就有一个人要下来（无法进入校园），那你这种行为也是不道德的。但是你享受了读书，就是比如说你走后门就读书，或者是走后门去找公司这种，也是相当于一个优待了。)

… *The ideas I was exposed to before were like those about Lei Feng—the good person who would be rewarded. But Lei Feng died very young. … Nowadays, there are many corrupt officials who are very immoral, yet they get to have lots of money. Unless one day their wrongdoings are exposed, they get to enjoy a good life beforehand. Now it feels like more and more people without conscience do better. (I believe more in the idea that the more immoral a person is, the easier it is for them to survive.)* (……以前接触的思想就是觉得像雷锋那种好人就会得到怎么样，但是雷锋也很早就死了。……现在不是有很多那种贪官嘛，那些贪官他们也是很不道德，但是他们就可以得很多很多钱。除非有一天他们那个事情败露了。但在此之前他们就可以享受很好的生活，那现在就感觉越来越多这种没良心的会导致更好吧（更相信“越不道德的人越容易在社会中生存”这个观点）。)

… *The older generation believed that hardship was a blessing and that hard work would bring rewards. But now it seems like in this society, the harder you work, the less certain you are to get good rewards. (上一代的人他们都会觉得吃苦就是福, 拼命去做事情走会有回报这种。但是感觉现在这个社会你越努力, 不一定就是就会得到很好的回报吧。)*” — Gen Z FM 200010

“I believe it. I especially believe now that people with very low moral sense survive more easily, as long as they don't break the law. In middle and high school, I thought people with low morals were probably easier to be disliked, so it was kind of hard for them to survive. (我相信。我现在特别的相信, 道德感极低的人越容易生存, 只要他不犯法就行。初高中的时候, 我是觉得道德感比较低的人可能容易被人讨厌吧, 也算是不易生存的一种 (原因) 吧。)” — Gen Z FM 199910

“I didn't believe it while studying, but after working, I feel there really are people who survive well like that. (我读书的时候是是不相信的, 但是工作之后会觉得确实会有这样子的人生存的很好。)

… *The people around me who are very honest don't live well. For example, those who truly love their jobs and dedicate themselves to their work—right now, they are still working overtime. But they don't get promoted or get a raise just because they are responsible. They get nothing, but they keep working. So I feel like*

honest people don't get many benefits. Meanwhile, those who flatter the boss don't even need to do much—they just pass tasks to others. They live very easily and sometimes get bonuses, commissions, or performance rewards. They have all of that. (……我觉得我身边特别正直的人，他们过得不好。因为像如果真的是爱岗敬业的人，他都会工作奉献一切的人，我告诉你，此刻他还在加班。但是他并没有说因为他做的事情多么的多么的尽责而得到晋升 甚至提拔或者是加工资，这些都没有，他什么都没有，但是他还是在做着。所以我觉得这样子，正直的人他也没有得到什么样的好处。而那些拍了马屁的人，他们甚至什么事情都不用做，把任务分下去给别人做就行了。他们就过得很轻松，甚至还会有些奖金、提成、绩效。这些他们都会有。)” — Gen Z FM 200008

2. The communication challenges faced by Chinese Gen Z in communicating with Gen X

d-3.1 Most Gen Z participants (8 of 10) believed that Gen Z swore more than Gen X.

g.5 Results of Gen X – 4 - 1: Gen X believes that fewer people use swear words now compared to the past.

g.4: Gen X perceives younger generations as more sensitive to swearing words, and even unintentional swearing can hurt them.

d-3.4 For some members of Gen Z, the inability of Gen X to empathize with them is also a reason why intergenerational conflicts break out.

d-3.1 *Most of Gen Z (8 of 10, N=10) believed that Gen Z were more likely to swear than Gen X.*

“Older generations (Gen X) definitely swear more. I would say those around their 50s and 60s tend to swear a lot — like, almost every sentence includes a swear word. It’s as if they can’t even speak properly without swearing. … And in my neighborhood, there’s someone who just sits on the stairs and swears all day — every sentence is filled with swear words. She can just swear to the air. Everyone thinks she has mental health issues (脏字来说的话, 那我还是觉得是老一辈说的多。而且我小区是有那种坐在楼梯到骂一天奶奶的。就是坐在楼梯口纯骂。就骂空气。大家都觉得他精神有问题。)”——Gen Z M 199804

g.5 Results of Gen X – 4 - 1: Gen X believes that fewer people use swear words now compared to the past.

When the research asked, *“Do you think you heard more swear words when you were young or now?”* Participants consistently noted that people today swear less and are generally more civilized than in the past. This suggests that during Gen X’s youth, the use of swear words was more prevalent. Their swearing habits may have been shaped by the social atmosphere and linguistic norms of two major political movements they experienced during childhood.

"I heard more swear words when I was young... People speak more civilized nowadays." - Gen X Female born in 1962

During the interviews, the researcher observed that the "Send - Down Policy" movement may have had a greater impact on the social environment of swear words than the Cultural Revolution.

Although the Cultural Revolution involved extensive use of verbally violent expressions, speech was heavily regulated during that period, and few individuals dared to openly vent negative emotions or use profane language. During the Cultural Revolution, people could suffer misfortune for their words, even if the speaker had no malicious intent. "...those who dared not speak out were easily labeled with any label: 'landlord,' 'rich peasant,' 'counter-revolutionary,' 'leftist,' 'rightist,' 'five black categories'—there was always one that could be pinned on you." —Gen X Male 1965. Therefore, those who experienced the Cultural Revolution were more careful with their words, even "daring not to express anger."

"At that time, I didn't dare to swear, or I would be criticized. Swearing means that your thinking is backward (that will be criticized and paraded through the streets)." - Gen X Male born in 1956

In contrast, during the "Send - Down Policy" movement, urban youth were exposed to a wide range of swearing words in rural areas.

“...The language in the countryside can't be civilized. ...Maybe it's not swearing, but the language can be very harsh. ...For example, "You are a jerk, you don't know anything" ("Jackie" is a dialect term used to describe a person who is mentally retarded and immature. The interviewee believes that the "Jackie" in this sentence does not include sexual organs, so it is not a swear word.) (……农村里面的语言就不可能文明。……可能脏话算不上，但是语言会非常刻薄。……比如说“你个哈仔，什么都不会”（“哈仔”是方言，形容一个人智力低下且幼稚。该受访者认为这句话中的“哈仔”不包含性器官，所以不算脏话。））” - Gen X Female born in 1967

After returning to the cities at the end of the movement, they may brought these swearing words back to the city with them. As political and social control over speech gradually relaxed in the subsequent years, the conditions became favorable for the widespread dissemination of profane vocabulary.

g.4: Gen X perceives younger generations as more sensitive to swearing words, and even unintentional swearing can hurt them.

When research asked whether they had ever unintentionally hurt younger people by using swearing words, 3 participants agreed that their words could indeed cause harm. The rest of the participants were not posed this specific question. Gen X interviewees emphasized that they generally try to avoid swearing when speaking with younger generations. Despite these efforts, they admitted that swear words sometimes slip out uncontrollably. Upon realizing that

such language has unintentionally hurt younger listeners, they expressed feelings of guilt and regret.

“... This situation does happen. Sometimes the swear words I say in daily life are very sensitive to them. Sometimes the catchphrases I say to my peers contain swear words, and when I communicate with young people, I will say them unintentionally. ... I will still be careful when talking to young people, and I also have to pay attention to my image. (……这种情况是有的, 有时候自己日常说的脏话会对他们来说很敏感。有时候和同龄人说的口头禅就带着脏话, 在和年轻人交流的时候就会无意中说出来。……和年轻人说话的时候我还是会注意的, 我也要注意自己的形象的。)” - Gen X Female born in 1979

d-3.4 For some members of Gen Z, the inability of Gen X to empathize with them is also a reason why intergenerational conflicts break out.

“It’s usually like, when we’re with people of our own generation, we just share bits of our daily life, or talk about something that happened to us. But if you tell these things to them [Gen X], it feels like, in the grand scheme of their life experience, what you’re talking about seems tiny and insignificant. They tend to very quickly start giving you advice in a lecturing tone. That actually makes people uncomfortable. ... They can’t really understand our confusion at the time, or the situations we’re going through. They always want to give you advice, always wanting to ‘teach you’ from the stance of someone who’s been through it all. But

what we really want isn't to be taught—we just want someone to listen. ... They just want to give advice as a way to show themselves off (to show how strong they are). (就是一般我们同一个人之间就是分享自己生活的日常, 或者是说遇见了一些什么事情, 说一说。但是如果你跟他们说的话, 感觉你这一点点事情在他们岁月的场合里面就显得很渺小。他们就很容易用一种说教的方式给你一些建议。这样子其实是让人产生不适的。……不能够理解我们当时的困惑或者是说一些处境吧, 他们就总是会想给你一些建议, 总是会以一种过来人的姿态去教导你。但我们想要的其实不是教导, 只是倾听而已。……他们只是想给出建议, 这样显示自己而已 (表现自己很坚强) 。)

I think their proper response should be: after hearing what the younger generation has to say, they should share their own feelings or thoughts from that time in a way that resonates with us—so we can exchange views. Not things like, 'Oh, we've seen plenty of this kind of thing in our time,' or, 'Ah, this is just a small matter, it's nothing,' or, 'Don't worry, as long as you know about it, that's enough.' *Those kinds of empty comfort words don't even count as comfort—they're just perfunctory.* (因为我觉得作为他们正确的回应, 应该是听完晚辈说了这些东西之后, 可以跟他同频 (感同身受) 地去分享一下你的那种感受或者是你当时的一些思考, 可以互相交流。而不是说: “这种事情我们以前也见得多了的”, “哎呀, 这种小事情吧, 不要紧的。” “哎呀。不要紧。这种事情你晓得就足够的”。就只是这样子的无关痛痒的一些安慰劝戒都不算吧, 只是一些敷衍。)

-Gen Z FM 200008

3. How Gen Z respond to Gen X when Gen X uses swearing words

Abstract

d-3.2 Psychologically distancing themselves from Gen X is a strategy Gen Z uses when facing intergenerational conflict.

d-3.3 When asked how to deal with someone swearing, most Gen Z respondents mentioned the concept of "yin and yang (阴阳)" as a balancing approach.

g.5: Gen X finds some of the swearing words used by younger people difficult to understand, but they can still perceive it as an expression of anger.

d-3.2 Distancing themselves psychologically from Gen X is one of the strategies Gen Z adopts when facing intergenerational conflict.

