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## Language, Script, and Art in East Asia and Beyond: Past and Present

edited 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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Language, Script, and Art in East Asia and Beyond:  
Past and Present

Edited by Victor H. Mair  
University of Pennsylvania



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## Preface

Victor H. Mair

University of Pennsylvania

This collection of papers, “Language, Script, and Art in East Asia and Beyond: Past and Present,” was selected from classwork submitted to my course called “Language, Script, and Society in China” in fall 2017. “China” in the title of the course is writ large, inasmuch as these papers, like the class, examine questions concerning written and spoken language in the entire Sinographic sphere and Sinophone realm, together with adjacent cultures and societies that have interacted with them. Thus, for example, we look at such diverse topics as an Inner Asian Sinoform script (Tangut), Korean attitudes toward Chinese characters, Sinitic languages in Singapore, and the English language oeuvre of a distinguished Chinese dissident living in America.

Moreover, not only do these papers engage with language and writing directly as linguistic entities, they also are concerned with how Chinese characters may be used as design elements in art and in fashion. A unique emphasis of the course is the importance of topolects in the history of the Sinitic language family and right up to the present moment with their adoption in contemporary cinema. We also venture into politics with an investigation of the attempts by the Chinese government to increase Mandarin language instruction in schools, colleges, and universities around the world.

On the one hand, we look at non-Sinitic (“minority”) languages inside China, while on the other we survey various aspects of comparative Sinographic vocabulary in China, Korea, and Japan.

There is undoubtedly no more powerful driving force in linguistic change than that of the Internet. In this regard, we analyze the use of an entirely new kind of “set phrase” that has sprung up in digital discourse. Whereas traditional “set phrases” are based on historical and literary allusions, those today are created by “netizens” out of current discourse drawn from around the globe.

There is no better time than the present for studying the nature and development of the Sinitic languages and the scripts in which they have been written, as well as their mutual interactions with neighboring languages and scripts. We are delighted to offer this set of a dozen lively, illuminating essays by Penn undergrads and graduate students to all who share an interest in the Sinophone world.



LANGUAGE, SCRIPT, AND ART IN EAST ASIA AND BEYOND



# The Chinese Script and Its Use in Art: The Works of Gu Wenda and Xu Bing

Rhosean Asmah

This paper examines and compares several artworks by Gu Wenda and Xu Bing. Their works often contain elements of or inspired by the Chinese script. There is a fair amount of scholarship written on both artists, and their works have often been studied and viewed in tandem because of the engaging yet different ways in which they wield the Chinese script.

Both Gu and Xu are considered contemporary Chinese artists. Scholars generally agree that contemporary Chinese art began to be produced at the end of the Cultural Revolution, in 1976, and, of course, it continues to be created today.<sup>1</sup> Gu and Xu emerged as notable figures of this movement in the early 1980s by challenging the paradigm and ideas of traditional Chinese art.<sup>2</sup> There are many aspects of contemporary Chinese art, but here I will address only trends in the period that are particularly relevant to both Gu and Xu.

First, many contemporary Chinese artists changed what they address with their art. These artists are moving away from overtly politicized topics that are directly related to China and increasingly approaching their art within a more global framework.<sup>3</sup> This shift is related to another trend in contemporary Chinese art. In the 1980s and early 1990s, many Chinese artists decided to leave

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<sup>1</sup> Minglu Gao, "A Crisis of Contemporary Art in China?" *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 10 (n.d.): 11.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Ying and Yan Sun, *Reinventing Tradition in a New World: The Arts of Gu Wenda, Wang Mansheng, Xu Bing, and Zhang Hongtu* (Gettysburg, PA: Penn State University Press, 2004), introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Petya Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 256 (April 2015), 64.

China and go abroad, where they believed they could create art with fewer restrictions.<sup>4</sup> Gu moved to New York City in 1987, and in 1990 Xu also moved there. The works that resulted from this migration were hybrid and transnational artworks that contained juxtapositions between and attempted reconciliations of Chinese and Western cultural elements.<sup>5</sup> Another development is that many contemporary Chinese artists, including both Gu and Xu, have demonstrated a strong interest in calligraphy, which they artistically reinterpret in the context of China's various social and cultural transformations.<sup>6</sup> Calligraphy and script, already so intimately connected to Chinese culture, become a means of commenting upon it. Though the two artists both frequently work with the Chinese script, they have different reasons for doing so. I will discuss various aspects of Gu's and Xu's lives that are relevant when examining their work.

Gu Wenda was born in 1955 in China. Two major realizations during his life have influenced the course and development of his artwork. First, while at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Gu realized that all his previous artwork, copied from tradition, was "wrong."<sup>7</sup> At that time he was studying and recreating Classical Chinese landscape paintings and calligraphy, but realized that the resulting works, though beautiful, were not at all original.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Gu basically stopped painting and began reading many books on the philosophies of East Asia and of the West.<sup>9</sup> He rebelled against the tradition in which he was being trained and absorbed influences from those philosophies that encouraged artistic experimentation and innovation.<sup>10</sup> This is when Gu began to create the miswritten and modified Chinese characters that became a recurrent theme in his later works.

Gu later had another important artistic revelation. He realized that many Chinese artists had

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4 Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 167.

5 Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 167.

6 David Cateforis, "Calligraphy, Poetry, and Paradoxical Power in Wenda Gu's *Neon Calligraphy Series*," *Word & Image* 26 (2009).

7 Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History, 1970s–2000s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 107.

8 David Cateforis, "Calligraphy, Poetry, and Paradoxical Power."

9 Wu, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 107.

10 Cateforis, "Calligraphy Poetry, and Paradoxical Power."

become captives of Western modernism: by using Western ideas to impact Chinese art, they were following the same path that Western art had already traversed.<sup>11</sup> Gu thought this trend was limiting, and, from that time forward, actively worked to make the reference point for his art encompass the entire world.<sup>12</sup>

Xu was also born in 1955 and in China. Growing up during the Cultural Revolution had a profound impact on Xu and his thoughts about language. When Xu was a child, he was fascinated by all the books he saw around him. However, by the time he learned how to read, he could not read the books that had so interested him — he had learned to read simplified characters, while the books were written in traditional characters.<sup>13</sup> In an interview Xu said that the "...abandonment of the old characters and the promulgation of the new ones had a profound impact on his earliest memories of language, ultimately leaving him confused about the fundamental concept of culture."<sup>14</sup> This confusion led Xu to view characters themselves as unstable. Further, he began to focus more on the *appearance* of language than its actual meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Xu is also a proponent of Mao's Cultural Revolution idea that art should serve the people.<sup>16</sup> Ideas related to these Cultural Revolution experiences and beliefs occur frequently in Xu's work. In 1980, Xu had an important experience that changed what he desired to convey in his art. While viewing the works at a North Korean Socialist Realism art exhibit, he saw a reflection of what he believed China's artistic movement had become. He saw that "...[the] art was a lot less intelligent than the eyes that were looking at it."<sup>17</sup> Xu thought that these artists were more than capable of creating more complex and intelligent art. As a result, he decided that he had to move away from simple art

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<sup>11</sup> Wu, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 108.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>13</sup> Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," 55.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," 56.

<sup>16</sup> Scott Albright, "Xu Bing: Transcending Culture," *Yishu: A Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 10.5 (n.d.): 38.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 44.

and needed to express his thoughts in an elevated manner that would cross cultural boundaries and not strengthen old notions of ethnocentrism and closed-minded, nationalistic thinking.<sup>18</sup>

I will now discuss and analyze, in chronological order, four artworks, two of which are by Xu and two of which are by Gu. The works are *Book from the Sky* by Xu, *Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry* by Gu, the *united nations project* by Gu, and *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* by Xu. These are some of the artists' most prominent and most analyzed pieces. In addition, most of Gu's and Xu's notable experiences, discussed above, occurred before the creation of these works, so their influence is clearly seen in them. Gu Wenda and Xu Bing are two artists who use the Chinese script to convey their beliefs and reveal truths about the world and human interaction, albeit in different ways.



**Figure 1.** Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987–1991, hand-printed books and ceiling and wall scrolls printed from wood letterpress type, ink on paper. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Xu Bing.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Allison Young and Dr. Steven Zucker, “Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*,” in *Smarthistory*, December 14, 2015, accessed September 3, 2018, <https://smarthistory.org/xu-bing-book-from-the-sky/>.

Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (See Figure 1), worked on between 1987 and 1991, is a collection of scrolls, books, and panels, all of which display thousands of unreadable characters.<sup>20</sup> The scroll section of the piece drapes down from the ceiling, while its other components are displayed on the wall or in the middle of the exhibition room. All of the unreadable characters were rendered using a traditional typeface invented during the Song Dynasty. Xu chose this typeface because over time it had come to be associated with modern books and newspapers.<sup>21</sup> With this choice Xu intentionally connects his work to the public, embracing Mao's idea. Though the characters are unreadable, their typeface attracts the audience by creating an element of familiarity in the piece that allows it to "...[belong] to everybody, not just to [Xu]."<sup>22</sup> Further, because no one, including Xu, can read the characters, everybody experiences the same confusion. To create the unreadable characters, Xu combined and rearranged a limited number of existing components of Chinese characters.<sup>23</sup> By using the Song Dynasty typeface together with parts of real Chinese characters, Xu creates a tension in his piece: it is simultaneously both familiar and distant. An additional point is made by the fact that the process of creating and carving the unreadable characters was incredibly time-consuming.<sup>24</sup> Xu's task of making them, tedious and laborious, recalls the problems that come with relying too heavily on characters. Through his process, Xu emphasizes the great amount of time and effort that goes into understanding the Chinese script. Moreover, as Petya Andreeva notes, "characters [have] been an impediment to conveying one's thoughts in a free manner throughout Chinese history...."<sup>25</sup> In this way, Xu's piece comments upon the nature of the Chinese script, pointing out its limitations and flaws. By making the characters unreadable, Xu suggests that Chinese characters hinder the effective communication of one's thoughts.

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20 Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," 57.

21 Simon Leung, "Pseudo Languages: A Conversation with Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Jonathan Hay," *Art Journal* 58. 3 (n.d.): 88.

22 Ibid., 89.

23 Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," 57.

24 Wu, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 99.

25 Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," 57.

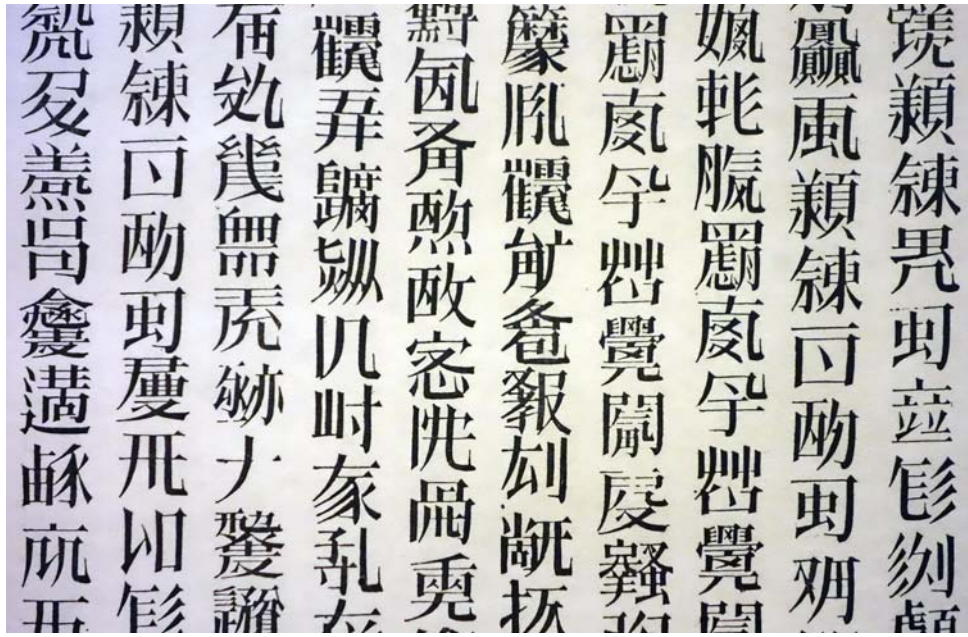


Figure 2. Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987–1991, ink on paper. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Xu Bing. A look at some of the invented and meaningless characters.<sup>26</sup>

Xu's inspiration for *Book from the Sky* is rooted in his childhood experiences during the Cultural Revolution, as discussed previously. He thought that the tedious and repetitious task of creating his *own* book would help clear his mind of the confusion resulting from the conflict between simplified and traditional characters.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, there is a relationship between Xu's work and the political. Xu believes that the "...meaningless characters, intriguing and eye-catching on the surface, and yet lacking in content, are strongly redolent of the Cultural Revolution posters and all the propaganda texts of that decade."<sup>28</sup> Xu again creates a connection between his work and the public. Several generations of Chinese people lived through the Cultural Revolution, and they are familiar with the posters and texts that Xu recalls with his work. Therefore, the audience recognizes another

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26 Dr. Allison Young and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*," in *Smarthistory*, December 14, 2015, accessed September 3, 2018, <https://smarthistory.org/xu-bing-book-from-the-sky/>.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 58.



familiar aspect of Xu's work, their own memories, somewhat offsetting the distant unreadableness of the characters. In addition, Xu expands upon what he sees as the unstable nature of characters, changing them in a way that allows them to have more meaning. By stripping the characters of their semantic meaning, Xu makes them convey his beliefs about the Chinese script and the Cultural Revolution. In this piece, Xu uses and changes the Chinese script to comment upon common Chinese experiences and explore his own confusing experiences with languages.



**Figure 3.** Gu Wenda, *Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry*, 1993–2005, stone steles, 110 cm (wide) × 190 cm (long) × 20 cm (thick) and 1.3 tons each, Xi'an, China.<sup>29</sup>

Gu Wenda's *Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry* (See Figure 3), constructed between 1993 and 2005, consists of fifty individual stone slabs, weighing 1.3 tons each. On each of the steles is three sets of text carved in both Chinese and English, and chosen and created

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<sup>29</sup> Gu Wenda, "Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry," [www.wendagu.com](http://wendagu.com), September 3, 2018. [http://wendagu.com/installation/forest\\_of\\_stone\\_steles/forest\\_of\\_stone\\_steles01.html](http://wendagu.com/installation/forest_of_stone_steles/forest_of_stone_steles01.html).

through a process Gu calls “complex English-Chinese translation.”<sup>30</sup> The three sets of text are all versions of a Tang Dynasty poem. Complex English-Chinese translation is a process invented by Gu himself. Gu first chooses a Tang Dynasty poem, carving it vertically on the right side of the stele. Next, he gets a translation by the American poet Witter Bynner of the same Tang Dynasty poem. This version of the poem is carved horizontally on the left side of the stele. For the final step, Gu translates Bynner’s English back in to Chinese, basing the translation on sound rather than meaning.<sup>31</sup> This version of the poem is placed in the middle of the stele and written in Gu’s own calligraphy. This final version of the poem is nonsensical and hard to decipher. By basing his translation on sound rather than meaning, Gu gets a string of logically unrelated Chinese characters. Further, Gu chooses to write the final version of the poem in his own calligraphy. His calligraphy is difficult to read because he shifts the radicals to a new place — from the left to the top, for example — and changes simplified characters and radicals back into their traditional forms.<sup>32</sup> Gu leaves viewers with something that is difficult for both English speakers and Chinese speakers to understand. While both would be able to read at least one version of the poem — Bynner’s English or the original Chinese — both struggle to comprehend the final version: the English speakers because they do not know Chinese, and the Chinese speakers because the phonetic and semantic aspects of the characters have been moved around and changed. Bilingual speakers would face a similar challenge, and speakers of neither language would see only that there were different scripts, not being able to read any of them. Like Xu, Gu presents aspects of his work that are familiar to his audience. However, while Xu’s *Book from the Sky* is unintelligible for everybody, Gu’s work creates different degrees of incomprehensibility that are related to one’s language background.

