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Developments in Chinese Language and Script During the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

edited and with an introduction by
Victor H. Mair

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

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Developments in Chinese Language and Script
During the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

Edited by Victor H. Mair
University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

The papers in this issue of *Sino-Platonic Papers* were written as part of the requirements for a course entitled “Language, Script, and Society in China” that I taught in the fall of 2010. Altogether twenty papers were submitted, which fell fall the following groups:

Language Maladies

Kira Simon-Kennedy: “Chinglish”

(English written in a Chinese context that is substandard with respect to grammar, syntax, idiomatic usage, mistranslation of terms and phrases, and so forth)

Rebecca Fu: “Character Amnesia”

(loss of the ability to write certain characters due to reliance on electronic language processing and transmitting devices, especially alphabetical inputting of characters for computers, cell phones, and so forth)

Taiwanese

Jarrad Roeder: “The Prospects for Written Taiwanese”

(whether roman letters, bopomofo [phonetic symbols originally

devised for Mandarin], or Chinese characters [including special characters, as is common with Cantonese written in characters])

Rashon Clark:

“Taiwanese Polyglots”

(Taiwanese writers who write in more than one language [especially in Taiwanese, Mandarin, and Japanese])

Sophie Wei:

“Taiwan Mandarin”

(the special features of Mandarin as it is written and spoken on Taiwan)

Internet

Peng Fei Chen:

“Internet Topolect”

(the special features of Chinese as written on the Internet)

Lareina Li:

“Martian Language”

(a kind of Internet writing employing Mandarin and topolects, together with elements of English and Japanese, written using characters, alphabets, syllabaries, emoticons, etc.)

Japanese

Ariel Herman:

“Dekanjification”

(the decreasing use of Chinese characters in Japan)

Kenneth Winterbottom:

“Inefficient System”

(on the proposition that the Japanese writing system vies for being the world’s most inefficient and cumbersome)

Korean

Pablo Barrera:

“Idu (Yidu)”

(the earliest type of Korean writing — before Chinese characters were adopted and adapted)

Barom Chon: “Korean Diglossia”
(vernacular and relatively more highly Sinicized Korean)

Sol Jung: “Imchonggak”
(terminology related to a type of Korean architecture)

State and Society

Daniel Freiman: “Role of the State”
(the effects of government upon language usage)

Rachel Reese: “Minorities”
(the languages of ethnic groups in China)

Chelsea Harper: “Confucius Institutes”
(the controversial program for establishing PRC-funded language institutes on American and other nations’ campuses)

Shu-en Wee: “Sexism”
(as reflected in language usage, especially character construction)

Thought

Joel Dietz: “Ideograph”
(the ideological implications of the Chinese writing system)

History

Matt Anderson: “Shang Writing”
(the nature of the earliest writing in China)

Sarah Basham: “Surgery”
(the development of terminology for surgery in Chinese)

Society

Jin Guan: “Guanxi”
 (“connections” in Chinese society, especially as they pertain to
business)

Two of these papers have already been published separately in *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 215 (“An Investigation of Orthographic Variance in Shang Writing”), by Matthew Anderson, and no. 217 (“*Guanxi*: The Key to Achieving Success in China”), by Jin Guan. Of the remaining papers, seven are included in this issue. Remarkably, they represent a balanced representation of the subjects that were covered in the “Language, Script, and Society in China” course.

First comes Kira Simon-Kennedy’s “Chinglish,” which offers a lively look at one of the most charming (and at the same time, dismaying) aspects of language usage in China, one which is often discussed on the popular linguistics blog called Language Log and which was recently the subject of a Broadway play.

The second paper, by Rebecca Fu, is unique in offering the first critical appraisal of the government-sanctioned shape-based character inputting system known as *Wubi zixing* (“Five Stroke Character Form”) by someone who is highly proficient in the system and who was previously an ardent proponent of it.

The third paper, by Robert Glasgow, tackles the thorny problem of the role of Sinitic forms of speech other than Mandarin. Since many of these varieties of Sinitic are mutually unintelligible, yet are spoken by tens of millions of people, including the inhabitants of several of China’s economically most vibrant cities, their existence offers challenges to the linguistic unity of the nation and to the rights of the speakers of these languages.

Daniel Freiman’s paper examines the role of the government in managing the development of language and script in China. It touches on numerous vital matters, such as simplification of characters, romanization, and the use of Mandarin as the national language.

Sophie Wei’s paper, the fifth in this collection, is concerned with the special characteristics of Mandarin as it is spoken in Taiwan, particularly with regard to the semantic

transcription of terms from other languages. She predicts that this tendency may ultimately lead to a gap in intelligibility between speakers of Mandarin and speakers of other Sinitic languages.

Rashon Clark explores the polyglotism of the Taiwanese elite who navigated among the Taiwanese, Mandarin, and Japanese languages. The impact of Japanese (the language of the Empire of the Rising Sun) upon the Taiwanese linguistic landscape has been enormous.

Kenneth Winterbottom investigates the causes for the continued use of the Japanese writing system, despite its manifold cumbersomeness and difficulty. In contrast to romanization efforts in China and Taiwan, the Japanese cling to their awkward writing system because of the prestige of the *kanji* (Chinese characters) within it.

Such are some of the topics of interest pertaining to language and writing within the sphere of Chinese character usage today. Given the remarkable state of flux in which Chinese culture exists today, there are bound to be more tremendous changes in language and script usage during the coming years.

—Victor H. Mair

Chinglish

by Kira Simon-Kennedy





“Don’t fall down.” That imperative, written in white lettering on a dull brown metal sign, has stuck with me since the day it first caught my eye in one of Beijing’s temples in 2004. The wording is neither grammatically incorrect nor nonsensical — it is simply unusual in that particular place and format. “Don’t Fall Down” is universal, applicable to most (if not all) quotidian situations. In the United States, one has come to expect a more detailed, less direct warning from such a sign, such as “Caution, wet floor” or, “Floor slippery when wet.” Yet in China, signs like “Advert skidproof,” “Beware of slippery,” “Slip and fall down carefully,” “Take care of your slip,” “Be careful of landslide,” “Caution Wetflook,” and, simply, “Slippy” greet pedestrians on streets, in malls, in university dormitory showers....



The signage is ubiquitous throughout mainland China; the language it employs has been dubbed Chinglish. The word Chinglish is a portmanteau of Chinese and English, “a mixture of Chinese and English; esp. a variety of English used by speakers of Chinese or in a bilingual Chinese and English context, typically incorporating some Chinese vocabulary or constructions, or English terms specific to a Chinese context,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Chinglish contributes more words to the English language every day than any other source and is one of the top ten words of the decade, according to the Global Language Monitor.¹

For centuries, languages have partially fused as people traveled and intermingled. Spoken hybrids emerged and thrived in multilingual conversations. Chinglish is one of the many “-glishes” to emerge alongside Frenglish, Spanglish, Hinglish (English combined with French, Spanish and Hindi, respectively), to name but a few. Singlish abounds in Singapore, in Japan you hear Japlish. These spoken hybrids are intuitive and fluid among speakers of two languages; code-switching is often spontaneous as sometimes a word comes out more naturally in one language than in another. Chinglish can be traced to its seventeenth-century ancestor Pidgin English, formed as a trade language between the British and the Chinese, which brought us the now commonly used sayings “no can do” (a literal translation for *bù nèng zuò* 不能做), “long time no see” (*hǎo jiǔ bù jiàn* 好久不见), and “no go” (*bù xíng* 不行.) But spoken Chinglish is an altogether different matter from the written and printed broken English that appears on signage all over the China.

Humor, disbelief and incomprehension occur when Chinglish is (sometimes literally) set in stone. Public signage, restaurant menus, instruction manuals — many come saturated in mistakes and miswordings, awkward syntax and informal grammar. Chinglish, very broadly defined, is any English seen, read or heard in China that somehow sounds strange to native English speakers.

Chinglish is fundamentally an issue of translation gone awry. Very often, the combination of wonky grammar, twisted syntax, strange wording, and misspellings produce dense, tedious sentences. Joan Pinkham, a professional translator, published a *Translator’s Guide to Chinglish*

¹ Mark Liberman, “For Glue the Sex Rubber Mat,” *Language Log*, 31 Aug. 2007. Web.

in 2001 to ease the task of translating Chinese into English. She methodically calls attention to several common problems that often occur in Sino-English translation, such as redundancies and repetitions, superfluous words and strange sentence structure. The author examines common mistakes and misshaping of translated Chinese to help turn mangled English into proper, legible, and logical English. The guide is filled with examples of awkward formulations: "We should exercise centralized control over the management of foreign exchange and foreign debts and centralize such power in the hands of central authorities." The author provides her readers with corrected versions, turning the aforementioned Chinglish into: "We should place the power to manage foreign exchange and foreign debt in the hands of the central authorities."

Pinkham iterates a basic truth about both languages' sentence structures that hinders translation: English is verb-based, and Chinese is noun-based. Her guide provides insightful directives for methodical revision without poking fun at the oddities that arise. She avoids public signage and purely functional display translations, perhaps because trained translators and advanced students of translation, both Western and Chinese, are rarely called upon to perform such mundane tasks.

Chinglish arises precisely because signage is penned by non-native speakers with little training in translation. Although one usually translates into one's mother tongue, Chinglish is written by Chinese translating out of their native language into English. With moderate or little command of the English language, many turn to dictionaries. When presented with multiple definitions for a single word, amateur translators go about finding their favorite meaning for each Chinese character, sometimes leaving the word order untouched. The advent of electronic translation aids such as Google Translate, Yahoo!'s Babbelfish, and a slew of other online dictionaries, along with handheld translation devices, have increased access to immediate translation. Misuse of online tools account for many poor translations that fail terribly in obeying the rules of English grammar, let alone in reflecting context, yet these devices and websites post no disclaimer regarding the potential pitfalls of synonym use. On the contrary, these online aids most likely increase lay people's confidence that the English they produce is correct and acceptable.



When trying to translate “请勿涂画/喧哗” someone came up with “No painting / no whoopla.” When run through several translating websites, “涂画” becomes “paint a painting” or “scribble, draw, daub.” 喧哗’s definitions come up as varied as “confused noise,” “clamor; hubbub,” “uproar; to make a racket,” and, the most outdated suggestion: “brouhaha; hullabaloo.” Jinshan Ciba, a very popular Chinese/English online translation site comes up with “a hue and cry,” “blatancy,” “hullabaloo,” “shindy,” and, at last, “whoopla.” Google Translate provides “do not paint/noise” while Pleco, an iPhone App, helpfully adds that when placed after “请勿” (please don’t) “喧哗” means “Please keep quiet (a sign in a public place).” Therefore, a more fitting but much less amusing translation would be “No Graffiti / Quiet Please.” Although “whoopla” (“boisterous merrymaking” according to Merriam Webster) is not technically an incorrect translation, using such an old-fashioned, silly-sounding word might fail to produce the desired effect, especially given that these signs commonly appear in museums, temples, and cemeteries.

Instant Internet translators have replaced humans with common sense and bicultural knowledge. Thousands of menus, public signs, store names, and product packages have been subjected to approximate translation, to the delight not only of English speakers who encounter amusing Chinglish examples but also of hundreds of thousands of Internet users worldwide. Chinglish thrives in cyberspace. Almost one thousand users have uploaded upwards of four thousand pictures to the Flickr Chinglish group; close to two thousand people belong to a dozen Facebook groups devoted to this humorous linguistic hybrid. Several blogs devote themselves entirely to the subject, most notably chineseenglish.com, founded by a Malaysian educated in

China and a pronounced Chinglish fan. His website sorts Chinglish into very precise categories such as Garden & Park, Food & Beverage, and Traffic & Road signs. A German enthusiast, Oliver Lutz-Radtke, founded *chinglish.de* in 2001. He first encountered Chinglish in a Shanghai taxicab, where a small sign kindly reminded him "Don't forget to carry your thing." Since then, his blog has amassed content and followers, garnering him two book deals. His popular small picture books spread the novelty of Chinglish far and wide. He currently is completing a Ph.D. at the University of Heidelberg on the subject.

A fascinating problematic raised by Lutz-Radtke is simply, "Why is no one checking?"² Anyone who spends even a brief time in China, especially in the major metropolises, meets Chinese individuals fluent in English. Foreign exchange students as well as long-time foreign residents also abound. Several universities offer degrees in translation, so why not have students practice on local signage? The most probable explanation seems to be that until recently correct signage was not a top priority concern. Providing English translations was at best a courtesy to non-Chinese speakers, at worst merely a decoration to make one's shop, restaurant or public transportation system seem more worldly. Many mistakes could easily be avoided by a native English speaker's quick glance, but no one seems to value proofreading. Mistakes are overlooked neither out of malice nor sheer ignorance but rather out of a general sense that approximation will get the job done quickly and cheaply. This "anything goes" attitude, which Lutz-Radtke dubs the "差不多" approach (which roughly translates as "more-or-less") best conveys most Chinese' opinions regarding the exactitude of translation.

Sometimes Chinglish signs are amusing; at other times, Chinglish misinforms. Occasionally, Chinglish offends.

At times, omitted or double negatives reverse a highway sign's meaning. Case in point: "Do drunken driving." Westerners, well used to warnings about the dangers of drunk driving, will most likely understand the sign's intended meaning right away, but when safety instructions are incomprehensible and even the diagrams are not helpful, peril may ensue. General consensus favors the removal of Chinglish when it poses danger, say in safety instructions, warning signs,

² Oliver Lutz Radtke, *More Chinglish: Speaking in Tongues*, p. 10.

evacuation and emergency exit directions for example. Hospital emergency rooms, pharmacies, police stations....



Following that same line of thought, some contend that restaurant menus and food and beverage packaging should also be rid of Chinglish, as undetected ingredients may cause fatal allergic reactions. Many consumers feel entitled to full knowledge of what foodstuffs they are purchasing, to accommodate dietary restrictions or simply for the sake of knowing which parts of what animal you are about to enjoy. Many mushrooms tend to fail the translation test, resulting in "jew's ear," "tea trees," and obscure scientific or medical terms.



Trouble worsens when verbs like “rape” and “fuck” sneak into the menu.



The F-word appears in place of “干” (*gān*), a simplified character combining the meanings of two traditional characters: “乾” which means “dry, dried” and “幹” “to touch, to do,” which is also a slang euphemism for sex. An infamous example of *gān* gone wrong is a menu from the Chongqing airport, photographed and emailed virally worldwide. Choices included “fuck a fish head,” “fuck a spring chicken” and “fuck a bullfrog.” This menu has since been corrected, but other instances still continue to appall.

Vulgarity and extreme political incorrectness frequently grace restroom signs. Handicapped toilets are often labeled “deformed man toilet” or “cripple toilet.”



In anticipation of grand international events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 World Exposition in Shanghai, the Chinese government launched programs that vowed to rid cities of Chinglish before scores of foreign visitors flocked to the Olympic grounds and Expo pavilions. “Our goal is to make Beijing free of Chinglish signs by the end of this year”

proclaimed Liu Yang, director of the Beijing Speaks Foreign Languages Program³ (BJSFLP) in 2007. Chen Lin, a retired Beijing Foreign Studies University professor, consults for the program and counts himself among the “English Police.” Motivations for cleaning up Chinglish go beyond averting dangerous situations and preventing offense. Chinglish is humiliating. “We don’t want anyone laughing at us,” confessed Chen. “Moreover, our work is aimed to help foreigners. After all, Chinese people don’t need English-language signs.”⁴ Embarrassed by the giggles provoked by Lutze-Radtke’s Chinglish books as well as Chinglish at main tourist sites such as the Great Wall or the Forbidden City, the BJSFLP redoubles its efforts. David Tool, an American advisor to the BJSFLP, claims Chinglish “takes away from the aesthetic, educational and cultural value we want these signs to provide.” Zhao Huimin, the director general of the capital’s Foreign Affairs Office states that “the purpose of signage is to be useful, not to be amusing.”

Shanghai International Studies University recruited 600 volunteers and employs a roster of highly proficient English speakers to be part of Shanghai Commission for the Management of Language Use. The commission had corrected more than 10,000 public signs in anticipation of the Shanghai Expo.⁵



Chinglish still abounds after the Olympics and Expo have left town. In fact, even during these events, Chinglish was captured in plain sight on the Olympic Grounds. In 2010, even the

³ www.bjenglish.com.cn, ironically in Chinese only.

⁴ “Ahead of 2008 Olympics, Beijing Says Goodbye to ‘Chinglish,’” *People’s Daily Online*.

⁵ Andrew Jacobs, “Shanghai Is Trying to Untangle the Mangled English of Chinglish,” *The New York Times*.

municipally operated subways brimmed with some of the funniest Chinglish. The Urban Mass Transportation Branch Shanghai Public Security Bureau (a redundant mouthful of Chinglish in itself) created a series of public safety warnings.



In Beijing, subway cars greet passengers in a soothing voice at every stop: "Welcome to taking Beijing subway line 10."

Chinglish still prevails in supermarkets, department stores, cafés, and countless other locations where a little bit of English is enough to appear international, regardless of whether the strings of alphabetic letters make any sense at all. On the following menu, instead of attempting to translate 炒菜(fried or sautéed dishes), someone just hit the s, d, f, j, k and l keys.



A quick glance at a standard Chinese or English keyboard elucidates the choice of consonants: the six keys are conveniently centrally located where both hands naturally fall upon the keys.

T-shirts display similar gibberish:



Snack packaging, stationary, beauty products — lyrical descriptions of the product and its effect on the consumer add to the items' charm. Advertisements speak in the product's voice: the mint chocolate chip ice cream's puzzling question "Am I look good?" beckons customers to the Cheer Way Snack Bar at the Qingdao Airport (see title page.) The English text claims a bag of

pistachios is “fashionable,” has an “aftertaste without end,” and is “more delicious than I can tell.”



Sometimes, products and signs not destined for Westerners create some of the most dumbfounding Chinglish. A skin whitening cream promises to “remove horniness” while signs like “don’t stampede” inform lavatory users that using a sitting toilet like a squatting toilet is prohibited.



But many enjoy Chinglish. A backlash of the government’s efforts to tidy up broken English has been the adamant defense of Chinglish, sometimes by the very people employed to implement corrections. David Bruno Davis is paid to correct Chinglish but professes mixed feelings towards the task. Davis claims removing Chinglish is “Beijing’s latest attempt to

modernize China by making it as bland as possible.”⁶ His ambivalence towards this new side job (he originally was an English language and history teacher at a local university) increased when his Chinese colleagues contested many of his suggested modifications. He gave up arguing over Chinese Characteristic Commerce Street, which was changed to Chinese Traditional Mall, and Famous International Brands of Women’s Clothing (which was left intact). He raised concerns about the oxymoron in the first sign, as malls are anything but traditionally Chinese, but “the Chinese translation teachers wanted us to give reasons for every change we suggested. They weren’t happy with us for calling some of their translations ‘completely senseless.’”

The “Save Chinglish—China’s disappearing culture” Facebook group includes over 9,000 members who have posted nearly 3,000 pieces of Chinglish evidence. Part of the Chinglish appeal lies in reading absurd, sometimes profane, occasionally culturally and politically insensitive sentences printed on official signage. The many who collect Chinglish signs and build extensive online photo archives explain that Chinglish provides daily laughs and valuable insights into Chinese minds and culture. Chinese grammar and word order become clearer; mistakes in pluralizing or conjugation are understandable, if not forgivable, in the eyes of Mandarin learners. Indeed, it can be a wonderful exercise that forces foreigners to turn to the Chinese characters to grasp the English meaning. In addition, some Chinglish is quite charming. I particularly enjoy the unusual gerunds found in “No noising,” “No louding,” “no photoing,” and “No nearing.”



⁶ Daniel Bruno Davis, “Silver Collars and No Talls in Disorder: Changing Chinglish,” *Wall Street Journal Blog*.

Other Chinglish signs, particularly those regarding nature conservancy or the protection of cultural heritage, can be lovely snippets of poetry. These signs tend to personify natural elements and often provide a reason for prohibiting actions.



Sometimes, they bear no prohibitions at all:



While Western signage prefers neutral imperatives (“keep off the grass”), Chinese signs employ vivid, personified messages charged with emotional content: “Green grass dreading your feet” or “Show Your Tender Heart by Leaving the Green Leaves Untouched.” The Chinese versions lead the reader to think twice about why they aren’t allowed on the lawn. Reminded that grass too is living, albeit by imagining it could express feelings of fear and dread, might lead

humans to a more environmentally conscious way of life. The gentle humor in grammatically correct and comprehensible English translations of Chinese are also Chinglish, a Chinglish that can be embraced by all for the love of cultural diversity.



Some Chinglish is already gone. “Please Keep off The Grass” has none of the poetic charm of its Chinese counterpart, which rhymes and reads something akin to “We are tiny, we are shy. Without trampling you pass by.”⁷

Lutze-Radke strongly advocated for the preservation of the “cultural bridge between the West and China” that is Chinglish. “It should be regarded with pride.”⁸ The German had even tried convincing local business to change their signage back to something more colorful, to no avail.

Chinglish will not disappear overnight, however hard some might wish it would. The future of Chinglish lies in the hands of many. Although government purges and other top down measures to eradicate and banish Chinglish may never achieve their ultimate goal, sightings of aberrant Chinglish will nevertheless decline as English literacy increases and online software improves. Google translate employs algorithms to provide words with their most frequently used translation. As other dictionaries and translation services start to use these methods, outdated

⁷ Oliver Lutz-Radtke, www.chinglish.de

⁸ Erik Nilsson, “Chinglish Has Life, Don't Trample on It,” *China Daily*.

vocabulary will appear much less frequency. Adieu to whoopla, bumf,⁹ and Latin terms for fungi.



Other measures such as including the level of speech will prevent curse words and colloquial expressions from slipping into official signage. Spelling will also become less erroneous, as those in charge of translating and printing will have better access to English spell checking software. Grammar, sentence structure, and word spacing will benefit from more advanced programs that allow for full sentence translations.

Those who cherish the little grass signs may not be disappointed, however. As long as the rules of orthography, punctuation, and grammar are obeyed, the English Police will have little reason to “disappear” them.

Beijing Today, a weekly English language newspaper circulated in the capital, dedicates one section, under the header “study” to “light-hearted and humorous pieces to help English-language students improve their skills.” Since September 2010, *Beijing Today*’s print and online versions host a column called “Chinglish on the way” written by Canadian Terry Boyd-Zhang, currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Ancient Chinese Poetry. She decodes Chinglish sightings, sent in by tipsters via email, in proper, precise, and lighthearted posts. Some terms and phrases are relegated to a subset of the Chinglish section: the Blacklist. The editorial urges aspiring English teachers, journalists, and multinational corporate employees to pay close attention to their content so as not to repeat these re-occurring mistakes. The column serves as a useful refresher to

⁹ *British Slang* a. Printed matter, such as pamphlets, forms, or memorandums, especially of an official nature and deemed of little interest or importance. b. Toilet paper.

even native speakers, clearing up the who/whom conundrum and reminding everyone to pluralize appropriately.

Beijing Today's approach, by relying on user-submitted tips, is a very helpful way to provide universal access to those wishing to fix Chinglish. By teaching the grammar and explaining the reasons behind the errors, *Beijing Today* shows how Chinglish can be phased out intelligently by calling upon volunteers who desire its absence. As for those who love Chinglish, they may be out of a laugh or two, but Chinglish books and photographs will last forever. T-shirts, mugs, and other paraphernalia further immortalize and circulate the best snippets of Chinglish. Some hip bars and clubs catering to both young foreigners and Chinese started to deliberately leave up their Chinglish signage, or even rescue them from the trash to replace them in new positions. "Mind the fire" hangs above the stage at an underground rock concert venue in Beijing.

Language is constantly evolving. Over the last few centuries, English has spread all the way to the Far East, and it should be no surprise that it stretched and morphed along the way. Latin splintered into French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian with the expansion of Roman influence. "By 2020, native speakers will make up only 15 percent of the estimated 2 billion people who will be using or learning¹⁰ [English]." English is said to have celebrated its one millionth word in 2009, and now that everyone and anyone can publish their forms of speech on the Internet, nothing can stop the adoption of new words, terms and expressions. Whether it irritates, offends, enlightens or delights, Chinglish will continue to exist in print and speech for as long as Chinese and English interact.

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In the order in which the photographs appear:

Cheer Way Snack Bar / Am I look good? / want more? Please come in and enjoy cheer way time!

Kira Simon-Kennedy. October 29, 2009, Qingdao.

Don't fall down. Kira Simon-Kennedy. April 2004, Beijing.

Beware of Slippery. Ming Xia via Flickr. October 4, 2006.

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Incurable Character Amnesia:
The Unavoidable Trend toward the Romanization of
Traditional Chinese Handwriting

by Rebecca Shuang Fu

It is often claimed that computer use erodes traditional Chinese handwriting. This paper will examine this phenomenon, and explore the question whether shape-based input systems would help solve this problem. As an experienced user of the Wubi 五笔 (“five strokes”) input method, I will employ it as the representative of shape-based input systems, as well as taking it as my chief example.