“Respecting the elderly and caring for the young” is commonly regarded as a traditional virtue in Chinese culture. However, some members of Generation X may misinterpret this norm as granting them the perpetual authority to admonish younger people. When Gen Z bluntly points out this relational dynamic and reminds them to maintain an appropriate distance, Gen X often experiences a sense of shame. Distancing themselves psychologically from Generation X is one of the strategies Gen Z adopts when facing intergenerational conflict.

Following the interview with Gen Z FM 200008, the respondent accompanied the researcher downstairs, only to discover that an item they had left on the roadside earlier was missing. The item had considerable value but was merely an accessory to another object, and both needed to be combined for use; hence, the respondent had not anticipated anyone stealing it. As the respondent was feeling uneasy, a

relative—belonging to Gen X—passed by and noticed them. Instead of offering comfort, the relative scolded the respondent: *“In today's society (with its poor security), why would you leave things on the street? Your next-door neighbor even locks a scrap of paper in their house for fear that a junk collector might take it. Now the item is gone, isn't it? What are you going to do about it? 现在这社会（治安差）你为什么要把东西放在路边？你隔壁邻居连一张废纸都要锁在自己的门里害怕给收破烂的人捡走。现在东西找不到了吧？这该怎么办呢？”*

Although the Gen X individual did not use profanity, such remarks—delivered when Gen Z was already distressed—only added fuel to the fire. Not only did they fail to provide support, but they also induced self-blame in the Gen Z respondent.

In the earlier interview, the participant had remarked: *“I think that, rather than retaliating with profanity, directly exposing the flaws in the other person's words and striking at them without vulgarity is more sophisticated and impactfull. 我觉得其实比起用脏话来反击，你直接抓住对方语言的漏洞，直击他不带脏字会更加的高级、有杀伤力。”* In this intergenerational conflict, the respondent's counterattack was as follows: *“Even if the item is gone, that's still our family's business—what does it have to do with you? What use are your words right now, apart from making the atmosphere even more tense? If you can't think of any solution, then stop lecturing others. 即使东西找不到了，那也是我们家的事，*

和你有什么关系？你现在说这些话除了让气氛更紧张还能有什么用？一点办法都想不出就知道教训别人。” —Gen Z FM 200008

One reason this approach proves effective is that members of Generation X internalized an important lesson from the sent-down youth movement and the Cultural Revolution: the necessity of maintaining a “collective consciousness” and continuously aligning one's thinking with that of the group. For Gen X, when younger individuals create psychological and social distance from them, it evokes a sense of detachment from the collective. In the political movements they experienced, such detachment was perceived as highly dangerous. This perceived danger places them at a psychological disadvantage during conflicts with Gen Z.

In addition, the researcher found that for some members of Gen Z, the inability of Gen X to empathize with them is also a reason why intergenerational conflicts break out.

“It's usually like, when we're with people of our own generation, we just share bits of our daily life, or talk about something that happened to us. But if you tell these things to them [Gen X], it feels like, in the grand scheme of their life experience, what you're talking about seems tiny and insignificant. They tend to very quickly start giving you advice in a lecturing tone. That actually makes people uncomfortable. ... They can't really understand our confusion at the time, or the situations we're going through. They always want to give you advice, always wanting to 'teach you' from the stance of someone who's been through it all. But

what we really want isn't to be taught—we just want someone to listen. ... They just want to give advice as a way to show themselves off (to show how strong they are). (就是一般我们同一个人之间就是分享自己生活的日常, 或者是说遇见了一些什么事情, 说一说。但是如果你跟他们说的话, 感觉你这一点点事情在他们岁月的场合里面就显得很渺小。他们就很容易用一种说教的方式给你一些建议。这样子其实是让人产生不适的。……不能够理解我们当时的困惑或者是说一些处境吧, 他们就总是会想给你一些建议, 总是会以一种过来人的姿态去教导你。但我们想要的其实不是教导, 只是倾听而已。……他们只是想给出建议, 这样显示自己而已 (表现自己很坚强) 。)

I think their proper response should be: after hearing what the younger generation has to say, they should share their own feelings or thoughts from that time in a way that resonates with us—so we can exchange views. Not things like, 'Oh, we've seen plenty of this kind of thing in our time,' or, 'Ah, this is just a small matter, it's nothing,' or, 'Don't worry, as long as you know about it, that's enough.' *Those kinds of empty comfort words don't even count as comfort—they're just perfunctory.* (因为我觉得作为他们正确的回应, 应该是听完晚辈说了这些东西之后, 可以跟他同频 (感同身受) 地去分享一下你的那种感受或者是你当时的一些思考, 可以互相交流。而不是说: “这种事情我们以前也见得多了的”, “哎呀, 这种小事情吧, 不要紧的。” “哎呀。不要紧。这种事情你晓得就足够的”。就只是这样子的无关痛痒的一些安慰劝戒都不算吧, 只是一些敷衍。)

-Gen Z FM 200008

d-3.3 When answering how to deal with someone swearing, most Gen Zs mentioned the keyword "yin and yang (阴阳)".

"People nowadays prefer to be sarcastic(yin yang “阴阳”). It means to curse people without using any swearing words. “ Why are you so nosy? ”“ I don't eat your rice.” Like these...” (现在的人更喜欢阴阳怪气啊。就是骂人不带脏字啊。你管那么宽。我又不吃你家大米。这种。)——Gen Z M 199804

Both Gen Z M 199909 and Gen Z M 20002-1 are enthusiasts of online gaming. In their responses, they reported that the frequency and intensity of swear words encountered in online gaming environments far exceed those observed in real-life interactions. On Chinese gaming platforms, there is often a built-in language censorship mechanism that automatically blocks messages containing swearing words. As a result, 阴阳 (yīnyáng)—a form of sarcastic, indirect insult—has emerged as a strategic method for expressing negative emotions while circumventing automated censorship systems.

In contemporary Chinese internet discourse, the term “阴阳” (yīnyáng), often extended as “阴阳怪气” (yīnyáng guàiqì), refers to a sarcastic, passive-aggressive tone of expression. It is characterized by indirectness, exaggerated politeness, or feigned sincerity, which is used to mock, insult, or criticize someone without making an overtly offensive statement.

Rather than using direct swearing words or explicit confrontation, 阴阳 language operates through subtle cues — such as unnatural word choices,

deliberately formal phrasing, ambiguous statements, or ironic praise. The goal is to undermine or provoke the target while maintaining plausible deniability, making it difficult for others (including content moderation systems) to detect the speaker's hostile intent.

This rhetorical style is especially prevalent among Chinese Gen Z internet users, who employ it as a creative form of resistance under speech censorship. It allows for emotional expression and social critique while avoiding keyword-based bans. However, because the message is often cloaked in ambiguity, the effectiveness of 阴阳 relies heavily on shared cultural or subcultural knowledge. As a result, older generations or those outside the linguistic community may “fail to get the point.”

The essence of 阴阳 lies not only in its avoidance of explicit swearing but also in its ambiguity. The target may not be entirely certain whether they are being insulted, or even what the insult entails. Consider the following example:

“Is that shit? (zhe shi shi ma? 这是屎吗?)”

A few minutes later, when the other party shows signs of anger, the speaker clarifies:

“Wrong typing, sorry, I meant to say ‘what’s this?’ (da cuo zi le, zhe shi shenme 打错字了, 这是什么?)”

In this scenario, the ambiguity is heightened by the use of pinyin input. When typing “zhe shi shenme” (这是什么), some users might shorten it to “zhe shi sh m”. Given that the pinyin for “shit” (屎) and “what” (什) are similar (shi vs sh), the message can be misread as an insult. If a recipient sees their shared content described as shit, they may feel offended—yet the yīnyáng effect is achieved precisely because the offensive intent is deniable. The speaker can plausibly claim that the insult resulted from a typographical error or an input method malfunction, leaving the target emotionally injured but without clear grounds for retaliation.

Moreover, most 阴阳 insults require a certain level of imagination or cultural decoding. Such as:

1. “你爸妈是在家庭聚会上认识的。”

Literally: “Your parents met at a family gathering.”

Implied meaning: This remark suggests that the individual's parents are blood relatives—implying incestuous relations. Under the 阴阳 rhetorical strategy, this indirect insult carries a layered implication: if one's parents are closely related, the speaker insinuates that the individual may have been born with congenital health issues, such as physical or cognitive impairments.

As a comeback: “不像你, 打开前置摄像头就是全家福。”

Translation: "Unlike you, turning on your front camera is already a family photo."

Implied meaning: You are an orphan.

2. “刚醒，钻石暂时成为第二硬物质；刚醒，珠穆朗玛峰暂时成为第二高峰。”

Translation: "Just woke up, and now diamond is only the second hardest material; now Mount Everest is only the second tallest peak."

Implied meaning: Describing male morning erection with poetic metaphor.

3. “我知道你是直肠子，但也没想到你是直接从嘴里拉的呀。”

Translation: "I know you're straightforward (zhíchángzi, literally 'straight intestine'), but I didn't expect you to shit directly from your mouth."