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<sup>30</sup> Cateforis, “Calligraphy Poetry, and Paradoxical Power.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 4.** Gu Wenda, *Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry*, 1993–2005, stone steles, 110 cm (wide) × 190 cm (long) × 20 cm (thick) and 1.3 tons each, Xi'an, China. A close-up of the stone steles.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gu Wenda, "Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry," [www.wendagu.com](http://www.wendagu.com), September 3, 2018. [http://wendagu.com/installation/forest\\_of\\_stone\\_steles/forest\\_of\\_stone\\_steleso6.html](http://wendagu.com/installation/forest_of_stone_steles/forest_of_stone_steleso6.html).



**Figure 5.** Gu Wenda, *Forest of Stone Steles: A Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry*, 1993–2005, stone steles, 110 cm (wide) × 190 cm (long) × 20 cm (thick) and 1.3 tons each, Xi'an, China. A close-up of the calligraphy on the stone steles.<sup>34</sup>

By making the piece hard to understand, Gu points out the miscommunication that often occurs between different languages, showing how meaning is lost. The final version of the poem technically *can* be unraveled (if one reads traditional characters and knows Gu's process), but the original thoughts are still disguised. Even if one dissects Gu's calligraphy, one is left with a poem that is completely different from the original. Gu intends this work to convey the idea that "...reality always goes in the opposite direction of our ideals."<sup>35</sup> The inability of language to convey or translate ideas specific to a culture is an unavoidable constant. However, Gu also believes that "Only through the misunderstanding can we create the new!"<sup>36</sup> He makes the final version of the poem inaccessible so that viewers explore the unknown that exists beyond their uncertainty and confusion. He suggests

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Claire Huot, "An Interview with Gu Wenda," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 9. 4 (n.d.): 38.

<sup>36</sup> Cateforis, "Calligraphy Poetry, and Paradoxical Power."

that different cultures *can* have a mutual dialogue, even through mistranslations and misunderstandings, and that there is something valuable to be gained from that which seems incomprehensible.<sup>37</sup>

Through this piece, Gu also references his Chinese heritage. His steles were influenced by the *actual* Forest of Stone Steles, a repository in Xi'an that houses many stone steles from the Tang Dynasty. Gu includes these references to China in his work both to make Chinese symbols recognizable as world symbols and to identify his work as Chinese.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, this work embodies a tension between two previously mentioned ideas. Gu began working on the *Forest of Stone Steles* after he moved to New York City, but the piece seems particularly related to China, due to the steles, calligraphy, and the Tang Dynasty poem. However, the work also shows references to many cultures, using the translations between Chinese and English to stand in for the interaction between any or all cultures. Consequently, the shift from addressing that which is specific to China to that which is more international is clear in Gu's piece, but the work remains inherently Chinese, particularly in appearance.

Xu's *Book from the Sky* and Gu's *Forest of Stone Steles* deal with similar themes. Both artists use the Chinese script to convey an idea of understanding or misunderstanding, but use that idea for different purposes. Xu wants viewers of his piece to see an emptiness in the unreadable characters in order to recall ideas about the Chinese script and the Cultural Revolution, while Gu wants readers to find meaning in the incomprehensible. Further, Xu uses the Chinese script to convey ideas that are related to one specific culture, while Gu tries to represent the relationship between all cultures. This aligns with the trends in contemporary Chinese art discussed above, as most of Xu's making *Book from the Sky* happened in China, while Gu had already been living in New York City for a few years before he began *Forest of Stone Steles*.

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<sup>37</sup> Huot, "An Interview with Gu Wenda," 38.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 39.





Figure 6. Gu Wenda, *united nations–china monument: temple of heaven*, 1998, human hair. New York City, USA, MoMA PS1. A site-specific installation commissioned by the Asia Society for “inside out.”<sup>39</sup>

Gu Wenda constructed the *united nations* project between 1993 and 2004. The series is a collection of twenty-two different monuments, all constructed of hair. Each of the monuments was displayed in various cities around the world, spanning several continents. They all incorporate several invented, unreadable scripts, based on Chinese, English, Hindi, and Arabic. Gu based the unreadable Chinese script on seal script, an ancient style of Chinese writing, because he thought that Chinese and English readers would immediately recognize whether today’s simplified or traditional characters were actually fake.<sup>40</sup> This choice suggests that Gu wants the audience to view the unreadable Chinese script as something foreign because they are not familiar with the writing system, and not because a script they are familiar with has been changed. Gu’s unreadable scripts recall Xu’s unreadable script in

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<sup>39</sup> Gu Wenda, “united nations project” [www.wendagu.com](http://www.wendagu.com), September 3, 2018. [http://wendagu.com/installation/united\\_nations/united\\_nations\\_map.html](http://wendagu.com/installation/united_nations/united_nations_map.html).

<sup>40</sup> Leung, “Pseudo-languages,” 89.

*Book from the Sky*. However, because Gu's unreadable script is based on seal script, and not rooted in a traditional typeface, like Xu's, their works have different meanings and reveal different goals. Xu wants his audience to feel a slight connection to his invented characters, despite the fact that they are unreadable, while Gu wants to make his audience to feel as though the unreadable seal script is a foreign language.

Gu acquired the large amounts of hair required for the series by finding and working with local barber shops in the city where a monument was to be displayed. In addition, Gu made sure to explore and learn the histories of the city where a monument was to be displayed, so that the monument would be an honest and thoughtful presentation of the city and its people. Gu did all of this so that, once the series was completed, it would be "... as if millions of people helped shape it."<sup>41</sup> Gu's efforts reveal a similarity between Xu and himself. By involving people in the creation of his art, Gu illustrates Mao's idea that art should serve the people. He creates a connection between the artwork and the audience, allowing the audience to be a part of something bigger than themselves and feel connected to those around them whose hair may also be in the piece. Further, this series is the embodiment of Gu's effort "to make the reference point for his art encompass the entire world." Gu goes beyond *Forest of Stone Steles* by making the monuments directly reference cities and cultures that are not particularly Western or Chinese. Examples include monuments like *united nations-Israel monument: the holy land* (1995) in Tel Aviv and *united nations-africa monument: the world praying wall* (1997) in Johannesburg, among others. When examining the series in its entirety, no one monument is the focus, and the reference point truly becomes the world.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 98.

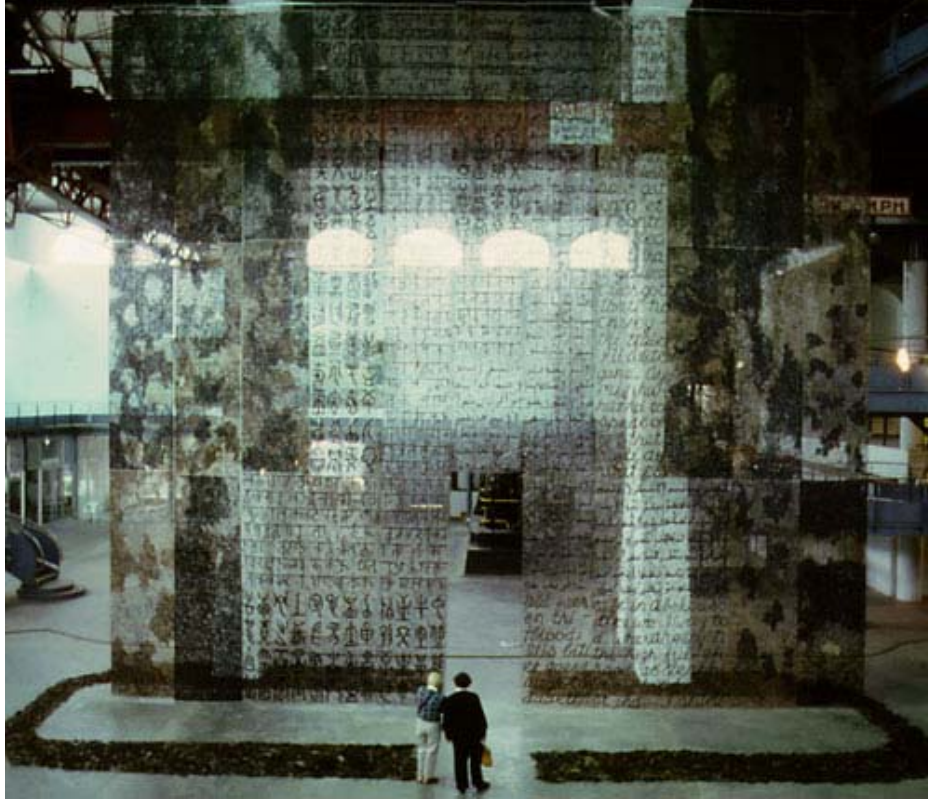


Figure 7. Gu Wenda, *united nations– africa monument: the world praying wall*, 1997, human hair and African shorn hair. Johannesburg, South Africa, Institute of Contemporary Art. A site-specific installation for second Johannesburg biennale.<sup>42</sup>

Gu intends the unreadable scripts in the *united nations* project to evoke the limitations of human knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Even though the different scripts seem familiar, they convey no literal meaning and cause the audience to feel that they are misunderstanding something. However, Gu believes that these unreadable scripts, through the misunderstanding and confusion they present, help the audience imagine a world beyond language.<sup>44</sup> Just as in *Forest of Stone Steles*, Gu presents the idea that misunderstanding something can lead to new knowledge. He shows that everything, even that which

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<sup>42</sup> Gu Wenda, “united nations project” [www.wendagu.com](http://www.wendagu.com), September 3, 2018. [http://wendagu.com/installation/united\\_nations/united\\_nations\\_map.html](http://wendagu.com/installation/united_nations/united_nations_map.html).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



is technically incomprehensible, can have meaning if one looks beyond its appearance. Additionally, this series acknowledges the linguistic and cultural differences that continuously divide humanity.<sup>45</sup> The different scripts that clearly belong to distinct languages remind individual audience members of the differences between themselves and those around them. Nevertheless, Gu offsets this divisive idea through his use of hair from many different peoples. He connects everyone that has viewed or contributed to his series and shows them that they can come together to create something great. Consequently, Gu also presents a difference between his and Xu's use of unreadable scripts. Xu uses an unreadable script to reflect upon himself and China, while Gu uses several unreadable scripts to convey ideas about human knowledge and relationships.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 98.



Figure 8. Xu Bing, *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy*, 1994–1996, hand scroll, ink on paper. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Xu Bing.<sup>46</sup>

Xu Bing's *An Introduction Square Word Calligraphy*, created between 1994 and 1996, produces English writing according to Chinese-looking brushmark, composing whole words within a square.<sup>47</sup> In this series, Xu uses square word calligraphy to write poems by Robert Frost, Tang Dynasty poems translated by Wang Wei, lyrics by Bob Dylan, quotes from Mao about art and the people, and children's nursery rhymes, among other things.<sup>48</sup> These choices of text indicate the increasingly global

46 Xu Bing, "An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy," *The Met*. September 3, 2018. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73325>.

47 Andreeva, "From Xu Bing to Shu Yong: Linguistic Phenomena in Chinese Installation Art," 58.

48 Albright, "Xu Bing," 41.

nature of Xu's work. In *Book from the Sky*, Xu dealt only with a script based on Chinese, but in this series writes in English and uses several popular English texts. By the time Xu began *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy*, he had already lived in the United States for four years, suggesting the reason his work became less directly related to China and more related to the English language. Additionally, this series embodies Xu's desire to escape "notions of ethnocentrism, and close-minded, nationalistic thinking." Xu crosses boundaries, mixing and changing both the English and Chinese scripts. In addition to Xu's own writings in square word calligraphy, *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* also has an interactive component in which audience members can learn how to write in square word calligraphy themselves.<sup>49</sup> With the interactive component of the exhibit Xu tries to break down barriers between audiences and contemporary art, which Xu thinks is often too distant from its audiences.<sup>50</sup> By doing this, Xu ensures that his art serves the people. By learning to write with square word calligraphy, audiences get to experience a part of Chinese culture and become part of the art-making process. This is similar to Gu's use of hair in the *united nations project*, as both works allow the audiences to feel more connected to the art they are viewing.

In his essay *On Words*, Xu says that becoming accustomed to certain concepts and styles is the result of laziness. He thinks that, periodically, one must destroy and then recreate convention by opening spaces that have historically never been touched.<sup>51</sup> Xu's goal with *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* is to break convention. By creating an overlap between the scripts of Chinese and English, Xu ensures that audiences look at both languages in a new light, effectively accomplishing his goal. Additionally, by making English writing look like Chinese characters, Xu questions how viewers define their cultural identity, causing the implications of the script to transcend the language of calligraphy itself.<sup>52</sup> This reflects Xu's early experiences with language. Xu was confused about culture and came to view characters as unstable, later conveying a similar idea in his artwork. Because

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Wu, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 254.

<sup>52</sup> Wang and Ying, *Reinventing Tradition in a New World*, introduction.

experiences with language have already prompted Xu to question the ideas of culture and language, he does so for other people.