The Wubi input method (*Wubi zixing shuru fa* 五笔字型输入法), known, for short, as “Wubi,” meaning “five strokes,” is the primary shape-based input method adopted in the Peoples’ Republic of China to create and transcribe texts in Mandarin.¹ It allows users to input Mandarin characters based on their structure rather than on their pronunciation. This makes it possible to put in Chinese characters even when the user doesn’t know the pronunciation, or if the user speaks a dialect. The phrase “character amnesia,” referring to the negative impact of computers upon the ability of Chinese to write characters by hand, is borrowed from Professor Victor H. Mair’s language blog.² Even before this blog entry was published, this issue had been reported in various journals and discussed by scholars. The underlying cause of this problem seems to be widely accepted: how is it possible that the morphosyllabic Chinese writing system can be compatible with the phoneme-based Romanization system? Given the negative impact of

¹ Since Wubi mainly targets simplified characters, all the examples in this paper are given in simplified Chinese characters. All other Chinese characters are also written in simplified form in order to maintain consistency.

² Victor H. Mair, July 22, 2010, “Character Amnesia,” *Language Log*, accessed Dec. 16, 2010, <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=2473>.

the Romanized Pinyin input method on Chinese handwriting, one may bring forward a tentative proposal: a stroke-based input system, like Wubi, should be adopted instead of Pinyin to cure this “character amnesia,” that is, to help Chinese remember characters. I will argue, by contrast, that, although stroke-based input methods do indeed outweigh Pinyin for remembering how to write a character, they cannot solve the problem thoroughly.

I. The Invention of Wubi: The Myth of a National Hero

As is widely known, writing Chinese characters by hand is a confusing task of memorizing strokes and characters, and the use of computers did not make it easier until certain advanced Pinyin input methods became widely employed in the late 1990s. Chinese text-input methods can be divided into two main groups: pronunciation-based and shape-based. Before the wide acceptance of Pinyin input systems, Chinese took great pains to invent a convenient shape-based input method, a method consistent with their thought, shaped as it was by morphosyllabic Chinese characters. However, the slow progress brought nothing but frustration until the invention of Wubi by Wang Yongmin 王永民 (b. 1943) in the 1980s.

Wubi is still the primary shape-based input method used to create and transcribe texts. It is based on the structure, or shape, of characters rather than on their pronunciation. The essential concept of the Wubi system is that characters can be built by combining *zigen* 字根 (radicals, lit. character roots) according to a standardized system of rules. As the name suggests, the Wubi (“five strokes”) system divides the keyboard into five areas, to each of which is assigned certain types of character strokes. Wubi allots more than two hundred so-called radicals, to each of the five sections, corresponding to five types of character strokes in the Chinese writing system:

1. Horizontal
2. Vertical
3. Downward Left
4. Dot / Downward Right
5. Bend / Hook



Figure 2

The user needs no more than four keystrokes to type any character in the code chart, and the most frequently used 600 characters require only one or two keystrokes. It is true that the user has to take great pains to memorize the radicals assigned to each key, but once the array is memorized, the user can type efficiently. A skillful Wubi user can enter a text at a rate of 160 characters per minute, a much higher rate than any other Chinese input method.³

The introduction above presents a very brief picture of the input principles of Wubi. In fact, the Wubi system makes use of an extremely complex concept of deconstructing Chinese characters into their constituent parts with minimal ambiguity. It took its inventor, Wang Yongmin, ten years to perfect it. His research ultimately resulted in Wubi, patented in China in 1986, and accepted internationally as “a very fast input method for entering Chinese characters using a standard Latin keyboard.”⁴ Due to this invention, Wang gained both financial profit and widespread reputation.⁵ He was offered the title of National Model Worker (*Quanguo laomo* 全国劳模), and even was praised as a National Hero for “saving Chinese characters from the dilemma in the use of computer input.”⁶ Admittedly, Wang did make great contributions in

³ “Support for the Wubizixing Input Method in the Solaris(TM) Operating System,” Oracle Sun Developer Network (SDN) http://developers.sun.com/dev/gadc/technicalpublications/articles/wubi_features_en.html, accessed Dec. 16, 2010.

⁴ Wikipedia, accessed Dec. 13, 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Yongmin.

⁵ Wang established his own company Wangma (lit. Wang Code) in 1989.

⁶ Liang Boshu 梁伯枢, “Diannaoshuru zhi wang: Wang Yongmin 电脑输入之王: 王永民,” *Guoji rencai jiaoliu* 国

breaking the bottleneck of inputting Chinese based on the nature of the computer. However, in my opinion, to some extent, the merit of Wang’s invention was exaggerated, and the originality and innovations of the Wubi input method may be questioned.

Wubi was the first popular shape-based input method in mainland China. But Cangjie 仓颉, another shape-based input method, was already in wide use in Taiwan by 1976, ten years earlier.⁷ The keyboard layout below calls our attention to the relationship between the two shape-based input methods:

~	!	@	#	\$	%	^	&	*	()	-	+		←
`	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	-	=	\	←
Tab	Q	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P	{	}		
↔	手	田	水	口	廿	卜	山	戈	人	心	[]		
Caps	A	S	D	F	G	H	J	K	L	:	"			←' Enter
Lock	日	尸	木	火	土	竹	十	大	中	:	'			←' Enter
↑		Z	X	C	V	B	N	M	<	>	?	↑		
		重	難	金	女	月	弓	一	,	.	/			
Ctrl		Alt							Alt					Ctrl

Figure 3

This keyboard layout seems similar to that of the Wubi (see Figure 3). By comparison, one may find that Wubi is very close to Cangjie in both concept and principle. The basic character components in Cangjie are also called *zigen* (radicals), and the 24 radicals are assigned to six categories on the keyboard: Philosophical (*zheli* 哲理) Group (A-G), Stroke (*bihua* 笔划) Group (H-N), Body Parts (*renti* 人体) Group (O-R), Character Shapes (*zixing* 字型) Group (S-Y), Exceptional (*teshu* 特殊) Key (X), and Special Character Key (Z). Also, in order to arrive at a Cangjie code, one must be familiar with several deconstruction rules that establish the way to analyze a character. There are also many other details in the Cangjie principle that hint at the similarity between Cangjie and Wubi. Shaped by similar concepts, Wubi and Cangjie are the

际人才交流 9(1995): 12.

⁷ The input method is named after Cangjie, the man historically credited with the invention of the first writing system of China. The name was suggested by Chiang Wei-kuo, then Defense Minister of Taiwan.

primary structure-based Chinese input methods that target both simplified and traditional Chinese characters separately.

II. The Wubi Input System: The Myth of Curing Character Amnesia

In this part, I will show how the method of curing character amnesia by a shape-based input became a myth, and what the real facts of the matter are.

A. Typing Hatred

It clearly takes a lot of practice to type with Wubi at a high speed. It is extremely time-consuming to memorize the typing code chart at the very beginning of input training. Moreover, even these pains are not sufficient for Wubi users to become fully acquainted with the method.

An online introduction says:

It is not mandatory to be highly intelligent to master the Wubi input system. However, its users must be creative and imaginative, for Wubi is as abstract as ideography. When it comes to its practical application, some of its principles need to be utilized flexibly and based on case-by-case analysis.⁸

This remark is in reference to the structural analysis of Chinese characters, that is to say, character deconstruction. It is an important step before choosing keystrokes, and regarded as the principal obstruction to becoming familiar with the Wubi method. Wubi users, especially beginners, often face an embarrassing dilemma: when they fail to give the correct structural analysis of a character, no matter how easy the character’s handwritten form, there is no way to input it into the computer. As a result, Wubi users are also the people who hate this system most.

The structural analysis of Wubi is based on the assumption of the users’ mastery of stroke orders. However, due to the complexity of Mandarin character structure, it is, in fact, difficult to specify the “correct” stroke order for a given character. There are characters that are difficult for most native speakers to write in the appropriate order. For example, the last stroke of 牛 is “丨,” but some Chinese have the habit of writing the “丨” before they give the last stroke “一.” One

⁸ “Wubi 五笔,” accessed Dec. 19, 2010, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/4350.htm>.

could easily multiply such examples. Although children are taught and required to write characters in correct stroke order in school, most do not follow the rules. An incorrect stroke order doesn't undermine handwritten graphs, but if the regular stroke order is followed strictly, one may fail to input even a simple character. Taking 牛 as an example, if one regards “一” as the last stroke, which it actually is according to proper handwriting rules, using Wubi typing principles, the typist will input 片 instead of 牛.

It should be emphasized that in some cases the stroke order mandated by the Wubi system is not the same as that of the handwritten system. In order to keep some radicals as a unit, Wubi designers employ certain principles that are often different from those of Chinese handwriting. For example, in the character 圆, the last stroke should be “一,” because it is conventional to write the radical inside first and then finish the closure “口.” However, according to Wubi input principles, the radical “口” is taken as a unit and should be finished first. Automatically, “丶,” the last stroke of 员, becomes the last stroke of this character. Also, when it comes to the characters like 力, 刀, 九 and 匕, whose last stroke should be “丿” in handwriting, the bend is regarded as the last stroke in the Wubi system. As for 我, 戈, 成, etc., their last stroke is stipulated as “丿” rather than “丶,” which it should be according to handwriting.

As we can see, then, Wubi users are obliged to abandon the rules on stroke order that they learned in elementary school and to adapt to another system, a system which, in some cases, may conflict with their mastery of character stroke order. In doing so, the Wubi input system leads to the popular acceptance of a system of incorrect stroke order, rather than help users memorize their traditional handwriting system.

B. Character Fragments

In many cases Wubi users do not have to memorize all the strokes or their order, in order to type the correct character. A multiple-syllable phrase can be produced by merely inputting the first stroke of each character. Thus one who knows how to type a character in Wubi may not know how to write it by hand, because he only learns fragments of a character from the Wubi input system.

In Professor Mair's class, we took a handwriting test: can you write the word *bahu* 跋扈 correctly? *Bahu* means “arrogant,” and it is used in written Chinese frequently. Even in

colloquial Chinese, speakers often use the idiom *feiyang bahu* 飞扬跋扈 (being arrogant and domineering) to express a feeling of complaint. However, the test result might disappoint Chinese native speakers: none of the Chinese students or scholars from Mainland China in this class wrote the word correctly, including myself. What’s more disappointing, I type Chinese with Wubi, the primary shape-based input method every day, but still failed to give the accurate handwriting. The result of this test inspired me to reconsider how much the Wubi input method is associated with the Chinese handwriting system: I have no difficulty in typing the word *bahu* on my computer, but I was puzzled by why I couldn’t write it correctly by hand.

In order to solve this problem, one needs to know the “no-more-than-four-keystroke” principle, one of the basic Wubi input rules. That is, the user needs no more than four keystrokes to enter any character, word, or phrase. To type a single character, the user needs to know four strokes or radicals: the first, the second, the third, and the last one, as well as which keys they are assigned. For example, the character *nang* 囊 (bag; pocket) is commonly used but very complicated in written form. Compared to the handwritten form, its Wubi input code is much easier: only the stroke unit on top and the one at bottom are required. As for a double-syllable word, one only needs to know either character’s first two strokes or radicals. Taking *bahu* as an example, its Wubi code is KHYN, whose corresponding radicals are 口止、尸, covering less than half of the word’s radicals. If one wants to type a multiple-syllable word or phrase, its typing code will be much easier than either case above. In this case, only the first radicals of the first three characters, and the last character’s last radical are required. For example, KWWL is the code for 中华人民共和国 (People’s Republic of China). In this seven-character phrase, three characters (民共和) and most radicals of the other four are irrelevant to its Wubi typing code.

Based on the examples above, it is not difficult to reach the conclusion that the Wubi typing system uses a selected portion of the radicals of a character, rather than all the radicals and their accurate order. In other words, one only needs fragments of characters to type them out with Wubi on a computer. Also, it should be pointed out that the transcribing process from the writing form of a character to its Wubi code does not work in reverse. If one knows how to write a character accurately, based on his acquaintance with Wubi typing principles, he will have no

problem in typing it out. However, if one only knows the code of a character, it is entirely possible that he can give only the character’s fragments rather than the exact and complete written form. The interpretations above would help explain why an experienced Wubi user may fail to write *bahu* correctly by hand.

An additional question may be raised here: is it true that a shape-based input method, like Wubi, fulfills its function based on a user’s handwriting ability? Before answering this question, I shall introduce three kinds of computer input users. As the distinguished applied linguist Zhou Youguang 周有光 (b. 1906) reveals:

For typewriting with Chinese, there are three different circumstances which call for different considerations: 1. “think and type” (想打) by authors, 2. “hear and type” (听打) by recording-typists, 3. “see and type” (看打) by copying-typists. Character-code suits the work of professional copying-typists to input handwritten documents, even without knowing the pronunciation of the characters.⁹

Given the fact that only a few Wubi users are professional copying-typists, and most users follow the way of “see and type” and “hear and type,”¹⁰ one can conclude that the Wubi input system is based on character recognition rather than writing. A Chinese speaker employs character fragments in memory to identify the characters in a text, as well as to type Chinese characters on a computer with a shape-based input method like Wubi. Although the Wubi method is superior to any input system based on pronunciation in memorizing how to write Chinese characters, it does not have the function of improving the user’s ability at handwriting. In other words, if one only knows a character’s fragments but cannot give the accurate written form, even if he is extremely familiar with the Wubi input system, he will remember fragments of characters forever rather than learning how to write them accurately.

⁹ Zhou Youguang, “Intrinsic Features of Chinese Language as Applied in Word Processing on Computers,” in *Characters and Computers*, ed. Victor Mair and Yongquan Liu (Burke, VA: IOS Press, 1991), 23.

¹⁰ “See and type” means that a typist does the typing transcription by seeing the characters; “hear and type” refers doing dictation by typing.

C. Unavoidable Pinyin Adjunction

The previous section is dedicated to those Chinese characters that are stored in users’ memory in the form of character fragments, in other words, which can be written partially. In this section, I will focus on those characters whose writing forms are entirely neglected by most Chinese speakers.

The chart below provides some characters and words whose structures and pronunciation both challenge Chinese native speakers’ confidence in their mother tongue. The characters in the first row are given in the context of bi-syllabic words in which they occur:

character	孱 (弱) chán(ruò) weak; feeble	坍 (塌) tān(tā) collapse	讖 (语) chèn(yǔ) omen	(乖)戾 (guāi)lì surly	飙 (升) biāo(shēng) (price) soar(s)
word	潋滟 liànyàn (water) ripple(s)	旖旎 yǐnǐ gently charming	璀璨 cuǐcàn dazzling	耄耋 màodié 80s and 90s	猥亵 wěixiè salacious

Figure 4

One may argue that these characters are only used in formal written Chinese, and they are difficult for those who do not have a college level education to recognize or write. In actuality, even educated individuals struggle with these words and characters. The chart, however, gives some characters and words that were frequently used in colloquial Chinese:

character	(豆)豉 (dou)chǐ fermented soybeans	瘸 (腿) que(tuǐ) lame	(鱼)鳍 (yú)qí fins	泔 (水) gān(shuǐ) swill	(寒)砣 (hán)chén unsightly
word	旮旯 Gālá nook; corner	蛤蜊 Gēlì clam	尴尬 Gāngā embarrassed	邋遢 Lātā sloppy	狡黠 Jiǎoxiá cunning; crafty

Figure 5

All the characters and words in Figure 2 are in common use, and the characters in both rows are not terribly complicated in written form. Such characters occupy a considerable portion of the Chinese writing system. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that when tested most Chinese native speakers can give neither complete written forms nor accurate pronunciations for them. Some people may write these characters correctly in part, but it is entirely possible that some people do not know even a single stroke for many, or even most, of them. There is no doubt that Wubi users fail to input these common characters, let alone those truly obscure characters that are rarely used.

The typing dilemma depicted above would not be a problem for professional copying-typists who input handwritten documents without knowing a character’s structure. However, this situation will greatly frustrate those authors and recording-typists who employ the Wubi input system in the way of “think and type” and “hear and type.” In order to solve this problem, Wubi-input designers have commercially added the Pinyin system to Wubi software as one of its important auxiliary functions. For example, varieties of Wubi input software, like Wangma Wubi 王码五笔, Wanneng Wubi 万能五笔, Jidian Wubi 极点五笔, Liuchang Wubi 流畅五笔, etc., all include an adjunctive Pinyin input system. Ironically, almost humorously, most of these Pinyin-augmented varieties of Wubi have names that make grand claims for their announced efficiency. Their users can resort to the Pinyin system simply by inputting a character’s or word’s Pinyin. To some degree, Wubi input software is no different from Pinyin input software. It is obvious that even an experienced Wubi user has to admit that he is frequently forced to use Pinyin to type Chinese. In this case, if a Wubi user does not know how to write a certain character, he will resort to Pinyin every time he encounters it, and consequently he will never know how to write this character.

To conclude Part Two, we may say that the shape-based Chinese input systems, represented by Wubi, cannot solve the problem of “character amnesia” effectively. In order to maintain traditional Chinese handwriting, one should explore other measures rather than blaming the Pinyin input method, or character amnesia will indeed be incurable.

III. Conclusion: Exploring Other Prescriptions for Character Amnesia

In Part Two, I gave explanations of why the adoption of the Wubi input method cannot cure character amnesia. However, I have to admit that the discussion does not have practical significance because Wubi has never been popular in mainland China. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the computer was not in wide use and advanced Pinyin input methods had not yet been invented, in some regions of China, like the three provinces of the northeast, students in middle school were required to learn Wubi. However, most people employ convenient Pinyin input now, and many of the original Wubi users have abandoned Wubi and have adopted Pinyin. In elementary schools, it is mandatory for students to learn Pinyin as the primary input method.¹¹ Obviously, one can learn the Pinyin input method without any effort and type with it very fast. An experienced Wubi user also admits that if one is already familiar with the Pinyin input system, it is not necessary to learn Wubi, because Pinyin is fast and convenient enough.¹²

Besides those professional copy-typists, how many Chinese are still using Wubi as the primary input method in mainland China? Unfortunately, there are no statistical surveys providing clues for this inquiry. As far as I know, only a few people prefer Wubi to Pinyin. Taking the students in the class of my college as an example, only three (including myself), out of ninety, used Wubi as their primary input method. They were all from Northeast China, where Wubi was still a mandatory class at school after Pinyin gained wide acceptance as a convenient input method. One has to admit that Wubi has never been popular in mainland China, and the complexity of its typing principles is no doubt responsible for this, though it was once mandated in some regions.

By contrast, despite its complexity, Cangjie is employed as the primary input method by many people in Taiwan. The proportion of Cangjie users in Taiwan far outweighs that of Wubi users in mainland China. Actually, as a shape-based Chinese input method, Cangjie is inferior to

¹¹ See Xu Zhiyong, “Xiaoxuesheng Hanzi Diannao Shuru Shouxuan ‘Quanpin Shuru Fa’” 小学生汉字电脑输入首选‘全拼输入法’, *Xin Kecheng Xuexi* 新课程学习 12 (2009):121–122.

¹² “Wubi 五笔,” <http://baike.baidu.com/view/4350.htm>, accessed Dec. 19, 2010.

Wubi.¹³ However, other auxiliary measures have been adopted to facilitate the user’s typing task. For example, Cangjie radicals are marked on the keyboard of computers, to which Cangjie users can resort when they forget the radical chart (See Figure 6).¹⁴ Another fact in Taiwan that contrasts with the situation in Mainland China, as I mentioned in Part One, is that people in Taiwan seem not to have the problem of character amnesia, or at least not really so seriously as on the Mainland. One of my friends from Taiwan, Sophie Wei, admitted that her amazing memory of Chinese handwriting benefited from the strict training of traditional Chinese calligraphy in school. This may provide a clue for those who are worried about the character amnesia that is ailing mainland Chinese people.



Figure 6

We can conclude that, due to its complexity and the shortcomings for facilitating Chinese handwriting in some situations, I would not recommend that Chinese people employ a shape-based input method, like Wubi, to save the traditional Chinese handwriting system, which is

¹³ Some users of both Cangjie and Wubi reach the conclusion by comparing the two methods. For example, Allencch thought the keyboard layout of Wubi is more systematic, see her comment on the blog entry “Review of Wubi input method and Cangjie input method,” <http://allencch.wordpress.com/2010/08/02/review-of-wubi-input-method-and-cangjie-input-method/>, accessed Dec. 16, 2011.

¹⁴ The picture in Fig. 6 was contributed by Sophie Wei.

being seriously eroded by computer use. In order to cure “character amnesia,” one should explore other effective measures rather than blaming the Pinyin input method, or character amnesia will be incurable, and the Chinese people will suffer greatly from the loss of one of the most conspicuous and essential symbols of their culture.

The Continuing Debate Over the Use of Topolects in Present-day China

by Robert Glasgow

I. Introduction

Conflicts between regional languages and or dialects and the language of the state are not uncommon throughout history. It was only after hundreds of years and through the insistence of both the revolutionary and royalist French governments that Parisian French became the lingua franca of France and eventually the world.¹ Efforts to implement a common language throughout China have also taken place over an extended period of time and, like France, under multiple forms of government. The *Báihuà* (白话) revolution, which is the spiritual father of the current language initiatives in China, began in earnest as part of the New Culture Movement in 1919.² The literary and linguistic revolution begun in the early twentieth century has continued as has the debate.

Now, as in the early years of the New Culture movement, few question the need for a language that can be spoken and understood by all of China’s citizens; however, the debate on what role that mutually intelligible language should play remains. From the present government’s point of view it increasingly seems the language should permeate all levels of society and be spoken by all peoples within China. Campaigns carried out by the Chinese government have encouraged its citizens to replace their ancestral topolect with Mandarin rather than simply learning Mandarin in addition to their topolect. While in many regions of China this has become accepted, others, notably Xinjiang and Tibet, have refused to accept the

¹ Milton J. Esman, “The State and Language Policy,” *Internal Political Science Review*, Vol. 13, No.4 (Oct., 1992), 383.

² Amitendranath Tagore, *Literary Debates in Modern China* (Tokyo: Hinode Co. Ltd.1967), 13.

marginalization of their language. Widespread protests in October 2010, for example, were staged in Tibet in opposition to increased use of Mandarin in schools.³ The debate is not restricted to regions primarily populated by China's ethnic minorities. The debate still takes place, at a decreasing volume in Shanghai but still quite loudly in the Cantonese-speaking region comprised of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hong Kong.

II. Scholars and Politicians, Language and National Identity

We must see to it that the basic ideals of the modern world produce some direct effect upon the life of the average man. The method seems to lie in using simple language and literature for the wide dissemination of ideas among the people.⁴

Hu Shih (1891–1962), one of China's leading intellectuals and a strong proponent of language reform in his home country, delivered this excerpt from a letter written by Huang Yuang-yung in 1915, as part of a speech given to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in England on November 26, 1926. As early as 1917, while still a student in the United States, Hu Shih advocated using China's spoken language as China's literary language as well.⁵ The letter expresses not just Huang's views, but Hu's own. Both Huang and Hu saw the revolution in language that Huang anticipated, as part of the foundation for revolutionizing and modernizing all of society. Huang died before his vision of a reformed China could be realized, but Hu Shih would play an instrumental role in realizing that goal.

Hu was at the heart of China's literary-movement-turned-social-revolution during the teens and twenties. Hu Shih's movement endeavored to use the "spoken language of the people"

³ Edward Wong, "Tibetans in China Protest Proposed Curbs on Their Language," *The New York Times*, October 22, 2010, http://nytimes.com/2010/10/23/world/asia/23china.html?_r=1&src=me

⁴ Hu Shih, "The Renaissance in China," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov., 1926), 270. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3015743>

⁵ Tagore. 13.

in all forms of print material and literature.⁶ One of the many problems Hu and his fellow reformers faced when attempting to institute this policy was that China had no “spoken language of the people.” China had a written language of the elite that did not closely resemble any living language, and a multitude of languages and dialects dividing the people of China into a multitude of language groups. This cannot be a simple oversight on the part of Hu. It would have been strikingly obvious to anyone who had traveled in China during the teens and twenties; it even remains obvious today. As a native son of Anhui province, which then, as now, is known to have speakers of many different topolects, for instance Gan and Huizhou, there is little doubt Hu was well aware his countrymen spoke a wide variety of often mutually unintelligible topolects.⁷

During the debate over how best to reform the language(s) of China, competing ideologies emerged which reflected not just the nature of the intended reforms to the language, but the nature of the new state. The dual nature of the movement, as it was both a social and political movement, added to its appeal, rather than detracted from it.⁸ For example, Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), one of the leading militarists prior to the *Baihua* movement, believed that by reforming the Chinese language and increasing literacy rates China would become a more powerful nation.⁹ A key reform quickly agreed upon was the need for an overarching language to tie the nation together. However the identity and nature of that language was a matter of intense and prolonged debate.

The reformists and politicians were given the choice between two different interpretations of *guóyǔ* (国语). Whether *guoyu* was interpreted as national or state language was not merely a matter of semantics or a matter for linguists. The interpretation state language carried with it concepts of both how the newly crowned national language would function within the state and a concept of the state’s ethnic identity. One side of the debate believed a state language would function as a “standard language,” *biāozhǔnyǔ* (标准语), to unify a single people who had

⁶ Shih, 271.