Interpretation: While the first part seems to compliment someone's bluntness, the second part turns it into a grotesque insult, implying that their words are as disgusting as excrement.

Gen Z M 199909 stated, “*When insulting people in such an indirect and roundabout way, the target may not even realize it in time. ... If we use 阴阳 (yīnyáng) sarcasm on the older generation, they often don't even get the point (they don't understand it). I feel like their capacity for emotional resonance is significantly reduced compared to our peers—阴阳 expressions may only work half as effectively on Gen X as they do on people our own age.* (这样拐弯抹角地骂人对方很可能反应不过来。……老一辈的人如果我们这样阴阳他们, 可能都有时候都get不到那个点(听不懂)。我感觉他们感同身受会打一个折扣相对于同龄人来说(相较于同龄人, 对Gen X 阴阳将只有一半的效果))”

When asked, “你觉得方言里面包含的脏话多还是普通话里面包含的脏话多?” (“Do you think there are more swear words in dialects or in Mandarin?”), this participant responded that they had limited exposure to regional dialects. However, the participant emphasized that while traditional swear words possess broad offensive power, their meanings and usage tend to be relatively stable and predictable. In contrast, swear words in Mandarin—especially those in the form of euphemisms and 阴阳 (yīnyáng, sarcastic or veiled language)—are perceived as more flexible and creative.

The participant explained that the prevalence of euphemistic and indirect expressions in Mandarin may even surpass that of conventional swear. This is largely due to the wider use and accessibility of Mandarin,

as well as its role as the national language, which facilitates faster dissemination and broader creativity among speakers.

"I think Mandarin, being a written and widely used language, has undergone long-term development, which enables the creation of a wide variety of swear words. For example, when we were in elementary school, phrases like '你妹的' (a common insult meaning 'your sister') were already popular, and are still in use today—or have evolved into more forms of profanity. These include homophonic puns, such as those from a few years ago like '你配锁吗? 你配钥匙吗? 你配几把?' ('Are you worthy of a lock? A key? A jiba?'). The last phrase '几把' (jǐ bǎ) sounds identical to '鸡巴' (slang for penis in Chinese), and is thus a veiled insult. These homophonic wordplays are commonly used to curse others in a more playful yet offensive manner. (……我觉得普通话毕竟它是有文字的, 它是使用的更多的, 它也(经历了)这么多(长时间)的发展, 它能衍生出很多这种脏话。就比如说我们那是读小学的, 就火什么你妹的什么之类的这种, 到现在都还在用, 或者是说已经衍生出了更多的脏话。包括一些什么谐音什么之类的这种, ……; 比如说可能也是几年前的什么“你配锁吗”“你配钥匙吗? 你配几把(几把的中文发音为 Ji Ba, 与鸡巴声、韵母相同, 暗指男性生殖器)”这种类似于这种谐音梗啊, 来骂人的。)"

The participant noted:

“Those who get these references may not be a large group overall, but among young people—particularly those familiar with internet culture—most would understand. However, for the older generation, even those in their thirties might already be unaware of such expressions.(……能 get 到这一点的人, ……; 我觉得应该没有特别大。但是在年轻人中间, 应该是只要有互联网使用经验的应该都了解。但是对于老一辈来说, 可能三十多岁的这些人他就已经不知道这个。)”

In conclusion, “*阴阳*” (yīnyáng) sarcasm has emerged as a particularly effective means for expressing negative emotions on platforms subject to speech censorship. Since such expressions typically avoid the use of explicit profanity or sensitive vocabulary—and may even be incomprehensible to their intended targets—they are difficult for automated censorship systems to detect or suppress.

As Mandarin functions as China’s national language, it allows *阴阳* expressions to transcend regional linguistic boundaries. Unlike dialect-based insults, which may be restricted to specific geographic or cultural contexts, *阴阳* in Mandarin can be understood, reproduced, and creatively expanded upon by a much broader population.

Moreover, the covert nature of 阴阳 has become a defining feature of how Gen Z insults others. Compared to Gen X, who tend to use more explicit and vulgar terms, Gen Z favors a more euphemistic and indirect style of verbal aggression. However, this subtlety does not necessarily reduce the communicative impact; on the contrary, the strategic ambiguity of 阴阳 insults may provoke equally strong, if not stronger, emotional responses in their recipients.

In response to restricted language environments, individuals — particularly younger generations—may innovate indirect expressions that bypass censorship while retaining, or even enhancing, their offensive power. This phenomenon also illustrates that keyword-based censorship does not necessarily eliminate the use of profanity. Instead, it may inadvertently encourage users to develop newer, more creative, and potentially more psychologically impactful forms of “swear.”

g.5: Gen X finds some of the swearing words used by younger people difficult to understand, but they can still perceive it as an expression of anger.

There are 2 Participants noted that although they often could not comprehend the exact meaning of internet slang used by younger individuals to express anger, they could still perceive hostility through tone and facial expressions. However, they perceived such language as less emotionally impactful compared to the swear words they were more familiar with. The rest of the participants were not posed this specific question.

“Sometimes young people use some Internet slang, which I don't understand at all. One time, the other party said, “Do you live by the sea? (Why do you mind so much?)” I don't understand sentences like this at all. Young people nowadays are like this, they curse without using swear words…Once when I asked that junior high school girl about her grades, I just wanted to care about her performance, but she said, “(Do you live by the sea?) You are so nosy!” I felt hurt at that time. ... If the other person said “Fuck you for being so nosy”, I would be even more sad. (有时候年轻人用一些网络用语, 自己根本听不懂。有一次对方说了一句“你家是住海边吗? (你管那么宽)”像这种句子自己根本听不懂。现在的年轻人都是这样的, 骂人不带脏话的。……有一次问一个初中女生成绩的时候, 我只是想关心一下对方考的好不好, 但是对方就说了一句: “你管那么宽啊!”这时候我就感觉受到伤害了。……要是对方说“操你妈管那么宽啊”我会更伤心。)” - Gen X Female born in 1979

4. Other Findings

Abstract:

g.2: Gen X uses swearing fluently, not through deliberate learning but via passive exposure in everyday contexts.

g.6: Diverging Gen X Perceptions of Social Morality and Success Rooted in 'Send-Down' Experiences and the Culture Revolution.

g.7: Personal experiences are an important way through which social movements influence individuals.

g.3: Gen X tends to regard the absence of such language as a mark of refinement rather than a social disadvantage.

d-4 Generation Z tends to endorse the belief that “those who behave immorally are more likely to succeed in society,” reflecting their perceived lack of fairness and justice in social reality.

g.2: Gen X uses swearing fluently, not through deliberate learning but via passive exposure in everyday contexts.

To assess participants' ability to respond with swear words when provoked, the researcher posed a hypothetical scenario: "If someone cuts off your car while you're driving, honks at you, and finally says 'fuck you,' how would you respond?" Responses revealed a gender-based divergence—male participants tended to suppress their reaction, while female participants indicated they would retaliate verbally. This variation may stem from gender-related socialization patterns or differing formative experiences. Specifically, the male participants, being older, recalled or experienced the Cultural Revolution, during which resistance was perceived as dangerous. In contrast, the female participants primarily lived through the later phase of the “Send - Down Policy” campaign, after the Cultural Revolution had ended. These historical contexts may have shaped differing attitudes toward confrontation and verbal expression.

The female participants all said they would curse back with swear words.

"If that happens, I will curse back at them. "Are you in a hurry to reincarnate?"

"I will also swear them loudly and fiercely."- Gen X Female born in 1979

When asked whether they had ever intentionally learned swear words, four participants emphasized that such language felt "*natural*." They explained that the words seemed to come out instinctively, as if innate, without any need for deliberate learning.

According to one participant (Gen X Male born in 1979), *"As long as I get angry to a certain degree, this kind of language will come out of my mouth, just like a volcano erupting, it will come out very quickly, there is no need to practice at all."*

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1980), *"There is no need to learn this. When someone scolds me, the words suddenly come out. There is no need to practice them."*

g.6: Diverging Gen X Perceptions of Social Morality and Success Rooted in 'Send-Down' Experiences and the Culture Revolution.

Due to the "Send – Down Policy" Movement, there was a perceived decline in social morality, leading to a belief among some individuals that the less moral a person is, the more likely they are to succeed in society. However, this view was not widely endorsed among the Gen X participants in this study, particularly those who experienced the Cultural Revolution. These individuals

explicitly rejected such a belief, often emphasizing the strict social order and moral discipline of the time.

"In 1983, when the crackdown was severe, immoral people were condemned by many people wherever they went. ... When I was a child, I saw some people who stole things being arrested and paraded through the streets and criticized. ... Parading through the streets means that if a rural person went to the mountains to cut down trees indiscriminately and stole some wood, and was caught, he would be paraded through the streets carrying the wood from one village to another, and there would be militiamen with weapons (guns) escorting him during the parade. ... However, some people use power to seek personal gain. Such situations exist both in the past and now. We were still young at that time, and we didn't see such things too much, but they definitely existed. ... In the past, there were corruption and bribery, including improper relationships between men and women, but once it was discovered, even if it was just a little money that was embezzled, as long as there was "fact", it would be immediately "purged" and expelled from the team. The society at that time was much more honest than it is now. (绝对不可能，特别是我们那个年代。83年严打，不道德的人到哪里都是千夫所指的（被很多人指责）。……小时候看到有些人偷东西会被抓起来游街示众的、要被批斗的。……游街示众就比如说有个农村人去到山上乱砍乱伐，偷了一些木头，被抓住了，就会让他扛着这些木头从这个村到那个村游街，游街的时候会有民兵拿着武器（枪支）押送。……但是一些人利用权力谋求私利这样的情况不论在过去还是现在都是存在的。那时候我们也还小，这种事情没太见过，但是肯定也存在。……之前贪污受贿，包括不正当男女关系都有，但是一旦发现，哪怕只是贪污了一点点钱，只要“存

在事实”，就会被立刻“清洗”，逐出队伍。那时候的社会要比现在廉洁得多。）”

- Gen X Male born in 1965

It is important to note, however, that the attitudes captured in the current data reflect present-day perceptions, which may not fully correspond to participants' views during the historical period in question. Moreover, differences in lived experiences among Gen X members appear to shape their interpretations. For example, participants who experienced the "sent-down youth" campaign tended to agree with the statement.