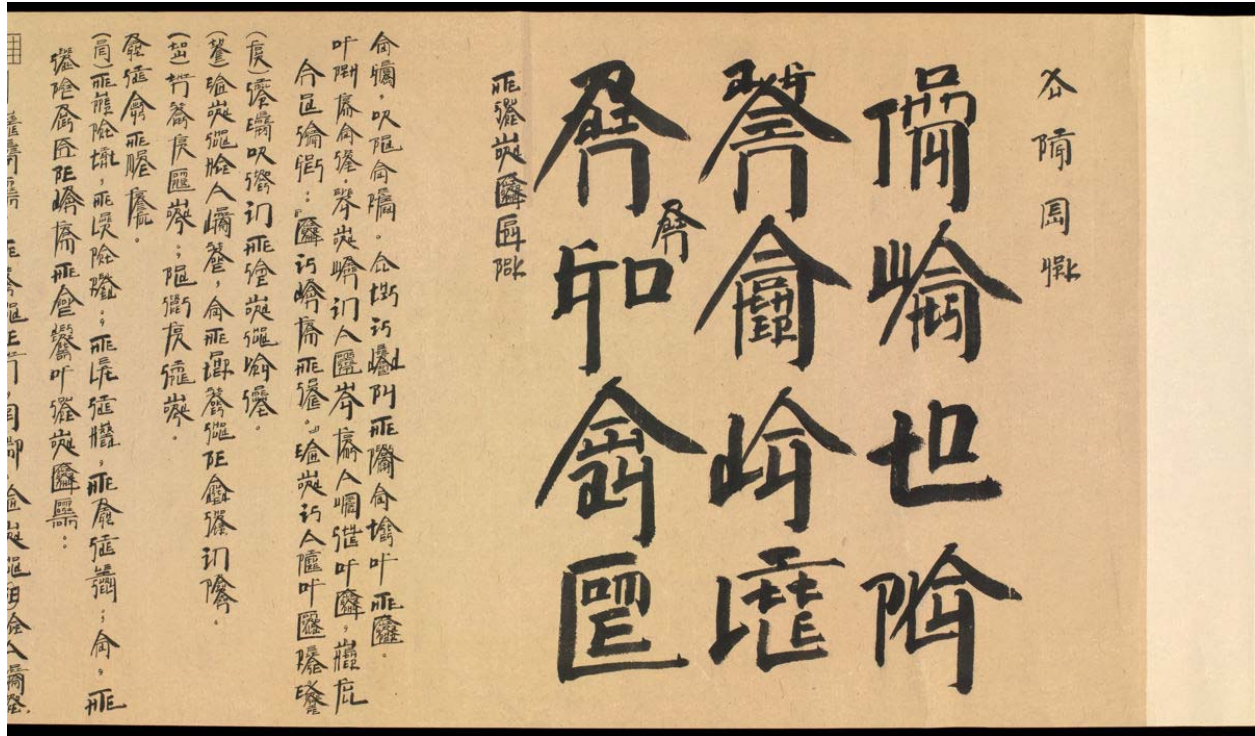


Figure 9. Xu Bing, *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy*, 1994–1996, hand scroll, ink on paper. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Xu Bing.<sup>53</sup>

In many ways, *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* is the opposite of *Book from the Sky*. In the latter Xu changes the external form of a character to make it meaningless, but in the former, he changes the character's form to give it new meaning. Further, an important aspect of *Book from the Sky* is its unreadableness and inaccessibility. However, *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* is the opposite, because it focuses on accessibility. Though square word calligraphy may initially seem unreadable, audiences are given a chance to learn and reproduce what they see in the exhibit. These differences arise from the fact that the two works have different goals — *Book from the Sky* seeks to

53 Xu Bing, "An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy," *The Met*. September 3, 2018. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73325>.

discuss China, while *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* aims to break tradition and make art accessible. *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* also discusses the interaction between cultures, recalling Gu's works. These works exhibit a similar understanding of the value in misunderstanding things. Both artists suggest that misunderstanding leads to new learning — Gu's artworks present a world beyond language, and Xu's piece allows one to experience a new culture.

Overall, the artworks of Gu Wenda and Xu Bing are compositions that make audiences think about language and its relation to life. Gu and Xu consistently show that a script is more than just a written language — they show that script goes beyond language and is capable of conveying theoretical ideas about politics, culture, and human interaction. It is important to note that it is the unique nature of the Chinese script and aspects of Chinese culture that makes much of this possible. Many of Gu's and Xu's artworks would not have been conceived without things like the simplification of characters or traditional Chinese art techniques that pushed the artists to consider the connections between art, language, and their lives. As a result, Gu and Xu are able to instill in their audiences many important ideas. Gu and Xu teach the importance of intercultural interaction and the ability to find meaning in anything, even that which seems unknowable.

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*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*  
and Written Wu Topolect in the Late Qing Period

Yaoying Dai

INTRODUCTION

Chinese literati of the modern generation regarded *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* (*Haishanghua Liezhuan*, 海上花列传) as the first and most outstanding work of fiction written in the Wu topolect. Published as a single volume in 1892, *Sing-song Girls* is based on the demimonde experiences of the author, Han Bangqing (韩邦庆, 1856–1894). As a patron and observer,<sup>1</sup> Han was able to chronicle the lives of courtesans in the Shanghai gay quarters during the last decades of the nineteenth century. From the literati active in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Lu Xun (鲁迅, 1881–1936), Liu Fu (刘复, 1891–1934) and Liu Dajie (刘大杰, 1904–1977) to contemporary scholars like Chen Pingyuan, David Wang and Fan Boqun, many intellectuals have realized the uniqueness and importance of this work in the historical and literary fields. An invaluable work, it vividly records the tumultuous encounters between the late Qing and the modern period, studded as the period was with brilliant literary talents.

Taking the importance of the publication further, some literature scholars tried to evaluate its contributions in the linguistic field. Among these reformers, Hu Shi (胡适, 1891–1962) was the most devoted advocate. Stressing the linguistic features in this work of fiction, Hu claimed that a new literary genre had been established: topolect literature (*fangyan wenxue*, 方言文学). Regarding *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* as the founder and representative of this new field, he hoped future topolect literatures and thus a new national literature, would be born.

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<sup>1</sup> Hu Shi 胡适, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* 中国章回小说考证 (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels) (Shanghai: Shiye yinshu guan ban, 1942), 492.

In this paper, I intend to challenge Wu's categorization of the work as a piece of Wu topolect literature. In particular, I will challenge his hypothesis that there exists a genre of topolect fiction in a pure topolect writing style. My analysis also questions his and other reformers' understanding of the influences of topolect writing on modern Chinese literature. The relevant questions are: in a real sense, can *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* be regarded as fiction written in the Wu topolect? During the late Qing period and early modern period, had there ever existed a genre that could be called topolect literature? Was there a pure topolect writing style? And what contribution did topolect writing make to modern Chinese literature?

These questions will be discussed first through scrutinizing the inheritance and innovation of written Wu topolect in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. Next, this paper will discuss the merits, limits and mechanisms of written Wu topolect in fiction. A comparative study on *He Dian* (何典) and *Nine-tailed Turtles* (*Jiuwei Gui* 九尾龟) examines the similarities among pieces of fiction written more or less in the Wu topolect. It also casts doubt on the possibility that these represent a pure written Wu topolect or form a genre. The last section of this paper focuses on how *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and topolect writing encountered and struggled with modern Chinese literature. Theoretical analysis and historical facts illuminate the gap between literary reformers' expectations and the real influences brought by written Wu topolect in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and other literary works.

## WU TOPOLECT AS A WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Beginning in the Ming dynasty, the Wu topolect started its evolution into a written language. Non-elites first adopted the Wu topolect in Suzhou "plucking rhymes" (Suzhou *tanci* 苏州弹词) and Kun Opera (*Kunqu* 昆曲). These became the popular art forms of the time, and they were thus widely perceived as the folk origin of the written Wu topolect. Separately, intellectuals like Feng Menglong (冯梦龙, 1574–1646) collected the mountain songs (*shan'ge* 山歌) of the Wu people. He described written Wu topolect in a way that demonstrated its uniqueness and expressiveness. Though this was the most famous source, all these art forms became references for Han Bangqing in his efforts to adopt Wu topolect in his fiction. At the same time, he also made innovations in written Wu topolect to fit it into the speaking trends of the time. Throughout the process, the Wu topolect continued its



development as a written language. This helps us to understand the features of written Wu topolect in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*.

### 2.1. WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN SUZHOU PLUCKING RHYMES AND KUN OPERA

Written Wu topolect first appeared in Suzhou plucking rhymes and Kun Opera. As folk arts, they rely on the interpretations of the performers. When performers had to put the dialogues that appeared in their performances into written form, they created a written Wu topolect. Since the spoken language had many morphemes that did not correspond to any extant characters, people at the time adopted one of the universal laws of Chinese characters, called "borrowing" (*jiajie*, 假借), to write it down. By borrowing characters with the same or similar pronunciations to represent the pronunciations of topolect words, writers expanded the meanings of these characters.<sup>2</sup> As Zhang Huaijiu has pointed out, the literatures of Kun Opera and Suzhou plucking rhymes had adopted this method to record Wu topolect and that form was handed down to succeeding generations for hundreds of years. At the same time, it also erected a model for the written Wu topolect.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Hu Shi called these literatures "preparations made for Wu topolect literature."<sup>4</sup>

However, this model set by Suzhou plucking rhymes and Kun Opera was problematic. First, the expressiveness of the Wu topolect was overwhelmed by the dominating Chinese literary tradition in these literatures. Liu Fu has mentioned that Suzhou plucking rhymes and Kun Opera rhyme in lines, and many of the texts are written in literary Chinese. Therefore, they cannot fully express the merits of the Wu topolect as oral language.<sup>5</sup> With more literary Chinese than written Wu topolect, and more rhyming tradition than free flow, written Wu topolect in these art forms could not capture the

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<sup>2</sup> See "borrowing" in Introduction, to Xu Shen 许慎, *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字 (Explaining graphs and analyzing characters) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Huaijiu 张怀久, ed., *Wudi Fangyan Xiaoshuo* 吴地方言小说 (Wu topolect fiction) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhonghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 511.

<sup>5</sup> Fu Liu 刘复, "Du 'Haishanghua Liezhuan' 读《海上花列传》 (Reading *Haishanghua Lie Zhuan*)," in Han Bangqing 韩邦庆, *Haishanghua Liezhuan* 海上花列传 (*The sing-song girls of Shanghai*) (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gufen youxiangongsi, 1983), 604.

expressiveness of the spoken language shown in performance. Another problem was in the process of transforming spoken Wu toplect into written form. Zhou Zhenghe points out, in the case of Suzhou plucking rhymes, that “once these toplect lines are recorded and put into characters, the written language could not remain thoroughly toplectical.”<sup>6</sup> Although writers could borrow characters to represent the spoken language, some parts of spoken Wu toplect still failed to be transmuted into written forms, and were erased in the process. Furthermore, the function of written Wu toplect was also constrained by actors who appeared in performances. Zhou explained that in Suzhou plucking rhymes, the narrative, as well as the lines of the young male protagonists (*sheng* 生) and young female protagonists (*dan* 旦) were usually written in literary Chinese. Only the lines of the comedic characters (*chou* 丑) were written in Wu toplect.<sup>7</sup> The use of Wu toplect created a dramatic effect that vividly reflected the idiosyncrasies of comedic characters. But it was considered improper for the non-comic protagonists. In these three ways, written Wu toplect failed to dominate the literatures of Suzhou plucking rhymes and Kun Opera. It is appropriate to quote Hu Shi in concluding that, in Suzhou plucking rhymes and Kun Opera, the written Wu toplect is positioned only in “subordinate status” and “cannot form an independent toplect literature.”<sup>8</sup>

#### WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN *THE MOUNTAIN SONGS* (SHAN'GE 山歌)

Feng Menglong, a vernacular writer and poet from Changzhou (now Suzhou), contributed to the enrichment of written Wu toplect from a literati perspective. He collected, edited and published *The Mountain Songs*, the love songs sung by the Wu folk at the time. Before this, he had already added some Wu toplect elements to his vernacular work of fiction, *Hanging Branches*. *The Mountain Songs*, however, was his first attempt to write mostly in Wu toplect and to express fully its characteristics in direct discourse. Zhou has argued that “the toplect system” in the first nine volumes of *The Mountain Songs* originated purely from the local oral language and was dependant on it. With notes from Feng

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6 Zhou Zhenghe 周振鹤 and Rujie You 游汝杰, *Fangyan yu Zhongguo Wenhua* 方言与中国文化 (Toplects and Chinese culture) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1986), 188.

7 Ibid.

8 Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 501.

Menglong, "it could largely reflect the conditions of Wu topolect around Suzhou of the time."<sup>9</sup> The contribution of these 237 songs lay in their use of around 350 topolect words and over 1000 topolect sentences.<sup>10</sup> These formed a historical vocabulary and the syntax of the Wu topolect in direct discourse.

In addition, from a literati perspective, this literature meant still more to written Wu topolect. With the notes from Feng, the borrowed characters corresponding to spoken Wu topolect could be better understood by readers. Simultaneously, Feng claimed that these songs were not collected by the court to admonish or please the emperor, *and thus he did not expect them to be understood all over the realm*. Both acts alleviated the emphasis and reliance on literary Chinese and enabled written Wu topolect to dominate in the texts. Besides, in his work, Feng followed the pronunciation rules of Wu topolect instead of the orthodox rules prescribed in the widely accepted rhyme books of the time such as *Zhongyuan yinyun* (中原音韵). Oki Yasushi has analyzed the first song of the work "Smile" (笑). He pointed out that Feng stuck to Wu topolect pronunciations and categorized characters "sheng" (生), "sheng" (声) and "zheng" (争) in the *Jiang-yang* (江阳) rhyme group.<sup>11</sup> Although in the usual classification these characters belong to the *Geng-qing* (庚青) rhyme group, Feng asserted the value of Wu topolect pronunciation and the uniqueness of the Wu topolect. Paolo Santangelo also has admitted its linguistic value to "create a lexicon of proper emotional terms (containing the conceptual component 'to feel' or 'feeling')." Through this lexicon, Wu topolect in *The Mountain Songs* managed to "collect information on the way of representation," to evaluate and perceive "emotional and imaginary phenomena," and finally to reconstruct "fragments of mental representation of inner and outer reality."<sup>12</sup> Briefly, Feng expanded the narrative sphere of Wu topolect by exerting its expressiveness. Regarding Feng's ambition in the work, we can see *The Mountain Songs* as expressing

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<sup>9</sup> Zhou Zhenghe and Rujie You, *Fangyan yu Zhongguo Wenhua* (Topolects and Chinese culture), 194.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>11</sup> Oki, Yasushi, and Paolo Santangelo, *Shan'ge, The "Mountain Songs": Love Songs in Ming China* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 293.

“Feng’s intention of establishing a literature of topolect.”<sup>13</sup> We can also see Feng’s accomplishment in complementing and enriching the model of written Wu topolect set by Suzhou plucking rhythms and Kun Opera.

However, the writing model in *The Mountain Songs* also had its limits in narration and purity. And these limits are shared by all the works mentioned in this section. Regarding narration, all the written Wu topolect in different art forms was written in direct discourse. That is to say, written Wu topolect, since its establishment, had only a single narrative perspective. It set the pattern to depart from “I,” an “I” representing either the folk-art performer or the mountain songs’ singer. Another limitation concerns the alleged purity of written Wu topolect.

Although *The Mountain Songs* mostly consists of written Wu topolect, as Shi Rujie has pointed out, it is unavoidable that it would be influenced by Guanhua (官话, literally “the official language”) and that it would have Guanhua elements mixed into the writing. For example, in *The Mountain Songs*, Feng usually adopted the Wu topolect sentence particle — a grammatically functional word — “*zhuo*” (捉) to suggest the occurrence of circumstances or the conduct of behavior. However, in rare cases, he would also use Guanhua “*na*” (拿) and “*ba*” (把).<sup>14</sup> Shi’s conclusion emphasizes the difficulty of obtaining pure topolect materials. He agrees that all the available documents have very complicated linguistic features. Most of them are composed of both topolects and Guanhua.<sup>15</sup> None of these literatures has established a pure written Wu topolect without interference from literary Chinese and Guanhua elements.

#### INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION IN THE WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN *THE SING-SONG GIRLS OF SHANGHAI*

Through scrutiny of the aforementioned art forms, we can see both the historical development of written Wu topolect and its limits. The model established by these works supported the novelists of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>14</sup> Shi Rujie 石汝杰, *Mingqing Wuyu he Xiandai Fangyan Yanjiu* 明清吴语和现代方言研究 (Study on Ming-Qing Wu topolect and modern topolects) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), 151, 181.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 159.

the late nineteenth century in using written Wu toplect for their fiction. Meanwhile, they also updated their versions of written Wu toplect to reflect the period in which they lived.