⁷ “Languages of China,” *Ethnologue*. http://www.ethnologue.com/15/show_country.asp?name=CN

⁸ John DeFrancis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

diverged from one another in language, despite the fact they are all genetically related.¹⁰ The ultimate goal was to forge a state with a single ethnic and linguistic identity. As the largest ethnic group, Han was to assume the role of the unitary group.¹¹

The opposing view presented a fundamentally different role for both language and ethnicity within China. Those who supported national language saw China as a nation composed of multiple ethnicities each with a language tradition that should be respected. This entitled them to retain their native topolects, and to educate their members in their native topolect. However, a “common” speech or *Pǔtōnghuà* (普通话) was needed to link the communities.¹² The alternate multiethnic/multilingual state was primarily advocated by those on the left, while the strongest proponents of state language were members of the Nationalist party (KMT).¹³

The former interpretation gained the support of the KMT and was implemented upon their ascension to power after the Northern Expedition (1928) and later by the Communist Party.¹⁴ The KMT, due to a variety of factors, not the least of which were World War II and the ensuing civil war with the Communist Party, were able to have only a limited impact on Mandarin reform in schools. The KMT were able to execute their education goals much more effectively after fleeing across the straits to Taiwan.¹⁵ Despite the left’s original support for a multiethnic/multilingual state and their use of the term *Putonghua*, the People’s Republic of China, founded after the ouster of the KMT, would largely follow the KMT’s plan of installing a state rather than a national language. Early education under the KMT and in the early years of the PRC was still carried out in an area’s topolect, with an introduction to Mandarin. Higher levels of education were to be taught not in topolects but in Mandarin. The PRC’s stance over

¹⁰ John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1986), 224.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹² *Ibid.*, 224–225.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁵ T. Y. Wang and G. Andy Chang, “External Threats and Political Tolerance in Taiwan,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Sept., 2006). 378.

time tended increasingly toward the standard language and unified ethnicity model as a method of firmly unifying the nation.¹⁶

III. The Campaign in Shanghai

The idea of a standard language for all Chinese has been in place in China for nearly a century; however, the implementation of policies to bring about this sea change in Chinese speech has not yet reached its fruition. This is due in part to a number of factors, one being the policies of particularly the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the tenacity to which people have held to their dialects. As of 2004, according to a national survey, 47% of Chinese were unable to speak Putonghua.¹⁷ Six years earlier, the institution of a Putonghua promotion week marked the beginning of the Chinese government's efforts to fully implement a standard language. This initiative was strongly reinforced two years later with the passing of the People's Republic of China Common Language Law on October 31, 2000.¹⁸

While the law does not ban topolects, it is constructed in a manner that is certainly intended to marginalize them. The law requires all government organizations to use Mandarin unless it is required to use another language by law. With few exceptions the law extends to educational institutions and radio and TV stations as well.¹⁹ Employment in these sectors was also made contingent on the ability to pass a state-set Mandarin proficiency test.²⁰ By mandating that Mandarin be used in all schools and government agencies, as well as for TV and radio broadcasts, the CCP effectively signaled their intention of eliminating any language or dialect other than Putonghua from both the public and private spheres of China.

¹⁶ DeFrances, *The Chinese Language*, 226.

¹⁷ Dali L. Yang, "Language and the Politics of Identity in China in the Age of Globalization," in *Is There a Greater China Identity? Security and Economic Dilemma*, ed. I Yuan (Taipei: Institute of International Relations: National Chengchi University, 2007), 162.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

Shanghai has been and continues to be one of the focal points of the CCP's Putonghua campaign. Although the campaign still encounters some resistance, it has largely been successful. Shanghai's city government has taken steps to implement the Common Language Law. These steps cover the education system, publications, TV, and, to a lesser extent, radio broadcasts. Students as of March 1, 2006, are required to reach level II B of a Mandarin proficiency test in order to enter either a traditional or vocational college. (The students can be tested up to level 3. Each level has two subdivisions.) Students pursuing a career in teaching or performance arts are subject to more stringent requirements. The city government further stated all newspapers, theaters, and television programs could use only Mandarin material. Radio broadcasts were able to partially escape the mandate of Shanghai's government; however, even radio broadcasts in Shanghainese were temporarily banned.²¹

In the case of TV programs the government crackdown had begun at least two years earlier. In 2004, the central government put a stop to the broadcasting of the shows featuring the U.S.'s iconic cat and mouse team Tom and Jerry. The reason for the ban was not any offensive content in the cartoon itself, but the topolects it was being broadcast in. The show had been dubbed over in multiple topolects for its broadcast within China, including Shanghainese. In an interview by Christopher Bodeenon cited by the L.A. times, December 19, 2004, the Deputy Director of the Shanghai People's Comedy Troupe spoke out against the banning: "As an artist, I think dialect should be preserved as a part of local culture." He went on to state, "Schools don't allow Shanghainese to be spoken, and now TV doesn't either. It looks like Shanghai comedy will be dying out."²²

The banning of a topolect version of *Tom and Jerry* is an interesting case when examined in light of the 2000 Common Language Law. The law does stipulate topolects can be used in broadcasts when needed for mediums such as "operas, films, and other artistic works."²³ The

²¹ Ibid., 164.

²² Christopher Bodeenon, "Tom and Jerry at the Heart of China's Linguistic Storm"
<http://articles.latimes.com/2004/dec/19/news/adfg-polyglot19>.

²³ Dali Yang, 162.

show would likely fall under films, and one could make the case the topolects were in fact needed for the local voiceovers given that the show is aimed at children who are too young for school or just beginning and may not have a high enough level of Mandarin to understand Putonghua voiceovers, even if they are at as basic a level as *Tom and Jerry*.

The case of *Tom and Jerry* seems to indicate the law is intended to strictly limit the use of topolects to emergency situations and culturally specific instances such as regional operas, or lending authenticity to a film or work of art. As *Tom and Jerry*, being foreign, lacked strong ties to any topolect and was simply using them to better market their product, they seem to have been judged in violation of the law. A contrasting case is that of the 2004 film *The World* (*Shijie*/世界) by Jia Zhangke. Jia uses Shanxi dialect in sections throughout the film, not throughout the entire feature as *Tom and Jerry* did. As Sheldon Lu states in his critique of the film, dialect is also used to highlight the backwardness and isolation of the speakers.²⁴ Jia’s use of the Shanxi dialect in *The World* is an effective method of conveying his protagonist’s isolation within Beijing and in a greater sense China’s drive to modernity. However, it also reinforces the government’s stance on topolects by making the use of topolects a barrier to one’s integration into the greater Chinese society and an obstacle one must overcome to be truly modern. The once ubiquitous “be civilized, speak Mandarin” posters’ message has been inserted into Chinese films as well. Statements such as Jia’s are allowed by the CCP while those of a cat and mouse who are eternally at odds with one another, but use a topolect as they would any other method of speech, are silenced.

The attempt to broadcast shows such as these in Shanghainese and other topolects indicates the desire of Shanghai residents to view materials in their own language rather than in the government-declared Putonghua. This desire for Shanghainese, though, is not just expressed by voice actors or children who miss their cartoons — academics have voiced their concerns as well. A September 2005 article in *The China Daily* quoted a Jiaotong professor who echoed Dong’s fear over the loss of his language; Professor Wu said, “It will be a great loss if our

²⁴ Sheldon Lu, “Dialect and Modernity in 21st Century Sinophone Cinema,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, No. 49, Spring 2007. www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Lu/text.html.

precious linguistic heritage disappears."²⁵ While the loss of topolect-dubbed *Tom and Jerry* is unlikely to usher in the end of Shanghainese or any other topolect, strict regulations over broadcasting rights certainly will contribute if material can only be transmitted in Putonghua.

Although no large-scale protests have been carried out in opposition to these measures, many of articles express the dissatisfaction of local Shanghainese with the growing marginalization of their topolect. Netizens have also made their feelings heard on blogs and bbs boards. Kris Chen posted a story, "Shanghai Radio Station Criticizes Shanghainese People," on September 30, 2008, on his blog at Chinasmack.com. The piece, taken from another source, relates the story of a radio host at a Shanghai radio station who criticized a caller for speaking in Shanghainese. This sparked, as the blogger notes, 276 replies in four hours. Even taking into account factors such as multiple posters, people discussing topics other than that of the thread, and responders bickering with one another, the thread does highlight the amount of interest stories such as these are able to generate. Responders were highly critical of the radio personality, and many of them demanded an apology and vehemently demanded his/her right to speak Shanghainese and be respected, "Shanghai people speak Shanghainese, this is an unalterable truth. If the boycott is real, I only have one thing to say: fuck your motherfucking hell."²⁶ While most other posters were not as volatile in their expressions, this poster should not be considered an outlier. The reactions seen on blogs and bbs boards to anti-Shanghainese measures seem to be much more vocal than those printed in official media, such as the state-run *People's Daily*.

Despite continued resistance to the Mandarinization of Shanghai, the loss of Shanghainese as a commonly used language seems nearly inevitable. The mandatory use of Putonghua in Shanghai's schools is one of the driving forces behind this. "Shanghainese's Last Gasp" an article by Zhang Yuchen published in June of 2009, in the online *China Global Times*, illustrates how children in Shanghai's schools are not only strictly required to use Mandarin in class, but also are strongly encouraged to use it in their free time as well. The article states

²⁵ Pan Haixia, "Proud Shanghainese Asked to Speak Putonghua," http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-09/29/content_481714.htm

²⁶ This blog posting can be found at <http://www.chinasmack.com/2008/stories/shanghai-radio-station-criticizes-shanghainese-people.html>.

children in Shanghai schools are punished for speaking Shanghainese in school with low marks for Civil Behavior. Ubiquitous signs stating, "Please speak in Putonghua" decorate every teaching building, according to a graduate student at Shanghai University who was interviewed for the article. By enforcing the use of Mandarin when working, i.e., learning, as well as when socializing outside of lessons, Shanghainese children become accustomed to using Mandarin at all times and in all situations. This is reinforced by broadcast policies that dictate that nearly all broadcasts and media must be in Mandarin. As the article states, "Practically speaking, the only interesting program on TV for children like Ivan [aged five at the time of the article] are Putonghua-language cartoons."

This takes Mandarin use out of just the public sphere. These policies firmly insert it into the private sphere as well. Strict school and broadcast policies along with the massive influx of non-Shanghainese people into the city have helped create a generational gap between children of the eighties and nineties. For instance the graduate student interviewed is said to communicate best in her topolect; however, she relates an exchange between a child and a parent in which the parent attempts to communicate to the child using Shanghainese only to switch to Putonghua due to the child's inability to understand. This indicates students born in the eighties still retain a fair ability to speak Shanghainese; however, those born in the nineties and later who would have been in elementary school when these measures were enacted, have a significantly lower ability to speak and or understand Shanghainese. Policies such as these are effectively curbing the debate over the generations in Shanghai by forcibly removing the medium in which its citizens would be able to conduct it, their topolect.

IV. The Campaign in the Cantonese Region

One area in which the debate is still strongly maintained in China is the Cantonese-speaking region, particularly in Guangdong and Hong Kong. These areas share several key factors with Shanghai. As they are both major hubs of economic development in China, they have both seen substantial numbers of citizens of other provinces who are unable to speak the local topolect relocate to the area. A key factor which distinguishes Guangdong from Shanghai is its ability to broadcast programs in their topolect rather than in Putonghua. Guangdong's right to broadcast in

Cantonese, however, seemed to come under attack in July of 2010.

In early July, during a "political consultative conference" for Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, the city was advised that Guangzhou TV should change its news programs on the News Channel and Channel One from Cantonese to Mandarin. Zhang Yuchen, writing for the *People's Daily* in an article titled "Mandarin News Proposal Slammed in Guangzhou," cited Jie Keguang, a member of the committee, as saying the proposal's intent was to "help the visitors during the Asian Games which will open in November." This statement makes the proposal seem like a temporary measure intended for the games alone. However a following statement Zhang attributes to the committee and other statements made by Ji alter the nature of the measure. The committee, relates Zhang, felt this measure would allow Guangzhou's TV stations to broadcast across the entire country, not just Guangdong. Ji supported the idea, saying, "Four of the five biggest cities in China — Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Tianjin — have all broadcast their TV programs nationally via satellite, with Guangzhou being the exception." Ji's statements and the committee's suggestion give the impression that Guangzhou's TV stations, and therefore Guangzhou itself, are lagging behind China's other major cities due to their use of Cantonese rather than Putonghua. Once again topolects present a barrier on the road to integration and modernity.

The proposal, when made known to the Guangdong public, met with an overwhelmingly negative response. Zhang's article gives the results of a poll posted on the conferences website. Eighty percent of the 30,000 respondents disagreed with the proposal. 79.5 percent stated their preference for Cantonese programming, while only 20.5 wanted shows in Mandarin. The poll, while not necessarily indicative of Guangdong's entire population, shows that a substantial minority do in fact want Mandarin programming; however, the vast majority of respondents preferred programming in their topolect. The measure, beyond evoking simply expressions of disapproval from Guangdong's populace, sparked a sense of fear that Mandarin programming was to be phased in at the expense of Cantonese programming.

This fear was then expressed in a protest staged on July 25, seventeen days after Zhang's article was published. In "Cantonese Dialect in Danger: Protestors," an article for the *Global Times*, Liang Chen writes, "Hundreds of people staged a peaceful, but loud, protest in

Guangzhou." Protestors numbering at least 1,000 gathered at Jiangnanxi subway station in response to the proposed language switch to defend their topolect. Chen writes that protestors, many of them wearing shirts emblazoned with "I love Guangzhou" repeatedly shouted, "Protect Cantonese, Love Guangzhou" often, in between singing Cantonese songs. The protest was not long lived as it was peacefully dispersed by police after two and a half hours. A foreign blogger present at the event praised the restraint of the police, quoting one officer in his effort to move people from the streets. The officer was non-confrontational and polite in his efforts to clear the streets saying "Excuse me this way please."²⁷

Guangzhou's government moved quickly to pacify the population using a mixture of reassurances and warnings. An article published in *The People's Daily* quotes Ouyang Yongsheng, Guangzhou's city office's deputy director in his attempts to reassure Guangzhou's citizens that Cantonese would not only be protected, but encouraged: "the city government will continue to spare no effort to promote Yueju, Cantonese opera, and Cantonese pop music in the coming years." Ouyang categorically denied any intent on the part of Guangzhou's government to replace Cantonese with Mandarin. In an effort to minimize the significance of the measure that had been introduced in the meeting, Ouyang stated it was merely a "suggestion," and it was not meant to be interpreted as an order. He went on to warn that any who would spread rumors about the matter would be punished. The warning should not be taken lightly as a man suspected of organizing the protest online had already been ordered to serve five days detention.²⁸ Neither the government's threats nor its reassurances were able to fully defuse the situation.

Two days after the article was published, Guangzhou's citizens once again took to the streets to protest their right to speak Cantonese be honored. The site chosen for the August first rally was the People's Park in Guangzhou. The protestors were once again estimated to be in the hundreds. Unlike the previous week, this protest was quickly suppressed by "heavily armed police," stated Austin Ramzy, writing for *Time Magazine*. Ye Du, a writer who attended the

²⁷ Pete, July 27, 2010 (4:50PM), "At the Cantonese Protest in Guangzhou" The Blacksmith Books Blog, <http://www.blacksmithbooks.com/blog/?p=887>

²⁸ Caixiang Zheng, "Cantonese Set to Carry on as Officials Quash Rumors," *The People's Daily Online*, July 30, 2010.

demonstration and who was quoted in Ramzy's article claimed, "At least a thousand policemen were at the scene." Du and at least three others were detained after the protest had been dispersed.²⁹ Xinhua reported the other two detainees to be a man, nineteen, identified as Liang, and a forty-two-year-old female, identified as Guo, both with checkered pasts (robbery and repeated drug use respectively). Another man, aged twenty-five, was also reported as being detained, but no mention of his past was made. All three were held on charges of disrupting public order, stirring affrays, and causing traffic jams. In addition to the quick suppression of the protest, Guangzhou's city government reiterated there was no intent on the part of the city government to end the use of Cantonese. Guangzhou's security bureau is quoted by Xinhua as calling on its population to ignore rumors concerning the end of Cantonese and to instead, "help us to create a harmonious city."³⁰ Reports of the protest however differ.

Reports from American news agencies differ from not only *Xinhua's* report, but from each other as well. The *Times* article largely bears out the *Xinhua* article and states only three people were taken away. However, *Xinhua* makes no mention of Du, or why he had been detained by the police for several hours, unless Du had been given an alias and listed amongst the three. If Du is not listed under an alias, at least four people at the protest were detained. An article published online for *Reuters*, "Pro-Cantonese Protestors Scuffle with Chinese Police," contradicts *Xinhua's* claim that only three people were detained during the protest, asserting significantly more were taken by the police. The article cites an anonymous reporter who witnessed the protest as saying approximately twenty-four individuals were taken from the scene, eight of them journalists from Hong Kong.³¹ Conflicting reports and tight media controls make it difficult to determine the facts concerning sensitive events such as this within China.

While the two American sources may not agree on the numbers of people detained, they report an important concurrent event that took place in Hong Kong. The *Times* and *Reuters*

²⁹ Austin Ramzy, "Chinese Protestors Stand Firm on Cantonese Rights," *Time Magazine Online*, August 2, 2010.

³⁰ Guanqun Wan, ed., "Three Detained in Chinese City's Rally for Preserving Dialect," *Xinhuanet*, August 8, 2010.

³¹ Emma Graham-Harrison and James Pomfret, "Pro-Cantonese Protestors Scuffle with Chinese Police," *Reuters Online*, August 2, 2010.

articles again disagree on the numbers of participants, but both acknowledge a small scale protest comprised of approximately one hundred to two hundred individuals staged by Hong Kong residents at Southorn Playground.^{32 33} Protestors marched out of sympathy for their Guangzhou neighbors. Ramzy quotes Hong Kong teacher's union official Han Lin Shan, voicing the groups' concern, "If their freedom of choice is interfered with, sooner or later Hong Kong people's freedom of choice will be interfered with, because we are in the same country." Although the events took place in Guangzhou, they still managed to stir up the fears of neighboring Hong Kong.

Although small in scale, the Hong Kong protest highlights the connection between the two areas. Guangdong's proximity to Hong Kong, an entity able to broadcast TV and radio signals into the area free of Chinese government restrictions, practically forced the CCP to allow Guangdong to broadcast in its dominant topolect in order to have a governmentally regulated alternative. Graham-Harrison and Pomfret write the primary motive behind allowing Guangzhou to broadcast in Cantonese, its topolect, rather than *Putonghua*, Mandarin, was to "lure viewers away from cross border [Hong Kong] shows." While the measure provides a Cantonese language alternative to Hong Kong's programming, it also helped create a market for Cantonese language goods in Guangdong, by ensuring the topolect remained a viable medium of communication and expression.

Cantonese pop music, or "Cantopop," and TV programming, was not restricted to an underground means of access to the Chinese market. After Deng began his reforms, Cantopop music was legally if selectively imported into China via the China Book Publishing and Export Corporation.³⁴ Fung asserts these stations actually helped expand the popularity of Cantonese music throughout China even into non-Cantonese speaking areas.³⁵ While Cantopop's popularity

³² Ibid.

³³ Ramzy.

³⁴ Anthony Y. H. Fung. "The Emerging (National) Pop Music Culture in China," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* vol. 8 No. 3(2007): 430.

³⁵ Ibid., 431.

would significantly wane after the early nineties in the non-Cantonese speaking regions of China, the Cantonese music industry based in Hong Kong still continues to produce albums, pop, and more recently rap stars for public consumption.³⁶ Liang Chen's article highlights the continued interest of Cantonese music in Guangzhou as the protestors were still able to belt out Cantonese songs during their July demonstration. Pop culture elements such as music, movies, and TV shows, many of which originate in neighboring Hong Kong, have given Cantonese-speaking people avenues to express and use their language which have been denied Shanghainese.

V. Conclusion

The debate that arose in the opening of the twentieth century over the nature and role a unifying language should play in China continues in the twenty-first century. The need for a language shared by all of China's citizens seems clear to most citizens, and Mandarin has been accepted as the language to fill that vital role. However, the question of how Mandarin is to be used in Chinese society is still being questioned by citizens of Shanghai and Guangzhou, although questions in Shanghai are asked more and more quietly and less often. Beijing's answer, since 2000, has been clear: Mandarin is to be used at nearly all times and in nearly all situations. Exceptions can be made on the basis of artistic merit, such as traditional opera and the use of Shanxi dialect in *The World*. And generally the use must conform with the government's desired image of dialects as alienating and a barrier to progress.

Shanghai and Guangzhou, two of China's most economically vibrant cities, offer two contrasting cases of Manderinization in China. A combination of laws passed at the national, and subsequently municipal level, has paved the way for the marginalization of Shanghainese. The 2000 Common Language Law signaled a renewed interest in instituting a state language rather than a common language. Measures passed by Shanghai's government severely restricting the ability to broadcast or distribute media such as newspapers, TV programs, and movies in Shanghainese as well as encouraging radio shows to broadcast in Shanghainese, combined with proscriptions against using Shanghainese in school classes, effectively restricted speakers'

³⁶ Ibid., 432.

opportunity to use the topolect in the home or with friends outside of class or work. In addition, the demographics of the city were and continue to undergo significant changes due to large numbers of non-Shanghai or Wu family speakers moving to Shanghai due to its economic prosperity. The effects of these occurrences are most clearly seen in children born in the nineties, who have since grown up in an environment in which they are denied access to and punished for using their mother tongue. This has resulted in a generally poor grasp of Shanghai and a preference for Mandarin. In light of the events that have taken place since 2000, Shanghai looks set to become a relic preserved by linguists, but not by its people.

Guangzhou and Cantonese present a different picture. Efforts have been made to instill the population with a desire to speak Mandarin over dialect, but the July and August protests, as well as the results of the advisory conference's poll, show strong support for Cantonese in the city. While Guangzhou's schools feature the same slogans of "Please speak Putonghua" as their Shanghai counterparts, their airwaves are very different. Guangzhouers' TV shows, radio broadcasts, and movies can all be seen and or heard in the local topolect. Use of Mandarin may be required in schools and or at work, but the abundance of Cantonese language media ensures the language stays relevant. As in other economically booming areas of China, Guangzhou and Guangdong's demographics are changing, even if precise figures are unknown. The influx of non-Cantonese speakers into Guangdong and Guangzhou has created a demand for Mandarin media, but the demand is still substantially smaller than that for Cantonese. Unlike Shanghai, Guangdong's neighbor has actually been instrumental in the preservation of its topolect, as Beijing has been careful to ensure it can offer a state regulated alternative to media originating in Hong Kong.

The cases of Shanghai and Guangzhou highlight the conflicts over language roles that still persist in the Chinese state. Shanghai and Guangzhou residents to varying degrees have advocated for the retention of their respective topolects, but have been careful not to reject Mandarin and the need for a *Putonghua*. Instead they have expressed their desire to use both, employing topolects among those who share the same topolect, and Mandarin to cross linguistic boundaries within China. This seemingly has proved to be unacceptable to the Nationalist government, and the present leadership in Beijing. The CCP despite its use of the term

Putonghua to refer to Mandarin has instituted policies transforming the *Putonghua* into a *biaozhunyu*. Effective use of state control of the media and education systems have pushed once healthy topolects such as Shanghainese to the brink of extinction while others, such as Cantonese, have come under serious threat. Cantonese in mainland China has been able to maintain its viability, in part due to less strict media controls. The long-term fate of the Cantonese topolect is uncertain, but at present Guangzhou’s and Hong Kong’s citizens are set to defend it.

The Role of the State in the Development of Language and Script in Modern China

by Daniel Freiman

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, language and script in China have undergone dramatic changes. During the last decade of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), Chinese language reformers advocated the use of written vernacular language (*Báihuà* 白话) and urged the need to reform the Chinese script. These reformers faced constant government repression and lacked a popular base to support their proposals. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Chinese state actively supported language and script reform, that meaningful changes were brought about. Top-level political support from both the Nationalist Party (*Guómíndǎng* 国民党) and the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng* 中国共产党) were essential for the creation and popularization of the Modern Standard Chinese language (*Pǔtōnghuà* 普通话) and the emergence of written vernacular as the predominant style of writing in modern China. In addition, it is due to the support of the Chinese state that Pinyin (*Pīnyīn* 拼音) — a Romanized phonetic script that can be used to indicate the pronunciation of Chinese characters — was introduced as a tool to teach the Chinese language and script. Also, it is largely due to government efforts that simplified characters supplanted large numbers of complex traditional graphs. From the beginning of the Republican Era all the way to the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese state and its policies had a great impact on the reform and development of the Chinese language and script.

Throughout the Republican Era (1912–1949), the governing Nationalist Party actively supported language and script reform to modernize the country. Reforms during this period included the creation of various Romanized phonetic systems of writing, the simplification of traditional characters, and the push to substitute vernacular Chinese for Classical Chinese (*Wényán* 文言). In addition, the government supported the reform of the Chinese language by promoting the creation and adoption of a National Language (*Guóyǔ* 国语) as the official

language of instruction in schools throughout China. Language and script reform in China further accelerated after Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, ascended to power in 1949 and established the People’s Republic of China. Mao backed policies such as the simplification of characters, the adoption of Pinyin, and the popularization of vernacular language as means to increase literacy rates across China’s rural areas. At the same time, Mao supported efforts to spread Putonghua — a language with “a pronunciation based on the Peking dialect, the grammar of the northern Chinese dialects, and the lexicon of modern literary Chinese” (Lehmann 1975:17) — in order to accomplish his educational program and political aims.