“At that time, whoever had power would do this (use immoral means to seek improper benefits for themselves). For example, if the team leader had a good quota (a job that was not so tiring), he would give the quota to his relatives or acquaintances. ...So it was difficult for the educated youth to come out after going to the countryside. ...We were able to come out because of the "big cleanup". The "big cleanup" was the unified return of educated youth from all over the country to the city in 1979. This was called the big cleanup. We were assigned jobs only after spending a few years in the city. ...I think the social atmosphere is worse now than when I was there. (相信。那肯定有的，那时候普遍都是这样。那时候谁有权力谁都会这样 (用不道德的手段为自己谋求不当利益)。你比如说当时大队长有什么好的指标 (不那么劳累的工作岗位)，他就把指标给到他的亲人或者熟悉人。……所以当时的知青下乡后很难再出来。……我们当时能够出来是因为“大扫除”，“大扫除”就是1979年全国知青统一回城，

这就叫大扫除。在城里过了几年之后才分配工作。……我觉得现在比我之前社会风气更差。)” - Gen X Male born in 1967

However, those who neither participated in the movement nor experienced the Cultural Revolution expressed ambivalence, partially agreeing and partially rejecting the notion. Additionally, all four participants, regardless of their past experiences, expressed the view that contemporary society is more chaotic than before, and that it is increasingly difficult to perceive fairness and justice in the present social environment.

This variation suggests that generational cohort alone is insufficient to explain attitudes toward morality and social mobility; specific historical experiences within the generation also play a critical role.

g.7: Personal experiences are an important way through which social movements influence individuals.

Although the Cultural Revolution was a brutal movement, with slogans such as “Down with all monsters and demons! Smash feudal superstitions!” when asked about belief in ghosts and spirits, the Gen X respondent born in 1956 gave a reply that contradicted the movement’s slogans and shared his own experience with the researcher:

(Researcher asked: “Do you believe in ghosts or spirits?”)

“I have a friend who really can do these things. That was back in the 1970s or 1980s, when he worked at XXX, just after the Reform and Opening-up started. I went to the street market with him. He told me, ‘Just follow me, don’t do anything,

don't speak, just hold this woven bag. Tell me what you want to eat, and I will get it for you.' We went twice, and I saw it with my own eyes, but I don't know how he did it. He just waved something in front of the shop owners, and whenever he wanted something, he told the shopkeepers, and they would voluntarily give him the goods without charging him. Of course, after a while the shop owners would come to their senses, but it was useless—by the time they realized it, he had already taken the goods. That's how he got many things at the market without spending a cent.

(研究者问：你相信鬼神么？)

我有个朋友就真的会这些。那时候还是七八十年代，他到 XXX 上班，那时候刚刚改革开放。我当时和他一起去街上（集市），他告诉我：“你跟着我走，什么都不用做，不要出声，拿个编织袋就行了。你想吃什么就和我去，我到时候去拿就行。”我和他去了两次，我亲眼看到的，但是我不知道他是怎么做到的。他就拿着一个东西在商店老板前面晃一下，每次他无论想要什么就和那些商店的老板说，然后卖家就会自愿把东西给他，不收他的钱。当然过了一会老板就清醒了，清醒也没用，（等老板清醒过来）他早就把东西拿走了。就这样他在集上拿了很多东西而没花一分钱。” Gen

X M 1956

g.3: Gen X tends to regard the absence of such language as a mark of refinement rather than a social disadvantage.

When the research asked, “Do you think not being able to swear makes someone look weak?” 5 participants disagree. For them, refraining from

swearing is viewed not as a weakness, but as a conscious expression of self-control, respect, and personal refinement.

“No. Young people not swearing just means they have personality. I like young people like this, they are very polite. ... I don't swear just means I respect them... There are no people who don't swear, it's just that some people don't make me angry enough. If I'm really angry, I will definitely swear. ... Just like washing dishes, everyone can swear, it's a necessary skill.” - Gen X Female born in 1979

d 1-4 No direct impact of linguistic language regulation, polarized views among gen Z on the necessity of retaining the ability to swear as a means of self-protection.

The linguistic language regulation appears to have no direct impact on Gen Z's responses to the question, *“Do you think it is necessary to retain some ability to use profanity in current life?”* Regardless of whether considered it necessary, there was no significant difference between Gen Z respondents who had experienced strict linguistic regulation and those who had not. However, those who regarded such ability as necessary seemed more concerned that completely losing the skill of swearing would leave them vulnerable to harm, whereas those who considered it unnecessary viewed swearing without engaging in reasoned argument as meaningless.

In this question, Gen Z respondents exhibited a polarized set of views. 6 participants believed that retaining a certain ability to use profanity is necessary, as it serves as a means of self-protection, while four participants considered it

unnecessary, arguing that arguments should be grounded in reason and that swearing without engaging in reasoned discourse is meaningless.

Among those who viewed the ability to use profanity as necessary, 1 participant noted that physical violence is subject to punishment, whereas verbal violence is generally not (due to freedom of speech). Therefore, swear words, in their view, is necessary in the current social environment, as it enables one to “safely” retaliate without facing punishment.

“Of course it's necessary. In today's environment, would you dare to fight? If you lose a fight, you'll be hospitalized, and if you win, you'll go to jail. (肯定有必要啊, 现在这个环境你敢打架吗? 打架打输住院, 打赢坐牢。)” -Gen Z M 200002

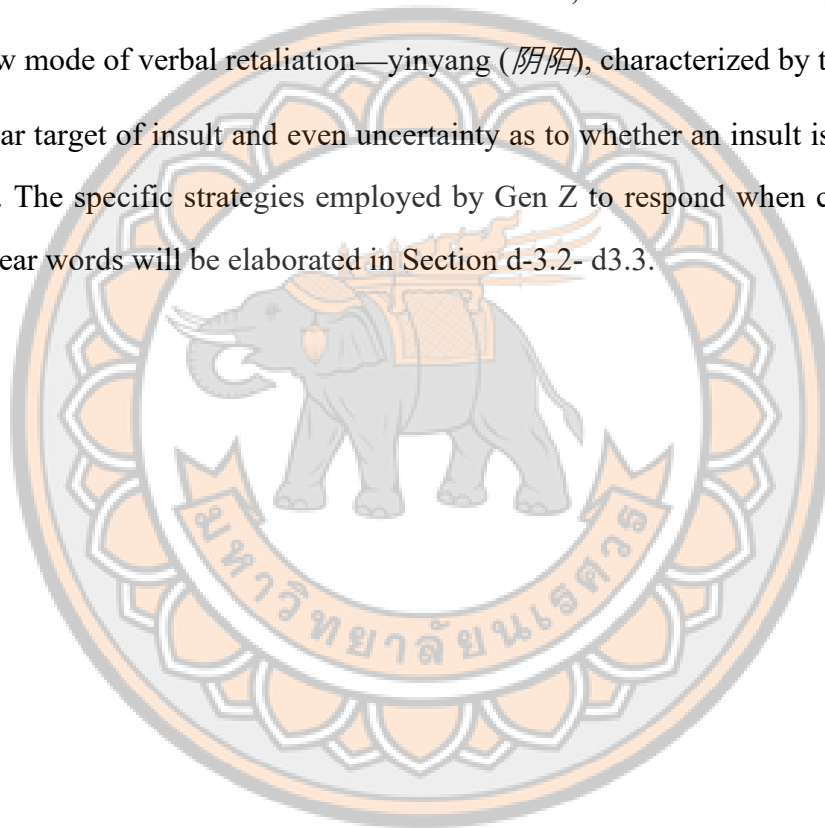
Another participant, employed in a rural government office, remarked that some individuals—particularly from Gen X—are difficult to reason with, and that swearing is sometimes the only way to communicate effectively with them.

“It's necessary to scold some people before they can calm down. Some people deserve to be scolded. 有必要, 有些人还是要骂几句才能安定的。有些人欠骂。”
– Gen Z M 199804

All of these respondents appeared to share the similar perspective: *“This is also a way of protecting oneself, because people in this society tend to bully the weak and fear the strong.”* (Gen Z FM 199910)

By contrast, among participants who considered the ability to use profanity unnecessary, all expressed a similar view: that swearing without reasoned argument serves no purpose. Some respondents, despite having experienced strict linguistic regulation, still regarded “retaining certain profanity skills” as unnecessary. This stance is not attributable to a lack of sensitivity toward profanity, nor to an absence of discomfort when confronted with it, but rather to their ability to counter opponents through reasoned argumentation. One participant stated: *“I think that, rather than counterattacking with profanity, directly pointing out the flaws in the other person’s argument and striking at them without vulgar language is far more sophisticated and impactful. This way, the difference in quality and civility is immediately clear. To me, profanity feels like a rather clumsy form of attack—it makes it seem like the person has nothing else to rely on except swearing. In my opinion, profanity typically appears either in situations of attack or complaint. Outside of these contexts, it offers no real advantage. Whether it’s verbally attacking others or venting frustrations, emotional expression could still be rich without profanity. If one can articulate such matters clearly and logically without swearing, I believe that is the better approach.”* 我觉得其实比起用脏话来反击，你直接抓住对方语言的漏洞，直击他不带脏字会更加的高级有杀伤力。这样子素质高下立判。脏话我觉得像是一种很蹩脚的攻击方式，就感觉你这个人除了脏话没有什么能拿得出手的了。因为我觉得脏话出现的场合，要么就是攻击，要么就是抱怨。那其他的地方，它也没有占什么优势呀。要么就是语言上的攻击别人，要么就是和别人吐槽抱怨，情感丰富一些。那如果没有脏话，你能够逻辑清晰的把这些事情说出来，其实这样子我觉得会更加好” (Gen Z FM 200008)