As one of these novelists, Han Bangqing inherited and continued to supplement the writing model, albeit with prudence. His 1892 work of fiction, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, received influence mainly from the Suzhou "plucking rhythms" form. The specific Wu toplect he employed in his fiction is the Suzhou toplect.<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact that Han was born in what is now west Shanghai, the language he spoke resembled Suzhou toplect more than it did Shanghainese at that time.<sup>17</sup> Zhang Huaijiu substantiated this observation in calling the toplect Han used in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* "Suzhou toplect."<sup>18</sup> Another aspect that Han inherited from Suzhou plucking rhythms was its vocabulary. He explained that:

Suzhou toplect written in plucking rhythms consists mostly of vernacular words. I would continue to adopt them, since they have circulated for a long time, and everyone knows about them.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, we can also see innovation in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. This was driven by the rapid updating of the Suzhou toplect. Ding Bangxin assumes that toplects of more prosperous areas change faster. "Since Suzhou was the metropolis and the wealthiest area in the south of the Yangzi River, its toplect should be changing rapidly."<sup>20</sup> Hu Shi goes on to explain that

<sup>16</sup> The Wu toplect is a language family that consists of many sub-toplects like the Shanghai and Suzhou toplects.

<sup>17</sup> See Wang Datong 王大同, *Jiaqing Shanghai Xianzhi* 嘉庆上海县志 (Shanghai gazetteer of the Jiaqing era) (Shanghai, 1814).

<sup>18</sup> Zhang Huaijiu, ed., *Wudi Fangyan Xiaoshuo* (Wu toplect fiction), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Han Bangqing 韩邦庆, "Introduction" 海上花列传例言, in Han Bangqing 韩邦庆, *Haishanghua Liezhuan* 海上花列传 (The sing-song girls of Shanghai) (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gufen youxiangongsi, 1983), 609. The original text is as follows: "Suzhou tubai, tanci zhong suo zai duo xi suzi, dan tongxing yi jiu, ren suo gong zhi, gu reng yong zhi. 苏州土白, 弹词中所载多系俗字, 但通行已久, 人所共知, 故仍用之。"

<sup>20</sup> Ding Bangxin 丁邦新, *Yibainian qian de Suzhou hua* 一百年前的苏州话 (The Suzhou dialect at the beginning of the twentieth century) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2003), 117.

topolects are living languages that keep changing all the time. When languages change, the written forms recording them would change accordingly. Therefore, when Han wrote *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, he had to “start on a course to boldly resettle the Suzhou topolect.”<sup>21</sup> Specifically, Han invented new vocabulary and new linguistic rules to put Suzhou topolect into a written form. For instance, Han elaborated his invention of new vocabulary words such as “*fiao*” (𪛗):

There are morphemes in Suzhou topolect without correspondent characters. In speaking two characters such as “*wu yao*” (勿要), the two are condensed into one syllable when Suzhou (Shanghai) people speak the syllables in a rush; if I insist on writing this syllable in two characters “*wu yao*,” they will not fit the context of the time; besides I have no other character in mind for their replacement. Therefore, I compound these two characters “*wu yao*” into one character. Readers should know that the character “*fiao*” did not exist before this. It is a compound of two characters that represents a syllable.<sup>22</sup>

In this way, not only had Han invented new vocabulary such as “*fiao*,” he also brought in a new law of word creation other than borrowing. This new law put spoken Wu topolect into texts by compounding characters into one while keeping both their phonetic features. It changed the relationship between spoken languages and characters. For the first time, spoken languages did not have to make compromises by borrowing characters with the same or merely similar pronunciations. Instead, characters evolved to serve the spoken language and ensure the exact pronunciation. This

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<sup>21</sup> Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 506.

<sup>22</sup> Han Bangqing, “Introduction,” in Han Bangqing, *Haishanghua Liezhuan* (*The sing-song girls of Shanghai*), 609. The original text is as follows: “Suzhou wei you yin er wu zi zhe, ru shuo wu yao er zi, Suren mei ji hu zhi, bing wei yi yin; ruo reng zuo ‘wu yao’ er zi, bian bu he dangshi shenli; you wu ta zi keyi tidai, gu jiang ‘wu yao’ er zi, bing xie yi ge. Yuezhe xu zhi ‘fiao’ zi, ben wu ci zi, nai he er zi zuo yi yin du ye. 苏州惟有音而无字者，如说勿要二字，苏人每急呼之，并为一音；若仍作‘勿要’二字，便不合当时神理；又无他字可以替代，故将‘勿要’二字，并写一格。阅者须知‘𪛗’字，本无此字，乃合二字作一音读也。”

was an innovation launched by Han. Behind this act we can see the novelist's ambition. In his comment on the invention of several new characters like "fiao":

These are my own concoctions. However, when Cang Jie<sup>23</sup> invented characters in his time, I guess he also endowed them with meaning according to his arbitrary will. The knack of the literati's game is to feel free about being innovative to establish something unique.<sup>24</sup>

Han expressed his high evaluation of innovation and regarded it as comparable to the thoughts of Cang Jie. In this way, he aimed to establish something unique as well as great in his written Wu toplect. His contemporary Sun Yusheng (孙玉声, 1864–1940) noted his ambition by recording in their conversation:

When we talked about the use of Wu toplect throughout the entire book, I expressed my worry that readers might not understand it. Because there are many pronunciations in the Wu toplect that have no corresponding characters, one would have to devote a lot of effort and research in writing such a book. Wouldn't it be better to write it in the vernacular language? Han then said: "Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹, 1715–1763) wrote the dialogues of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Shitou Ji*, 石头记) completely in the Beijing toplect. Then why couldn't I do it with Wu toplect?"<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cang Jie is regarded in legend as the inventor of Chinese characters.

<sup>24</sup> Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhonghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 483. The original text is as follows: "[Fiao fen zhu zi] sui chu zi yizao, ran dangri Cang Jie zao zi, du yi yi wei zhi. Wenren youxi san mei, he hefang ziwo zuogu, deyi shengmian bie kai? [麴麴诸字]虽出自臆造, 然当日仓颉造字, 度亦以意为之。文人游戏三昧, 更何妨自我作古, 得以生面别开?"

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.. The original text is as follows: "Yu ze wei cishu tongti jie cao Wuyu, kong yuezhe bu shen liaoliao; qie Wuyu Zhong you yin wu zi zhi zi shen duo, xiabi shi shu fei yankao, buru gaiyi tongsu baihua wei jia. Nai Han yue: 'Cao Xueqin zhuan *Shitou Ji* jie cao Jingyu, wo shu an jian buke cao Wuyu?' 余则谓此书通体皆操吴语, 恐阅者不甚了了; 且吴语

And we may regard *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* as the epitome of his ambitions. The work inherited the geographic toplect and historical vocabulary from the former written Wu toplect. Meanwhile, it established new vocabulary and a compounding law to invent characters suitable for the changing language. In both ways, Han intended to elevate written Wu toplect to a precise language. He also wanted to follow *Dream of the Red Chamber* in order to prove that it was feasible and wise to use Wu toplect to write great fiction. With these endeavors and ambitions, he commenced writing with the Wu toplect.

From plucking rhythms to *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, written Wu toplect developed, supplemented with updated vocabulary and multiple rules for its creation. Through the endeavors of generations, it had finally grown into a written language suitable for fiction. However, there was still a major barrier to completing the process. Since written Wu toplect derived from theatrical performances, it was still completely based on direct discourse. The later *Mountain Songs*, following the emotional flows of the singers, also stuck to the mode of direct discourse. Although Han was innovative, he nevertheless did not create an extra system of written Wu toplect for indirect discourse. This limit on narrative discourse restricted the use of written Wu toplect to dialogues between characters. It also constrained the role written Wu toplect was enabled to play in fiction like *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*.

#### WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN LATE QING VERNACULAR LITERATURE?

The second section of this paper offers a close observation of written Wu toplect in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. The limit it places on direct discourse had made written Wu toplect available only to record the dialogues among numerous courtesans and their patrons. Through consideration of the merits it had brought to dialogues, we can see the function of written Wu toplect in fiction. However, it is also necessary for us to investigate the bilingual mechanism in these works of fiction. Through the juxtaposition of written Guanhua and written Wu toplect, we can tell to what extent, as compared to written Guanhua, written Wu toplect had contributed to the construction of the novel. It also helps

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中有音无字之字甚多，下笔时殊费研考，不如改易通俗白话为佳。乃韩曰：‘曹雪芹撰《石头记》皆操京语，我书安见不可操吴语？’”



us judge: is *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* a Wu topolect-dominated fiction, if not in a real sense a fiction written in Wu topolect? Furthermore, comparative studies on *He Dian* and *Nine-Tailed Turtles* enable us to see the role the Wu topolect played in other fiction published in the late Qing period. This comparison leads us to wonder, did a genre called "topolect fiction" or "topolect literature" exist in the late Qing period? In other words, did written Wu topolects in the late Qing period contribute to the overall Chinese vernacular literature of the time?

#### THE MERITS OF WU TOPOLECT DIALOGUES IN *THE SING-SONG GIRLS OF SHANGHAI*

Although Guanhua was also an option, Han adopted Wu topolect instead to record all the communications among courtesans and their patrons in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. In this way, he demonstrated the merits of written Wu topolect in direct discourse that were not possessed by written Guanhua. Hu Shi called this advantage "spiritual liveliness" (*jingshen qi*, 精神气).<sup>26</sup> It referred to the expressiveness of written Wu topolect.

Fan Boqun and David Wang respectively have proved that the Wu topolect reflected the social identities of the characters. According to Fan, "Wu topolect was particularly the language of the upper class of society and the intellectuals."<sup>27</sup> Wang, on the other hand, mentions that the Wu topolect was used mostly by courtesan characters to reflect "the refined linguistic taste of their profession,"<sup>28</sup> and "the manners of the high-class courtesan house."<sup>29</sup> To speak the Wu topolect meant to be patrons of the upper class or courtesans with refined taste. In this way, Han established the identities of the characters through Wu topolect dialogues.

Furthermore, characters' differentiated ways of speaking the Wu topolect indicate their

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>27</sup> Boqun Fan 范伯群, "Haishanghua Lie Zhuan: Xiandai Tongsu Xiaoshuo Kaishan zhi Zuo 《海上花列传》: 现代通俗小说开山之作 (The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai: The pioneering work of modern popular fiction)," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 2 (2008.3): 472-490.

<sup>28</sup> David Wang, "Introduction," in Han Bangqing, trans. Eileen Chang, rev. and ed. Eva Hung, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>29</sup> David Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 359, n. 69.

distinctive idiosyncrasies. Just as Hu Shi has argued, the value of the written Wu topolect lies in its expression of people's "spirits in characteristics" (*shenli* 神理).<sup>30</sup> In different linguistic features, courtesans and their patrons demonstrate their distinctive characteristics. A naïve and timid courtesan who has just come from the countryside to start her career speaks pidgin and even broken Suzhou topolect. An experienced and prudent housekeeper of the big family, however, speaks elegant yet tedious Suzhou topolect. Han hid the nuanced idiosyncrasies of the characters in the dialogues, and thus avoided taking a direct yet one-sided sketch of them. Through the records of the diverse ways they are to speak the Wu topolect, Han maximized the merits of Wu topolect dialogues, and made them illustrate the identities and idiosyncrasies of the characters in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*.

#### THE MECHANISM OF BILINGUAL WRITING IN *THE SING-SONG GIRLS OF SHANGHAI*

Although in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* written Wu topolect dominates all the dialogues and makes them function to sculpt the identities and idiosyncrasies of the characters, it had its limits. In texts other than dialogues, it was written Guanhua that monopolized the indirect discourse.

One thing that explains the monopoly of written Guanhua was written Wu topolect's historical limits in narrative discourse. Since the topolect had not established a system for indirect discourse, written Guanhua did not receive any challenge from it. The other reason lies in the capability of written Guanhua. According to Liu Fu, Guanhua, as a vernacular language, had been used in vernacular fiction and other vernacular literary works for a long time. Therefore, it was rather developed in syntax and word combinations. And its well-developed condition facilitated the writer's efforts to adopt it to narrate stories.<sup>31</sup> In this way, written Guanhua demonstrated its indispensable role in narration.

Besides, written Guanhua in fiction also contributed by presenting the inner thoughts of the characters. Nakazatomi Satoshi has noticed that in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, characters spoke

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<sup>30</sup> Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 504.

<sup>31</sup> Fu Liu, "Du 'Haishanghua Liezhuan' (Reading *Haishanghua Lie Zhuan*)," in Han Bangqing, *Haishanghua Liezhuan* (*The sing-song girls of Shanghai*), 603.

in the Wu toplect, but the same people thought to themselves in Guanhua.<sup>32</sup> In other words, although the Wu toplect was introduced into the dialogues in the direct discourse, it could not express characters' thoughts, which were quoted in indirect discourse. This inevitably caused the author to adjust these thoughts into written Guanhua.

For Instance, in Chapter 60, there is an episode which simultaneously contains Crane Li's dialogues and lines representing his inner thoughts.

It occurred to Crane Li that it would be a good idea to consult Second Bai, so he followed the manservant into the garden at a leisurely pace, heading for Panorama Hall.

"Aren't you lonely staying here all by yourself?" Crane Li asked.

"That matters little, but it's a real pity about the chrysanthemum hill. Mr. Dragon Ma spent quite a lot of thought on it, and now it just sits there, neglected," Second Bai replied.<sup>33</sup>

In the original texts, the inner thought of Crane Li appeared in written Guanhua, whereas the chat between Crane Li and Second Bai was recorded in written Wu toplect. This corroborates the assumption that, in the fiction, even if the character could speak the Wu toplect, his mind would not

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32 Satoshi Nakazatomi, " 'Naimen' o sōshutsu suru: Buntaironteki apurōchi 「内面」を創出する: 文体論のアプローチ." (Inventing the 'inner world': A stylistic approach)," *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 56 (2004.10): 225–240.

33 Han Bangqing, trans. Eileen Chang, rev. and ed. Eva Hung *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005). The original text is as follows:

"Heting xiang dao: 'Qiyun sou sui yi gui jia, qie yu Gao Yabai shangliang yi wei wei b uke.' Sui gen guanxia kuanbu jin yuan, yizhi dao le Daguan Lou shang, yejian Gao Yabai. 鹤汀想到: '齐韵叟虽已归家, 且与高亚白商量亦未为不可。'遂跟管家款步进园, 一直到了大观楼上, 谒见高亚白。

"Heting dao: 'Nai yiganzi a jima a?' Yabai dao: 'Wo jimo dian wu yaojin, dao kexi ge juhua shan, Longchi xiansheng yifan xinsi duo, gu xie yijing xiansha lai lang!' 鹤汀道: '耐一干子阿寂寞嘎?' 亚白道: '我寂寞点勿要紧, 倒可惜个菊花山, 龙池先生一番心思, 故歇一迳闲煞来浪!'"

be fully expressed. In the end, it was written Guanhua that shouldered the work of conveying the interior aspects of the characters.