The support of the Chinese Communist Party for language and script reform in China was crucial for the establishment of Pinyin and Putonghua as well as for the popularization of simplified characters and vernacular script. It is worth noting, however, that Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party edifice promoted language and script reform because it suited their political objectives. In fact, one of the defining features of Mao’s era was the politicization of language and script. Throughout Mao’s era, language and education reforms served as platforms to conduct propaganda activities and to rally the support of the Chinese masses for the Communist cause. The more people spoke Putonghua and read Mao’s quotations in vernacular language, the more successful Mao would be in communicating his messages and creating a socialist society guided by Mao Zedong Thought. The use of language and script as a means to achieve political goals reached its peak during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*Wúchǎn Jiējí Wénhuà Géming* 无产阶级文化革命, 1966–1976) when Mao manipulated the Chinese language and script in order to further his political propaganda and raise his stature to that of a godlike figure.

This paper will discuss the main developments in language and script reform since the beginning of the twentieth century and highlight the impact of the Nationalist Party and Chinese Communist Party on language and script in China. First, the paper will trace the main developments of language and script reform since the beginning of the twentieth century. Second, the paper will assess the impact of the Nationalist Party on promoting a National Language (*Guóyǔ* 国语), the simplification of characters and introduction of various Romanized phonetic

schemes. Third, the paper will assess the impact of Mao’s script reforms — Chinese character simplification, the introduction of Pinyin, and the promotion of written vernacular language — on Chinese script. Fourth, it will discuss the impact of Mao’s policies and Mao Zedong Thought on the Chinese lexicon. Finally, the paper will assess the effect of Mao’s manipulation of language during the Cultural Revolution and its effects on the Chinese language and script. To bolster my arguments, I will rely on Western and Chinese academic sources that analyze the development of language and script reform in China since the first decade of the twentieth century. At the same time, I will draw on studies that focus on the political and social environment in China throughout Mao’s era. Finally, I will analyze the arguments of renowned linguists and philologists that focus on the development of language and script reform in modern China.

Vernacular Writing in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Classical Chinese (*Wényán* 文言) was the most prestigious form of Chinese writing. According to Zhou, Classical Chinese refers to a “polished style of writing that was based on the ancient Chinese Han language” (Zhou 2003:36). The vast canon of Chinese literature, history, and philosophy has been primarily written in Classical Chinese (Norman 1988:245). Furthermore, Classical Chinese is a purely written language that has no uniform pronunciation and has been used only by a small number of people (Zhou 2003:3). Nevertheless, in Imperial China Classical Chinese was considered to be the proper standard for government scholars and officials. Furthermore, during Imperial China the written vernacular, which was based primarily on spoken Chinese, was seldom used in publications and government documents. This is because written vernacular was condemned by Chinese literati and scholars as crude and inappropriate to express China’s ideological and literary heritage.

During the 1900s, written vernacular language manifested itself in the so-called “new written style” (*Xīnwéntǐ* 新闻体). This style of writing combined Classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese and was featured in periodicals and editorials. During this period, journals and periodicals composed in the “new written style” were linked to radical students in the Lower Yangzi region who opposed the Qing court. These students employed vernacular language in

order to gain a large following among the Chinese masses and to promote their nationalist ideas. In effect, these students employed vernacular publications as a “means of political propaganda” (Kaske 2008:167). One of these publications was the *Hángzhōu Báihuàbào* 杭州白话报 (Hangzhou Vernacular Newspaper), which was launched in 1901 by Lin Xie (1874–1926). This journal “had a political mission and aimed to improve public spirit, reform customs, and propagate nationalist ideas” (Kaske 2008:168). Other important vernacular publications included the *Zhōngguó Báihuàbào* 中国白话报 (China Vernacular Journal) and the *Jǐngzhōng Rìbào* 警钟日报 (Alarm Bell Daily News). Despite the enthusiasm of the student editors, their publications faced stiff government repression and suffered from low circulation rates (Kaske 2008:181–183). By 1905, these students had lost interest in vernacular publishing and instead turned their attention to plotting assassinations and uprisings against the government (Kaske 2008:180).

In 1906, there was a sudden revival of vernacular writing as “the center of gravity for the Baihua periodicals moved to northern China” (Kaske 2008:186). This trend continued throughout 1906 and 1907 when over twenty *Baihua* periodicals were launched. Out of these twenty periodicals half were published in Beijing (Kaske 2008:187). In this period, one of the main goals of vernacular publications was to spread knowledge to China’s uneducated masses or, as Lin Xie stated, to “enlighten the lower classes.” Furthermore, the editors of these publications, of which a large majority were also students, employed vernacular language to bolster propaganda efforts. Like their predecessors, however, these journals failed to reach a national audience and suffered from low circulation volumes.

One of the main reasons the aforementioned publications were unable to successfully diffuse vernacular writing was that they lacked official government backing. *Baihua* was “nothing other than the extension of oral speech and far from being considered a full fledged literary language” (Kaske 2008:214). Furthermore, *Baihua* journals were primarily read by students and were not appealing to the “lower classes” that preferred “daily newsheets with a local focus that was relevant to their needs” (Kaske 2008:222). Finally, intellectuals and government officials found *Baihua* crude and unpolished and therefore dismissed it as a suitable alternative to traditional writing.

The Republican Era and the Literary Revolution

During the Republican Era, which lasted from 1912 to 1949, the “movement for language and script modernization advanced from a preparatory stage to one of implementation” (Zhou 2003:2). The government first turned its attention to script modernization. In 1912, the Nationalist Party appointed the Commission on the Unification of Pronunciation, which produced the National Phonetic Alphabet (*Zhùyīn Zìmǔ* 注音字母). This phonetic system of writing consisted of thirty-seven characters and four tone marks and was endorsed by the government in 1918 and introduced in primary schools in 1920. The government also made outstanding strides in language reform. In 1919, the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of the National Language was founded. The Committee formally initiated a political and educational debate on language reform by proposing the implementation of a National Language in the primary school curriculum (Kaske 2008:463). This National Language was later labeled *Guóyǔ* 国语, and it became the common language for China during the Republican Era.

In 1916, Hu Shi (1891–1962), a philosopher and language reformer, pioneered the so-called Literary Revolution (*Wénxué Gémìng* 文学革命), which demanded “the liberation of literature from the constraints of classical language” and introduced the concept of the National Language as one “inseparable entity of [the] written and the spoken” (Kaske 2008:454–455). In addition, Hu Shi outlined the eight major criteria for proper writing (*Xiězuò Yàodiǎn Bāshì* 写作要点八事). Hu urged writers to express themselves in their own style by using common expressions and paying attention to grammatical structure. At the same time, he exhorted writers to avoid using old pedantic styles or copying old writers’ expressions (Zhou 2003:49). According to Kaske, the main reason for the success of the Literary Revolution was that by the time the movement was launched, there was already an evident “breakdown of the belief in the past” (Kaske 2008:470). By 1916, the Confucian system of education had broken down, and Confucian canonical texts were no longer taught in schools. Consequently, Classical Chinese “lost the very basis of its codification” (Kaskle 2008:470). By 1920, the Ministry of Education demanded that Classical Chinese be replaced by vernacular language as the medium of instruction in schools.

The Literary Revolution and the May Fourth Movement

The most important aspect of the Literary Revolution was that it presented vernacular written language as a replacement of Classical Chinese. More importantly, the Literary Revolution gained further strength and became the nationwide vernacular movement (*Báihuàwén* 白话文) during the May Fourth Movement (Kaske 2008:472–473). The May Fourth Movement, which started on May 4, 1919, was an anti-imperialist, cultural and political movement that originated as a result of China’s failure to revitalize its economy, military, and technology in the aftermath of the Versailles Treaty following WWI. The May Fourth Movement is an important episode in the course of Chinese language and script reform because it was during this period that the private revolution of language reformers became a nationwide movement.

The main objectives of the May Fourth Movement were to promote a new literature in a living language of the people (*Baihua*) and to protest against the ideas and institutions of traditional culture (Kaske 2008:464). During the May Fourth Movement, scholars such as Qian Xuetong (1887–1939) and Chen Guangyao (1906–1973) conducted extensive research into character simplification and advocated the acceptance of simplified characters as replacements for conventional forms (Hannas 1997:20). The May Fourth Movement also provided the cultural and intellectual momentum for the Mass Language Movement (*Dàzhòng Yǔ Yùndòng* 大众语运动) of the 1930s, which “led the reform of written style to its maturity” (Zhou 2003:50). Proponents of the Mass Language Movement argued that Chinese writing should be in a style that resembled the spoken language of the masses. According to Zhou, the Baihua movement became so popular that, by the late 1930s, “vernacular Chinese had basically been absorbed by Chinese society” (Zhou 2003:52).

Romanized Phonetic Alphabets During the Republican Era

Script reform in China was not limited to the replacement of Classical Chinese by written vernacular or by the simplification of traditional characters. In fact, script reform also involved the introduction of Romanized systems of writing to indicate the pronunciation of Chinese characters. In 1926, the famous Chinese linguist Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) developed a writing system that used Roman letters to indicate tones (tonal spelling) called National

Language Romanization (*Guóyǔ Luómǎzì* 国语罗马字) (DeFrancis 1986:245). As its name implies, this Romanized phonetic system of writing was meant only to represent the National Language. This system of writing became the first Chinese system of Latinization that obtained official approval when it was adopted by the Chinese government in 1928. Nevertheless, the system failed as an alternative to the traditional writing system because using letters to indicate tones proved to be too complicated and because the government never actively promoted its use (Norman 1988:259–260).

In the 1930s, Latinized New Writing (*Lādīnghuà Xīnwénzì* 拉丁化新文字) emerged as an alternative writing system that also used Roman letters. Originally, this system was developed to promote literacy among Chinese workers who lived in the Soviet Union. The most distinctive feature of this phonetic writing system is that it lacked tone representation (DeFrancis 1986:246). An important difference between Yuan Ren Chao’s *Guóyǔ Luómǎzì* and *Lādīnghuà Xīnwénzì* is that the former was meant only to represent the National Language and the latter could also be used to represent different regional forms of speech. The famous writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) was an ardent supporter of *Lādīnghuà Xīnwénzì* due to its simplicity. Lu Xun argued that “characters were a fatal disease” and that China needed to get rid of them to modernize (DeFrancis 1986:249). This system of writing was promoted with unprecedented zeal by the Nationalist Party and was used in journals, textbooks, and even translations (DeFrancis 1986:246).

Obstacles to Language and Script Reform in the Republican Era

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, language and script reformers faced stiff resistance from traditional Chinese scholars and literati. First, critics of written vernacular “looked down upon the vernacular style as a vulgar form of writing unsuited to elevated expression of thought” (DeFrancis 1986:244). Second, opponents of character simplification argued that measures to simplify Chinese characters threatened the continuity of Chinese culture and the integrity of nationhood (Zhao and Baldauf 2008:32). Furthermore, these critics argued that the loss of cultural continuity would have pernicious effects on classical literature and the aesthetics of the Chinese script (Zhao and Baldauf 2008:36). Third, conservative scholars opposed the spread of

Guóyǔ by arguing that a National Language would lead to the erosion of local dialects (*Tǔhuà* 土话) across China. Finally, the war against Japan (1937–1945) and the subsequent Chinese civil war (1945–1949) between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party impeded meaningful breakthroughs in language and script reform.

Language and Script Reform Under the Chinese Communist Party

After Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, ascended to power in 1949, language and script reform gained unprecedented strength. Reforms under communist rule included the simplification of Chinese characters, the introduction of Pinyin and the promotion of Putonghua as the official language of the state. Following Mao’s guidelines, the Chinese Communist Party carried out a program of language and script reform “through increasingly vigorous intervention on a scale previously unheard of” (Zhao and Baldauf 2008:41). During the Mao era, Chinese language and script reform had four main aspects. The first feature was the creation and diffusion of a Romanized phonetic alphabet (Pinyin). The second was the simplification of characters (*Hànzì Jiǎnhuà* 汉字简化), which entailed a reduction in the number of strokes and elimination of unnecessary characters. The third aspect was the popularization of Putonghua (*Tuīguǎng Pǔtōnghuà* 推广普通话). The fourth feature, especially during the Cultural Revolution, was the promotion of written vernacular language at the expense of Classical Chinese.

Shortly after the Chinese Communist Party assumed control over the country in 1949, Mao established the Association for Writing Reform with the purpose of reforming the written script and promoting the phonetization of the Chinese writing system. In 1952, the Association for Writing Reform was renamed the Research Committee on Writing Reform and was placed under the auspices of the State Council — the highest administrative organ in the People’s Republic of China (Seybolt 1979:2). The main task of the Research Committee on Writing Reform was to “make the Chinese language serve the workers and peasants and to further socialist construction” (Lehmann 1975:43). In 1955, the Committee sponsored the National Conference on the Reform of the Chinese Written Language, which drafted a proposal for the adoption of a Romanized phonetic alphabet: Pinyin. According to DeFrancis, the main functions

of Pinyin are to “indicate the standard pronunciation of Chinese and to aid in the acquisition of Putonghua via annotated characters” (DeFrancis 1986:265). Pinyin is so effective in indicating the pronunciation of Chinese characters that it has become the official way of transcribing Chinese personal and place names.

In the case of the simplification of characters, in 1956 the State Council published the Scheme for Chinese Character Simplification (*Hànzì Jiǎnhuà Fāng'àn* 汉字简化方案), which listed 544 traditional characters, 29 of which were abolished and 515 of which were later simplified. In 1964 the Committee for Chinese Writing Reform published a “General Table of Simplified Characters” that listed over two thousand simplified characters. In the same year, further simplification measures increased the number of simplified characters to 2,238 out of the 7,000 characters in general use. Under the Chinese Communist Party, character simplification was carried out in at least three different ways. The first was through phonetic borrowing: a character was used for its phonetic element to simplify another character. The second manner was through the replacement of a complex character with a simple one derived from the meaning of the word. The third method was through the removal of elements from a character or the elimination of radicals from homophone characters without distorting the meaning of the character (Seybolt 1979:12).

Advocates of character simplification often cite three main advantages of simplified characters. First, there is a greater clarity when writing simplified characters. Second, simplified characters are easier to recognize because the “strokes and components of simplified characters are easier to analyze and separate” (Zhou 2003:68). Third, simplified characters are easier to write because they have fewer strokes. Despite these advantages, proponents of character simplification concede that there are also several disadvantages associated with simplified characters. First, “the number of look-alike characters (*Jīnxíngzì* 近形字) increases,” which in turn causes confusion to the reader (Zhou 2003:68). Second, it is hard to identify a character’s radical and to arrange them in order. Third, individuals who learn only simplified characters are unable to read old texts written in traditional characters.

The authority William Hannas is very critical of character simplification efforts. First, he lambasts the exercise of “collapsing traditional characters through homonym substitution and

replacing complex components with ones that have the same sound but fewer strokes” and basing their phonetic correspondences in Mandarin (Hannas 1997:224). Doing so “deprived non-Mandarin Chinese speakers” of the links that the “writing system had with the sounds of their languages” (Hannas 1997:224). Second, he argues that officially sanctioning new simplified forms forced millions of literate Chinese to “start anew building fresh associations in their minds” with the new graphs (Hannas 1997:224). Third, he states that there was “no clear criteria for deciding which characters would be replaced or how many strokes a character needed to qualify as a candidate” (Hannas 1997:225). He concludes by stating that “character simplification in China has not benefitted the reader or the learner to any appreciable degree” (Hannas 1997:227).

Despite the validity of Hannas’ claims, it is important to acknowledge, as DeFrancis does, that simplification efforts resulted in a reduction of “12.5 percent in the average number of strokes in the 2,000 most frequently used characters” (DeFrancis 1986:260). Furthermore, Hannas overlooks, or at least fails to acknowledge, the fact that character simplification efforts were driven by political objectives. This was especially the case under Communist rule when the Chinese Communist Party pushed character simplification reforms because it faced “the urgent need to develop a corps of literate cadres as lower-level bureaucrats” (DeFrancis 1986:259). The fact that simplified characters have not, by themselves, succeeded in achieving universal literacy in China does not mean that they have not been successful in introducing characters that are easier to write and eliminating a large number of complicated and outdated graphs. In short, character simplification reforms have not had a pernicious effect on the Chinese written script, but have instead led the way in simplifying the highly complicated Chinese writing system.

Aside from promoting character simplification, Mao’s also backed the popularization of written vernacular. In fact, during Mao’s era the position of *Baihua* “as the common written language was strengthened, and the official use of Wenyan was curtailed altogether” (Norman 1988:255). Consequently, “the semi-vernacular and semi-Classical newspaper style (*Xīnwéntī*) was changed into an explicit and smooth spoken language style” (Zhou 2003:5). As a result, during the 1950s articles and editorials “written in colloquial language made prose written in standardized vernacular available to the masses on a daily basis” (Zhou 2003:54). The

importance attached to *Baihua* during the Mao era is illustrated in the Reform of Official Documents (*Gōngwén Gǎigé* 公文改革). This reform replaced the use of officialese (*Děngyīn Fèngcǐ* 等因奉此) with common vernacular in government documents.

In terms of language reform, the government actively promoted the use of Putonghua. As noted above, Putonghua is a language with a pronunciation based on the Peking dialect and the grammar of the northern Chinese dialects. Peking dialect was the common language of the officials (*Guānhuà* 官话) during the Ming and Qing dynasties and was the standard for the National Language (*Guóyǔ* 国语) in the Republican Era. In 1956, the government hosted the Conference on the Standardization of Modern Chinese, which defined, endorsed, and popularized Putonghua. In that same year, the State Council ordered the teaching of Putonghua in all elementary schools. It is important to note that the Chinese Communist Party did not intend Putonghua to become a “diglossic standard language remote from the language of everyday life” (Lehmann 1975:17). This is because Putonghua was, and still is, rarely spoken in its purely standard form. Instead, Putonghua represents “a kind of *Umgangssprache*, a variety of speech that lies somewhere between a local dialect and a standard proper” (Norman 1988:247).

Debate Over Language and Script Reform During Mao’s Rule

Throughout the 1950s, and especially during the Hundred Flowers Campaign (*Bǎihuā Yùndòng* 百花运动) in 1957, intellectuals and traditionalists (*Hàogǔjiā* 好古家) criticized the government’s language reforms and voiced their opinions in periodicals and academic conferences. Critics of language reform argued that Pinyin lacked aesthetics and that the disappearance of Chinese characters would endanger Chinese political unity and cultural identity. Nevertheless, the government pushed through with the reforms. In 1958, Zhou Enlai (1898–1976), the premier of the People’s Republic of China, presented a speech at the National Political Consultative Conference in which he voiced his support for language and script reform. He argued that standard vernacular was not intended to destroy the various dialects spoken across China, but to reduce the barriers among them. Furthermore, he urged the use of phonetic spelling to aid in learning characters and spreading Putonghua (Seybolt 1979:5). In that same year, Mao ordered all Chinese Communist Party cadres to learn written vernacular language. At the same

time, the National People’s Congress, China’s highest legislative body, approved the use of Pinyin as a tool to spread Putonghua (Seybolt 1979:25).

DeFrancis is very critical of Mao’s attitude towards language and script reform. First, he criticizes Mao and the Chinese Communist Party for their lack of support in regards to the Latinization of the Chinese script. Writing in the 1980s, DeFrancis notes that “very little has been produced in Pinyin” and that this Romanized phonetic system of writing is “an adjunct to characters” instead of a full-fledged orthographic script (DeFrancis 1986:265). Second, DeFrancis asserts that the emphasis on the simplification of characters has come at the expense of adopting a full-fledged Romanized alphabetic script. Furthermore, he argues that there has been a minuscule reduction in the number of characters and that further character simplification will be difficult to carry out (DeFrancis 1986:260–261). Third, he attacks Mao for his focus on promoting Putonghua at the expense of other regional languages and dialects. He shares Lu Xun’s position, which states that Chinese unity is found not in a single unified script, but “in a number of simple Latinized systems that would facilitate [the] achievement of literacy by the masses” (DeFrancis 1986:251).

Although DeFrancis does make very persuasive arguments, it is important to give credit to Mao and the Chinese Communist Party for their efforts in promoting the use of Pinyin to spread Putonghua across China. Likewise, one must acknowledge that Mao’s endorsement of language and script reform led to the subsequent institutionalization of these measures across China. To date, China has not developed a policy of digraphia — the use of two different forms of script to represent the same written language — in which Pinyin can coexist side by side with Chinese characters as an official writing script. Nevertheless, Pinyin has already become an essential tool in transcribing personal and place names and in teaching Putonghua to Chinese children and foreign students. Furthermore, Hannas contends that Pinyin will eventually “marginalize the sphere of character usage to classical studies and decorative facts” (Hannas 1997:25). It is also important to note that throughout communist rule, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, the role of Classical Chinese greatly diminished (Lehmann 1975:29). Finally, the spread of Putonghua, a policy backed by the Chinese Communist Party, has enabled

a greater number of individuals from across China to communicate in the same language and to participate in the country’s economic modernization that started over three decades ago.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and Its Impact on Language and Script

During the Cultural Revolution, Mao solidified his rule as the supreme leader of the Chinese Communist Party by eliminating political opponents and creating a cult around his persona. In order to achieve these goals, Mao implemented a set of linguistic and educational policies as means to control the thoughts and actions of Communist Party cadres and the Chinese masses. A large number of Western scholars argue that during the Cultural Revolution “all discussion of language reform ceased” (Seybolt 1979:6). Nevertheless, this was not always the case. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, policies to reform the Chinese language and script were among Mao’s top priorities. Mao’s support for language and script reform was especially evident in the promotion of Putonghua and the use of written vernacular language.

The main goal of the Cultural Revolution was to eliminate all “manifestations of bourgeois culture in arts, sciences, education, medicine, and in popular or elite attitudes” (Dittmer 1981:3). Furthermore, the aim of this movement was to purge Chinese society from *SìJiù* 四旧 (the “four olds”: old culture, old habits, old customs, and old ideas). By doing so, the Cultural Revolution sought to create “a proletarian political culture more consistent with a socialist society” (Dittmer 1981:5). In order to achieve these goals, Mao totalized discourse across China. First, Mao took control of the country’s newspapers, radio stations, and book publishing houses. Likewise, he diffused his ideas through literature and performing arts, which included operas and dramas (Mowry 1973:2). Throughout the Cultural Revolution, newspapers worshiped Mao’s word, radio programs exalted his thought, loudspeakers repeated his quotations, and plays re-enacted the Chinese Communist Party’s victory over its enemies. Second, Mao supplemented his linguistic policies with an ambitious social engineering program, in which he imposed a common education system, common rituals, and common experiences on China’s population. Finally, Mao homogenized the masses’ material environment by destroying the physical remnants of the old ideology and replacing them with those of Communism and revolution.

As the socialist system developed, the ideas of the old ruling class vanished and the corresponding linguistic expressions disappeared with them. For example, terms to address upper class women such as *Tàitài* 太太 (madam) and *Xiǎojiě* 小姐 (young lady) were dropped from the lexicon. Other honorific expressions such as *Lìngzūn* 令尊 (honorable father) and *Lìngtáng* 令堂 (honorable mother) were also dropped. The egalitarian spirit of Mao’s socialist society also manifested itself in the words to describe job professions that carried a derogatory meaning. For example, the word for peasant changed from *Nóngfū* 农夫 to *Shèyuán* 社员, and the word for worker changed from *Kǔlì* 苦力 to *Gōngrén* 工人 (Lehmann 1975:29).

One can point out some unique characteristics of language and script during the Cultural Revolution. The first one was the widespread use of numbers. As Dittmer notes, numbers are “easy to grasp, to recite, and to memorize” and are therefore politically effective. As a result, major political and purging campaigns were abbreviated in numbers: the “Five Antis” (*Wǔ Fǎn* 五反), the “Three Red Flags” (*Sān Hóngqí* 三红旗), and the “Four Modernizations” (*Sì Huà* 四化). Another unique component was the prevalence of set formulae — fixed expressions and scripts that embodied correct thought that the Chinese masses had to abide by in both the public and private spheres in order to follow the Communist road (Ji 2004:42). In the world of these formulae, Maoist Thought was the sole criterion of truth and Mao was the only god (Ji 2004:176).

Throughout the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s poems, conversations, and statements were widely circulated (Dittmer 1981:26). Consequently, the Chinese language became so full of Mao’s expressions that it became Mao’s language. For example, Mao was fond of using simple verbs such as *Gǎo* 搞 (to do/get). Although *Gǎo* was originally a vernacular word not used for writing, it soon became widely used in publications and propaganda (Dittmer 1981:23). In time, this verb was overused and became a cliché without its original freshness and poignancy. The religious worship of Mao greatly affected the expressions of the period. Common expressions during the Cultural Revolution included: *Dǎng de Xūyào Jiùshì Wǒ de Xūyào* 党的需要就是我的需要 (The needs of the Party are my needs) and *Rìyì Xiǎngniàn Máo Zhǔxí Sīxiǎng* 日益想念毛主席思想 (Every day think about Mao Zedong Thought). According to Ji, the excessive use of stock phrases and set linguistic formulae used throughout the Cultural Revolution led to “the

impoverishment of the Chinese language, which became repetitive, narrowly political, and cliché ridden” (Ji 2004:155).

During the Cultural Revolution the Chinese lexicon also went through dramatic changes, as various words in the Chinese vocabulary acquired new meanings (Ji 2004:4). For instance, the color red became “a symbol of love for Mao,” and Mao himself became “the red sun in Chinese people’s hearts” (Ji 2004:190). In contrast, the color black became associated with class enemies (e.g., intellectuals, capitalists, and landlords) who were portrayed as demonic ghosts and monsters (*Niúguǐ Shéshén* 牛鬼蛇神) from the “World of Darkness” (Ji 2004:195).