At the outset, the researcher assumed that Gen Z who had experienced strict linguistic regulation might be more inclined to view “retaining certain profanity skills” as necessary, as this could help them feel less hurt when confronted with profanity. In reality, however, Gen Z appears to have identified a more effective coping strategy—countering with rational and logical reasoning. Moreover, when faced with interlocutors who are unreasonable, Gen Z has developed an entirely new mode of verbal retaliation—yinyang (阴阳), characterized by the absence of a clear target of insult and even uncertainty as to whether an insult is being made at all. The specific strategies employed by Gen Z to respond when confronted with swear words will be elaborated in Section d-3.2- d3.3.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION&DISCUSSION

1. Conclusion
2. Discussion
3. Recommendations



1. Conclusion

Objective 1: Impacts of boarding schools and Linguistic Regulation in School on Gen Z's Communication with Gen X

1. Both Gen Z and Gen X perceive that, compared with the past, fewer people now use swear words frequently: "People speak in a relatively more civilized manner nowadays." Moreover, compared with Gen X, Gen Z report lower frequency of swearing and demonstrate higher sensitivity to swear words.
2. The frequency of swearing is unrelated to one's educational attainment but rather shaped by childhood linguistic experiences. Avoidance of swear words is not necessarily due to higher levels of knowledge; rather, it is more likely attributable to exposure to a linguistically regulated environment.

From a purely educational standpoint, most Gen X participants in this study had not completed high school, whereas most Gen Z participants held a bachelor's or master's degree. At first glance, it appears that higher educational attainment correlates with less frequent swearing. However, exceptions emerge: for instance, Gen Z FM 200002 (college diploma) reported swearing infrequently and being highly sensitive to swear words, while Gen X M 62 claimed: "I have never used swear words."

A more reliable explanation is that stricter school-based linguistic regulations account for the difference. Individuals with higher educational levels tend to have been exposed to such school regulations for longer periods, which resulted in less frequent use of swear words.

3. School linguistic regulation has created substantial differences between Gen Z and Gen X in how they identify swear words in others' speech. Gen Z, who experienced strict linguistic regulation, tend to adopt a keyword-based monitoring approach (d

1-1), whereas Gen X rely more on semantic analysis of the sentence. For instance, in the utterance “The weather is fmg great!”*, Gen X typically do not regard it as swearing, since the expression does not target a specific person. However, Gen Z who experienced strict regulation tend to be highly sensitive to the word “fmg”* and classify it as swearing. Gen Z who did not undergo such strict regulation align more closely with Gen X’s perspective.

4. Among Gen Z who reported having experienced strict school linguistic regulation, an extreme sensitivity to swear words was observed. They sometimes classified emotionally intense but not explicitly profane words as swear words, which confused Gen Z who had not undergone strict regulation.
5. There is no evidence suggesting that Gen Z feel disempowered by the perceived loss of swearing ability due to linguistic regulation. Although they may feel uncomfortable when exposed to swear words from others, in conflictual situations they prioritize “reasoning” over the act of swearing itself.
6. Due to the closed schooling environment, Gen Z has no time to care about the outside society. After graduating and leaving the campus, the students' perception of social justice has changed dramatically. Many Gen Z have begun to believe that "the more immoral people are, the easier it is for them to survive in society."
7. Those who neither participated in the movement nor experienced the Cultural Revolution expressed ambivalence, partially agreeing and partially rejecting the notion. Additionally, all four participants, regardless of their past experiences, expressed the view that contemporary society is more chaotic than before, and that it is increasingly difficult to perceive fairness and justice in the present social environment.

This variation suggests that generational cohort alone is insufficient to explain attitudes toward morality and social mobility; specific historical experiences within the generation also play a critical role.

Objective 2: Communication Challenges Faced by Gen Z with Gen X

1. Gen Z report discomfort with what they perceive as Gen X's frequent use of swear words, although Gen X often do not view themselves as frequent users. For Gen X, whether an utterance contains swearing is judged by its meaning; habitual swearing used as filler words does not count as swearing. By contrast, Gen Z rely on keywords for linguistic monitoring. Thus, in surveys asking whether participants swear frequently, most would answer negatively—because definitions of swearing differ across generations.
2. School linguistic regulations not only made Gen Z more sensitive to swear words, but also broadened the scope of words to which they are sensitive. Because their monitoring is keyword-based, the self-surveillance mechanism instilled by school policies compelled students to constantly examine their own speech, thereby expanding the list of words they perceive as swear words.
3. Gen X often struggle to empathize with Gen Z's complaints or grievances, particularly those related to swearing.

Objective 3: Gen Z Responses to Gen X's Swearing

1. “*Yinyang*” discourse—a form of sarcastic or passive-aggressive response—was a common strategy Gen Z employed when hearing Gen X use swear words (d.3-3). However, Gen X often did not understand the meaning of this discourse, although

they could still perceive Gen Z's anger through tone, facial expressions, and other cues. Nonetheless, this strategy may reduce its impact as a form of resistance.

2. Another strategy Gen Z employed during intergenerational conflicts was to increase the psychological and social distance between themselves and Gen X (d 3-3).

2. Discussion

Objective 1: Impacts of boarding schools and Linguistic Regulation in Schools on Gen Z's Communication with Gen X

The findings reveal that both Gen Z and Gen X perceive a decline in the frequency of swearing compared with the past. This perception aligns with Wajnryb's (2005) theory that repeated exposure to profanity diminishes its impact and normalizes it within discourse. Gen X, who were frequently exposed to verbal violence during the Cultural Revolution (Wang, 2004; Yan, 2019), have consequently become desensitized to profanity. Conversely, Gen Z's linguistic environment—dominated by school-imposed “clean language” regulations (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2015)—restricted their exposure to swearing, thus amplifying their sensitivity toward taboo expressions.

Although educational attainment initially appeared to correlate with reduced swearing, the data suggest that linguistic regulation, rather than education itself, is the key factor influencing speech behavior. This finding supports Fairman's (2009) assertion that prohibiting profanity constitutes a form of language control that shapes thought and moral judgment. Moreover, the extended exposure to regulated environments, particularly in boarding schools (China Education Daily, 2013, 2019), cultivated an internalized self-censorship mechanism in Gen Z, leading to their avoidance of swear words even in emotionally charged contexts.

The difference in linguistic monitoring methods between the two generations—Gen X's semantic judgment versus Gen Z's keyword-based vigilance—also reflects the

internalization of regulatory discourse. The self-surveillance noted among Gen Z echoes Foucaultian notions of disciplinary power but is also consistent with Fairman's (2009) view that self-censorship limits expressive capacity. Gen Z's heightened sensitivity to emotionally intense words further corroborates Wajnryb's (2005) observation that infrequent exposure increases the perceived shock value of taboo language.

The study also revealed that linguistic regulation during schooling fostered moralized attitudes toward civility, while simultaneously isolating students from broader social realities. As participants reported, upon graduation they perceived society as unjust or "immoral," a sentiment that parallels Mannheim's (1952) view that formative experiences during youth crystallize as enduring worldviews.

These observations collectively indicate that linguistic regulation in Chinese boarding schools shaped Gen Z's moral perception and communicative style more profoundly than formal education alone. Their avoidance of profanity signifies not merely politeness but an internalized linguistic morality, produced through long-term exposure to controlled speech environments.

This study also demonstrates that generational cohort alone is insufficient to explain attitudes toward morality and social mobility; specific historical experiences within the generation also play a critical role. (g.8)

Objective 2: Communication Challenges Faced by Gen Z with Gen X

Communication breakdowns between the two generations stem largely from differing definitions of "swearing." Gen X interpret swearing contextually—judging based on intent and semantic content—whereas Gen Z, trained in linguistically sanitized environments, rely on lexical identification. This divergence supports the

claim by Greenawalt (1992) that contextual interpretation is essential in evaluating offensive speech, while overly rigid norms can suppress legitimate expression.

The expansion of Gen Z’s “sensitivity lexicon” also aligns with Fairman’s (2009) and Wajnryb’s (2005) observations that linguistic prohibition broadens the category of taboo. The self-surveillance induced by school rules (Ministry of Education, 2004) extended beyond institutions, leading to a form of internalized monitoring even in interpersonal communication. This explains Gen Z’s discomfort when interacting with Gen X, who frequently employ profanity as an expressive or habitual speech act rather than as an intentional offense.

Furthermore, Gen X’s difficulty empathizing with Gen Z’s linguistic discomfort can be traced to their formative experiences during the Cultural Revolution and Send-Down Policy (Bonnin, 2013; Xiaoming, 2009). In such hostile environments, profanity served as both a coping mechanism and a social marker of toughness, reinforcing Mannheim’s (1952) idea that collective experiences shape a generation’s emotional and communicative repertoire.

Thus, communication challenges between Gen Z and Gen X are not merely linguistic but also moral and experiential in nature—rooted in historical differences in socialization, education, and ideological exposure.

Objective 3: Gen Z Responses to Gen X’s Swearing

The findings that Gen Z often respond with “yinyang” (sarcastic or passive-aggressive discourse) reflect a non-confrontational yet symbolic resistance. This response mirrors Fairman’s (2009) interpretation of euphemistic or indirect language as a self-protective strategy under censorship. The use of irony rather than direct confrontation also aligns with Wajnryb’s (2005) concept of linguistic substitution, where the speaker seeks expressive relief without breaching taboo norms.