With these different functions, written Wu topolect and written Guanhua constructed different parts of the stories and conveyed different aspects of the characters. Direct discourse in written Wu topolect served to convey dialogues. It also revealed the identities and idiosyncrasies of the characters. The indirect discourse in written Guanhua served to narrate the stories. It also unveiled the inner thoughts of the characters. Together they constructed what was in effect a necessarily bilingual mechanism in this fiction.

With the clarification that written Wu topolect and written Guanhua collaborated to form *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, the next question we need to answer is, was it proper, overall, for literati to call *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* a piece of fiction written in and dominated by Wu topolect?

Because of the aforementioned bilingual mechanism, it is surely not proper for us to overlook the contribution of written Guanhua. Through its narration of the inner thoughts of the characters and its role in essentially telling the stories, written Guanhua clearly had a great influence on the three most essential elements of a work of fiction, its characters, plots and settings, and it may well entirely dominate the latter two. Compared to the contribution of written Wu topolect to the dialogues, written Guanhua certainly composed no less a part of this work of fiction. Therefore, it is more appropriate to identify *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* as a bilingual work of fiction rather than one purely written in Wu topolect.

Seeing the limits and dependency of the written Wu topolect, it is unrealistic to regard it as the dominating writing system in this work of fiction. The limitations of written Wu topolect in the narrative course caused it to rely on written Guanhua. Only the well-developed written Guanhua could elaborate the indirect discourse. This dependency was one-sided. Therefore, it is wiser to identify *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* as a Guanhua-dominated fiction rather than a Wu topolect-dominated fiction.

In a true sense, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* is neither written in pure Wu topolect nor dominated by written Wu topolect. Instead, it is a bilingual fiction dominated by written Guanhua. This conclusion helps to support my effort to rectify the stereotype the literati had long ago established concerning *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, and the alleged Wu topolect literature.

WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN *HE DIAN* AND *NINE-TAILED TURTLES*

To better understand *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and the written Wu topolect in the historical context of the late Qing period, a comparative study on *He Dian* and *Nine-Tailed Turtles* is necessary. These works of fiction are important, because they provide a horizontal perspective on which to locate the similarities and differences among various uses of the written Wu topolect. They also help, together with *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, to demonstrate the evolution of the written Wu topolect in fiction.

The importance of *He Dian* is usually underestimated. Published in 1878,<sup>34</sup> ahead of the debut of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, the work challenges its title as the first and most outstanding fiction written partially in the Wu topolect.<sup>35</sup> As a Shanghainese, author Zhang Nanzhuang (张南庄, 18??–18??) adopted both Wu topolect and Guanhua to create stories of the ghosts of members of a landlord family. He creatively mixed written Wu topolect into the dialogues of the characters. In addition, he also skillfully used Wu topolect elements in narration. These elements were the idioms and country accents of the Wu area. However, in *He Dian*, they formed new “allusions” (*diangu* 典故).<sup>36</sup> In this way, the author demonstrated his skepticism of the orthodox literary tradition which cherished allusions as the symbol of high literature.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, his creativity also brought humor and liveliness to the language. In short, he started the tradition of partially adopting the Wu topolect in works of fiction. He also challenged the high literary tradition by equating Wu topolect elements with literary allusions and skillfully using them to establish the work’s unique language.

Compared to that of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Wu topolect elements in *He Dian* were less developed and functional. As elements that did not yet constitute a writing system, they could not independently be developed into lines or paragraphs. In addition, according to Zhou Zhenghe, these

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<sup>34</sup> It is said that Zhang Nanzhuang wrote it as early as in the Jiaqing period (1796–1820, 嘉庆). It was at first circulated only by hand, and it therefore had only very limited influence. The work was not well known by academia and the public until the 1920s.

<sup>35</sup> Zhang Huaijiu, ed., *Wudi Fangyan Xiaoshuo* (Wu topolect fiction), 24–25.

<sup>36</sup> The name of the book, *He Dian*, literally “What is the allusion?” also suggests its author’s idea.

<sup>37</sup> Zhang Huaijiu, ed., *Wudi Fangyan Xiaoshuo* (Wu topolect fiction), 114.

elements originated from the northern Wu area and absorbed influences from the Shanghai topolect, Suzhou topolect, and Changshu topolect, etc. As such a hodgepodge, they could hardly be used to convey the ghosts of a landlord family who had lived their lives through in a settled place and in a local accent.

Through the comparison between *He Dian* and *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, we can see the evolution of the Wu topolect in fiction up into the 1890s. Wu topolect elements developed into a written Wu topolect that could serve in dialogues to depict characters. The aim of adopting the Wu topolect into fiction changed from a rebellious, satirical use of folk sayings in the 1878 work into a symbol intended to show off class and taste for the 1892 piece.

A later work of fiction called *Nine-Tailed Turtles* also deserves attention regarding its relationship with *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. Published in 1910, this volume pictured the sexual adventures of the male protagonist in the gay quarters in late Qing Shanghai. By exaggerating the cold-blooded relationships and dirty transactions between courtesans and their patrons, Zhang exposed the dark side of the gay quarters. Hu Shi has argued that the author of *Nine-Tailed Turtles*, Zhang Chunfan (张春帆, 18??–1935,) had based his work on the written Wu topolect set by Han Bangqing and appreciation of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*.<sup>38</sup> However, unlike *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, *Nine-Tailed Turtles* employed the written Wu topolect only in the courtesans' speeches. The speech of their patrons was instead recorded in written Guanhua. Through this arrangement, Zhang deliberately kept written Wu topolect exclusive to courtesans. More exactly, Wu topolect was selected as the professional language of courtesans in this work of fiction. Zhang Huaijiu has proved this hypothesis by pointing out that, once the courtesans terminated their service and married their patrons, they followed them and spoke Guanhua instead.<sup>39</sup> Zhang took his own way to adopt written Wu topolect into fiction, that is, to make written Wu topolect serve to tell about and segregate courtesans as a social group. This suggested his moral critique of the demimonde.

From *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* to *Nine-Tailed Turtles*, written Wu topolect in fiction thus experienced a further evolution in the 1910s. In the process, written Wu topolect adopted a

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<sup>38</sup> Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 511.

<sup>39</sup> Zhang Huaijiu, ed., *Wudi Fangyan Xiaoshuo* (Wu topolect fiction), 77.

narrower application of recording the professional language of courtesans. The aim of adopting written Wu toplect in the fiction changed drastically from a symbol used to show off class and taste to a moral indication used to condemn the demimonde.

The differences in these authors' adoption of Wu toplect in their fiction demonstrate the historical evolution of written Wu toplect in *He Dian*, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, and *Nine-Tailed Turtles*. Every twenty years witnessed a drastic change in the use of the written Wu toplect. Each work was an individual experiment in trying to assimilate written Wu toplect into the Guanhua literary tradition. Authors never truly settled the scope and aim of adopting the written Wu toplect. But they had one thing in common: none of them developed written Wu toplect into an independent system. The dependency of written Wu toplect on written Guanhua remained an unsolved problem.

The similarities and differences among *He Dian*, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, and *Nine-Tailed Turtles* explain the questions asked at the beginning of this section. Did there exist a genre called toplect fiction or toplect literature in the late Qing period? Was written Wu toplect in the late Qing period able to form a powerful stream contributing to the river of overall Chinese vernacular literature of the time? The answer must be in the negative. Since written Wu toplect never developed into an independent system, there never existed a pure written Wu toplect enabling the establishment of such genres as toplect fiction or toplect literature. Since the written Wu toplect in different literary works varied in scope and aim, they could not form a stream of influence powerful enough to contribute to the vernacular literature of the time.

#### IS THERE A PLACE FOR WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE?

The limitations of the written Wu toplect caused the awkward position of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* in the Chinese vernacular literature of its time. It was a striking work because of the written Wu toplect it contained. But its power was constrained because this written toplect could not develop into a complete writing system. Neither could it nor others form a genre such as Wu toplect fiction or Wu toplect literature. However, when the late Qing period came to an end and the modern

period began, the written Wu topolect encountered modern Chinese literature of the 1920s and 1930s. Based on critics' expectations that *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* would establish future literary reforms, written Wu topolect tried to reposition and maintain itself in the framework of modern Chinese literature that began to be established in the 1920s and the 1930s.

The following section considers the feasibility of this repositioning. To start with, it elaborates on the dichotomy that existed in Han Bangqing's *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, in order to explain the literary context of the time. Then it examines the gap between the expectations of literary reformers like Hu Shi and the reality of written Wu topolect. Last but not least, it demonstrates the attempted repositioning and the fate of the written Wu topolect through a case study on the competition between “*yi*” (伊) and “*ta*” (她).

#### THE DICHOTOMY IN HAN BANGQING AND *THE SING-SONG GIRLS OF SHANGHAI*

There is a dichotomy in the formation of modern Chinese literature represented by Han Bangqing and *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. While on the one hand, the Chinese readership embraced the Western publishing model that had taken root in China, on the other, such readers also inherited the literary traditions of China. In order to publish *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Han established a new literary magazine called *Haishang qishu* (海上奇书). His magazine was advertised as the “first modern Chinese magazine devoted to fiction.”<sup>40</sup> And he himself was regarded as the “first professional literary writer” of modern China.<sup>41</sup>

Yet in many respects *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* appeared traditional. In fact, Han wrote its preface and afterword in literary Chinese. He also adhered to the traditional pattern of Chinese vernacular fiction, using parallel sentences to name every chapter. With respect to technique, the fiction chronicled the lives of courtesans by using the inherited “style of combined biography” (*hezhuàn tǐ*, 合传体) which originated from *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史记).<sup>42</sup> In

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40 David Wang, “Introduction,” in Han Bangqing, trans. Eileen Chang, rev. and ed. Eva Hung, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, 2.

41 David Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, 82.

42 Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 498.



addition, it borrowed the narrative techniques of implicit narration (*chuancha*, 穿插) and intermittent revelation (*cangshan*, 藏闪) from *The Plum in the Gold Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅) and *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (*Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* 聊斋志异).<sup>43</sup> These techniques were inherited from the literary tradition, but they do not suggest how entirely conservative Han's writing was.

What this dichotomy in Han Bangqing and *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* truly reflected was the literary context of the time. Late Qing intellectuals such as Han noted that the coming of the modern period had provided a new stage on which to present their own work. Accordingly, they adopted the latest publishing mode. However, Chinese literary tradition was still unquestionably dominant at the time. Unable to establish a new writing system in the Wu topolect, Han chose to make trivial improvements based on the literary tradition. Although these improvements ended up staying in the framework of Chinese vernacular literature, Han had accumulated an original experience of literary writing in the process.

#### THE GAP BETWEEN THE EXPECTATIONS OF LITERARY REFORMERS AND THE REALITY OF WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT

Nonetheless, literary reformers of the 1920s and 1930s did not critique *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* based on this literary context. What they were interested in was content that might contribute to later literary reforms and revolutions, for example, to a written Wu topolect. Hu Shi, as the most active promoter of a modern Chinese literature, elevated the role of written Wu topolect. He assumed that *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* was the official beginning of a Wu "topolect literature."<sup>44</sup> It had demonstrated an innovative intention and a well-planned literary revolution.<sup>45</sup> In the future, with its liveliness and popularity, the most representative part of written Wu topolect would turn into the foundation of a new national literature and drive its development, according to Hu.<sup>46</sup>

Depending on whether we accept the existence of the genre of topolect literature, we might

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<sup>43</sup> Zhang Huaijiu, ed., *Wudi Fangyan Xiaoshuo* (Wu topolect fiction), 23–24.

<sup>44</sup> Hu Shi, *Zhongguo Zhanghui Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (Textual study on Chinese chapter-divided novels), 501.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 504.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 501–502.

see Hu Shi's critiques and presumptions as nothing but a cloud of over-optimistic air. And in fact, as I argued previously, there was no such thing as "topolect literature." The use of Wu topolect in literary works started earlier than *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. Instead of being representative, it shared nothing in common with other written Wu topolects in other literary works. Instead of leading the national literature into the future, it relied on the union with an existing national language, Guanhua, to form works of literature.

But Liu Fu nevertheless praised the contribution of this work of fiction to linguistics. He proposed it as a good text for people to use as a base for linguistic study.<sup>47</sup> However, as the Wu topolect changed rapidly over time, the written Wu topolect in the 1890s was growing increasingly different from the spoken Wu topolect in the modern period. To study linguistic forms like the Wu topolect, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* therefore was not a good text.

In order to fit written Wu topolect into their framework, literary reformers like Hu Shi and Liu Fu oversimplified the function of topolect writing in literary works, as well as the changes happening within the Wu topolect. Through their studies on the uniqueness and fruitfulness of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, written Wu topolect was extracted from the framework of Chinese vernacular literature. It was then repositioned in the framework of a hypothesized Chinese modern literature. Written Wu topolect, therefore, started its struggle to survive and maintain its position in Chinese modern literature of the 1920s and the 1930s.

#### THE ATTEMPT AND FATE OF WRITTEN WU TOPOLECT IN CHINESE MODERN LITERATURE

The process of "yi" being replaced by "ta" witnessed an attempt that indicated the fate of written Wu topolect in the gendering of the modern third-person pronoun. Scholars at the time discussed the issue of designing a new Chinese term to fill the lack of an equivalent for the third-person feminine pronoun in European languages. This was considered to be an important step for Chinese modern literature, to complement its construction by directly encountering European languages.<sup>48</sup>

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47 Fu Liu, "Du 'Haishanghua Liezhuan' (Reading *Haishanghua Lie Zhuan*)," in Han Bangqing, *Haishanghua Liezhuan (The sing-song girls of Shanghai)*" 604.

48 Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National, Culture, and Translated Modernity: China, 1900–1937* (Stanford,

Regional forms like “*yi*,” an already existing third-person pronoun in the Wu toplect, were at one time experimented with and even adopted as candidates for this equivalent. However, after a few years, writers and linguists finally settled on writing the graph “*ta*” with a woman radical. The reformer Liu Fu attributed the failure of the toplect “*yi*” to several reasons. First, “*yi*” could not have popular appeal because its usage as a third-person pronoun had been restricted to a small local area. Second, the word was not marked by a radical meaning “female” as in the case of the feminine “*ta*.” Third, “*yi*” smacked of the classical language and sounded awkward when used in the vernacular.<sup>49</sup> Liu rethought the linguistic value of the Wu toplect, taking into account its limits in popularity, the linguistic laws of borrowing characters, and phonology.

After this attempt and failure to fit the Wu toplect into modern Chinese literature, it was seen to be not at all an ideal source for the construction of the Chinese literature of the future. Literary reformers like Liu Fu also came to realize its limits and thus to see it from a more objective perspective. With the fading of its proponents’ expectations into objective judgment, the written Wu toplect no longer took an active role on the stage of modern Chinese literature. It had failed to make the contribution the literary reformers of the 1920s and 1930s had expected. It also failed to reposition itself within the framework of modern Chinese literature.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion in the last section leads to this question: What contribution did written Wu toplect make to modern Chinese literature? If we position it in the framework of modern Chinese literature generally, we might say “nothing.” But if we position it in the framework of Chinese vernacular literature in the late Qing period, we can see the contributions it made. Historically, it enhanced the expressiveness of direct discourse. It enriched the depiction of characters. It brought humor and liveliness to narration. The skills and techniques it brought were all inspiring to Chinese modern literature.