As a whole, throughout the Cultural Revolution the Chinese language was based on the writings of Mao Zedong and was primarily guided by the Marxist–Leninist Theory of Language. According to this theory, language is “not the product of any particular economic structure or class” but is rather a product of the history of an entire society (Lehmann 1975:129). Its main function is therefore to serve as a medium of communication between all classes of society. As a result, even “when the economic base is changed” or revolutions take place, “there is no necessity for the creation of a new language” (Lehmann 1975:129–130). A common language was, and still is, a necessity to ensure communication among all peoples in China. Scholars who agree with the views of reformers such as Lu Xun tend to argue that the policy of promoting Putonghua necessarily occurs at the expense of other local dialects. Yet these scholars disregard the fact that, even at the height of the Cultural Revolution, Putonghua was “taught in addition to local dialects” and that in localities where minority languages were spoken, Putonghua was “taught only in response to the wishes of the local population to acquire it.” (Lehmann 1975:50).

During the Cultural Revolution the education system was not focused on theory or grueling examinations. Instead, schools were run in the “Open Door Way” in which there was less concentration on textbooks and classrooms. Most notably, this system of education encouraged peasants and workers to lecture to students (Lehmann 1975:19). Furthermore, students were encouraged to use “the rich language of the people” in their assignments and to use the expressions they learned in the factories and the countryside (Lehmann 1975:58). This method of instruction effectively played down the importance of Classical Chinese by promoting the use of vernacular Chinese in written compositions.

Mao’s linguistic program reached its peak during the early years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1968) when the discourse of Maoism was hegemonic in the public domain and “Mao’s language permeated daily life” (Ji 2004, 153). As the Cultural Revolution wore on, however, Mao’s linguistic and propaganda programs gradually lost their effectiveness as Mao constantly manipulated the content of key terms such as “socialist,” “revisionist,” and “bourgeoisie” in order to ensure that no political or student faction would acquire enough power to threaten his rule. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese language and script had become narrowly political and replete with Maoist rhetoric. Despite these developments, the Chinese script was primarily vernacular in nature, and Putonghua had extended its reach across the country.

Conclusion

Throughout the twentieth century the Chinese language and script underwent dramatic changes. In terms of the written script, vernacular language supplanted Classical Chinese as the standard writing style. At the same time, simplified characters were introduced and promoted at the expense of traditional and ancient graphs. Finally, Pinyin emerged in the 1950s as the officially sanctioned Romanized script that would be used to record the pronunciation of Chinese characters and transcribe personal and place names. In regards to the spoken language, Putonghua emerged in the 1950s as the standard form of verbal communication and the official language of the state. The aforementioned developments are the result of a protracted endeavor to reform the Chinese language and script spearheaded initially by students and reformers but ultimately carried through by the Chinese state.

The central actor in the reform of the Chinese language and script has been the Chinese state — the Nationalist Party from 1912 to 1949 and the Chinese Communist Party thereafter. As noted above, during the last decade of the Qing dynasty, proponents of language and script reform were primarily students and academics. These reformers campaigned with great enthusiasm and had the grand aspiration of reaching a national audience that would support their proposals. Nevertheless, they lacked top-level support from the government. It is largely due to

the efforts and policies of the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party that reforms to the Chinese language and script were institutionalized and internalized by the Chinese masses.

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The Influence of Semantic Transcription on the Sinitic Languages

by Sophie Ling-chia Wei

Abstract

Taiwan is privileged by its exceptional historical background. A colony of Japan for almost fifty years, its control then shifted back to the Chinese Nationalist Government for another sixty years. Taiwan Mandarin Chinese is therefore infused with semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese terms, a characteristic that has gradually become a feature distinguishing it from the *Putonghua* form of Mandarin that is used in Mainland China. The tradition of semantic transcription was not uncommon in Chinese history when two cultures encountered one another. In the early stages of the translation of Buddhist sutras, because the existing Chinese characters used in the philosophical terms could not match the meanings for the sutras, Buddhist monks employed rarely used Chinese characters to transcribe the Sanskrit. Later, the transcription advanced to the stage of semantic transcription, with the combination of Sanskrit and Chinese in the vocabulary. The Jesuit missionaries also employed the method of semantic transcription when translating the terms of Western science. However, while the Buddhist monks and the Jesuit missionaries had their own agenda of propagating their religions in mind, the semantic transcription of Japanese and Taiwanese terms is instead a reflection of the change in a society and the acceptance of a language. According to Hsieh and Hsu, “the change of the society reflects on the language, such as the change of the lexical structure.” In modern Taiwan, the use of Taiwan Mandarin is influenced by the semantic transcription and the semantic-transcribed terms become a label of fashion in the minds of the younger generation. For example, such terms as 涮涮鍋 (Japanese hot pot, しゃぶしゃぶ), 安打 (hits in a baseball game, あんだ) and 養樂多 (yogurt drink, ヨーグルト) in Japanese and 奧客 (àu-kheh, a bad customer), 速配 (sù-phuè/sù-phè, being perfectly matched), and 嗆聲 (tshiang-siann, to talk loudly to prove his

strength) in Taiwanese are a few of the examples of semantic transcription, and these transcribed words from Japanese and Taiwanese have changed the use of Taiwan Mandarin and formed a new sub-culture. The semantic-transcribed terms not only mean that they are the borrowed words from Japanese and Taiwanese, they also indicate the mentality of people who identify with using these two languages. In order to reveal this mentality, this paper not only analyzes the lexical structure of the semantic-transcribed terms from Japanese and Taiwanese with the data collected from different media, but also examines the ideologies and mental effects of using the semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese terms. The new face of Taiwan Mandarin will thus be disclosed.

The Protagonist or the Antagonist in the World of Translation?

In terms both of the inclusiveness of language and the diversity of its language development, Taiwan is privileged by its exceptional historical background. Taiwan was a colony of Japan for almost fifty years and then again came under the regime of the Nationalist Government for another sixty years. With the change of regimes, Taiwan Mandarin has grown to popularity with its own identity and has been more popularly used than the standard Mandarin among the younger generation as well as the public in Taiwan. Taiwan Mandarin is infused with semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese lexical terms.¹ This characteristic has gradually turned into a feature distinguishing it from the *Putonghua* Mandarin used in Mainland China. However, the tradition of semantic transcription was not uncommon in the past Chinese history when two cultures encountered each other, as demonstrated by the sutra translations of the Buddhist monks and the translations of Western science accomplished by the missionaries. This paper aims to analyze the lexical structure of the semantic-transcribed terms from Japanese and Taiwanese using data collected from various media, not only to locate the shift of language dominance in

¹ These semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese lexical terms combined the phonetic transcription of the terms in Japanese or in Taiwanese as the first part and the semantic translation of them as the second part. There are also terms that are fully phonetically transcribed, but the characters chosen for the phonetic transcription happen to match or be associated with the meaning in the source language to some extent. They will be discussed more in the later part of the paper.

Taiwan, from Beijing Mandarin to Taiwan Mandarin, but also to examine the similarities in the principles between the past and the present loanwords.

Introduction

Before elaborating on the theme of this paper and examining the semantic-transcribed terms in Taiwan Mandarin, it is necessary to list the characteristics of the Sinitic languages incorporating the terms from foreign languages or other topolects. In the encounter with another language or topolect, the Sinitic language has three tendencies. The first is to phonetically transcribe the words with Chinese characters. In the early stage of the translation of Buddhist sutras, because the existing Chinese characters used in the philosophical terms could not match the meanings for the sutras, Buddhist monks started from the transcription with rarely used Chinese characters to transcribe the Sanskrit. For example, *Tathāgata* (the name the Buddha in the scriptures uses when referring to himself) in Sanskrit was transcribed into *Da Sa A Jie* 怛薩阿竭 in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* 道行般若經, translated by Lokakṣema 支婁迦讖 (or 支讖). Another examples are *Maitreya* in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* 道行般若經. It was phonetically transcribed into *Mile* 彌勒 based on the pronunciation of Tocharian A, *Metrak*, and Tocharian B, *Maitrāk*. The phonetic transcription preserves the sounds and the phonetic features of the source language. The second tendency is semantic translation, and this reflects that the choice of Chinese characters is associated with the meaning. For example, the previous example of *Tathāgata* in Sanskrit was later semantically translated into *Rulai* 如來 (Thus gone) and *Maitreya* 彌勒 was semantically translated into *Ci Shi* 慈氏 in some sutra translations. The semantic translation was not adopted as a main strategy until the Buddhist monks had a better command of Chinese and chose the best words to connect with the original meaning in Sanskrit. What is worth noticing is that the third tendency, combining partly phonetic transcription and partly semantic translation, has been repeatedly employed in the past few important periods of translation, not only for the Buddhist sutra translation but also for the translation of the Western knowledge. For example, the term 禪定 combined a part of phonetic transcription from *Dhyāna* 禪那 with a Chinese character, *Chan* 禪, and a part of the semantic translation of 定, which was translated from the meaning of *Samatha*. Another example is *Mara* in Sanskrit. It was partially

phonetically transcribed and partially semantically translated into *Mo Gui* 魔鬼. The first character, *Mo* 魔, came from the elliptical pronunciation of *Mara* in Sanskrit; *Gui* 鬼 was originally used to describe the ghosts in the Han pantheist tradition, but here it is used to denote the obstacles, *Ye* 業, in Buddhist practice. In addition, *kṣamā* in Sanskrit originally means repenting and confession to others. The Chinese translation of *kṣamā* combines the phonetic transcription, *Chan* 懺, as the first word, and the semantic translation, *Hui* 悔, as the second word.

From the above examples, we can see that partially phonetic transcription combined with partially semantic translation is not a new phenomenon in the Sinitic languages. Instead, it might be thought of as a tradition of Sinicization. Another example is revealed in the translation of Western science. In the second climax of translation, the late Ming dynasty, when Matteo Ricci translated *The Original Manuscript of Geometry* with Xu Guangqi 徐光啓, they chose to record “geometry” with the sound of the Chinese character *Ji* 幾 and the second word, *He* 何, which means “how big and what shape the area is.” These semantic-transcribed terms in Buddhist sutra translation and the translation of Western science combined the phonetic transcription as the first part and the semantic translation as the second part. The advantages of this group of terms are that, not only did they maintain the sounds of the original language, such as Sanskrit, Western languages, or Taiwanese and Japanese (discussed in the later part of this paper), but also the semantic translation portion could help avoid confusion and evoke association of meaning. In Taiwan Mandarin, a great quantity of semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese vocabulary appears and is employed currently in different kinds of media. Though these semantic-transcribed terms in Taiwan Mandarin seem to be a regional phenomenon, the principles of the semantic-transcription parallel the third tendency indicated previously. In the next part of the paper, not only will the formation of Taiwan Mandarin be described, but we will also see how the three groups of the Japanese and Taiwanese vocabulary semantic-transcribed into Chinese show the footprints of past translation principles.

The Historical Background of the Formation of Taiwan Mandarin

Taiwan Mandarin is different from Mandarin spoken in other regions, and it has incorporated

many terms from other cultures. However, several languages have been used as the main language in different periods before Taiwan Mandarin became dominant recently in Taiwan. This is because Taiwanese society is a society of immigrants who moved there in different periods over the past four centuries, and the main dominant language was chosen by the ruling government or used by the major ethnic group at that time. The first group of inhabitants living on this island, and still resident, is the indigenous people, and this group can be divided into twelve tribes composed of people who shared the same origins as the Austronesians. The second period extends from the late Ming dynasty to the beginning of Japanese colonial rule in 1895. Most of the immigrants during this period came from Fujian 福建 and Guangdong 廣東 provinces. The immigrants from Fujian spoke the Southern Min topolect while the Hakka people from Fujian, Guangdong, and Anhui formed a comparatively minor ethnic group and lived within their own community in Taiwan. The people who spoke the Southern Min topolect were mostly from Amoy 廈門, Quanzhou 泉州 and Zhangzhou 漳州. In addition, some of the immigrants from part of Guangdong 廣東, Hainan 海南 and Zhejiang 浙江 could also speak the Southern Min topolect. The third period of immigration came after 1945, the end of World War II. This was the second wave of immigration from the Mainland China: the Nationalist Government led by Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 settled in Taiwan after their defeat by the Communists, and it brought groups of Chinese people speaking a diversity of topolects to Taiwan. After several generations and changes of regimes, each language passed on some of its characteristics and added to the variety of languages and their uses in Taiwan.

Due to the constant flow of immigrants and the specific language policy formulated and facilitated by each regime, the languages used in Taiwan interchanged with and influenced each other. According to Kubler, “when several groups of speakers of different languages live closely together and, to a greater or lesser extent, interact with each other, language contact is bound to occur.” As a community that always receives immigrants and accepts the foreign language when a new regime predominates, Taiwan has been inclined to absorb other language features into its own, and in the beginning phonetic transcription was the rule. For example, during the late Ming dynasty, Taiwan was ruled by the Dutch and the Spanish, and the names of places, such as Relanzhe Cheng 熱蘭遮城 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: Ji’at-lân-jia Siâⁿ, a Taiwanese

transcription of the Forte Zeelandia named by the Dutch) and San Diao Jiao 三貂角 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: Sam-tiau-kak, a Taiwanese transcription of Cape San Diego, as named by the Spanish) were formed.

When it came to the period of Japanese colonial rule, the language dominance of Japanese and its prevalent culture caused its vocabulary to penetrate into and be borrowed by the Taiwanese topolect. The Japanese government encouraged the Taiwanese people to speak Japanese and even carried out compulsory Japanese education. According to Lee Zhiyuan 李知沅, “in order to eradicate the national awareness and nationalism of Taiwanese people, Japanese language education was strongly promoted.” The Taiwan Governor-General’s Office also formulated, in 1933, a ten-year promotion plan, which aimed to propagate the language so that the Japanese-speaking population would reach fifty per cent. By 1940, the proportion of those literate in Japanese had exceeded fifty-one per cent, and by 1944 exceeded seventy-one per cent. Japan had not only laid the foundation for Taiwanese people’s admiration of and obedience to Japanese authority as represented by the Japanese language and culture, but it also distinguished Taiwanese from the Southern Min, due to the borrowed terms from Japanese. For example, at that time, ‘donation’ 寄付 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *kià-hù*) and stamps 切手 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *tshiat-tshiu*) were borrowed from Japanese. These Japanese borrowed terms were internalized as an integral part of the Taiwanese topolect and came to be used by the Taiwanese people as a result of the popularized use of Japanese. The Chinese characters used in Japanese, *Kanji*, for these terms were borrowed into Taiwanese and then pronounced in Taiwanese. From the above examples, it is revealed that while Taiwanese people accepted the terms from a foreign language, the implied message was that Imperial Japan and Japanese culture were at the highest rung of the language hierarchy at that period of time. On the other hand, by imposing the compulsory Japanese language education, the Imperial Japanese Government manifested its full control over the Taiwanese people, including their languages.

The struggle for language dominance was further extended after the Nationalist government moved to Taiwan, leading to the suppression of spoken Taiwanese. The large-scale Taiwanese opposition after World War II, an example of which is the 228 Event, posed a major threat to the legitimacy of the Nationalist Government’s rule over Taiwan. In addition, the

profound Japanese indoctrination, the high literacy in Japanese, and the economic and social development propelled by Japanese colonial rule made a stark contrast, and were seen to jeopardize the Nationalist Government's grip on power. In order to consolidate its authority, the language policy, speaking the Standard (Beijing) Mandarin, expanded rapidly from teaching school children in the elementary school to being expected of the adults. In the journal article "Language Ideology in Taiwan," Hsiao A-chin indicates that the language policy imposed by KMT aimed "on the one hand to 'de-Japanise' and on the other to 'Chinise' the people of the island." In addition, the terms borrowed from Japanese and then used in Taiwanese were also banned. However, in spite of the strong oppression of the use of Taiwanese and words borrowed from Japanese, these were nonetheless preserved and were transformed into terms used in Taiwan Mandarin.

The semantic-transcribed terms from Japanese and Taiwanese vocabulary were not popular until the society in Taiwan was released from the control of dictatorship, when the younger generation felt freer to transcribe semantically the terms from Japanese and Taiwanese (topolect) into Taiwan Mandarin. After the Nationalist Government moved to Taiwan, standard Beijing Mandarin was promoted as the only official language, with strict enforcement. The KMT's Nationalist Government regarded itself as the only legitimate regime, and speaking Standard Mandarin as a national language was taken to prove that the Republic of China in Taiwan was an authentic representation and extension of China. According to Hsiao, "Mandarin is held to be the focal point of linguistic unity and ethnic harmony. It is also the marker of KMT dominance." However, though Taiwanese was degraded to a topolect during KMT rule, and there was a decreasing number of youngsters who could speak fluent Taiwanese, nevertheless, following the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, the importance of Taiwanese has been growing stronger, and it has also been used as an indicator of identity and politics. While most politicians, such as the former president Lee Denghui, might try to deliver their speeches in Taiwanese in order to reiterate their assertion of Taiwan's unique identity, different from China's, the younger generation manages to incorporate pieces of the remains from Taiwanese and Japanese, such as Taiwanese and Japanese vocabulary, to join this imagined community in spite of their lesser command of Taiwanese itself. Gradually, a kind of "standard" Taiwan Mandarin developed,

which is currently what is spoken by the great majority of both native Taiwanese and mainlanders.

Taiwan Mandarin vs. Beijing Mandarin

Due to the language contact with the Southern Min, Japanese, and other topolects, Taiwan Mandarin is different from the standard Mandarin or Beijing Mandarin. Or it should be assumed that there is no standard Mandarin, just as it is impossible to argue that American English is the Standard. Though Taiwan Mandarin shares the seventy per cent of its lexical terms with Beijing Mandarin due to their common ancestry, these two still vary greatly in phonology, syntax, and vocabulary. For example, according to David Chen-ching Li, Taiwan Mandarin has “the salient features of the gradual loss of the non-syllabic final *-r* and retroflexivization,” both of which are the characteristics of Beijing Mandarin. Aside from the phonological and syntactic differences, which are not the main focus of this paper, there are semantic-transcribed terms borrowed from Taiwanese and Japanese, which manifest that the past dissemination of culture and language will not come to a grinding halt even when the regime is expelled. Instead, the cultural impact of both the native language and the past education imposed by Japan re-emerge in the currently-used Taiwan Mandarin.

In addition, speaking and using Taiwan Mandarin with these semantic-transcribed terms also manifests a local spirit of Taiwanese, being passionate and energetic. While *Putonghua* is strongly enforced in Mainland China to establish a polity unity, Taiwan Mandarin is formed in Taiwan not only for communication but also for a sense of identity, belonging, and togetherness. Speaking and using the same semantic-transcribed terms from Japanese and Taiwanese in Taiwan Mandarin assists the formation of this mentality. Before the lifting of Martial Law, when the Taiwanese people were all oppressed and made to speak Mandarin only, Mandarin became the symbol of “modernity, refinement, literacy, urbanity, high socio-economic status, and the like,” while speaking Taiwanese was regarded as more local and vulgar, but with the implication of being more honest and passionate. With the rising awareness of Taiwanese people, speaking Taiwanese and using the terms from Japanese and Taiwanese (topolect) is no longer considered despicable anymore.

What is more, linguistically speaking, it seems unavoidable that Taiwan Mandarin carries certain linguistic features, such as terms borrowed from Taiwanese and Japanese. Robert L. Cheng, in *A Comparison of Taiwanese, Taiwan Mandarin, and Beijing Mandarin*, points out that,

Three major forces seem to be at work in the shaping of TM. First is a drift toward those characteristics common to the entire Chinese language family, away from those Altaic features peculiar to PM. Second is the tendency to carry over features of the second-language learner’s native language. Last is the tendency to adopt features that are simpler, more regular, and therefore easier to process.

The first explains why Taiwan Mandarin and Beijing Mandarin still share a common vocabulary; the second explicates the way that once a lingua franca, such as Mandarin, is learned, the learners and the subsequent generations will still keep the linguistic features of their native language, such as Taiwanese. The third tendency illuminates the fact that due to the deeply rooted cultural and language implications as well as the frequent use of terms from Taiwanese and Japanese, it might be simpler for the speakers to borrow and then semantically transcribe the terms from Japanese and Taiwanese. With a variety of linguistic features from past footprints, Taiwan Mandarin thus gradually becomes “the most acceptable Mandarin” in Taiwan because it has been accepted and spoken not only by the younger generation of Taiwanese but also by the next generations of the mainlanders who moved to Taiwan and have grown up here. Speaking Taiwan Mandarin thus has become a label signifying that one is a member in this imagined community.

Semantic-Transcribed Terms from Japanese and Taiwanese

Taiwan Mandarin borrowed terms from Japanese and Taiwanese; though Taiwanese (topolect) belongs to the language family of Sinitic languages, the terms from Taiwanese (topolect), along with loan words from Japanese, follow the principles of Sinicizing the words of foreign origin. According to Liu Xing 柳星, words of foreign origin need to be Sinicized because “the Sinitic languages are tonal languages and languages of expressing meaning.” As the previous three tendencies indicate: In the beginning stage, there are some borrowed terms in Taiwan Mandarin

that are fully transcribed phonetically from Japanese and Taiwanese. It was because Taiwanese (topolect) does not have a unified writing system to transcribe the sounds, and Japanese words were also phonetically transcribed first due to their foreign origin. However, it seems to be an inevitable trend that the incorporated terms are gradually more and more semantically-transcribed, because when characters unrelated to the original meaning are chosen for the phonetic transcription, the terms are more rarely retained. There are more and more words that are partially semantically-translated and partially phonetically-transcribed. In the meantime, there are also terms that are fully phonetically transcribed, but the characters chosen for the phonetic transcription happen to match or be associated with the meaning in the source language to some extent. These semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese words later appear in daily use when the sounds and the meaning of Taiwanese words are simultaneously understood and accepted by the subsequent generations of the first-generation mainlanders and the Taiwanese people whose ancestors were from China centuries ago.

Due to the tendency of meaning expression in Chinese, the quantity of semantic-transcribed terms always exponentially exceeds the number of fully phonetically-transcribed terms. As for the semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese terms, there are three categories. The first category shows that when the term is phonetically transcribed, the words chosen in Chinese for transcription happen to match the semantic meaning to some extent. The terms are constituted by characters that encompass the phonetic transcription while the characters also denote the meaning, which helps the retention of the terms. This is not uncommon in the past translation of loanwords. Coca-Cola (可口可樂, *Kekou-kele*), TOEFL (托福, *Tuofu*) and Hacker (駭客, *Haike*) are examples of phonetic transcriptions but they also use words to match the semantic meaning. The following is a chart of the semantic-transcribed terms in the first group in Taiwan Mandarin.

Terms of Taiwan Mandarin	Origin	Meaning in Chinese	Meaning in English
吐槽	Taiwanese (Tu Tsiau)	找碴	to pick on
碎碎唸	Taiwanese (séh-séh-liām)	不斷地抱怨	to complain

膨風	Taiwanese (phòng-hong)	吹牛	to talk big
運匠/運將	Japanese (うんちゃん)	司機	driver (usually taxi drivers)
養樂多	Japanese (ヨーグルト)	一種活菌發酵乳	one brand of yogurt drink
安打	Japanese (あんだ)	安打	hits in a baseball game

In the above list, the semantic-transcribed terms are mostly content words, instead of function words. In addition, the characters used in these semantic-transcribed terms also create a vivid image for the expression. For example, the word *tu* 吐 (spit) in 吐槽 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: Tu Tsiau) matches the action of “picking on” while the word *sui* 碎 in the term 碎碎念 (Church Romanization: *séh-séh-liām*) parallels the action of nagging others repetitively. In addition, among the semantic-transcribed Japanese terms in the first group, the word and the pronunciation *Chan* 匠 (ちゃん) in the term 運匠 has become a common suffix for a familiar person, which denotes that the taxi drivers are close to us in our daily lives. Furthermore, due to the widespread penetration of Japanese culture, the words for food and drink like 養樂多 (ヨーグルト) and baseball jargon, such as 安打 (あんだ) have shed their identity as foreign words and have become widely accepted as a part of local culture and shared memory.

The second category of the semantic-transcribed terms is the group of terms combining a part from phonetic transcription and another part from semantic translation. The following is a list of this group of terms collected as examples.

Terms of Taiwan Mandarin	Origin	Meaning in Chinese	Meaning in English
奧客 (音+義)	Taiwanese (àu-kheh)	爛客人	A bad customer
速配	Taiwanese	天作之合	Perfectly matched (as a couple)

(音+義)	(sù-phuè/sù-phè)		
噲聲 (音+義)	Taiwanese (tshiàng-siann)	講話大聲來示威	To talk loudly to prove his strength
阿莎力 (音+義)	Japanese (あつさり)	乾脆、慷慨果斷	Decisive and generous
涮涮鍋 (音+義)	Japanese (しゃぶしゃぶ)	一種日式火鍋	Japanese hotpot

From the above list, it is clear that the combination is always composed with phonetic transcription as the first part and the semantic translation as the second. In addition, these terms entail two to three syllables, which are easier to retain and fit the normal principles of forming Chinese terms, while “four syllables and above will be hard to remember.” The use of these terms combining phonetic transcription and semantic translation also propel a new local culture. For example, the word 奧 (ao) in the term 奧客 (Church Romanization of Chinese: *àu-kheh*) has become a prefix to be attached to some terms and indicates that it is something or someone impolite, such as 奧厝邊 (a bad neighbor, Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *àu-tshù-pinn*). In addition, with the combination of sounds and meaning, these terms convey a more powerful and lively image. For example, the term 速配 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *sù-phuè/sù-phè*) connotes a perfectly matched couple, like a couple of our friends or relatives living close by, while the terms *Tian zuo zhi he* 天作之合 (a match blessed by God) might establish a fairy-tale-like image but not one as approachable and achievable as the previous term. In addition, the terms 噲聲 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *tshiàng-siann*) and 阿莎力 (あつさり) now are not just used by the lower class in the society but also employed by the educated and social elites. When these terms are used, not only is the meaning expressed, but, due to the past history and the personality of the Taiwanese people, the imbedded message of being frank and straightforward, the by-products will be a stress on kinship and fraternity, reducing the distance between people.