However, the limited understanding of such discourse among Gen X participants suggests intergenerational semiotic disconnection. The subtlety of Gen Z’s “yinyang” communication may fail to achieve its intended resistance function because Gen X interpret tone and emotion rather than implicit meaning—again reflecting the semantic versus lexical distinction observed earlier.

Moreover, Gen Z’s strategy of psychological distancing from Gen X parallels Mannheim’s (1952) view that new generations establish identity by distinguishing themselves from predecessors. This distancing underscores an emerging generational boundary grounded in moral language, not ideology alone.

Synthesis

The discussion demonstrates that linguistic regulation in school (Fairman, 2009; Wajnryb, 2005) and historical exposure to verbal violence (Bonnin, 2013; Wang, 2004; Yan, 2019) jointly account for generational disparities in communication. Gen Z’s clean-speech upbringing created a “moralized” linguistic habitus, while Gen X’s experience under social turmoil normalized profanity as an expression of resilience. Consequently, intergenerational miscommunication arises from divergent semiotic norms and differing interpretations of civility and morality.

In essence, the study supports Mannheim’s (1952) generational theory: historical context during formative years shapes not only worldview but linguistic consciousness. The findings also extend Fairman’s (2009) and Wajnryb’s (2005) frameworks by illustrating how state-regulated civility can unintentionally foster communicative fragility in younger generations.

3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for educators, policymakers, and communicators aiming to improve intergenerational understanding and navigate the implications of linguistic regulation:

3.1 Reevaluate the Implementation of Linguistic Regulation in Schools

The study demonstrates that school-based linguistic regulation significantly shapes Gen Z's language sensitivity, swearing frequency, and communication strategies. While strict regulations reduce the frequency of explicit swearing, they also instill heightened vigilance toward language, encouraging internalized self-monitoring and keyword-based evaluation of others' speech. This can lead to overly rigid interpretations of profanity and reduce spontaneity in verbal expression.

Educational authorities should consider balancing the goals of linguistic regulation with the developmental needs of students. Rather than enforcing blanket prohibitions on swearing, schools might adopt curricula that teach critical language awareness, contextual evaluation, and emotional regulation. This approach could maintain social civility without producing extreme oversensitivity or restricting students' natural expressive capacities.

3.2 Facilitate Intergenerational Communication Training

Generational differences in interpreting and using swear words create barriers to effective communication between Gen Z and Gen X. Gen Z relies on keyword-based monitoring due to school regulation, whereas Gen X evaluates swearing semantically and considers habitual or filler swearing largely neutral. These differences can cause misunderstandings and discomfort, particularly during conflict or casual conversation.

Programs or workshops that promote awareness of generational linguistic frameworks could help bridge these gaps. For example, activities that simulate communication across generations, highlight differing interpretations of swearing, and teach strategies for contextual understanding can foster empathy and reduce friction. Encouraging open dialogue about linguistic norms and cultural expectations may help both generations adjust their expectations and responses.

3.3 Recognize and Support Alternative Forms of Emotional Expression

Although linguistic regulation reduces overt swearing, it does not eliminate the need for emotional release. The study finds that Gen Z often employs culturally specific strategies such as “yin and yang” discourse—indirect, sarcastic, or passive-aggressive language—to express disapproval or frustration while avoiding direct violation of linguistic norms. These strategies serve as a form of emotional venting that is more complex and harder to regulate than traditional profanity.

Recognizing the existence of such adaptive language strategies is important for educators, supervisors, and policymakers. Efforts to enforce rigid language norms without understanding these indirect forms may inadvertently create stronger, more subtle linguistic tools as a form of resistance. Supporting healthy emotional expression, through structured discussion, reflective writing, or supervised debate, can reduce the need for hidden or potentially disruptive linguistic strategies.

3.4 Promote Awareness of Social and Peer Dynamics in Language Regulation

The study highlights that Gen Z’s social networks often cluster around shared sensitivity thresholds. Peer influence reinforces linguistic norms and may exacerbate differences even among individuals who have experienced similar

school-based regulation. Policymakers and educators should be aware that linguistic regulation does not produce uniform outcomes and that variations in sensitivity can create intra-generational divides.

Encouraging collaborative and reflective peer activities can help mitigate extreme polarization, allowing students to negotiate differences in language tolerance and interpretation collectively. This may foster greater understanding and reduce social fragmentation based on linguistic habits.

In conclusion, while linguistic regulation in schools can effectively reduce the frequency of explicit swearing among Gen Z, it does not diminish the underlying need to express emotion or vent frustration. Instead, Gen Z has developed more sophisticated, less controllable strategies—exemplified by “yin and yang” discourse—that allow them to navigate social constraints while maintaining communicative agency.

This study is not intended to argue for or against swearing itself; rather, it demonstrates that abruptly prohibiting a group from using profanity can create generational gaps. These gaps appear not only between regulated and unregulated groups but also within groups who have experienced regulation differently, due to varying levels of sensitivity. In response, individuals may invent more powerful, subtle, and difficult-to-regulate linguistic tools to express emotion while avoiding scrutiny.

Therefore, any implementation of linguistic norms must account for the complex interplay between regulation, emotional expression, peer dynamics, and intergenerational communication. Policies should aim to foster understanding and adaptability, rather than simply suppressing certain forms of language, to prevent unintended consequences such as generational rifts or the emergence of unregulated linguistic strategies.

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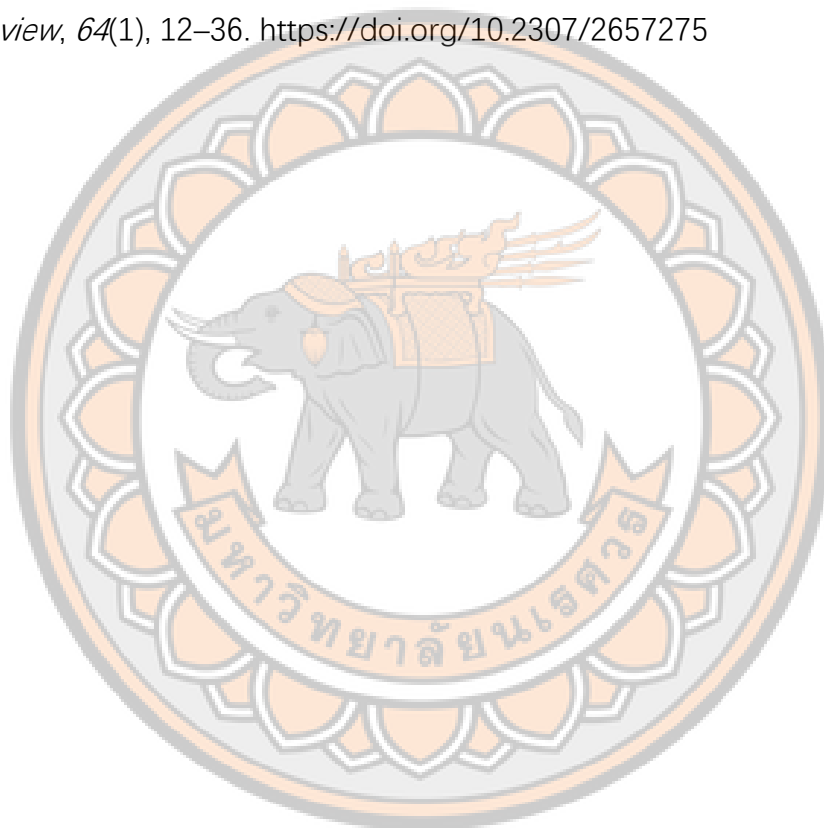
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E6%9D%80%E4%BA%BA%E5%90%83%E4%BA%BA%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6](https://www.rfi.fr/cn/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD/20161105-%E5%85%B3%E4%B
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1. IRB approval document

COA No. 311/2025

AF 11/6.0

IRB No. P2-0250/2568



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, NARESUAN UNIVERSITY

99 Moo 9, Tha Pho Subdistrict, Mueang Phitsanulok District, Phitsanulok Province 65000, Tel 66 5596

Certificate of Approval for Expedited Review Protocol

The Institutional Review Board of the Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand, has approved the following study which is to be carried out in compliance with the International guidelines for human research protection as Declaration of Helsinki, The Belmont Report, CIOMS Guideline and International Conference on Harmonization in Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP)

Study Title : The Impacts of Linguistic Regulation in School for Civility on Chinese Gen Z's Communication with Gen X —— A Case Study of Guangxi Province of China.

Principal Investigator : Mr. Zicheng Li

Faculty : Faculty of Social Sciences

Advisor : Prof.Dr. Phitsanu Aphisamacharayothin

Review Method : Expedited Review

Continuing Report : Submit a progress report at least once a year.

Document Reviewed :

1. IF 01 Non-intervention Study Version 2.0 Date 21 July 2025
2. IF 02 Conflict of Interest and Funding Form Version 1.0 Date 29 May 2025
3. (CN) IF 03 For Participants Aged 18 and Above Version 2.0 Date 21 July 2025
4. (ENG) IF 03 For Participants Aged 18 and Above Version 2.0 Date 21 July 2025
5. (CN)IF 04 Consent Form For Participants Aged 18 and Above Version 2.0 Date 21 July 2025
6. (ENG) IF 04 Consent Form (If not necessary, please ignore) Version 2.0 Date 21 July 2025
7. IF 05 CV Principal Investigator Version 1.0 Date 29 May 2025
8. IF 06 Budget Version 1.0 Date 29 May 2025
9. Full Proposal Research Version 1.0 Date 29 May 2025
10. Interview Guide Version 1.0 Date 29 May 2025



Signature:.....