Therefore, the question of “how to see its contribution” is in fact the question of “where to

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CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 36.

49 Fu Liu 刘复. “‘Ta’ Zi Wenti” ‘她’字问题 (The problem of feminine *ta*),” *Xue Deng* (1920.9).

position written Wu topolect in Chinese literature.” In the chaotic literary context of the time, Chinese vernacular literature and modern Chinese literature could coexist. *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and written Wu topolect, at the center of this context, encountered both. Written Wu topolect in fiction had failed to establish a full writing system and a unified topolect literary genre within Chinese vernacular literary tradition. With the optimistic advocacy of literary reformers, it was absorbed into the modern framework and expected to achieve greater accomplishments in modern Chinese literature. However, it soon exposed its limits in linguistic value during the competition with the feminine “*ta*.” It could not further exert its influence without the literary tradition in which it was embedded. Its failure was caused by the misconceived attempt to position written Wu topolect in a modern framework. To position it in a modern framework could not guarantee its contribution to Chinese modern literature.

The correct positioning of the written Wu topolect allows us to maintain our observations on it within its original vernacular literary framework. Only in this way can we find its real meaning to Chinese modern literature. As David Wang has pointed out, when we scrutinize the development of modern Chinese literature and focus on the very end of the nineteenth century, we should prioritize the importance and creativity of the late Qing period over those of the May fourth movement.<sup>50</sup> Looking into the late Qing period and analyzing the written Wu topolect, we find nutrition for the future of modern literature.

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# The Place of Hanja in Korea

Irene Do

The Korean alphabet, Hangul, is unequivocally respected throughout Korea as its indigenous writing system. Surely, that the Hangul writing system is uniquely Korean is sufficient to swell the pride of Korea. Yet Hanja (the Korean name for Chinese characters) is an indispensable thread that knits Korean history and language together. However, Hanja is often considered by Koreans to be an unwieldy script that hinders or complicates the learning of the Korean language and writing system. The place of Hanja in Korean language has tangled the yarn for decades, sparking a vociferous debate called the “Written Script War” (문자전쟁; 文字戰爭), in which the “All Hangul-use camp” (한글전용; 韓文專用) and the “Mix of Hanja and Hangul camp” (한자혼용; 漢字混用) incessantly contest over the place and role of Hanja in modern Korean society and education.

## I. LITERACY IN EARLY KOREA

While it is generally acknowledged that literacy in Korea dates back to the period of the Han dynasty (second century BC to third century AD), the first appearance of what is indubitably recognized as direct evidence for native Korean literacy comes from the Kwanggaet’o stela, which recounts the deeds of Koguryŏ monarch Kwanggaet’o (391–412 AD) (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 41). The stela, which bears a text of 1,800 Chinese characters, sets the scene for the almost total monopoly enjoyed by Literary Chinese as the core instrument of literate culture in Korea for the next 1,500 years. In the second century BC, the Chinese bureaucratic system gained direct political control over Korea, and it officially introduced Chinese writing (Haarmann 1993, 145). Appreciation of Chinese writing ranked quite high, as “the aim of Korean education was quite explicitly to make Korea a *Sohwa*, a ‘Small China’” (Sampson 1985, 121).

The year 1446 is considered to be the critical juncture at which the history of the Korean language, in its truest sense, achieved its own writing system. In 1446, to remedy the inadequacy of Hanja as the sole script, King Sejong (1418–1450) of the Chosŏn kingdom (1392–1910) promulgated the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* (訓民正音, Correct Sounds for Instructing the People), the new system for writing Korean (Kim 2012, 210). A remarkable feature of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* (also called *onmun* and later Hangul) writing system is the intersection between the alphabetic principle and the syllabic principle; the symbols transparently reflect the individual sounds in each word, but they are also assembled into explicit syllabic blocks (Kim 2012, 210). At the time of its invention, the alphabet consisted of twenty-eight letters, but only twenty-four remain today, as four letters became obsolete with the sound change in Korean (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 126).

The reason for creating the alphabet is saliently expressed in the preface of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm*; King Sejong claims, "The spoken language of our country is different from that of China and does not suit the Chinese characters," revealing his distress concerning the many uneducated Korean people who were unable to express their thoughts in writing (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 126). The invention of the Korean alphabet marked a radical improvement of Korean language transcription, and its unwavering respect and legacy are discernible today: each year the ninth of October is celebrated as official "Hangul Day," and King Sejong is honored in various ways by appearing on money as well as in many Korean institutional names (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 34).

## II. TRANSCRIPTIONS IN EARLY KOREA

Even before the invention of the Korean alphabet in 1446, Korea was a literate society, and the extent to which Chinese characters were entrenched in Korea is evident especially during the Three Kingdom period (fourth and fifth centuries) and the beginning of the Joseon dynasty (fourteenth century). For many centuries, Koreans lived active and literate lives with Literary Chinese as the primary written medium, and literary activities bloomed on various levels. Knowledge of Chinese characters served two primary functions: first, to read and assimilate works written in Literary Chinese and to write narratives or keep records in Literary Chinese. The second goal was to transcribe Korean, since there was a need to record proper local names with indicated pronunciation (Kim-

Renaud 1997, 46). However, using Chinese characters to write down Korean, a polysyllabic, agglutinative language with inflexional endings quite different from Chinese, presented a grueling task. As a result, in order to surmount the difficulties posed by Chinese characters to render specific phonetic values for Korean, various incipient efforts to phonetically transcribe Korean with Chinese characters were made, out of which three different but related systems were born: *idu*, *hyangch'al*, and *kugyŏl* (Haarmann 1993, 151).

Unfortunately, the source materials for tracing the development of the transcription methods are scanty. Because the lack of linguistic explanation or commentary on these source materials has tended to obfuscate the basic terminologies, more emphasis is given to their functional differences (Kim 2012, 62). *Idu* was used in prose transcription; it was not a spoken form because it was not necessary to fully transcribe spoken forms in order to communicate basic information (Kim 2012, 63). *Hyangchal*, used for poetry or lyric transcription, required a more comprehensive and detailed system, because the actual sound of the language was needed to render aesthetic effects. During the Silla period, vernacular poetry known as *hyang-ga* (local songs of Silla verse) were written down using this method (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 51). Lastly, *kuygol* served as a transcription for translation or interpretation. A major thirteenth-century source for Korean history, *Samguk yuksa* (Recollections of the Three Kingdoms) is a manifestation of *kuygol* transcription (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 51). Out of the three methods, *idu* survived the longest into later periods, but all three methods remained subordinate to Literary Chinese (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 46).

### III. BONDS OF LITERARY CHINESE

According to Chong In-Ji's postface to the *Hunminjeongeum Haerye* (Explanation and Examples of the Correct Sounds for Instructing the People), "a wise man can acquaint himself with them (Hangul) before the morning is over; a stupid man can learn them in the space of ten days" (Koehler 2010, 32). Yet to the surprise of many scholars, the invention of the alphabet in Korea in fact had relatively little power in shaking the steadfast position of Literary Chinese (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 46). That is, despite Korea's possession of an explicitly more efficient Korean alphabet, the break from the fetters of Literary Chinese, Korea's standard writing system, was harder than had been imagined until the late



twentieth century. If Koreans had such an efficient Korean alphabet system as Chong claims, why were they not able to escape from the traditional writing system?

#### THE *ŏnmun* SYSTEM

In contrast to the expected reaction to King Sejong's solution, which would be to embrace the invention, the repercussion in reality was a paradox: notwithstanding the success of King Sejong's promulgation of the Korean alphabet, the academic and aristocratic elite in Korea was far from welcoming the *ŏnmun* (common, ordinary, general) writing system. The members of the educated classes rebuffed the *ŏnmun* system as the "vulgar script," hinting that they considered King Sejong's far-sighted plans in favor of national identity and popular education as an unpalatable idea (Haarmann 1993, 153). For almost half a millennium after King Sejong's invention, the term *ŏnmun* was burdened with a pejorative connotation. It was not until 1910 that the linguistic patriot Chu-Si-gyŏng coined the term "Hangul" (the Han [Korean/great script]), which carried a nationalistic tone (Haarmann 1993, 154).

What the majority of the aristocrats rejected was not the *ŏnmun* script system itself, but rather its potential functional consequences on literacy among the Korean people living in the environment of Sinicized learning (Haarmann 1993, 154). Perhaps the elites' disdain of the *ŏnmun* script as a "trivialization of the serious and difficult task of writing in Chinese" obscures their inner fear of losing their privileged status as literati and of being compelled to share literacy with the common people (Sampson 1985, 123). Indeed, the opprobrium suffered by the *ŏnmun* system ever since the onset of its promulgation was fervent enough to herald the beginning of a harsh trend: the *ŏnmun* script was banned from public life and even had to be limited in the sphere of private literacy (Haarmann 1993, 154).

Proficiency in Chinese writing continued to be a cornerstone of the civilized Korean lifestyle, and the use of the *ŏnmun* system remained a matter of personal inclination. In the principal schools of Korea before the twentieth century, *sŏwŏn* (private academies) and *sŏdang* (private grammar schools), the primary vehicles of education were Literary Chinese and the Chinese classics. The *ŏnmun* script was something one had to learn oneself if one desired to (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 56). Moreover, official documents used in government administration, such as *Annals of the Chŏson*

*Dynasty*, as well as the writings of renowned Confucian scholars such as Yulgok (1536–1570) and Toegye (1501–1570) were transcribed in Literary Chinese. The stunning degree to which Literary Chinese occupied Korea prevented the *ŏnmun* script from challenging the Chinese writing system, thus restraining a break from the traditional writing system. Korea continued inexorably as a literary diglossia, with Literary Chinese writing as the high and *ŏnmun* as the low variety (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 57).

However, it is important to differentiate between escaping the bonds of Literary Chinese and stopping the use of Chinese characters. Because a significant part of the Korean vocabulary is made up of Sino-Korean words, even if Korean were written completely in Hangul without any Chinese characters, sentences would still constitute a mixture of words made up of the readings of Chinese characters. For example, the following Sino-Korean word could be written either in Hangul or Chinese characters, but no matter which way the word is written, the sentence would still be completely Korean. The choice here is very similar to deciding between writing “number 1” or “number one” in English (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 58).

1a. 나무는 덕을 가지고 있다. *namunŭn tŏkŭl kajigo itta* (Tree possesses virtue)

1b. 나무는 德을 가지고 있다. *namunŭn tŏkŭl kajigo itta* (Tree possesses virtue)

At first glance, one might easily be misled into believing that 1b, which shows a mixture of a Chinese character with Hangul, is a result of the direct influence of written Chinese. However, the sentence is not Literary Chinese, but Korean; what 德 represents is naturally spoken Korean, and this is in accordance with the idea of unifying the spoken and written languages (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 58). We see that, although Koreans may have escaped from the fetter of Literary Chinese, the bonds of Chinese character usage remain deeply ingrained, presenting themselves to this very day.

#### IV. PREMODERN KOREA

In the early twentieth century, mixed-script (the mixture of Hangul and Hanja) replaced Literary

Chinese as the formal medium for writing. Yu Kilchun's travel diary, *Sōyu Kyōnmun* 西遊見聞 (Observations on a Journey to the West), a much-lauded travel diary published in 1895, carried the reform of scripts to new heights. Rather than reporting marvels he observed in Europe and America in Literary Chinese, Yu used mixed-script consisting of Chinese characters transcribing Sino-Korean words, linked by Hangul particles. At this critical point in language transformation, following the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919, Chinese characters gradually came to be used only in a mixed-script format (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 288).

Around the same period, ardent advocates of the Hangul writing system started up their engine, gradually heating up the highly flammable issue of Korea's written script. In 1896, *Sō Chaep'il* founded Korea's first true modern newspaper, *Tongnip sinmun* 독립신문 (The Independent), which was printed entirely in Hangul (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 249). Although *Tongnip sinmun* was short-lived, its instrumental role in sparking Korean nationalism and later arousing the "All Hangul-use camp" should not be underestimated. Most mass-circulated newspapers continued to be published in mixed-script until the mid-1900s, when the proportion of Chinese characters found in print materials gradually (and notably) declined. In fact, today Korean publications actually solely use Hangul. Hanja is used only to write nouns of Chinese or Sino-Korean origin, and even then only in narrowly circumscribed contexts. Most commonly, Hanja appears in parentheses to clarify a preceding Sino-Korean word (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 173).

Nationalist backlash, fueling the perception that Hangul needed to be actively protected, became ubiquitous after Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945. Following that, responses to the idea of the superfluity of Hanja were demonstrated in the Korean national government's volatile policies on the public use of Hanja. Although President Syngman Rhee (1875–1965) propagated the Hangul-Only policy in 1948, it was not until President Park Chung-hi's dictatorship (1963–1979) that the policy became truly tangible (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 178). For example, in 1970, Hanja disappeared from both government documents and educational materials. A few years later, in 1976, the Ministry of Education banned the teaching of Hanja in primary schools. Frequent interruptions with policies like the ones above have been detrimental to mass literacy, invariably producing an uneven Hanja literacy gap among different generations of Koreans (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 179).

## V. THE “WRITTEN SCRIPT WAR”

Even up to the present day, one of the persisting conundrums faced by linguistic experts is the preservation of Hanja is: if Hangul is such an efficient script, why should Koreans keep Hanja? In fact, Korea seems to offer the ideal condition for abolishing Hanja, because the phonetic script Hangul is available. By way of evaluating the merits of such a hotly contested question, the advantages of using Hanja are examined below.

## ADVANTAGES OF HANJA

To enumerate the most significant points, one paramount reason that prevents the complete eradication of Hanja is that, to abolish Hanja, Sino-Korean words must be abolished first. In 1962, the Committee for Exclusive Use of Hangul advocated replacement of over 14,000 Sino-Korean words and other foreign words with native words. However, this suggestion was considered non-viable and thus was not carried out into action (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 179). In any case, the extent of the movement to eliminate Sino-Korean words has a patent ending, for replacing all of these with native words is infeasible. The unabated debate following this movement invokes the question of which native word should replace a particular Sino-Korean word and which Sino-Korean words are common enough to be retained (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 225). This heated question alone, therefore, would hardly suffice to carry out complete eradication of Hanja.

Another critical reason that inhibits the elimination of Hanja is that Hanja words are expressive and concise, often used for abbreviations as well. A single word or idiom of Hanja is sufficient to communicate, as opposed to a long native phrase (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 223). For example, the public sign for “no drinking” in Korea is *kŭm’ju* (“prohibit,” “drinking”), written as 禁酒 in Chinese characters. In sharp contrast, the same prohibition written in native Korean would be quite wordy, as seen in examples 1 and 2 below. The Hanja 禁 (“prohibit”) *kŭm* is used in other prohibitions as well, including *kŭm’yŏn* (“prohibit,” “smoking”) (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 223). Such abbreviations are not limited to written forms like public signs, for people also use them in speech to communicate in a direct and concise manner

Example 1. *Sool rŭl masiji masio* (“Please do not drink”)

Example 2. *Sool rŭl samkahae jusipsio* (“Please refrain from drinking”)

Furthermore, Hanja allows one to rapidly and accurately decipher Sino-Korean compound words as well as technical terms. The word *tongnimmum* 독립문 独立門 (“independence gate”) is an example of a Sino-Korean compound word that may be recognized faster and more accurately in Hanja than in Hangul, due to its composition: *tok* (“sole, alone”); *nip* (“stand, establish”); and *mun* (“gate”). The first two, *tok* and *nip*, join to generate a compound word meaning, “independence.” *Mun* is added at the end to form the final three-Hanja-morpheme compound word. Such intangible information implicit in Sino-Korean words may remain hidden to readers if Hangul phonetic script were the sole basis of learning the Korean language (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 225).