The third group of semantic-transcribed terms is an extension from the first group. When

Taiwan Mandarin borrowed the semantic-transcribed terms from Taiwanese, these Taiwanese terms were actually borrowed from Japanese loanwords that were originally from English. The examples are listed in the chart below.

Terms of Taiwan Mandarin	Origin	Meaning in Chinese
損龜	Skunk→スコンク→Taiwanese (kòng-ku)	失敗
紅不讓	Homerun→ホームラン→Taiwanese (Hông-put-lâng)	全壘打

Due to the inter-influence among languages, Taiwan Mandarin incorporates semantic-transcribed Taiwanese terms indirectly borrowed from Japanese and English. This principle of indirect borrowing was also seen in the Late Qing period. While Japanese language borrowed the *Kanji* in classical Chinese literature to translate Western ideas and then assimilated them in Japan, the translation of these words with Chinese characters was later disseminated back to China, and these became set terms accepted by Chinese literati. These terms include *Wenxue* 文學 (literature) and *Jingji* 經濟 (economy). On the other hand, the indirect borrowing in Taiwan Mandarin went through more transformations through different languages. For example, the word *Ganggui* 損龜 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *kòng-ku*) is usually seen in the newspapers and is used to describe someone who has not won the lottery or has failed an exam. *Ganggui* 損龜 is actually borrowed from a Japanese word, スコンク, which was itself a transcription of the English word, ‘skunk.’ Another example is the *Hongburang* 紅不讓 (Church Romanization of Taiwanese: *Hông-put-lâng*), which is not only used in a baseball game but also is employed to describe a comprehensive victory. Therefore, even a variety show in Taiwan has used this word as its name. The term *Hongburang* 紅不讓 borrowed from the Japanese word ホームラン, which was transcribed from the English word, ‘home run.’ In spite of the indirect borrowing and the word transformation from different languages, words in the third group of semantic-transcribed terms in Taiwan Mandarin retain their own meanings with a new form, different from the source

language, and instills new energy from other languages, in addition to Taiwanese and Japanese, into Taiwan Mandarin.

Conclusion

In modern Taiwan, the use of Taiwan Mandarin is influenced by these semantic-transcribed terms, and these terms become not only a fashion in the minds of the younger generation but also a representation of an imagined community, the society of the Taiwanese. These terms are not solely used by the politicians but have become commonly used by the public. According to Hsieh and Hsu, "the change of the society is reflected in the language, such as the change of the lexical structure." On the World Wide Web, there are 2,900,000 links using "吐槽;" there are 18,700,000 links using "速配;" there are 841,000 links using "嗆聲;" there are 734,000 links using "擯龜." These terms are not short-lived fads or phenomena; instead, they have been incorporated into daily life and have been used as significant markers of Taiwan Mandarin and as a label of identity. In addition, these semantic-transcribed terms from Japanese and Taiwanese prove that the semantic transcription is one of the major tendencies in the Sinitic languages when faced with terms from another language or topolect. Though with different historical and cultural backgrounds, the development of Taiwan Mandarin with words from a semantic-transcribed vocabulary may eventually lead to a mutual unintelligibility between Beijing Mandarin and Taiwan Mandarin, Taiwan Mandarin also manifests that, with its own unique language power and linguistic features, it can exert a powerful influence over the interchange with Beijing Mandarin. For example, there are 2.93 million links or Websites in China using "碎碎念" out of 29.6 million links in the world using "碎碎念." In this paper, what has been discussed is only a small part out of a great number of the semantic-transcribed Japanese and Taiwanese terms. With these terms, Taiwan Mandarin maintains the linguistic value of the remains from the country's history and also helps to weave a new and bright blanket, with which the Taiwanese people are able to embrace their identity and to embark on the journey to their next stage.

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Language and the Evolution of the Taiwanese Elite in the Japanese Colonial Era:
From Chinese Gentry to Taiwanese Polyglots

by Rashon Clark

For the upper strata of Taiwanese society, the early 1920s inaugurated a brave new world. Change was rapidly engulfing East Asia, bringing both hope and uncertainty. In China, the protests of May 4, 1919, against Western and Japanese imperialism had just ignited the “New Culture Movement,” which provoked a nationwide reevaluation of traditional Chinese culture. Likewise, in a similar shift for Japanese society in 1918, Hara Takashi became the first commoner appointed prime minister, signaling the beginning of Japan’s “Taisho democracy” — an era of widespread excitement about liberalism, socialism, equality, and social change.¹ Taiwan sat in the center of these changes, at a confluence of new strands of culture, society, politics, and especially language. In fact, the Taiwan of the Japanese colonial period can be analyzed as a kind of linguistic laboratory in which the orthography, pedagogy, and literary forms of the Chinese, Japanese, and Western traditions were fused, morphed, and experimented with. This created a nearly unique language paradigm, with few analogues in the history of the Sinitic world.

Although Taiwan had existed at the frontier of the Chinese polity for centuries, by 1920 its two decades under Japanese imperial control had pulled its people deep into the Japanese cultural sphere. Raised entirely under Japanese colonial authority, many of the upper- and middle-class Taiwanese born at the turn of the century experienced a thoroughly modern Japanese education. They spoke Japanese fluently, practiced Japanese customs, and took part in

¹ Stephen S. Large, “Oligarchy, Democracy, and Fascism,” in *A Companion to Japanese History*, ed. William M. Tsutsui (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 160.

the Japanese colonial bureaucracy as teachers, physicians, and clerks. Lacking their own institutions of higher education, many Taiwanese even went off to study in the "home islands."²

This was in stark contrast to the Taiwan of only forty years earlier. As a province of the Qing Empire, it had been managed by an imperial administration composed of scholar-officials. These were men steeped in Confucian learning and allocated the uppermost positions in the traditional Chinese social order. Their language was the prestigious Classical Chinese, a written language largely detached from the languages the Taiwanese spoke. E. Patricia Tsurumi remarks about this gentry-elite, "Although the class was small, it was, like the group on the mainland, extremely important because of its wealth, status, and power."³

The concern of this study is to discover the dynamics and implications of this radical shift. In addition, it seeks to chronicle the rise of Modern Chinese and Written Taiwanese in Taiwan, two written languages that possessed little or no cultural capital in pre-colonial Taiwan. By the end of the Japanese colonial period, these and a number of other languages had gained a foothold on the island. Moreover, the existence of a burgeoning middle class gave a newly expanded readership to a plethora of newspapers and journals, published not only in Japanese, but also in Classical Chinese, the newly developed Modern Chinese, and even Taiwanese. Many Taiwanese not only consumed reading materials, but also became active participants in creating a new linguistic paradigm, through the writing of short stories, poetry, editorials, manuals, and Western-style diaries. With such a broad range of coalescing new media forms, and a variety of languages to choose from, code switching and language choice became a doorway into the complex interplay of language, identity, and politics going on in the Taiwan of the 1920s.

To address this thesis, the paper has three aims: to examine the social, political, and economic dimensions of language change in colonial Taiwanese society, to note the actual effects of these dimensions on language use, and, finally, to explore the use of language in identity formation in the 1920s. According to Leo T. S. Ching, a scholar of the Japanese colonial period,

² E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 177.

³ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 177.

colonial Taiwan is characterized by identity formations that both conflicted and coalesced.⁴ These identities were principally formed through language. Japanese, Taiwanese, Modern Chinese, and Classical Chinese were all integral parts of contemporary Taiwanese society, and the battle over which respective identity would hold sway was played out mainly through language policy and politics.

To understand how the Japanese period transformed Taiwan into a linguistic laboratory, with qualities largely distinct from the mainland, one must be acquainted with two sets of facts. The first is knowledge of the dynamics governing Japan’s “nation-building” process as created and managed by the Meiji oligarchy. The second is knowledge of Taiwanese society directly preceding the Japanese annexation of the island in 1895. These two conceptions of social organization, that of a Confucian society organized around a civil bureaucracy, and that of the modern Japanese nation-state sustained by a cohesive citizenry, have vastly different aims and assumptions. The use of language comprised a large number of these assumptions, and it was only natural for conflicts to arise between the two. Most of the unique patterns of linguistic change of this period developed out of these conflicts. A brief history of both traditions is necessary in order to understand Taiwan’s “roaring twenties.”

Japan’s First Colonial Experiment

In 1895, Japanese victory in the first Sino-Japanese War was confirmed with the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which, along with granting spheres of influence in a few of China’s coastal provinces, also ceded Taiwan to Japanese control.⁵ Although long an ambition of the ruling Japanese oligarchy, the annexation of Taiwan was a relatively unexpected windfall. At the time there was much uncertainty in Tokyo about the actual nature of Japan’s coming expansion. Would Taiwan be incorporated as one of the “home islands,” as were Hokkaido and the Ryukyu

⁴ Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 56.

⁵ Harry J. Lamley, “Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule, 1895–1945: The Vicissitudes of Colonialism,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 203.

islands, or would there be a clear demarcation between the *metropole* and the colony, as was the case with Britain and India?⁶

This decision was far more than an abstraction to be worked out in political doctrines. The implications would be very significant. Full incorporation into the Japanese empire would consist of assimilating the Taiwanese into the Japanese polity and cultural world, while adherence to the British model would mean maintenance of Japanese suzerainty through coercion and force, with the native culture left largely untouched. As with most decisions, expense and feasibility weighed the heaviest. After a number of extended and violent pacification campaigns in the first years of Japanese rule, the newly established Taiwan Affairs Bureau was persuaded to adopt a middle course. The island was to be governed for an indefinite period by a martial administration led by a governor-general, but it would at least nominally operate under a policy of *doka* (assimilation).⁷

Doka was elaborated as "extending the system of Japan to the colonies" (*naichi enchoshugi*).⁸ For the oligarchy then shaping the new Japanese nation-state, this mainly meant the exportation of Japanese social and educational institutions that ensured fidelity to the emperor and to the central government in Tokyo. This included a standardized national language and education system that engendered a sense of belonging to the nation, a modern civil bureaucracy, and a full-scale modernization program that would ensure that all of these could be implemented smoothly. This was meant to reinforce a self-identification with the Japanese nation rather than an individual's native village, province, or, in Taiwan's case, country. For the Taiwanese, assimilation was essentially the embrace of the Japanese socio-cultural package, and represented the recognition and acceptance of Japanese imperial rule. Resistance to Japanese assimilation was the rejection of this authority.

⁶ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 204.

⁷ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 204.

⁸ Ching, 51.

As education was the primary tool for engendering a self-identification with the Japanese nation-state, Japanese education, and later the Japanese language, would naturally become the most significant symbols of assimilation. E. Patricia Tsurumi observes,

The Japanese wanted to replace “backward” Chinese learning with the modern, scientific education pursued so enthusiastically in Meiji Japan ... [and] because Chinese classical studies had been associated with Taiwan’s past under Chinese rule, many Japanese regarded them with suspicion.

Although the importation of Japanese education was characterized as a goal unto itself, it was carefully implemented to displace Chinese Confucian, and to a lesser extent, Christian education.⁹ Correspondingly, the prestige language of each educational system, respectively Classical Chinese and Taiwanese, would also become targets of such “displacement.” “Displacement” was not “destruction” only because the Japanese colonial administration’s use of a “carrot-and-stick” policy slowed its course, in addition to a general lack of resources.

The importance the Japanese placed on language and education as instruments for control and governance cannot be overstated. Only a month after the formal transference of Taiwan to Japanese control in June of 1895,¹⁰ the first Japanese language school was already established in a suburb of Taipei.¹¹ Izawa Shuji, the first head of the colonial administration’s Bureau of Educational Affairs, established the school in an abandoned temple, quite literally attempting to lay the foundation of colonial education on top of the traditional Chinese education system. In a speech inaugurating the establishment of the school, Izawa spoke to the local community to garner support. He explained that the bureau’s plan was to use “education to make Taiwanese into law-abiding Japanese citizens.”¹² Izawa was quite passionate about the project. Even after

⁹ Lamley, “Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule,” 211.

¹⁰ Lamley, “Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule,” 204.

¹¹ Eika Tai, “Kokugo and Colonial Education in Taiwan.,” *Positions* 7.2 (1999), 511.

¹² Harry J. Lamley, “The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915” (Ph.D. Dissertation, 1964), 14.

hostile locals killed six of the school's teachers in January of the following year, Izawa continued to expand his program, establishing fourteen more Japanese language schools in 1896.¹³

The Japanese language was pushed to the forefront, and the colonial education system became language-centric. The first schools established by the colonial administration were institutions primarily for language instruction rather than science or arithmetic. As the principal goal of education was to produce loyal imperial subjects, it was essential for Japanese language to be the principal subject. Knowledge of mathematics would not ensure loyalty to the emperor. William Campbell, an English Presbyterian missionary working in the Tainan area, observed the emphasis on language. He noted, "opportunities for acquiring knowledge of the Japanese language they could not get elsewhere. Much stress was laid upon this last named item."¹⁴ Education was a highly valued tool of the colonial administration, specifically education through the Japanese language.

The focus on language was also a pragmatic decision. Assimilation was perceived as an end as well as a means. For Japanese policy-makers, the acquisition of Taiwan offered a resource-laden colony abundant with arable land as well as a strategic southern outpost for the defense of the home islands.¹⁵ The only obstacle to the realization of these plans was the Taiwanese themselves, whom the Japanese perceived as decidedly un-modern and, in their current state, unable to accept the full range of Japanese modernization. The Japanese believed that in order to transform its new colonial possession into a profitable enterprise, they had to enact a wholesale transfer of the modern Meiji bureaucracy onto Taiwan.¹⁶ This would mean economic development and modernization in the manner witnessed by Japan only a few years

¹³ Tai, 511.

¹⁴ William Campbell, *Formosa Under the Japanese: Being Notes of a Visit to the Taichu Prefecture* (Tainan: English Presbyterian Mission, 1902), 17.

¹⁵ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 203.

¹⁶ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 204.

earlier during the first decades of the Meiji Restoration — railways, telegraph lines, standardized currency, a modern postal service, commercial agriculture, and national banking system.¹⁷

This would require smooth communication between the ruler and the ruled. Implicit in the implementation of the colonial endeavor was the existence of a literate, and orderly, if not loyal populace. This largely meant a pliable but healthy workforce. To attain this kind of labor pool, the rulers believed they needed to rid Taiwanese society of a variety of social ills that could hamper the colonial project, such as foot-binding and unsanitary lifestyles.¹⁸ At the very least, the Taiwanese needed to understand the orders relayed to them. As a result, the Japanese colonial endeavor was conceived with a long list of logistical problems concerning language. How would the Japanese communicate with their new subjects? In what language would they learn and live their new culture? Such were the problems that the new education system hoped to solve.

These were problems conceived in the mind of ethnocentric colonial administrators, so it was natural that their solution would be Japanese language education; however, this fact conceals an even more difficult question that disturbed colonial educators. How would they transform a populace that was largely illiterate for centuries into a thoroughly educated citizenry, and this in a language different from their mother tongue? Moreover, how were they to enact the changes in such a way as to maintain a consistent pace for modernization? There was no precedent for mass, public education in Taiwanese society, and even the elite were relatively “uneducated” in terms of the standards of the mainland. Moreover, as elaborated later in this paper, the linguistic characteristics of traditional Chinese society were entirely unsuited to the paradigm of modern education. Consequently, the Japanese were attempting to implement something much more ambitious than assimilation. They were trying to create a new society. Therefore, the language changes that took place on Taiwan have a social and even economic dimension. The society of pre-colonial Taiwan, of the deteriorating Qing Empire, provided the context for these changes.

¹⁷ Lamley, “Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule,” 209.

¹⁸ Lamley, “Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule,” 210.

Foundations and Education of Pre-Colonial Taiwanese Society

The Taiwan of the pre-colonial period was vastly different from Meiji Japan, or even the “early modern” Japan of the Tokugawa era. This was not solely due to cultural differences between China and Japan. Taiwan was a “frontier” society composed of settlers and transients, and, thus, it lacked many of the characteristics indicative of more stable societies found in Mainland China or the Japanese archipelago. Until the early seventeenth century, Taiwan was largely populated by a number of different groups of non-Chinese hunter-gathers and slash-and-burn agriculturalists, linguistically categorized as an Austronesian people.¹⁹ Han settlers did not migrate to the island in numbers until the early 1600s, when the Dutch recruited Chinese migrants from nearby Fujian province to help transform the island into a profitable export colony.²⁰ After relatively short periods of rule by the Dutch, the Spanish, and fleeing loyalists of the recently toppled Ming dynasty, Taiwan was finally brought under Qing authority in 1684.²¹

From this year until the mid-1880s, Taiwan is best characterized as a frontier of the Qing Empire. Imperial authorities largely viewed the island as a nest of rebels and a malarial backwater unfit for large-scale colonization. Accordingly, the Qing enacted policies to depopulate Taiwan and quarantine it from further colonization. They only reluctantly incorporated the island into the empire due to coastal security concerns.²² Despite these efforts, frequent rebellion by aborigines and Han settlers, as well as intra-ethnic feuds spilling over from southern China, menaced the Qing administration during their first century and a half of rule.²³

¹⁹ Ronald G. Knapp, “The Shaping of Taiwan’s Landscapes,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 9.

²⁰ Knapp, 12.

²¹ Murray A. Rubinstein, “Introduction,” *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), xiii.

²² John R. Shepherd, “The Island Frontier of the Ch’ing 1684–1780,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 109.

²³ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 7.

After restrictions to immigration were lifted in the 1780s, a flood of immigrants led to a tripling of the population of the island by 1824, to almost two million.²⁴ This began the transformation of Taiwan from a frontier society to a "settled" society.

Such a transition did not necessitate the immediate arrival and spread of all the trappings of Han culture as recognized on mainland, especially that of the upper strata. Education, literacy, and "high" culture remained at a premium. Harry Lamley notes, "the unsettled conditions prevalent throughout Taiwan had a deleterious effect on the development of the island literati group. Uprisings delayed the growth of schools and hindered the workings of the examination system."²⁵ The lack of a large or effective administration may have also limited the need and demand for education. Therefore, completion of the civil service examinations would have not been a goal of most frontier families. In her genealogy of the Lins of Wufeng, Johanna Meskill notes that their local urban center of Chang-hua had established an examination system in 1726, but it "produced few higher literati, no chin-shih in the eighteenth century, and only two chu-jen before the 1770s."²⁶ She further observes that "there were few exertions on behalf of higher learning and the arts.... Intellectual and artistic endeavors must have seemed frivolous to an upper class that was still little removed from the pragmatism and materialism of the wider society."²⁷ The treacherous Taiwan straits impeded native Taiwanese who wanted to study on the mainland, as well as would-be scholar émigrés, also creating a barrier for the creation of a scholarly class.²⁸ The absence of a scholarly elite is a significant point to emphasize, for without a stable assemblage of highly educated teachers, scholars, and civil servants, the Taiwanese

²⁴ Chen Chiukun, "From Landlords to Local Strongmen: The Transformation of Local Elites in Mid-Ch'ing Taiwan, 1780–1862," in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein. (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 137.

²⁵ Harry J. Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915" (Ph.D. Dissertation, 1964), 82, 83.

²⁶ Johanna M. Meskill, *A Chinese Pioneer Family: The Lins of Wu-feng, Taiwan, 1729–1895*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 54.

²⁷ Meskill, 55.

²⁸ Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915", 83.

upper strata's outlook on education may have been much different from that of the elite of traditional Mainland China.

Change came only much later during a boom in education and literati culture in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Prompted by Taiwan's entrance into a modern market economy, the education paradigm on the island slowly began to shift. Precipitated by the Treaty of Peking in 1860, which "opened" the Taiwanese ports of Danshui and Anping to foreign trade, many local leaders in Taiwan began to come into affluence.²⁹ Their rise in wealth also corresponded with an expansion of the Qing administration to accompany new "self-strengthening" and modernization campaigns on the island.³⁰ Now firmly secured in their position in society, many established, wealthy families sought to become gentry in the traditional Chinese sense. Besides the construction of grandiose mansions, the most direct path to "gentrification" was the purchase of official positions and titles, and the funding of their sons' education for the civil service examinations. New wealth and an expanded administration allowed for all three.³¹

The expansion of education was illustrated by the rapid establishment of new community schools known as *shuyuan* (書院). These served predominantly as preparatory schools for the civil service examinations.³² In 1796 there were only twelve of these schools across the entire island, but by the eve of the Japanese annexation in 1895 almost forty had been established. Harry Lamley notes that during this period Taiwan's growing class of scholars began a "poetry renaissance," represented by scores of new literary societies dedicated to "traditional genres of Chinese verse."³³

It may appear that the relationship between the elite of this period and the linguistic

²⁹ Robert Gardella, "From Treaty Ports to Provincial Status, 1860–1894," in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 167.

³⁰ Gardella, 184.

³¹ Gardella, 180.

³² Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915," 98.

³³ Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915," 127.

situation of the 1920s is tenuous, but a deep understanding of the former is needed for even a basic understanding of the latter. By the time of the Japanese annexation, Taiwan's local elite had become the guardians of the traditional Chinese cultural register, which represented their position at the top of the Taiwanese social structure. A classical education for their sons represented not only an affirmation of their heritage, but was also a measure for ensuring the maintenance of their status and ancillary privileges. Perhaps even more significant was the fact that the acquisition of such wealth and education was a relatively recent phenomenon, making the stakes of any change even more tangible. The introduction of Japanese control would turn all the familiar conventions of class and identity upside down.

Within the new colonial administration of the Japanese empire, Japanese, rather than Classical Chinese, would become the new language of business, law, and education. Furthermore, as the Japanese colonial machinery became more entrenched, Classical Chinese would become more and more denigrated as representative of a non-Japanese, backward society. The removal of Classical Chinese as an emblem of prestige, at least in the Japanese conception of Taiwanese society, would not only give room for the expansion of Japanese, but also for Taiwanese and Modern Chinese. The need to use these languages as the *lingua franca* in the written environment as well as the spoken further encouraged their proliferation.

The Pre-colonial Development of Written Taiwanese (*Minnanhua*)

With the exception of pockets of Hakka from Guangdong, the spoken language of settlers in Taiwan was one or another variety of Southern Min (*Minnanhua*), the language then largely spoken in southern Fujian and in some parts of Guangdong and Hainan Island.³⁴ Southern Min has three major dialects, corresponding to three counties in southern Fujian: Quanzhou, Zhangzhou, and Xiamen (Amoy). Settlers mainly hailed from two of these counties, Quanzhou and Zhangzhou.³⁵ Owing to the migratory demographics, the Taiwanese dialect of Southern Min became a fusion of the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou forms known as the Quan-Zhang dialect.

³⁴ Henning Kloter, *Written Taiwanese* (Wiesbaden: Harrsowitz Verlag, 2005), 2.

³⁵ *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Lynn Pan, 23.

Because of its position between Quanzhou and Zhangzhou, Amoy developed a similar fusion Quan-Zhang dialect.³⁶ This is significant, for once Amoy was designated a treaty port and opened to missionaries, the orthographies that they eventually developed for the Quan-Zhang dialect in Amoy could readily be transferred across the straits to Taiwan.

As with most Chinese vernaculars, the writing systems of *Minnanyu*, whether in Chinese or Romanized form, were typically "suppressed by officialdom and neglected by scholarship."³⁷ Beyond this lineage of neglect, there was the actual difficulty of reconciling the large divergence in meaning, sound representation, and grammar between the vernacular and the written form. Despite these obstacles to development, there are a number of materials written in *Minnanhua*. Henning Kloter notes that the earliest extant sources of *Minnanhua* written in Chinese script date back to the sixteenth century, in the form of local dramas. Written media in the language continued to exist long after in the form of rhyme books and songbooks.³⁸ It is important to note that this material was meant to be read aloud or sung rather than to serve in the capacity of a written tradition. It largely did not challenge the supremacy of Classical Chinese.

Written *Minnanyu* also has a long history as a Romanized script. It was first formulated by Catholic priests in the Spanish-dominated Philippines in the sixteenth century as a way to better communicate with and convert Chinese immigrants.³⁹ Later, in the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries in both Fujian and Taiwan would develop a similar alphabetic system most commonly known as Church Romanization. Scholars often make a distinction between the scripts of vernaculars proliferated by Catholic missionaries and those used by Protestant missionaries. Some scholars have noted that, while Catholics only used their scripts for studying the language, Protestants created theirs with the intent of translating religious texts with them and educating the people in the vernacular.

With the use of Church Romanization in weekly services and in the textbooks of their

³⁶ *Encyclopedia*, 23.

³⁷ Kloter, 29.

³⁸ Kloter, 59, 64, 71.