(Assoc.Prof.Suthat Yiemwattana)

Vice Chairperson of The Institutional Review Board
Naresuan University

Date of Approval : 22 August 2025

Expired Date : 22 August 2028

Approval is granted subject to the following conditions: (see back of this Certificate)



All approval investigators must comply with the following conditions:

1. Strictly conduct the research as required by the protocol.
2. Use only the information sheet, consent form (and recruitment materials, if any), interview outlines and/or Questionnaires bearing the Institutional Review Board's seal of approval; and return one copy of such documents of the first subject recruited to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the record.
3. Report to the Institutional Review board any serious adverse or any changes in the research activity according to the standard operating procedures.
4. Provide reports to the Institutional Review Board concerning the progress of the research upon the specified period of time or when requested.
5. If the study cannot be finished within the expired date of the approval certificate, the investigator is obliged to reapply for approval at least one month before the date of expiration.
6. Expiry of COA, Investigator can not recruit new participants.
7. Complete and submit the final report form to the NU-IRB, as soon as possible after the completeness of research.

*A list of the Institutional Review Board members (names and positions) present at the meeting of Institutional Review Board on the date of approval of this study has been attached (per requested). All approved documents will be forwarded to the principal investigator.

2. Publication






มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏพิบูลสงคราม

ขอมอบเกียรติบัตรฉบับนี้ไว้เพื่อแสดงว่า

Zicheng Li and Phitsanu Aphisamacharayothin

ได้รับรางวัลการนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับดีมาก ในรูปแบบบรรยาย
สาขาวิชามนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์

เรื่อง

“We said “fuck”, but we didn’t swear.” The Impacts of Culture Revolution and Send-Down Policy on Chinese Gen X — A Case Study of Guangxi Province of China.

ในการประชุมวิชาการนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติ เครือข่ายบัณฑิตศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏภาคเหนือ (GNRU) ครั้งที่ 25
โดยสมาคมพัฒนาวิชาชีพการบริการการศึกษาแห่งประเทศไทย (สพบท.)
สมาคมวิจัยสังคมศาสตร์แห่งประเทศไทย สมาคมวิชาชีพเทคโนโลยีและนวัตกรรมเพื่อการพัฒนาท้องถิ่น
ร่วมกับเครือข่ายบัณฑิตศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏภาคเหนือ (GNRU)
วันที่ 26 กรกฎาคม 2568



ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.ปิชวรรณ สุทธิกิตติพัฒณา
ผู้อำนวยการบัณฑิตศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏพิบูลสงคราม



ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.ชุมพล เสมาชันส์
อธิการบดีมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏพิบูลสงคราม

Certificate of Publication

**“เราพูดคำหยาบ แต่เราไม่ได้สวด” ผลกระทบของการปฏิวัติวัฒนธรรมและนโยบายส่งลงชนบท
ต่อคนเจนเอ็กซ์ของจีน : กรณีศึกษาจังหวัดกว่างซี ประเทศจีน**
**“We said “fuck”, but we didn’t swear.” The Impacts of Culture Revolution and
Send-Down Policy on Chinese Gen X : A Case Study of
Guangxi Province of China.**

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บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษานี้คือเพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้ ความชำนาญในการใช้ และทัศนคติต่อคำหยาบของกลุ่มประชากรรุ่นเจนเนอเรชันเอ็กซ์ (Gen X) ในมณฑลกว่างซี ประเทศจีน และเปรียบเทียบพฤติกรรมการใช้คำหยาบระหว่างรุ่น โดยเน้นการเปรียบเทียบกับกลุ่มเจนเนอเรชันแซด (Gen Z) การวิจัยใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกเพื่อถ่ายทอดภาพสะท้อนทางภาษาของกลุ่ม Gen X ต่อการใช้คำหยาบ ซึ่งมีส่วนสำคัญต่อการศึกษาในด้านภาษาศาสตร์สังคมเชิงความแตกต่างระหว่างวัย (intergenerational sociolinguistics)

กลุ่มตัวอย่าง Gen X ประกอบด้วยผู้เข้าร่วมจำนวน 6 คน (N=6) อายุระหว่าง 45–60 ปี จากชุมชนที่อยู่อาศัยในมณฑลกว่างซี ขณะที่กลุ่มเปรียบเทียบ Gen Z ประกอบด้วยผู้เข้าร่วมจำนวน 10 คน (N=10) อายุระหว่าง 18–25 ปี ผลการศึกษพบว่า (ก) กลุ่ม Gen X โดยทั่วไปไม่รู้สึกละอายต่อคำหยาบ และตีความการใช้คำหยาบตามบริบท กล่าวคือ คำอย่าง “fuck” อาจไม่ถูกมองว่าเป็นคำรุนแรงหรือหยาบคายเสมอไป (ข) กลุ่ม Gen X ใช้คำหยาบได้อย่างคล่องแคล่ว โดยส่วนใหญ่เกิดจากการได้รับฟังหรือสัมผัสผ่านบริบทต่าง ๆ โดยมีได้เรียนรู้ด้วยความตั้งใจ (ค) กลุ่ม Gen X มักมองว่าการหลีกเลี่ยงการใช้คำหยาบเป็นสัญลักษณ์ของความมีระดับมากกว่าจะเป็นข้อจำกัดทางสังคม

เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับพฤติกรรมและทัศนคติของกลุ่ม Gen Z การศึกษานี้ได้ให้ภาพสะท้อนของการเปลี่ยนแปลงบรรทัดฐาน ค่านิยม และอุดมการณ์ทางภาษาในสังคมจีนร่วมสมัย อีกทั้งยังขยายความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับบทบาทของประสบการณ์ระหว่างรุ่นและการควบคุมทางภาษาต่อการใช้ภาษาหยาบในบริบททางสังคม

คำสำคัญ: การควบคุมทางภาษา บาดแผลทางประวัติศาสตร์ คำหยาบ เจนเนอเรชันเอ็กซ์

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the responses of Generation X (Gen X) in Guangxi Province, China, to the sensitivity, proficiency, and attitudes toward swear words, and to compare how swearing behavior has evolved across generations by contrasting Gen X with Generation Z (Gen Z). Through in-depth interviews, the study provides a vivid portrayal of Gen X’s linguistic responses to swear words, contributing to intergenerational sociolinguistic research.

A total of 6 participants ($N=6$) aged 45–60 from a residential community in Guangxi represented the Gen X group. Additionally, a separate group of 10 participants ($N=10$) aged 18–25 representing Gen Z were interviewed to serve as a comparative reference. The study found that: (a) Gen X is generally not sensitive to swear words, and interprets swearing in a context-dependent manner—frequent usage of words like *fuck* may not be considered offensive; (b) Gen X uses swear words fluently, typically acquired through passive exposure rather than intentional learning; (c) Gen X tends to perceive the avoidance of swearing as a sign of refinement rather than a social limitation.

By comparing these findings with the swearing behaviors and attitudes of Gen Z, the study sheds light on shifting norms, values, and language ideologies in contemporary Chinese society, and contributes to a broader understanding of how linguistic regulation and generational experience shape the use of profane language.

keywords : linguistic regulation, historical trauma, swearing words, generation x

Introduction

Generation X in China, born between 1965 and 1980, was shaped by the Cultural Revolution and the Send-Down Policy, where swearing was normalized as a tool of verbal violence, social survival, and political expression (Jackson & Hogg, 2010; Wang, 2004; Zhang, 2013; Yan, 2019; Pan, 2005). Words like "fuck" (操你妈) became part of revolutionary discourse, especially among youth, including schoolgirls (Wang, 2004). Unlike younger generations who may view such language as offensive, Gen X sees swearing as a byproduct of their turbulent formative years. These linguistic habits reflect not low civility, but deeply embedded survival strategies from politically charged environments (McEnery, 2004; Mannheim, 1952).

The purpose of this study is not to express whether it is right or wrong for people to use swearing words, but to try to understand the feeling of the use of swear words by Gen X to contrast with subsequent research on more new generations. The study explores 4 core questions:

- (a) What is Guangxi, China's Gen X's sensitivity to swearing words?
- (b) How proficient is Gen X in Guangxi, China in using swear words?
- (c) What is Gen X's attitude toward the use of swear words?

Literature Review

Generation Theory

This study applies generational theory to explore how major sociopolitical movements—the Cultural Revolution and the Send-Down Policy—shaped Generation X during their formative years, embedding lasting worldviews and social assumptions (Mannheim, 1952). While individuals within a generation differ (Steinerowska-Streb, 2016), shared historical experiences can produce common behavioral traits, offering insight into intergenerational differences (Dolot, 2018; Pilcher, 1994).

The Cultural Revolution & Send – Down Policy

Guangxi Province witnessed the most extreme violence during the Cultural Revolution, including mass killings and cannibalism—over 10,000 were killed in Guilin’s “August 20 Incident” alone (Zhao, 2016; Sutton, 1995; CK, 2016). Despite official calls for “Words struggle,” verbal abuse became normalized, with swear words like *tā mā de* becoming emblematic of Red Guard rhetoric.

The following is the content of a big-character poster posted by the Red Guards in the bedroom of a victim during the Cultural Revolution: “狗恶霸·下毒蛇·你他妈的听着·你再敢骑在劳动人民头上耀武威·我们抽你的狗筋·挖你的狗心·砍你的狗头。你他妈的别妄想东山再起·我们要断你的孙·绝你的种·砸你个稀巴烂。” (Dog bully, Bian poisonous snake, you fucking listen, if you dare to show off your power by riding on the heads of working people again, we will whip you I’ll dig out your dog’s tendons, dig out your dog’s heart, and chop off your dog’s head. Don’t fucking think about coming back again, we will cut off your grandchildren, destroy your seeds – makes you cannot pregnant anymore, and smash you to pieces.) During the revolution, swear words were used frequently. “Fuck (操你妈)” began to be commonly used in schools as a “revolutionary” style at that time, and later became one of the characteristics of the Red Guard language (Y. Wang 2004).