An example of a technical term that is easier to decipher in Hanja is *simnihak* 심리학 心理学 (psychology). The meaning becomes transparent when dividing the word into three Hanja: mind (心), logic (理), and study (学). In fact, even when adding the word *-cha* (“person”) at the end, the four-Hanja word is still recognizable as “psychologist” (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 227). As described above, despite the general decline in the frequency of the use of Hanja in Korean publications, newspapers still serve as a prime example of a medium that persists in effectively utilizing Hanja. Because one usually runs the eye quickly over one headline and then another, the right mixture of Hanja allows the reader to quickly grasp the articles’ main ideas.

#### THE “MIX OF HANJA AND HANGUL” CAMP (한자 혼용; 漢字混用)

The “Mix of Hanja and Hangul” camp of course embraces the above-mentioned advantages of Hanja, but it also has a say in the field of education. With respect to educational standards, this camp promotes Hanja education in elementary school, claiming that Hanja is the fundamental root of the Korean language. Jin Cheol-yong, an elementary school teacher in Songhwa Elementary School, shared a story that argues that Hanja is useful not only for enriching students’ vocabulary, but also for understanding many Korean words (Yoon 2015), as follows.

A student asked Ms. Jin to define 인위 (*inwi*), which means “man-made.” She wrote “人爲” on

the board and the students immediately recognized the first character, 人, to mean a person. She then explained the second character, 爲, to mean “do” or “make.” Students then connected the two characters and understood the meaning of *inwi*, “what a person does or makes.” Jin Cheol-yong claims: “There could be many ways to teach the meanings of words, but since we can’t spend much time on explaining the meanings of words and still make progress in class, using Chinese characters is a very effective method” (Yoon 2015).

Furthermore, numerous Korean words are identical in writing and pronunciation but have different meanings, according to how they are written in Chinese (Kim-Renaud 1997, 43). For example, all of the following words are written and pronounced as *수도* (*sudo*), but they have different definitions: 水道 (drain, rivers, path of surface water), 隧道 (tunnel), and 首都: capital (city).

In addition, there are certain monosyllabic Sino-Korean words that must be written in Hanja to distinguish them from other words having the same sound. Three of the Confucian virtues, *ch’ung* (“loyalty”), *in* (“benevolence”) and *hyo* (“filial piety”), are abstract concepts without representative native Korean words (Lee and Ramsey 2011, 58). This means that, in such cases, Hanja writing sometimes is necessary to understand a meaning and concept. With such examples, the “Mix of Hanja and Hangul” camp argues that Hanja would serve as a beneficial and useful tool when learning to differentiate words such as those mentioned above.

Disconnection from Korea’s history and culture, and even the prospect of future loss of economic efficacy is another consternation for the “Mix of Hanja and Hangul” camp. Following the Hangul-Only policy, not only does a trove of materials published only a few decades ago become hard to access, but there has been a growing trend toward illiteracy (Taylor and Taylor 2014, 179). In fact, many Koreans who went to college in the 1980s have trouble reading their own writing because it was written in mixed-script.

The concern for illiteracy extends to Korea’s future. Today, because Korea’s largest trading partners include countries with large Chinese-speaking populations, such as China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, knowledge of Hanja could aid in paving Korea’s economic pathway (Kai 2015).

"ALL HANGUL-USE" CAMP (한글 전용; 韓文專用)

Prominent British linguist Geoffrey Sampson expressed his awe for Hangul when he claimed the following: "Hangul must unquestionably rank as one of the great intellectual achievements of humankind" (Sampson 1985, 122). Indeed, he is just one of many who have poured plaudits onto Hangul for its advanced phonetic system and its ease of use (Sundin 2008). Perhaps the renowned scholars' praise heaped upon Hangul is one of the reasons why the "All Hangul-use" camp (한글 전용; 韓文專用) advocates pure use of Hangul and regards Hanja as taboo.

The "All Hangul-use" camp advocates foremost the "linguistic pure blood theory" (言語純血主義, 언어순혈주의), which is a conscious application of the "pure blood theory" (純血主義, 순혈주의). The "pure blood theory" arose during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945), and it asserts that all Koreans were descended from a single five-thousand-year-long "untainted" bloodline that originated from the Altaic people ("Korean ethnic nationalism"). By applying such an assertion, the "linguistic pure blood theory" claims the following: if the Korean race is pure, then its writing and language should and must be pure as well. The simultaneous implementation of President Park Chung-hi's Hangul-Only policy in 1948 and the heightening of the pure blood theory is no coincidence. Nevermind the blaring irony that there is no "pure" Korean word for the word "pure" (純), the "All Hangul-use" camp possesses solid reasoning for its belief ("Korean ethnic nationalism").

In the field of education, many students are already struggling to meet the demands of their Korean-language education. According to a survey carried out by the Korean Teachers' and Education Workers' Union (KTU), 78% out of 1,400 nationwide fourth to sixth graders opposed the use of Hanja in textbooks. Out of those opposing students, 48% of students said they "understand the meaning well enough with only Hangul," while 23% claimed that Hanja "gets in the way of our reading." Moreover, the survey KTU carried out on 2,200 nationwide elementary school teachers revealed 87.8% of the teachers opposing the use of Hanja. Following these striking results for both students and teachers, the KTU described the use of Hanja in elementary school textbooks as a "beast opposed by students, teachers, parents, and civil society alike," that must be repelled (Um 2015).

Furthermore, the "All Hangul-use" camp refutes the widespread belief that 60-70% of Korean words are Sino-Korean words. According to the National Korean Language Institute, among 510,000

words, around 51% are Sino-Korean words. In fact, when taking out the words Koreans do not use often in daily and professional settings, Sino-Korean words only account for 35% (Hwang 2013). Yet even when acknowledging that a significant portion of Korean vocabulary indeed has a Hanja basis, the “All Hangul-use” camp suggests that the majority of these words can be spelled out in Hangul in everyday use. Park Yong-gyu, the head of the executive committee at the HMAHES (Headquarters for Movement against Hanja in Elementary School Textbooks) used the example of the word *sa-gi* 詐欺 (“fraud”) in his pungent remarks against the minister’s education policy advocating Hanja. Park pointed out that almost everyone knows the meaning of the word, and thus there is no need to know how to write it in Hanja. That is, “if it’s not broken, why fix it?” (Yoon 2015).

The rippling effects of Hanja implementation producing “advanced-learning” is another lingering predicament. The so-called “advanced learning” is a phenomenon prevalent in South Korea, where students study materials designed for older students at younger ages. If students start using Hanja around third grade, the effect will not remain limited among older students. Second, and first grade, and even kindergarten students will actively engage in “advanced learning” to master Hanja before they reach third grade. Although a bill banning “advanced learning” was passed in the same year, it does not apply to private education institutes. Thus, adding Hanja education will aggravate the already existing “advanced learning” phenomenon that continues to plague Korean students (Yoon 2015).

Unlike the “Mix of Hanja and Hangul” camp which views the low reading literacy rate as a result of learning to read and understand only Hangul, the opponents regard the above as a lie concocted by Hanja proponents and private education businesses. The National Association for Hanja Education, which proposed the requirement of Hanja education in elementary schools in 2002, is also one of the co-sponsors of the annual Hanja Grade Level Test. This fact has raised considerable suspicion regarding the hidden profit-minded motives behind the association’s calls for Hanja education (Jeon 2015).

#### NORTH KOREA

South Korea’s “All Hangul-use” camp often asserts North Korea as the model for language purification, as they believe that North Korea has “purified” its language of Sino-Korean vocabulary after North



Korea's dictator Kim Il Sung banned the use of Hanja in 1949 (Lee and Ramsey 2000, 3). However, in the 1960s, Kim Il Sung's second thoughts on his language policy became prominent when he announced his intention to reintroduce Hanja education. Today in North Korea, Hanja education is mandatory starting from fifth grade, and by the time North Korean students graduate from college, they are expected to have learned approximately 3,000 characters (Kaplan and Baldauf 2010, 158). North Korea seems to be conscious of the fundamental role of Hanja in the study of the Korean language.

The question of how to write the Korean language has been a vital ingredient in the evolution of national culture and in the self-awareness of the Korean people. Both academic and non-academic circles in Korea find a challenge in the critical question of digraphia governing the functional distribution of Hanja and Hangul, and they test their ethnic identity by taking a stance in the "Written Script War." Today, footprints of past attempts to abolish Hanja have been dissipating with the sweep of the "Chinese language craze," which has penetrated into Korean society; there has been a notable increase in Chinese language institutions, private tutors, and a Chinese major in colleges and universities. Despite the unremitting debate on the place and role of Hanja, Hangul will continue to serve as a solid visual ambassador for Korean culture.

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# Tangut Script: Creation and Structure

Nikita Kuzmin

## INTRODUCTION

At present there are several thousand languages in the world, but only a portion of them possess writing systems. Of those that do have them, it is interesting to note that, in many cases, the writing system of a particular community was not created by the ancestors of those who use it today. Script systems tend to be transmitted from one community to another. For instance, the Greek alphabet was created on the basis of the Phoenician alphabet, which was used in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Latin alphabet, developed initially on the Apennine peninsula, was created on the basis of the Greek alphabet, but it is now used by several billion people all around the globe for many different languages, and these belong not only to Romance or Germanic language groups, but also to Turkic, Vietic, and others.

The Sinitic writing system, which is one of the oldest writing systems in the world that is still in use, began to form about three and a half millennia ago, mainly finished its formation in the first centuries CE, and (with certain modifications) is still used now. In addition to this, due to the political and cultural strength of Chinese dynasties throughout history, the Sinitic script greatly influenced cultural-political entities that belonged to the Sinosphere: Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc. Aside from its influence on the regions that were outside the borders of the Chinese state, the Chinese writing system also had a great impact on the non-Han socio-cultural groups that lived inside or near the Chinese borders. Some of the ethno-cultural groups that populated the territory of China also created unique scripts for their languages.

In the current paper I would like to focus on the Tangut script (*Xixia wen* 西夏文), which was created in the Tangut (*dangxiang* 党項) state Xixia 西夏 in the eleventh century. This script is famous for its relatively complicated structure, as well as for the dominant position that it occupied in the Tangut state. Despite the fact that in the twentieth century a cohort of outstanding scholars in Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and the Soviet Union has conducted wide-scale research on the Tangut script, there are still many questions to be answered. My research focuses mainly on the following issues: Why did the Tanguts decide to abandon the Sinitic script and choose the route of creating and developing their own script? What were the cultural and political circumstances and reasons for such a decision? I attempt to answer these questions through close examination of Tangut and Chinese literary, historical, and linguistic sources. The second problem that I address is connected with the structure of the Tangut script and the logical basis of its creation. I do this by examining and analyzing previous research on this topic, as well as by comparing the Tangut and Khitan scripts, which could be related.

I would like to point out that the current paper is only a first step to a comprehensive understanding of the Tangut script and its role in Tangut society. This project serves as a foundation for needed further and deeper research.

#### THE TANGUT SCRIPT: A BRIEF RESEARCH HISTORY

Before speaking about the Tangut script itself, I will offer a brief theoretical introduction to the script situation in the Sinosphere. Zhou Youguang (周有光) identified twenty writing systems of ethnic groups, past and present, in and outside the PRC, whose scripts were created on the basis of the Sinitic. He refers to these as “character-type scripts.”<sup>1</sup> Zhou defined the four main stages of the historical development of the script families as transplantation, naturalization, imitation, and creation. The first two stages refer to the usage of the Sinitic script and its alteration in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, but the third stage, “imitation,” mainly refers to the scripts that were created by ethno-cultural groups such as the Zhuang 壯族, the Miao 苗族, etc. Zhou divided this stage into two

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<sup>1</sup> Zhou Youguang, “The Family of Chinese Character-Type Scripts: Twenty Members and Four Stages of Development,” *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 28, ed. Victor H. Mair, September 1991, 1.

categories: imitation through propagation and imitation through differentiation. The category "imitation through propagation" includes some scripts, graphs of which were created from the elements of sinographs, such as the Zhuang and Miao scripts. Another way of creating scripts was "imitation by differentiation." This category includes Khitan, Tangut, and Jurchen scripts. Zhou Youguang says that "they (Khitans, Tanguts, and Jurchens) hated to borrow characters from the Han people, but they could not escape the influence of Chinese characters."<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Tanguts, I am skeptical about this suggestion, and in the current paper I would like to offer my conclusions about this question. The final stage, "creation," refers to the creation of character-type alphabets like *kana* in Japan and the Yi writing system of the Yi people (彝族), etc.<sup>3</sup>

In order to proceed, we need to get acquainted with the timeframe of the Tangut script. The earliest transmitted document written in the Tangut script is an official document sent to a military inspector (*jianjungsi* 監軍司) of the Guazhou District (瓜州) in present-day Guazhou county (瓜州縣), Gansu Province (甘肅省), which is dated 1072. Another very early example of the Tangut script is an inscription on a stele of Liangzhou Ganying Pagoda (涼州感應塔碑文), which was erected in 1094 and is now exhibited in Xixia Museum (西夏博物館) in Wuwei (武威) in present-day Gansu Province (甘肅省). The most recently discovered examples of early Tangut script are the stone inscriptions of Juyong guan (居庸關石刻), which originate from 1345, and inscriptions on statues of the Buddha from the Dunhuang Mogao caves (敦煌莫高窟), from 1348. In addition, in 1962 archaeologists found in Baoding (保定) (Hebei Province [河北省]) a column (*shichuang* 石幢) with an inscription in the Tangut script, which was erected in 1502.<sup>4</sup> This means that the Tangut script was used for more than four hundred years. Moreover, this fact justifies the conclusion that the Tangut script was used even after the collapse of the Tangut state following the Mongol invasion in 1227.

The first Western scholar to conduct research and publish on the Tangut script was a British

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3–10.