³⁹ Kloter, 41.

schools, Fujianese Christians and, later, Taiwanese Christians would inevitably use Church Romanization as their primary system for writing.⁴⁰ The reason for the slowness of its spread can be attributed to its relatively limited use. It would only develop as far as the Chinese Christian community would develop. Additionally, the position of prestige held by Classical Chinese or even Chinese script could not be usurped so easily. This is the linguistic environment that the Japanese faced when they began their grand colonial endeavor. There was one language for speaking, and a separate language for writing.

Identity Control and Language in the Japanese Colonial Education System

The Japanese, in the person of Bureau of Educational Affairs chief Izawa Shuji, were well aware of the linguistic morass they were stepping into. Accordingly, their initial effort to establish an education system in the years following the annexation of 1895 was fairly extensive, especially considering that rebellions continued to plague the Japanese years into their rule. In his short stint as bureau chief, Izawa launched a number of initiatives to facilitate the creation of an effective educational system. One of these measures was the establishment of an institute to train Japanese teachers in the rudiments of the Taiwanese language. He hoped the six-week course offered to newly arrived trainees would be enough to provide a foundation to begin instruction.⁴¹ Conversely, as mentioned above, a series of Japanese language schools were opened to give Taiwanese training in the basics of the Japanese language. These schools offered six-month programs for people between the ages of fifteen and thirty who hoped to work in the colonial administration in some clerical capacity.⁴²

Izawa Shuji assumed that the Taiwanese only needed to become fluent in Japanese to begin the process of assimilation, and his policies were centered on this assumption. According to Eika Tai, the doctrine, conception, and ideology of a Japanese national language (*Kokugo*) was "now interpreted as universal, since any person could become assimilated as a Japanese. It was

⁴⁰ Kloter, 91.

⁴¹ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 16.

⁴² Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 16.

this universalist version of the ideology that became an institutionally sanctioned doctrine in colonial education."⁴³ Although this conception of language was largely based on the philosophy of Japan's nation-building process, it could not help but influence the perception of other languages on the island. If one could become part of the Japanese nation by simply speaking Japanese, then logically one could also become part of a Taiwanese nation by speaking and writing in Taiwanese, or part of a Chinese nation by speaking and writing in Chinese. As will be seen later, during the 1920s this perception of language as an index of national identity would create an important venue for political and social activism.

Unfortunately for Izawa, budget overruns in the colonial administration were giving many politicians in Tokyo a bout of buyer's remorse. Vast expenditures on colonial adventures were not desired by a country still enacting its own program of reform and development. As a result, in 1897 austerity measures were implemented, and many of Izawa's most ambitious education plans were scrapped.⁴⁴ This coincided with a shake-up in the colony's administration. In 1898, General Kodama Gentaro was appointed Governor-General, and the majority of the responsibility for governing was transferred from Tokyo to the administration in Taipei.⁴⁵ The head of this regime's civil administration was Goto Shimpei, who is traditionally portrayed as the official who most shaped social policy in colonial Taiwan. During his eight-year reign, he would establish an administrative regime of modernization and economic development that would characterize the entire Japanese colonial era.⁴⁶

Concerning education and language policy, Goto views on assimilation differed greatly from those of Izawa. Goto regarded assimilation as a much more gradual process. E. Patricia Tsurumi notes: "Izawa's mind was capable of imagining young Taiwanese rising to the top of the Japanese educational pyramid and making their way into the ranks of the elite that governed the

⁴³ Tai, 512.

⁴⁴ Tai, 17.

⁴⁵ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 209.

⁴⁶ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 209.

empire."⁴⁷ In contrast, Goto was very skeptical of the ability of Taiwanese to become full-fledged Japanese subjects; indeed, he deemed it "imprudent."⁴⁸ He even described the assimilation scheme as "the great hundred-year plan,"⁴⁹ emphasizing the distance Taiwanese had to travel to reach "Japaneseness."⁵⁰ Goto's goals were simple and pragmatic. He only aimed for "winning support for the new regime; developing a stratum of Taiwanese sufficiently well educated to service the administrative and clerical apparatus of the colonial government ... [and] producing Taiwanese teachers and medical personnel."⁵¹ A passage from a colleague of Goto Shimpei, Mochiji Rokusaburo, perfectly epitomizes contemporary Japanese thought on the subject:

But in regard to education facilities we must consider what kind of harvest we want to reap. It is indeed regrettable that the production of unemployed intellectuals is so conspicuous in the mother country itself. It is of utmost importance, then that we take care to see similar results do not come out of the education facilities in the colony.⁵² (Translation from Tsurumi)

Goto's system would seek to damper the professional aspirations of the Taiwanese, effectively imposing a hard ceiling on their career trajectory and a limit on the variety of career prospects offered to them. The change in focus would naturally alter the nature of the school system. Izawa's system was more idealistic in that it at least theoretically imagined that assimilation would lead to limitless opportunities in the Japanese polity and cultural sphere.

Although the career expectations fostered by each system diverged greatly, their

⁴⁷ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 43.

⁴⁸ Lamley, "Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule," 211.

⁴⁹ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 51.

⁵⁰ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 51.

⁵¹ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 18.

⁵² Cited from Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 24.

curriculums were "almost identical."⁵³ This meant that the Taiwanese were still educated to become loyal subjects of the emperor, but they would lack many of the privileges supposedly assured by the assumption of "Japaneseness," such as legal equality and access to comparable levels of education. As will be shown later in this paper, this discrepancy between expectation and reality would help foster a group of educated Taiwanese who were neither individuals of traditional Han society or fully assimilated Japanese subjects. As neither "full" Chinese nationals nor Japanese subjects, some would seek to create a particular Taiwanese identity that could represent a space in between the two traditions.

The largest component of the Japanese colonial state that fostered this battle of identities was the Common School system. Established in 1898, these common schools (*kōgakko*) were essentially elementary schools offering a six-year course of study comprised of classes in ethics, Japanese language, Classical Chinese, arithmetic, music, and gymnastics.⁵⁴ Hui-yu Caroline Ts'ai remarks of the institutions, "From the very beginning of Japanese rule, elementary schools were the battleground for competing identities of the Taiwanese." The place of Classical Chinese in education was one of the first clashes over identity. Although seemingly counter-intuitive, the inclusion of Classical Chinese in the curriculum was actually part of Goto Shimpei's pragmatic approach to governance. Consequently, in the early years of the system, Taiwanese were taught Confucian classics such as the *Classic of Filial Piety*, *the Doctrine of the Mean*, and *the Analects of Confucius*.⁵⁵ He viewed it as a benevolent gesture to enlist support for the new regime. Moreover, it was a way to encourage attendance at government schools, rather than the traditional *shobō* (or *shufang*, 書房, a Japanese term used to denote all traditional, Confucian schools of Taiwan).⁵⁶

As a rival to the newly established common schools and the most tangible representative of pre-colonial Han society, the *shufang* represented a pernicious challenge to the authority of the

⁵³ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 18.

⁵⁴ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 18.

⁵⁵ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 20.

⁵⁶ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 21.

colonial administration. This was not merely an imagined threat. In the first years of Japanese colonial rule, the number of *shobō* actually increased.⁵⁷ This is largely due to the fact that the Japanese annexation had eliminated the governmental academies that trained candidates for the civil service examinations. The *shobō* absorbed the students left abandoned by the shift and thus enlarged their rosters.⁵⁸ To combat this expansion the colonial administration decided to enact a variety of regulations to siphon students into the government system.

Firstly, they ordered that all schools, whether government, traditional, or missionary, were required to teach Japanese and arithmetic. Secondly, when a common school was established in an area, all other schools were required to cease operations.⁵⁹ A third, less coercive method was the employment of scholars from the *shobō* in common schools. The Japanese essentially sought to buy out the competition. In this way, it was hoped that the students would simply follow their teachers into the government school system. When the competition for students was finally eliminated, the Japanese could then slowly ease Classical Chinese out of the curriculum.⁶⁰ The Japanese even tried to incorporate Taiwanese teachers trained by foreign missionaries, favoring their familiarity with Western, modern education. An English Presbyterian missionary, William Campbell, who ran a school in the Tainan area remarked,

And there was no way evading this, because (1) our own little congregational school here had been closed owing to the children having all becoming pupils in the free Government schools established for their benefit; (2) two young men who formerly attended our Theological College in Tainan were now teachers in these Government schools ... receiving a very much higher salary than our Mission had ever paid to such workers.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915," 312.

⁵⁸ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 30.

⁵⁹ Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915," 312.

⁶⁰ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 21.

⁶¹ Campbell, 15.

The Japanese would utilize every available method to enact their education expansion. Their endeavor was fairly productive. At the end of the first year of the program, in 1898, the island-wide sum of elementary school students was only 7,883. By the end of 1904, 23,346 students had already been incorporated into the system.⁶²

Identity Transformations: The Creation of a Japanese-speaking Taiwanese Elite

With the decline of the presence and utility of the *shobō* and other community schools, the Taiwanese elite would have no alternative but to educate their children through the Japanese educational system. Furthermore, if they hoped to participate in a society now dominated by Japanese governmental and business interests, a basic knowledge of the Japanese language would be essential. With these push and pull factors, many of the Taiwanese who grew up in the colonial education system attained a fluency in Japanese, and some of the most prosperous were even able to travel to the "home islands" to receive a tertiary education. Many others became Japanese teachers in the colonial school system.

For upper class Taiwanese, the Japanese regime represented a fundamental change in the organization of society. This was not simply due to the new language of prestige, however, but also because of new class dynamics between the rulers and the ruled. In the pre-colonial society, education and official position were the most reliable symbols of status. As the holders of such privileges, the traditional scholar-gentry and their families were easily distinguishable from commoners. After the annexation, the Japanese community that populated the new colonial machinery would become the new upper class, and Taiwanese, regardless of class, would see themselves in much more similar, and relatable, circumstances. This was due to the near-apartheid policies imposed by the colonial regime, which legally divided the population into Japanese and non-Japanese citizen segments. Harry Lamley notes, "a caste-like society immediately grew up in Taiwan between the colonial population and the Japanese residents...."

⁶² *The Progress of Taiwan for Ten Years: 1895–1904* (Government of Formosa, 1905), 43.

Segregation and discrimination in employment practices continued to prevail throughout the early period of Japanese rule."⁶³

Education was probably the realm where segregation was the most visible. While the majority of Taiwanese children attended only six years of elementary school, the children of Japanese residents were able to attend a separate, higher-quality school system, and were expected to return to Japan for their tertiary education. This differentiation was to "remind Taiwanese and aborigines of the superiority of their rulers."⁶⁴ Only during the late 1910s was education for Taiwanese expanded to the middle school level, in response to an increasing number of prosperous Taiwanese sending their children to Japan for secondary schooling.⁶⁵ The Japanese wanted to maintain a clear and visible division between themselves and their Taiwanese subjects.

Obviously, there was an inherent difficulty in mingling assimilationist ideology with segregationist policies, for both the colonized and the colonizer. There were many different responses to this segregation. Some Taiwanese believed they needed to assimilate further to garner full acceptance into the Japanese cultural sphere, while others became alienated and searched for new identities. The significant point is that there was no turning back to the identity of pre-colonial, traditional Qing society. A new identity needed to be assumed, Japanese or other, and again, language would be a large part of the assumption of that identity.

Despite discrimination, many educated, city-dwelling Taiwanese initially grasped for full assimilation. In 1914 a Taiwan Assimilation Society (*Taiwan dokakai*) was even created, led by wealthy Taiwanese community leaders based in Tainan — although it was quickly dismantled by the Japanese authorities.⁶⁶ There were many reasons for the gestures towards assimilation. Taiwanese who had the opportunity to receive a Japanese education became relatively prosperous. The expansion of the Taiwanese economy and various reform policies of the

⁶³ Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915," 295.

⁶⁴ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 43.

⁶⁵ Tsurumi, *Japanese Colonial Education*, 69.

⁶⁶ Lamley, *Taiwanese Under Japanese Rule*, 219.

Japanese eliminated much of the wealth disparity between upper and lower class Taiwanese, and opened areas of economic activity previously inaccessible to common people in traditional Confucian society.⁶⁷ Thus, despite the rampant discrimination it fostered, the regime actually represented a net benefit for many Taiwanese.

Upper-strata products of the colonial education system, largely based in urban centers such as Taipei and Taichung, became modern professionals, fluent in Japanese and comfortable in Japanese social environments. Hui-yu Caroline Ts'ai notes, "The 1910s witnessed the emergence of 'new elites': doctors, teachers, accountants, interpreters, and employees of various rural or farming organizations."⁶⁸ These were indeed the elite of Taiwanese. Even as late as 1917, only thirteen percent of school-aged Taiwanese attended school and even fewer reached middle school or the university level.⁶⁹ As participants in the Japanese cultural sphere, many of these new elite even supported its expansion, in the form of modernization and the Japanese language. These were the people who most identified with the Japanese regime.

Accordingly, many prosperous Taiwanese helped establish programs that corresponded with the wishes of the colonial regime, such as the proliferation of the Japanese language. This is because modernization was often linked with "Japanization." Included in these programs were associations for Japanese education for peasants and farmers, as many Taiwanese residing in the hinterlands had no access to schooling beyond the six-year common schools. One such program was the Japanese (Language) Popularization campaign (國語普及).⁷⁰ Through Japanese "study groups" held on weeknights and weekends, Japanese instruction was offered to the lower strata

⁶⁷Lamley, "The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915," 294.

⁶⁸ Hu-yu Catherine Ts'ai, *Taiwan in Japan's Empire Building: An Institutional Approach to Colonial Engineering* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 133.

⁶⁹ Gary Marvin Davison. *A Short History of Taiwan: The Case for Independence* (Westpoint, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 64.

⁷⁰ Ts'ai, 133.

of society who hoped to better interact with the colonial administration during everyday life. Many of the teachers were Taiwanese.⁷¹

As shown regarding attendance in the colonial school system, the popularization of Japanese was not entirely motivated by idealism. There were also pragmatic motivations for educated Taiwanese to teach the language. According to Ts'ai, "Some localities even went to the extreme of refusing to offer services unless one learned to speak the official language, that is, Japanese."⁷² Educated Taiwanese reasoned that if the lower strata did not learn Japanese, they would not be able to operate in the new society, and might even suffer privations from Japanese abuse. Sometimes they even went as far as to unbraid the regime for the paucity of Japanese language training. One editorial in the *Taiwan Minbao* (台灣民報) captured the sentiment. Concerning, rural children, the author pronounced,

Most of them have forgotten their Japanese. All for nothing they have wasted six years of their life, and what is the outcome? For all of this you could have just recalled the principals of rural common schools, fired a few people, and generally speaking, pursued the practices of old. They [the Colonial Administration] do not have the least bit of enthusiasm for the education of Taiwan's younger generation.... Therefore, we advocate three points. (1) Village education for a foundational knowledge of agriculture. (2) An education of useful language, we must take Taiwan into language education, Japanese [language] is a necessary course, with every week needing ten hours of class. (3) The principals of common schools need to utilize Taiwanese who have an enthusiasm for education. If these three points are implemented, village education will right itself somewhat and be able to produce a countryside with useable talent suitable to a rural society.

⁷¹ Ts'ai, 133.

⁷² Ts'ai, 135.

Otherwise, you are merely counting how many children are in class and will have a young generation that cannot form a word.⁷³

Even if Taiwanese did not believe in the ideology of assimilation, many recognized that total engagement with the Japanese cultural sphere, especially language, was the only method for achieving well-being in the new society. Indeed, if they desired that their rural compatriots would become literate enough to attain useable knowledge, Japanese was a far more suitable medium than Classical Chinese or Modern Chinese, which even most educated Taiwanese were just beginning to learn.

Taiwan’s Roaring Twenties: Language and the Creation of a Taiwanese Identity

Although learning the rudiments of Japanese was enough for a simple, practical, or even relatively successful life, many educated Taiwanese believed that the cultural world of Taiwan needed to be elevated before Taiwanese would be accepted as an entity worthy of independence from and equality with their colonial rulers. Previous experience had shown simply “becoming Japanese” would not assure a satisfactory result. This shift in strategy corresponded with political changes in Taiwan and Japan. In 1919, Japan inaugurated its first party-run government, and the repercussions were felt in Japan’s colonial possessions. The expansion of the Diet’s power in the Japanese government extended to Taiwan’s colonial administration, and initiated a relaxation of the colonial administration’s sterner policies.⁷⁴ Within this environment, the Taiwanese began to petition for self-government and emphasize the uniqueness of a Taiwanese identity as a corollary to intellectual and political self-determinism. The various social, political, and cultural movements coalesced into the Taiwan Cultural Association, an organization for the support and promotion of a Taiwanese identity.⁷⁵

The principal medium for exploration in the new Taiwanese identity was the written word,

⁷³ “農村公學校教育的效果如何,” *Taiwan Minbao* 8 Jan. 1925: 3.

⁷⁴ Lamley, “The Taiwan Literati and Early Japanese Rule, 1895–1915”, 232.

⁷⁵ Davison, 66.

whether through newspapers, literature, or even writing systems. Although Japanese was probably the dominant medium for communication, many Taiwanese utilized Classical Chinese, Modern Chinese, or even Taiwanese as they became increasingly disenchanted with the colonial administration's segregationist policies. The use of languages other than Taiwanese allowed for a demonstrable expression of their repudiation of the Japanese cultural sphere. Sometimes language use would even change day-to-day as Taiwanese experienced and internalized the trivialities of life under an apartheid regime. Taiwanese scholar Shih-jung Tzeng chronicled such changes through an examination of the personal diaries and reading lists of educated Taiwanese, such as Chen Wangcheng, a teacher in the government school system. In his analysis of Chen's diary, Tzeng noted that after a dispute with the Japanese principal of his school concerning a Japanese-only regulation for teachers, Chen suddenly changed the language of his diary from Japanese to Classical Chinese. A few weeks later he began using a mixture of both languages and then finally made a wholesale switch to Classical Chinese.⁷⁶

An inspection of Chen Wangcheng's motivations and sentiments is useful because he was a keen observant of Taiwan's political and intellectual developments in the 1920s. Most of these developments were initiated by a small contingent of Taiwanese attending higher education institutions in Tokyo. The main thrust of Taiwanese intellectual activity came from this community, not only because of their higher education, but also because of the intellectual climate then reigning in Tokyo. Liberal Japanese thinkers, as well as many of the best students of China and Korea, populated Japan's institutes of higher education, and thus many of the ideas of the New Culture Movement, Korea's March First Movement, and Japanese liberal movements were collected and filtered back to Taiwan through these expatriate students.⁷⁷

This may even be the manner by which Modern Chinese was transmitted to Taiwan. Since the colonial education offered only an education in Japanese, perhaps with primer courses in Classical Chinese, literacy in Modern Chinese could only be achieved through alternative or

⁷⁶ Shih-jung Tzeng, *From Honto Jin to Bensheng Ren: The Origin and Development of Taiwanese National Consciousness* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2009), 9.

⁷⁷ Tzeng, 11.

unconventional methods. Because of this state of affairs, the first newspapers and magazines published by Taiwanese, such as *Taiwan Youth* (*Taiwan seinen*), were published in Japanese and Classical Chinese editions.⁷⁸ For those educated Taiwanese who wanted to learn Modern Chinese, the most natural approach was the employment of a tutor. Chen Wangcheng noted in his diary that his wealthy employers, the Cai family, had hired a tutor from Nanjing, and Chen agreed to give the tutor Japanese lessons in exchange for Modern Chinese instruction. He would even keep his diary in Modern Chinese, as a method for practice.⁷⁹

Although Modern Chinese had no real practical use in the Japanese-dominated society of Taiwan, it became a viable language to some Taiwanese because its use could emphasize their sympathy with Mainland China and the then-emerging Chinese nation, as well as a way to distance oneself from the Japanese polity. And if Taiwanese wanted to read works produced by the New Culture Movement, such as Lu Xun's "Ah Q," literacy in Modern Chinese would be requisite. Indeed, participation in the New Cultural Movement rendered the use of Classical Chinese, as a representative of the old society, untenable.

With such sentiments, the *Taiwan Minbao* (台灣民報), a weekly newspaper offered in Modern Chinese and Japanese editions, began publication. Established in 1923,⁸⁰ the *Taiwan Minbao* represented a platform for the articulation of political grievances, social organizing, and debates over the direction of the Taiwanese culture. It also included international news, notifications of public speeches, and articles republished from mainland newspapers. Among the issues promoted by the *Taiwan Minbao*, Modern Chinese (and language policy in general) were very significant topics.

Articles about Modern Chinese would range from editorials on the philosophy behind the adoption of Modern Chinese, to simple suggestions on reading and teaching materials. In the Suggested Reading section of one issue, an article titled "Teaching Materials for Chinese Grammar" (中國語法講義) emphasized to readers that it was necessary to establish a good

⁷⁸ Tzeng, 11.

⁷⁹ Tzeng, 23.

⁸⁰ Heylen, 233.

foundation of grammar before one could achieve fluency.⁸¹ Another issue featured a two-page spread on the results of a conference for the standardization and correction of character pronunciation (文字校勘讀音訂正).⁸² There were even articles focused on language policy such as "The Course of Action for China's National Language and Literature" (中國國語文做法).⁸³ Because all of these developments were springing from Mainland China, rather than Taiwan, implicit in the study and use of Modern Chinese was a self-identification with the Chinese nation. For many Taiwanese, Modern Chinese was best referred to as the Chinese national language (中國國語), rather than simply the vernacular (白話). This again was the assumption of an identity different from that of the Japanese cultural sphere.

Although Modern Chinese was the most readily accessible language with which to replace Japanese and Classical Chinese, many educated Taiwanese also sought to utilize the Taiwanese language. Heretofore Taiwanese (or *Minnanhua*) implementation in the written form had been relatively uncommon, and therefore its deployment as a written, literary language would be a relatively novel, potent gesture for the creation of a Taiwanese identity. With the dominance of Classical Chinese now eliminated and the currency of Modern Chinese fairly uncertain, proponents of Taiwanese had an opportunity to raise their language to a level of prestige. They already had the advantage of its stature as the mother tongue of most of the island's population. If they somehow raised the quality and prestige of the Taiwanese language, then they would inevitably raise the culture of all of its native speakers, even in the lower strata. Their only obstacle was the lack of a standardized writing system. When this problem was identified, a few of the most ambitious Taiwanese would try for a solution.

One of these individuals was Cai Peihuo (蔡培火), who attempted to create his own orthography for the Taiwanese language. Within the Taiwanese intelligentsia, Cai had a rather unusual background, and this may have contributed to his linguistic innovations. He had a dual education at a traditional Chinese temple and one of the few Japanese Language Schools

⁸¹ "中國語法講義." *Taiwan Minbao* 15 Apr. 1923.

⁸² "文字校勘會訂正." *Taiwan Minbao* 15 Sept. 1925.

⁸³ "中國國語文做法." *Taiwan Minbao* 25 Oct. 1925.

commissioned to train native teachers. In addition, he also was privately educated by his older brother, who attended an English Presbyterian mission in Taiwan (and is probably the reason that he later converted to Christianity), thus he was literate in Japanese, Classical Chinese, and Taiwanese (through use of the Church Romanization). Later, he traveled to Tokyo as a student of English and mathematics. There Cai would become one of the founders of Taiwan's New Culture Movement, as a writer for the magazine *Taiwan Youth* and an organizer for the *Taiwan Minbao*.⁸⁴ As a Taiwanese/Chinese nationalist, and a polyglot conversant with a variety of writing systems, it was natural that he would view the written language as a medium for advancing Taiwanese culture.

During his years as a teacher in Taiwan and a student in Japan, Cai initially promoted the use of Church Romanization as the best medium for written Taiwanese. Beyond its utility as a symbol of Taiwanese identity, Cai also believed Church Romanization had a variety of practical functions: as a tool for secret communication and a pedagogical device for educating the illiterate.⁸⁵ Once it was entrenched as the system for base literacy, Cai then anticipated that he would have a large Taiwanese readership receptive to ideas of social change. Ann Heylen notes: "His suggestion was to enlighten the adult population through social education, and to publish journals in Romanised Taiwanese as a first step in the direction to increase their awareness to the need for social change."⁸⁶ To this effect, in the 1920s he wrote a variety of articles in Romanized Taiwanese concerning social reform, as well as editorials in Japanese and Modern Chinese promoting the use of Romanized Taiwanese.⁸⁷

By the 1930s he had been promoting Taiwanese for nearly a decade, but with little progress. Most Taiwanese seemed unreceptive to his ideas, while the Japanese authorities viewed

⁸⁴ Ann Heylen, "An Excursion into Cai Peihuo's Colonial Diary" *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 3.2 (2007): 239–62.241, 242.

⁸⁵ Ann Heylen, "Cai Peihuo and the Romanisation Movement in Colonial Taiwan." Research Unit on Taiwanese Culture and Literature Web. Oct. 2010, 4.

⁸⁶ Heylen, "Cai Peihuo and the Romanisation Movement in Colonial Taiwan," 4.

⁸⁷ Heylen, "Cai Peihuo and the Romanisation Movement in Colonial Taiwan," 5.

his efforts with suspicion and disdain.⁸⁸ Chen Wangcheng, the reform-minded teacher mentioned earlier, was well read in Japanese and a writer in Modern Chinese, but only utilized Romanized Taiwanese to exchange secret letters with his mistress.⁸⁹ If similar uses were the primary function of written Taiwanese, then Cai Peihuo's initial effort can be considered unsuccessful. Use as an encrypted codex was not his principal intention. These difficulties made him change course and search for an orthography that was more suitable to the tastes of Taiwanese and the Japanese authorities.