Under the Send-Down Policy, about two-thirds of urban youth were sent to the countryside (Zhou & I lou, 1999), where they encountered harsh conditions, exclusion, and vulgar rural speech. Disillusionment led many to seek return to the cities by any means—some even through coerced sexual exchanges (Bonnin, 2013). These morally destabilizing experiences fostered a lasting belief that social survival required moral compromise (Pan, 2009).

Swearing Words

Not swearing is often seen as a good trait, and country folk are often thought to be more likely to swear than city dwellers. (Fägersten, 2012) People are more likely to swear when they are relaxed. Swear words are often associated with taboos, and the more people hear a swear word, the weaker its power becomes. (Wajnryb, 2005) People nowadays may have to say fuck a thousand times to achieve the same effect as people in the past said fuck. If people use euphemisms instead of swearing words, then the euphemisms used must be widely used to achieve the effect. (Fairman, 2009)

Methodology

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study’s objectives. The selection criteria focused on individuals belonging to Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) who had lived through major socio-political shifts in China and were currently residing in Guangxi province. The urban residential compound was chosen for accessibility and for its relatively high concentration of individuals with shared generational characteristics but with diverse regional backgrounds.

The study collected complete interviews from 6 Gen X participants ($N = 6$), with 3 male and 3 female, born approximately between the 1960s and 1980s. Though conducted in a single urban community in Guangxi, the study involved participants with diverse backgrounds, many of whom were from the other

cities before they settled down this community. The Gen Z comparison group consisted of 10 participants (N=10), including 6 females and 4 males, aged 18–25. While most participants were from Guilin (n=8), one female participant was from Liuzhou (central Guangxi), and one male participant was from Qinzhou (southern Guangxi).

Semi-structured face-to-face open-ended questions interviews served as the primary data collection tool, focusing on participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes related to language use, cultural values, and intergenerational communication.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews on Generation X's attitudes, sensitivity, and proficiency regarding swearing words—as well as their observations on intergenerational language differences—were analyzed using content analysis. Non-verbal cues and observed emotional responses recorded in field notes were also integrated into the analysis to enrich interpretation and provide contextual depth.

Results

(a) Gen X is not sensitive to swearing words.

Gen X generally shows low sensitivity to swearing, often failing to recognize swear words even when it is present. Their recollections of big-character posters lacking swear words—despite historical evidence to the contrary—further suggest that such language was normalized to the extent that it went unnoticed.

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1967), “We read a lot of big-character posters. ...I have become accustomed to seeing these things ... There may not be any swear words (on the big character post), but “peel off your skin and pull out your tendons” will be heard frequently. (我们看大字报就看的多了。.....这些已经看的习以为常了.....脏话不一定有，但是扒你的皮、抽你的筋是肯定会经常有的。)”

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1979), “I’m not very sensitive. I don’t mind hearing it, and it doesn’t make me uncomfortable. (我不敏感，听到了也没什么感觉，也不会不舒服。)”

But the participants also report that they would still feel disgusted and uncomfortable when the other party used to swear words too frequently or when the emotions were particularly intense.

However, 1 respondent (Gen X Male born in 1962) told the researcher that he was very sensitive to swearing. This respondent claimed that he never swears even not be angry. “I’m someone who never gets angry. (我这样的人从来都不会愤怒的。)” (Gen X Male born in 1962).

It is understandable that some cases are different from other cases, even within the same generation, personal traits and values can vary widely. The generational lens just offers a useful tool to observe patterns of behavior shaped by shared historical experiences.

Interview responses show that participants largely judge whether a word is offensive based on context and emotional tone rather than the literal word itself.

According to one participant (Gen X Male born in 1965), "... Like those people in the factory now, the first sentence is: "Fuck you, bring a tool here." "Fuck you, what are you doing with this?"... But they are just joking, not swearing. (像现在工厂里面那些人，第一句就是：“操你妈的拿个工具过来。”“操你妈的你拿这个干什么？”，他们已经说的很频繁了，以至于正常说话都不会说。但像这种只是说开玩笑，就不算脏话。)"

However, Gen X would be very sensitive about words involving sexual organs, not only defining them as swear words, but also feeling uncomfortable. "Although we were very harsh in our speech, we would not curse people so bluntly (not use words that contains sexual organs)." - Gen X Female born in 1967.

This may be largely due to the desensitization of Gen X toward swear words as a result of two major socio-cultural campaigns they lived through. Both Gen X and Gen Z participants generally agreed that Gen X uses swear words more frequently. Among the Gen X group, five out of six participants (N=6) stated that people today speak more civilly and rarely use swear words. The remaining participant felt there was little difference.

"Fewer people use swear words nowadays. Especially among the younger generations like those born in the 1990s and 2000s, the use of swear words is becoming increasingly rare. In our generation, swearing was more common. (现在说脏话的人少了。特别是年轻人像90后、00后说脏话越来越少了。我们那一代人说脏话的人多一些)" — Gen X female, born in 1979.

This same participant also mentioned that her own child (a member of Gen Z) is highly sensitive to swear words:

"My child is very sensitive. When she was younger, she would slap someone's mouth if she heard swear words. Now that she's older, she verbally reminds me if I swear. Sometimes, if I speak too loudly in public, she'll tug on my sleeve and say, 'Keep your voice down, mind your image.' ... I think people born in the 1990s and 2000s are especially polite — particularly those born after 2000. The post-90s can still be a bit mischievous, but I really like the post-2000s. (我的孩子很敏感。在小的时候她听到脏话会打嘴巴，现在长大了还会口头提醒我。有时候在公共场所说话太大声了她都会扯我衣服说：小声一点，小声一点，注意形象。".....我觉得90后和00后特别懂礼貌，特别是00后，90后还调皮一些。我特别喜欢00后。)" — Gen X female, born in 1979.

Among the Gen Z participants, seven out of ten believed that Gen X uses swear words more frequently, while the remaining three either reported having little contact with Gen X or felt there was no significant difference. One participant, a Gen Z female born in 2001, offered a vivid and extreme example:

"Older generations (Gen X) definitely swear more. I would say those around their 50s and 60s tend to swear a lot — like, almost every sentence includes a swear word. It's as if they can't even speak properly without swearing. ... And in my neighborhood, there's someone who just sits on the stairs and swears all day — every sentence is filled with swear words. She can just swear to the air. Everyone thinks she has mental health issues. (肯定老一辈人讲脏话多呀。就是要说的话我会觉得是五六十

岁左右那种会讲的脏话比较多。甚至是每一句话都会带带脏话,带脏字,没有脏话,话都说不下去那种。... 而且我小区是有那种坐在楼梯到骂一天奶奶的。就是坐在楼梯口纯骂(每一句话都是脏话)。就骂空气(对着空气漫骂)。大家都觉得他精神有问题。)” —Gen Z FM 19912-1

(b) *Gen X uses swearing fluently, not through deliberate learning but via passive exposure in everyday contexts.*

In a hypothetical provocation scenario, male participants—many of whom experienced the Cultural Revolution—tended to suppress swearing, while female participants, shaped more by the later Send-Down Policy, were more verbally reactive. This gendered divergence likely reflects differences in socialization and historical experience. The female participants all said they would curse back with swear words. “If that happens, I will curse back at them. “Are you in a hurry to reincarnate?” I will also swear them loudly and fiercely (你想死啊?.....我不会用文明的话,这口气我要出的,他都这样说了,我不会再考虑文明了。)” — Gen X Female born in 1979.

When asked whether they had ever intentionally learned swear words, 4 participants emphasized that such language felt “natural”. They explained that the words seemed to come out instinctively, as if innate, without any need for deliberate learning.

According to one participant (Gen X Male born in 1979), “As long as I get angry to a certain degree, this kind of language will come out of my mouth, just like a volcano erupting, it will come out very quickly, there is no need to practice at all. (只要是到了愤怒到了一定程度,这类的语言就会脱口而出,就像火山喷发一样,很快就说出来了,根本不需要练习。)”

According to one participant (Gen X Female born in 1980), “There is no need to learn this. When someone scolds me, the words suddenly come out. There is no need to practice them. (这是不用学的。当对方骂我的时候,那些词汇突然之间就出来了,根本不需要练习。)”

(c) *Gen X tends to regard the absence of such language as a mark of refinement rather than a social disadvantage.*

In this study, 5 participants disagree that refraining from swearing is viewed not as a weakness, but as a conscious expression of self-control, respect, and personal refinement.

“No. Young people not swearing just means they have personality. I like young people like this, they are very polite... There are no people who don't swear ... Just like washing dishes, everyone can swear, it's a necessary skill.” — Gen X Female born in 1979

Discussion

This research is part of the thesis titled ‘The Impacts of Linguistic Regulation in School for Civility on Chinese Gen Zs Communication with Gen X--A Case Study of Guangxi Province of China’, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Program in Social Development, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Naresuan University.

Summary

This study finds that Generation X shows low sensitivity to swear words, shaped by formative experiences during the Cultural Revolution and the Send-Down Policy (Pan, 2009). Swearing is viewed as context-dependent and emotionally neutral unless overtly aggressive or sexual. Their habits stem from passive exposure rather than deliberate learning (Fairman, 2009; Wajnryb, 2005). Gen X value linguistic restraint as a sign of refinement. These findings underscore how sociohistorical conditions shape generational language use (Mannheim, 1952; Dolot, 2018; Steinerowska-Streb, 2016).

To improve intergenerational communication, especially between Gen X and Gen Z, it's essential to recognize that Gen X's swearing reflects sociopolitical conditioning rather than deliberate aggression. Educational and communicative strategies should emphasize empathy and contextual understanding rather than judgment of language use.

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