In 1931, he decided to create his own system based on katakana, so that it could be easily implemented in the colonial school system and be acceptable to the Japanese authorities. Ann Heylen describes this system:

This new phonetic script consisted of 28 symbols, of which 19 were taken from the phonetic Japanese kanazukai, five from the Chinese phonetic alphabet, and four were newly created symbols. Cai also added 14 different diacritics to indicate the tones and arranged the writing order in a way similar to that of the Korean hangul script.⁹⁰

Unfortunately for Cai, many people were also unreceptive to this system because of his Christian background (and thus the system's connection to Church Romanization).⁹¹ In his diary he lamented, "They say that I am a Christian, that the kind of script that I propagate is no more than a means to preach my religion, and that it is of no benefit to their Marxism."⁹²

The efforts of Cai Peihuo reveal the degree to which language was attached to identity and politics. Even though he was one of the most fervent supporters of Taiwanese culture, his colleagues rebuked his reform endeavor because it remained too closely associated with

⁸⁸ Heylen, "Cai Peihuo and the Romanisation Movement in Colonial Taiwan," 5.

⁸⁹ Tzeng, 45.

⁹⁰ Heylen, "An Excursion into Cai Peihuo's Colonial Diary, 1929–1936," 250.

⁹¹ Heylen, "An Excursion into Cai Peihuo's Colonial Diary, 1929–1936," 251.

⁹² Cited from Heylen, "An Excursion into Cai Peihuo's Colonial Diary, 1929–1936," 250.

Christianity. Perhaps it was fortunate that his linguistic innovations were so abruptly preempted. As Japan transformed itself into a militant, fascist world power in the late 1930s, policies of assimilation would quickly be replaced by strict orders for an adherence to a Japanese identity. This included a more vigorous, coerced spread of the Japanese language, as well as the Taiwanese's forced adoption of Japanese names and religious beliefs.⁹³ Again, language became a tool of identity politics.

We have seen that the Japanese colonial endeavor on Taiwan created an "identity vacuum" in which the old traditional Chinese society was eliminated and replaced by a Japanese-orientated cultural sphere. Contradictions and paradoxes in the implementation of Japanese culture and society, largely through language, created conflicted identities for Taiwanese. Cultural developments from China and within the Japanese empire further complicated this identity. The use of a specific language was seen as a way for many educated Taiwanese to uncomplicate this identity, inaugurating a brief period of experimentation in the 1920s and early 1930s. As the various proponents for the adoption of Japanese, Modern Chinese, and Taiwanese demonstrated, language is far more than a means of practical communication: it is an index for identity and association.

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⁹³ Tzeng, 57.

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“A Most Inefficient System”: An Investigation into the Basis for the Continued Usage of the Japanese Writing System

by Kenneth C. Winterbottom IV

The Japanese writing system is widely regarded as the most complicated writing system in the world.¹ It is written using a unique combination of Chinese characters (*hànzì*) and syllabic graphemes. Although the portions in the latter category are complicated by the use of two different syllabaries simultaneously, the use of *hànzì* is at the root of so many of the script’s unnecessary complexities. For centuries now, this system has been the subject of criticism from both Japanese intellectuals and Western observers who feel, to greater or lesser degrees, that the Japanese would be better off abandoning Chinese characters in their writing system. While I count myself among their number, I also cannot help but wonder why such an ill-fitting system has been retained for so long. Therefore, I wish to consider the possible reasons for this unfortunate fact, and hope to isolate those that are most likely.

Before considering the reasons for the continued usage of the Japanese writing system, however, let us first examine how it came to exist in its present form, as well as the reasons why it is so widely criticized. Sometime before the fifth and sixth centuries, writing was introduced into the Japanese by the Koreans, who had acquired it from the Chinese.² At this time, the Japanese wrote almost exclusively in Classical Chinese.³ It must be stressed that this does not

¹ George Sansom (quoted in DeFrancis, p. 140) says the Japanese writing system is “surely without inferiors,” and Dale Crowley calls it “a most inefficient system” (Crowley, p. 8).

² Seeley dates it roughly to the early fifth century (Seeley, p. 6), and Rogers as early as the third century (Rogers, p. 50). Habein admits the difficulty of knowing the exact century, but notes that there were Chinese inscriptions in Japan by the fourth century (Habein, p. 8).

³ Rogers, p. 50.

mean that the Japanese wrote their language using Chinese characters as they do in the present day — they actually wrote in the Classical Chinese language, much in the same way that medieval European writers wrote in Latin. Japanese names, however, which had no associated character, were written using Chinese characters selected for their phonetic value, which led to the development of what is called *man'yōgana*, in which *hànzì* are used for their phonetic value as opposed to their lexical value.⁴ This combination of Classical Chinese and *man'yōgana* persisted for centuries, even after the ninth century development of proper phonetic syllabaries, called *kana*, from abbreviated or simplified Chinese characters.⁵ As early as the twelfth century, texts began to be written in something similar to the current mixture of *kanji* (the Japanese name for Chinese characters) and *kana*,⁶ but this style did not gain official currency until the late sixteenth century.⁷ It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that the script completely crystallized into its modern form, using phonetic *kana* (now standardized) alongside characters.⁸

As the above history shows, Chinese characters have been integral to the writing of Japanese ever since the arrival of writing in Japan. So too are they integral to the problems with the Japanese writing system. For one thing, Chinese characters can be reasonably subjected to a slew of criticisms even when they are used to write Chinese: noted sinologist John DeFrancis, despite being an apologist for the phoneticity of the *hànzì*, notes their inferiority to *pīnyīn* and places China's system low on the list in his ranking of world writing systems.⁹ It is the unique Japanese application of the characters, however, which is so problematic. For a speaker of any given topolect of the modern Chinese language group, a given *hànzì* usually has approximately one main pronunciation, such as the character for “sun,” pronounced ‘*rì*’¹⁰. On the other hand, I

⁴ Habein, pp. 9–13.

⁵ Seeley, pp. 58–60.

⁶ Habein, pp. 35–39.

⁷ Seeley, pp. 100–101.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–144.

⁹ DeFrancis, pp. 267–269.

¹⁰ In actuality, many Chinese characters, including some of considerably high frequency, have two or more

can personally call to mind at least six variant pronunciations for that same character in Japanese,¹¹ from which a reader must select the pronunciation appropriate to the situation. The simplest analogy in English is to our Arabic numerals. Consider the symbol “2.” The go-to pronunciation for this logogram is ‘two’, but in the right context, its pronunciation can vary considerably, as in the following examples: “2nd” (‘second’), “x²” (‘squared’), “20” (‘twenty’). Japanese is an entire writing system that works like this.¹² This lack of a fixed pronunciation for Chinese characters in the Japanese writing system is perhaps the most inefficient and needlessly confusing of all of its features.

Other issues inherently crop up as a result of the fact that *hànzì* were developed for another language. The Chinese use of characters constitutes, to use DeFrancis’ term, a *morphosyllabary*, a meaning-plus-sound system in which each character represents at once one syllable and one morpheme.¹³ This is made possible only by the relative lack of polysyllabic morphemes in Chinese. The Japanese language, on the other hand, is rife with polysyllabic morphemes, forcing it to assign individual *kanji* to strings of phonemes longer than one syllable; this fact has led several scholars to toss around the word “morphograph” to describe Chinese characters as they are used in Japanese.¹⁴ This term differs from ideograph or logograph because it is meant to mean that, first and foremost, a Japanese *kanji* elicits a phoneme sequence¹⁵ in the Japanese language, which then acts as a stimulus to evoke a Japanese lexical morpheme. Function morphemes, however, are not written in *kanji* and thus must necessarily be written using *kana* supplements. This means that even when characters are expanded to allow polysyllabic phoneme sequences, Japanese still needs to employ additional devices in order to

pronunciations, but as we shall see, the number of possible pronunciations for any given Japanese character dwarfs that number for the same character in Chinese.

¹¹ ‘*nichi*’, ‘*hi*’, ‘*bi*’, ‘*ka*’, ‘*ni*’, and ‘*tachi*’.

¹² J. J. Chew (quoted in Rogers, p. 60).

¹³ DeFrancis, pp. 114–116.

¹⁴ Crowley, p. 2, and Matsunaga, p. 16.

¹⁵ Or in very rare cases, like the “a” in “au” (‘to meet, encounter’), a single phoneme.

encode its verbal conjugation as well as its various nominal, adjectival, and sentence-final particles, a problem never encountered by the Chinese using Chinese characters because their language effectively lacks inflectional morphology.

A final, fundamental flaw arose regarding the use of Chinese characters in the Japanese script as a result of the limited phonology of the Japanese language. In their attempt to appropriate the pronunciations of the *hànzì*, speakers of Japanese were forced to make crucial changes, such as lopping off consonants, adding new vowels, and completely disregarding the tone system. This was because of the tremendous phonological gulf between the Japanese language and the Chinese language: Japanese had no tones and no capacity to place stop consonants at the ends of syllables as did many of the Chinese topolects at the time that the sounds of the characters were borrowed.¹⁶ This had a corrosive effect on the ease with which Japanese speakers could learn *kanji*, because, as John DeFrancis points out, most Chinese characters "are composed of two elements, a phonetic grapheme which suggests the syllabic pronunciation of the character, and a semantic element which hints at its meaning."¹⁷ The helpful phonetic element, however, suggests a character's pronunciation in the Chinese language, meaning that this most important aspect of each character is almost certainly lost on Japanese speakers. To add insult to injury, the loss of so many of the phonetic features which distinguished Chinese morphemes unavoidably resulted in the existence of an absurd and confusing amount of homophonous Chinese-origin morphemes in the Japanese language.¹⁸

In summary, aside from possible weaknesses inherent in Chinese characters themselves, the Chinese writing system is a poor fit for the Japanese language. To put it bluntly: Chinese characters were made for Chinese, not Japanese. To their credit, those writing in Japanese have historically realized this problem on their own and have attempted to deal with it in a number of ways. When the Japanese were still writing exclusively in genuine Classical Chinese for official

¹⁶ Crowley, p. 4, DeFrancis, p. 132, and Rogers, p. 54.

¹⁷ DeFrancis, p. 116.

¹⁸ Crowley, p. 4.

documents like the seventh century *Seventeen Article Constitution* of Prince Shōtoku,¹⁹ syntactic anomalies, irregular word choices, and in some cases even Japanese honorific terms would occasionally crop up in inscriptions and other non-official documents²⁰ as speakers wished to include elements of their spoken language that Classical Chinese could not convey. Similarly, eighth century Japanese *senmyōgaki* writing actually employed two sizes of Chinese characters, larger ones to represent strings of Japanese sounds corresponding to the lexical entry signified by those characters and smaller ones to represent grammatical particles and inflectional elements phonetically,²¹ much as *kana* are used in the writing of Japanese today.

With the beginning of the formation of the Japanese state in the early modern period, script reform began to be considered in a more conscious way. Following the (supposed) opening of the country by Commodore Perry in 1854, proposals for script reform and acknowledgements that the Japanese writing system was ineffectual and baroque were something of a vogue. *Kana* clubs and Romanization clubs sprung up in the 1880s and advocated the replacement of *kanji* with a more phonetic system.²² While those in favor of complete script reform were always a minority, the publication of such frank tracts as “On Writing Japanese with the Western Alphabet”²³ and “Proposal for the Abolition of Chinese Characters”²⁴ did not go unnoticed, and in the years leading up to the Pacific War calls for linguistic reform for practical reasons came from people on both sides of the political spectrum.²⁵ There was, in fact, a considerable simplification of the Japanese writing system under the MacArthur government, but *kanji* were retained.²⁶ In the end, despite an eventual reduction in the number of commonly used characters,

¹⁹ Habein, pp. 8–9.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Habein, p. 19.

²² Seeley, pp. 139–140.

²³ Twine, p. 112. (The author of the work in question was Nishi Amane.)

²⁴ Twine, p. 227. (The author of the work in question was Maejima Hisoka.)

²⁵ DeFrancis, p. 141.

²⁶ DeFrancis, p. 142.

a standardization of the *kana*,²⁷ and moves towards using more *kana* in everyday life and writing in a style closer to Japanese everyday speech,²⁸ the Japanese system of using Chinese characters with *kana* supplements remained firmly in place. By the time Japan’s modernization was complete, it had undergone what one scholar has called strategic simplification, whereby “language is reshaped to better perform its modern tasks as a crucial cog in the mechanism of a growing state by ridding itself of those older features which slow down transition of the message.”²⁹ It had not, however, succeeded in making the break with the past sought by the *kana* and Romanization clubs and the Japanese Westernizers.

Considering the above attempts by people in Japan to rectify the problems inherent in using *hànzì* in the writing of their language, however, one must wonder why the Japanese writing system, with all of its shortcomings, remains in use? Recognized as the worst in the entire world and acknowledged as faulty by even those who use it, it is difficult to see why it would not have been discarded, especially when one considers the fact that the Japanese have had several distinct opportunities to do so.³⁰ There are a number of possible arguments as to why the system has been retained, and they can be broadly grouped into two categories: those which acknowledge that the system is inefficient but which offer reasons for keeping it not related to its efficiency, and those which deny its inefficiency or at least claim that it has enough redeeming features to overcome any faults it may possess. It will be valuable to look at each of the arguments in turn, starting with the latter category.

The most obvious reason for keeping the characters is that they might not, in fact, be inefficient from a purely practical perspective. While some problems with the system must be

²⁷ DeFrancis, p. 135.

²⁸ Twine, p. 112. The famous Westernizer Fukuzawa Yukichi came to the conclusion that the primary purpose of writing was the communication of a message, not its obscuring through unnecessary ornamentation.

²⁹ Karl Deutsch (quoted in Twine, p. 2).

³⁰ For example, during the Heian period when *kana* were first introduced, or when Japan first began modernizing, or even when the Occupation government started instituting reforms after World War II. In fact, there was a fairly popular movement to replace the *kanji* and *kana* with Roman letters during the MacArthur period, but it was rejected by MacArthur himself as being ‘too drastic’ (quoted in DeFrancis, p. 142).

acknowledged, such as the increased time and dedication required to learn to read Japanese as opposed to, say, German or Korean, it cannot be denied that a straightforward phonetic system would lack certain positive traits inherent in a system that also uses *kanji*. The number of homophones in Japanese, discussed earlier, is a problem that using morphographs resolves remarkably well. Even if the pronunciations for ten graphs are identical, the difference in the graph’s appearance can help readers distinguish between their meanings, in much the same way that in English we can use differences in spelling to differentiate homophonous words, e.g., “write” and “right” and “rite.” In this English example, spelling distinguishes three words, and if spelling is expanded to include capitalization, a great many more proper nouns homophonous with “right” could also be distinguished; I would go so high as to allow a possibility for ten word distinctions through spelling for this phoneme sequence.³¹ In Japanese, on the other hand, the syllable “*kō*” is represented by sixty different morphographs.³² Without *kanji*, the ability to readily distinguish between those sixty different meanings would be lost. The principle counter-argument for this case is that speech has no *kanji*, and yet the Japanese are able to distinguish between these homophones in speech. As DeFrancis says, writing is speech made visible.³³ If Japanese speakers can comprehend one another in spite of all of the homophones, then they should be able to do the same with written Japanese, with or without *kanji*.

But the distinguishing of homophones is not the only special benefit of the Japanese system: using both *kanji* and *kana* simultaneously conveniently results in the parsing of sentences into their grammatical components.³⁴ Western students of the Japanese language, including myself, have noticed the utility of this aspect of the script, and I suspect that many native Japanese speakers would hold this issue to be an indivisible one: the loss of this utility

³¹ *Rite* (as in “a religious rite”), *right* (as in “left vs. right”), *right* (as in “right vs. wrong”), *right* (meaning “correct”, as in “is that right?”), *right* (as in “a legal right”), *right* (the causative form of the adjective, as in “to right a wrong”), *write* (as in “to write”) are seven common morphemes with this form, but there are also a plethora of proper nouns, such as *Wright* (as in “the Wright brothers”), *Rite* (as in “Rite-Aid”), *Right* (as in “the Conservative Right”), etc.

³² Crowley, p. 4.

³³ DeFrancis, p. 269.

³⁴ Crowley, p. 8.

could never justify reforms to the system. The addition of spaces between words represented by *kana* would go a long way towards resolving this problem, however, and, provided that DeFrancis’ assertion about writing as the graphic extension of speech is correct, the Japanese would soon accustom themselves to the new system.³⁵

But while the problems of homophony and parsing are two practical concerns raised by the prospect of abolishing *kanji*, there remains also a significant, less mechanical concern. There is undeniably an additional, special layer of meaning one can manipulate from an artistic or poetic level when one is using Chinese characters, and even more so in the Japanese case when the characters do not have fixed pronunciations. In pre-modern times, writers could create playful puzzles for their reader, as in the case of the use of the character for “white” to represent the number “99” on the basis of the fact that the character for “100” differs from the character for “white” by one stroke, that one stroke being the single-stroke character for “one.”³⁶ Examples of this kind of clever usage of the nature of the Japanese writing system are far more numerous in modern times. There is a popular Japanese series of comic books with a protagonist named Light Yagami, whose given name is written with the character for “moon” and the pronunciation ‘*raito*’ (a Japanese approximation of the English word “light”). The work’s author has pointed out the deeper significance added by this name to its final scene when the character’s worshippers bow to him at night under the light of the moon.³⁷ Oftentimes a character will be used with the intended pronunciation of it being an English or foreign word, as in the case of the Japanese girl’s name *Noeru* (“Noel”), written with the character for ‘pine tree’) or of an item from a Japanese children’s game which is named using three characters in succession: “sea,” “dragon,” and “god” (with the standard pronunciation of that sequence being *kairyūshin*): the intended pronunciation is *ribaiasan* (“Leviathan”)³⁸. Ignoring all other problems one could have with this case, it remains a fact that without any *kanji* in the Japanese writing system this layer of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rogers, p. 52. The equation is: 白 = 百 minus 一.

³⁷ “How to Think,” *Death Note 13: How to Read*, VIZ Media, 61.

³⁸ Kairyū-Shin (海竜神), *Yu-gi-oh! Wikia*: <http://yugioh.wikia.com/wiki/Kairyū-Shin>.

playful meaning would be completely lost.

The ultimate realization of this kind of creative potential is the creation of new characters. There are a good number of these *kokuji* or *wasei kanji* (‘Chinese characters created in Japan’), although only three remain in general use.³⁹ Many modern examples are purely comical, like the character read “*erebeeta gaaru*” (‘elevator girl’), which is composed of the characters for “girl,” “up,” and “down,”⁴⁰ but there are a number of more obscure older examples which were completely serious, such as the use of a character made up of components meaning “metal” and “hat” with the intended meaning of “helmet.”⁴¹ The loss of these kinds of characters and this kind of added meaning would be an irrevocable negative consequence of a hypothetical Japanese swap to an exclusively *kana*-based (or otherwise phonetic) system of writing, and may be something many writers of Japanese would not want to give up.

Of course, there are also arguments that assume that Japanese would ideally be written without *kanji* and yet still reject the idea of abandoning them. These arguments generally arise out of either practical considerations or intensely personal ones. The most obvious practical concern that needs to be dealt with if one seeks to extricate *kanji* from the Japanese writing system is the physical difficulty one would be faced with in such a situation. All Japanese books currently in print would cease to be intelligible, and the entire educational system would need to be reformed. One Japanese translator during the Tokugawa period anticipated this problem, publishing a tract called “A Report on My Humble Opinion That Reform of Our Written Language Should Precede the Establishment of an Education System.”⁴² During the years since the Second World War, however, the number of “*kanji* for general use” was formally reduced by a significant proportion, decreasing the number of *kanji* that could be used in newspapers and other public documents to about 2000, a pool from which the list of *kanji* that would be taught in

³⁹ Buck, p. 49. The kanji in question are 働 (“work”), 畑 (“dry field”), and 峠 (“mountain pass”).

⁴⁰ Lehmann and Faust (quoted in Buck, p. 48).

⁴¹ Mills, p. 298.

⁴² Twine, p. 229. (The author of the work in question was Maejima Hisoka.)

public schools was drawn.⁴³ This decision has substantially reduced the comprehension requirement for literacy in Japan, and by extension, I do not see why a slow phasing out of *kanji* (reducing the number of “*kanji* for general use” to 1800, then 1500, then 1200, and so on until there were none or very few of them still in use) could not be successfully and reasonably performed over time. Therefore, I do not feel that this practical concern is the main reason why the Japanese system has not been discarded, especially given that the system is still in use in the present day despite numerous historically recent opportunities to eliminate it.

There are also more sentimental issues that could conceivably be factors in the persistence of this writing system. As of right now, the people in Japan have grown up with their writing system and undoubtedly hold it to be unique to themselves. There is a certain “Japanese-ness” to the script that many people would not want to give up. The obvious criticism of this belief is that Chinese characters are not, as the name shows, Japanese. This has not been lost on the Japanese, and during the end of the Tokugawa era, a man named Hirata Atsutane promoted the idea that, prior to the introduction of Chinese characters, the Japanese had had a native writing system all their own, which he called “the god age script.” The script has been debunked as the mere “fabrication dreamed up by Shintoist scholars who were unwilling to acknowledge that writing was one of the many cultural appurtenances for which Japan was at first dependent on China and Korea.”⁴⁴ In lieu of a native Japanese script, however, there must be some comfort to be found in sticking to a script that is at least of East Asian origin; for this reason it would be entirely understandable if the citizens of Japan were to reject a top-down imposition of, for example, the Latin alphabet. However, this sort of argument falls flat on its face when one considers that *kana* are equally East Asian and in fact a good deal more Japanese than *kanji*.

At last, we come to the matter of prestige. Here it is useful to look at the case of Korea, a country which, like Japan, came to dwell within the Chinese world order and to adopt Chinese-style writing despite the fact that *hànzi* are as poorly suited to the Korean language as they are to the Japanese language. Unlike Japan, however, Korea has largely switched over to its own native

⁴³ Seeley, pp. 151–155 and Rogers, p. 67. These officially sanctioned characters are called *tōyō kanji*.

⁴⁴ Seeley, pp. 3–4.

hangul script (comparable in phoneticity to *kana*, though it differs in a number of other respects which will not be discussed here), using Chinese characters only very occasionally and only for Sino-Korean words in South Korea; the North has eliminated characters completely.⁴⁵ The usage of characters in the South is decreasing further,⁴⁶ and is (or at least likely soon will be) comparable to that of the Latin language in Euro-American countries — something to be splashed here or there (such as in the mottos of American universities) for the benefit of erudite individuals, but not something essential to literacy. That being said, despite the existence, as in the Japanese case, of a native writing system better suited to their language, the Koreans have continued to use Chinese characters at some level, and this could well be because of the prestige value of the characters in a society which has historically been dependent on China for many facets of its civilization, something which is by and large true of Japan as well.

I would like to propose that the prestige value of Chinese characters in Japanese (and Korean) society is the primary reason for their survival as a means of writing Japanese. On this subject it is worth returning to the case of Korea, because of the curious fact that the Korean equivalent of *kana* has a much higher use ratio vis-à-vis *hànzì* than do the Japanese syllabaries.⁴⁷ This, I believe, is due to the fact that Korean *hangul*, by this stage in its history, has begun to acquire some prestige value of its own. It is now half a millennium old and held up by scholars around the world as a model writing system, placing third (as opposed to the eighth and ninth, respectively, of Japanese and Chinese) on DeFrancis’ ranking chart.⁴⁸ It was created not through the bastardization of characters as in the Japanese case, but by the decree of a respected monarch, King Sejong the Great, whose official document promulgating *hangul* is to this day committed to memory by Korean schoolchildren⁴⁹ and held up as a rare pre-modern example of a desire for

⁴⁵ Rogers, pp. 73–74.

⁴⁶ Taylor and Taylor (quoted in Rogers, p. 74).

⁴⁷ Though in this case it is worth noting that Korean *hangul* is an alphabetic system as opposed to a syllabic system, a factor that adds to the ease with which it can be widely learned.

⁴⁸ DeFrancis, pp. 267–268.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

literacy and education. Unfortunately, when it was initially created, it was seen as lesser than Chinese characters by the elitist Korean Confucian literati,⁵⁰ but I feel that this perception has waned over time, whereas Japanese *kana* are still generally seen as the domain of the less educated, of children, and of women.⁵¹

In final summation, I find myself in agreement with John DeFrancis, who holds the development of writing in Japan to be an illustration of the fact that foreign innovators, for all of their capacity to introduce variations into borrowed scripts, have seldom (as in the North Korean case) been able to make a complete break with the past.⁵² That is, foreigners adopting a writing system can break the mold in a beneficial way, but never completely so. This is a variation on the phenomenon which DeFrancis refers to as “the dead hand of the past.”⁵³ In the Japanese case, the grip of this “dead hand” seems to be maintained through a combination of several of the potential causes I’ve discussed, including the perhaps especially significant prestige value of Chinese characters in Japanese society and unique ability of the current system to allow artistic, creative flair in a special way that only meaning-plus-sound systems can provide.

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⁵⁰ Rogers, p. 74.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67. Further evidence is provided by the fact that a number of Japanese children’s video games are written exclusively in *kana*.

⁵² DeFrancis, p. 131.

⁵³ DeFrancis, p. 262.

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