<sup>4</sup> Gong Hwang-chenng (龔煌城), "Xixia wenzi de jiegou" 西夏文字的結構 (Structure of Tangut script), in *Xixia yuwen yanjiu lunwenji* 西夏語文研究論文集 (Tangut philology: Collection of papers by Professor Hwang-chenng Gong) (Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, 2011), 301.

physician and amateur Orientalist called Stephen Wootton Bushell. In his article “The Hsi-hsia Dynasty of Tangut: Their Money and Peculiar Script,” published in 1895, he drew comparisons between coin inscriptions in the Tangut and the Sinitic scripts. Through such comparisons, he defined thirty-seven Tangutgraphs,<sup>5</sup> which were mainly numerals and reign titles, in other words, the terms that are usually engraved on coins. Nevertheless, his work did not attempt to understand the phonetic features of the Tangut language.<sup>6</sup> In 1898, a French scholar, Gabriel Deveria, after a close examination of a Chinese-Tangut bilingual stele in Liangzhou, for the first time suggested that the Tangut script originated from the Khitan script. In addition to this, he proposed that the Tangut script was used for the transcription of all the languages that were spoken in Xixia (mainly Tangut, Sinitic, and Tibetan).<sup>7</sup> In 1904 a French scholar, M. G. Morisse, made another attempt to understand the structure of the Tangut script. In his research, Morisse analyzed a bilingual Tangut-Chinese version of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經). In this research, he figured out ten more Tangutgraphs (mainly Buddhist terms), but in contrast to Bushell’s research, he tried to make a phonetic analysis by comparing Tangut, Chinese, and Sanskrit syllables.<sup>8</sup>

One of the main problems that Bushell and Morisse both faced was the lack of written materials in the Tangut script. They based their hypotheses on only partial pieces of Tangut writings. But in 1908 a Russian expedition led by Pyotr K. Kozlov (Russian: Пётр Кузьмич Козлов) found in Khara Khoto (黑水城), a Tangut city in the Ejin Banner (额济纳旗) of the Alxa League (阿拉善盟), Inner Mongolia (內蒙古自治區), a great number of Tangut texts, including such important texts on Tangut philology as *Fanhan heshi zhangzhong zhu* 番漢合時掌中珠 (Pearl in the palm), *Wenhai* 文海 (Sea of graphs), *Tongyun* 同音 (homophones), *Wenhai zalei* 文海雜類 (Different categories of the sea of graphs), etc. This finding gave a new impetus to research on the Tangut script and language. In 1909 a Russian Sinologist, Aleksei I. Ivanov (Russian: Алексей Иванович Иванов, Chinese: 伊鳳閣),

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5 In the current paper I use the term “Tangutgraph” to designate the graphs of the Tangut script.

6 Gong, “Xixia wenzi de jiegou” 西夏文字的結構 (Structure of Tangut script), 301.

7 Evgeny Kychanov, “To the Study of Tangut Script Structure,” in *The History of the Tangut State* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2008), 402.

8 Gong, “Xixia wenzi de jiegou” 西夏文字的結構 (Structure of Tangut script), 301.

in his article “Zur Kenntniss der Hsi-Hsia-Sprache” (Toward understanding the Xixia language), carefully analyzed *Fanhan heshi zhangzhong zhu* (番漢合時掌中珠)<sup>9</sup> and suggested new hypotheses on the vocabulary and phonetics of the Tangut language. In 1916, based on Ivanov’s research, American anthropologist and historical geographer Berthold Laufer, in the article “The Si-hia Language: A Study in Indo-Chinese Philology,” concluded that the Tangut language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese language group. In 1914, a Chinese scholar, Luo Fuchang (羅福菴), in his research work *Xixia guoshu lüeshuo* 西夏國書略說 (Brief explanations of Xixia state-script), on the text of *Fanhan heshi zhangzhong zhu*, found twenty-three “radicals” (*bushou* 部首) of the Tangut script. In 1915, his brother, Luo Fucheng (羅福成), in the work *Xixia guoshu leibian* 西夏國書類編 (Thematic collection of Xixia state-script), suggested that the Tangut script contains 165 radicals *bushou*. Luo Fucheng also described 713 Tangutgraphs. In 1932 Luo Fucheng figured out forty-one more Tangutgraphs, based on materials from *Wenhai* and *Wenhai zalei* rhyme dictionaries. He provided Chinese translations and explanations of these. In the 1960s, a Japanese scholar, Nishida Tatsuo (西田龍雄), suggested the term *moji yōso* 文字要素 (script component) for the basic structural parts of Tangutgraphs. Nishida found 348 such components. In addition to this, he suggested that there are thirteen ways to combine *moji yōso*. He also identified 162 more Tangutgraphs. In 1964, a Russian scholar, Evgeny I. Kychanov (Russian: Евгений Иванович Кычанов), proposed a new approach to analyzing the features of Tangutgraphs. He suggested that Tangut writing is based on eight basic strokes, which form eighty-three basic forms, out of which 650 components (*pianpang* 偏旁) are created. Not all *pianpang*, as compiled by Kychanov, are radicals (*bushou* 部首).<sup>10</sup>

The studies by Nishida and Kychanov have had a great impact on the understanding and interpretation of the Tangut script. Their theories, based on the research results of Western and Chinese scholars of the first half of the twentieth century, created a theoretical framework that is applied in modern Tangutology. After this brief introduction of previous research, I now present and analyze some views on the formation of the Tangut script.

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<sup>9</sup> Sino-Tangut vocabulary book, which contains lists of paralleled terms and is divided into categories.

<sup>10</sup> Gong, “Xixia wenzi de jiegou” 西夏文字的結構 (Structure of Tangut script), 302–303.

# CREATION OF THE TANGUT SCRIPT: CHINESE AND TANGUT PERSPECTIVES

What were the reasons behind the creation of the Tangut script? Why did the Tanguts reject using Sinitic script? Japanese scholar Miyazaki Ichisada (宮崎市定) points out that the end of the Tang and the beginning of the Song was a period of great socio-political change in East Asia. It was the period of the rise of the national self-identity of the *izoku* 異族 (ethno-social groups different from the Han Chinese), which established relatively powerful states (the Khitan [契丹] people established Liao [遼], the Tangut [党項] established Xixia [西夏], and the Jurchen [女真] people established Jin [金]), which existed for a considerable period. Miyazaki suggested that they not only adopted a great number of Han Chinese cultural elements, but also struggled to preserve their own culture.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, Victor Mair points out that from the seventh century onward there was the period of the “second vernacular revolution,” which inspired the creation of texts in the vernacular languages.<sup>12</sup> Nicolas Tranter concludes that the creation of Khitan, Tangut, and Jurchen scripts was influenced by the development of Tibetan and Uighur writings, which was inspired by the “second vernacular revolution.”<sup>13</sup>

One approach to understanding the making of the Tangut script is to trace the related primary sources written in the Chinese and Tangut languages. What did the Chinese and the Tanguts say about the creation of the Tangut script? Despite the fact that we have only a limited number of surviving original Tangut sources, nevertheless we can discern some facts.

Nishida Tatsuo suggested that, according to the Chinese sources, the Tangut script was created during the reign of the first Xixia emperor, Li Yuanhao (李元昊; 1038–1048), by the official

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<sup>11</sup> Miyazaki Ichisada (宮崎市定), “Sēka no kōki to sēhakuen mondai” 西夏の興起と青白塩問題 (The rise of Xixia and the question of blue-white salt) in *Miyazaki Ichisada zenshū* 宮崎市定全集 (Complete works of Miyazaki Ichisada) Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992), 9: 363.

<sup>12</sup> Victor Mair, “Buddhism and the Rise of Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 53. 3 (Aug. 1994): 717.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Tranter, “Script ‘Borrowing,’ Cultural Influence and the Development of the Written Vernacular in East Asia,” in *Language Change in East Asia*, ed. T. E. McAuley (Richmond, Surrey [U.K.]: Curzon, 2001), 181.



Yuqi (遇乞). After several years of working on the Tangutgraphs, he presented the result of his work to the ruler; these were the basic forms of future Tangutgraphs. Li Yuanhao himself also made some additions, and then the script was edited and promulgated by Yeli Renrong 野利仁榮.<sup>14</sup>

元昊果叛，其徒遇乞先創造蕃書，獨居一樓上，累年方成，至是獻之，元昊乃改元，制衣冠禮樂，下令國中悉用蕃書、胡禮，自稱大夏。<sup>15</sup>

Yuanhao raised a rebellion. His attendant Yuqi first created *fanshu* [Tangut script]; alone he dwelled in the upper chamber; after several years, he finished his assignment. When it came to the point of presenting the results (to the ruler), Yuanhao therefore changed the reign title, defined the (color of the) garments (clothes and hats), as well as rituals and music. He ordered (everybody) in the state to become familiar with *fanshu* and *huli* (“barbarian”/Tangut rituals). He proclaimed the (name of the state as) Daxia (Great Xia).

From this abstract in *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* (續資治通鑑長編), we find that Yuqi was in charge of the creation of the Tangut script, and after that Yuanhao changed the reign title, which marked the beginning of a new era of the Tangut state. This abstract thus presents the close connections between the creation of the Tangut script and the self-identification of the Tanguts as creators of the powerful Great Xia state.

Nevertheless, Kychanov, in the article “Tangut Script in the Interpretation of the Tanguts,” suggested that the origin of the Tangut script can be found in the literary heritage of the Tanguts. Kychanov offered a translation of one of the Tangut odes, which was translated by Nikolay Nevsky from the Tangut language into the Russian:

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<sup>14</sup> Nishida Tatsuo (西田龍雄), *Seika no moji: sono dokkai no puroseshu* 西夏の文字：その読解のプロセス (Tangut script: The process of its reading) (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Shoten), 121.

<sup>15</sup> Li Tao (李燾), *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (Extended continuation to comprehensive mirror in aid of governance) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 5: 2814.

Tibetan, Chinese, and Mi – all three have the common Mother,  
 Their speeches are different, which was caused by (dwelling) in different lands.  
 On the far West, on the highlands there is Tibet,  
 In this Tibet land there is the Tibetan script,  
 On the far East, in the lowlands there is China,  
 In this Chinese land there is the Chinese script.  
 Each of these three has its own language, each of them love it,  
 Each of them pays a great respect to their language,  
 In our land there is a great *Teacher, Iri*,  
 On the sky there is a star of script – *it rose up from the East*,  
 Having brought script with it, it brightens the sunset.<sup>16</sup>

There are two points that we should pay attention to here. The first is “the great Teacher Iri,” who may be Yeli Renrong, mentioned above. It is interesting to figure out who Yeli Renrong was. *Songshi* (宋史) mentions him only three times. The following mention is presented in the context of Li Yuanhao’s establishing the ruling system of the Tangut state and arranging its official ranks and appointing its officers. Among these was Yeli Renrong:

<...> 耶利仁榮主蕃學。<sup>17</sup>

Yeli Renrong was in charge of *fanxue*.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, the creation of the Tangut script was closely connected with the first emperor, Li Yuanhao, and his official, Yeli Rengrong, who was in charge of the creation and promulgation of the

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<sup>16</sup> My own translation from Russian; see Evgeny Kychanov, “Tangut Script in the Interpretation of the Tanguts,” in *The History of the Tangut State* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2008), 389–390.

<sup>17</sup> *Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song), 卷四百八十五 (scroll 485) 列傳第二百四十四 (Historical biography) 244, 外國 Foreign Countries, Part 1 夏國上 State of Xia, part 1) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 40: 13994.

<sup>18</sup> I.e., Tangut philological learning.

Tangut script and the Tangut philology. Another point to which we should attend is the fact that “the star of script” rose from the “East,” which could mean that the idea of the Tangut script originated from China (or Khitan Liao?), located east of the Tangut state.<sup>19</sup>

Kychanov also points out another piece of evidence to support the argument that the Tangut script was inspired by the Sinitic and had close relations with it. The preface to *Fanhan heshi zhangzhong zhu*, created by the Tangut scholar Gule Maocai (骨勒茂才) in 1190, contains the following passage:

兼番漢文字者論末則殊考本則同<sup>20</sup>

As for Tangut and Chinese scripts, speaking about their branches (graph appearance), they are different, but speaking about their roots (origin of the script), they have much in common.

This passage from the work of the Tangut scholar makes it clear that the Tanguts tended to acknowledge the relations between Tangut and Sinitic scripts.

Due to the lack of Tangut materials, another option for learning more about the creation of the Tangut script is to trace it in the Chinese sources. *Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song) contains the following passage:

元昊自製蕃書，命野利仁榮演繹之，成十二卷，字形體方整類八分，而畫頗重複。教國人紀事用蕃書，而譯孝經、爾雅、四言雜字為蕃語。<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kychanov, “Tangut Script in Interpretation of the Tanguts,” 390.

<sup>20</sup> Gule Maocai (骨勒茂才), *Fanhan heshi zhangzhong zhu* 番漢合時掌中珠 (Pearl in the palm) (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1989), 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song), 卷四百八十五 (scroll 485) 列傳第二百四十四 (Historical biography) 244, 外國 (Foreign Countries), Part 1 夏國上 (State of Xia, part 1) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 40: 13995.

Yuanhao has himself created *fanshu* (Tangut script), he ordered Yeli Renrong to impliment it. (In order to do it, he) compiled 12 scrolls (of the Tangut writing). The forms of the graphs were square, similar to *lishu* (clerical script), but the strokes were very multiplied and repeated. He taught the people of the state to use *fanshu* (Tangut script) to make records, and also translated *Xiaojing* (Canon of Filial Piety), *Erya*<sup>22</sup>, *Siyan zazi*<sup>23</sup> in the *Fan* (Tangut) language.

From this text we can understand that, according to the author of the *History of the Song*, Yuanhao created the script himself (or more probably the compiler of the *Songshi* omitted Yuqi). Nevertheless, this record in a Chinese chronicle does not contradict the Tangut sources mentioned above, such as the Tangut ode, which also contains the name of Teacher Iri ([Yeli] Renrong). However, the Chinese source does not assert that the Tanguts created their script on the basis of the Sinitic.

Chinese scholar Li Xinkui (李新魁), citing *Xixia shushi* 西夏書事 (The written matters of Xixia),<sup>24</sup> suggested that after the Tangut script was created in 1036–1037, it was made a state-script (國書) by Li Yuanhao and was used for official records.<sup>25</sup>

As noted above, the earliest extant example of the Tangut writing system is an official document that was sent to a military official in Guazhou in 1072, roughly three decades after the Tangut script was created. In addition to this, Li Xinkui points out that in 1037 the Tanguts organized the *Fanhan erzi yuan* 番漢二字院 (Department of Tangut and Sinitic scripts), which was aimed at the teaching of these two scripts. He cited the *Xixia shushi* (西夏書事):

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<sup>22</sup> The oldest surviving Chinese dictionary–encyclopedia.

<sup>23</sup> Popular vocabulary textbook (with pictures and rhymed texts) for memorizing Sinographs.

<sup>24</sup> *Xixia shushi* (西夏書事) is a historical composition, created by Wu Guangcheng (吳廣成) of the Qing Dynasty.

<sup>25</sup> Li Xinkui (李新魁), “Lun Xixiawen de xingti jiegou he zaozi fangshi” 论西夏文字的形体结构和造字方式 (Study on structural forms of Tangut script and ways of graph creation), in *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* 中山大学学报 (1978) 5: 12.

元昊既制蕃書，尊為國字，凡國中藝文誥牒，盡易蕃書，於是立蕃字、漢字二院。漢習正草，蕃兼篆，隸”。<sup>26</sup>

Yuanhao created *fanshu* (Tangut script), which he respectfully acknowledged as “state graphs,” everything in the (Xia) state borders, (concerning) art, literature, orders, or documents, everything was changed into the Tangut script. Therefore he established two institutions of Tangut and Sinitic scripts, in order to practice proper Sinitic *cao*-style (cursive) and, for the Tangut script, *zhuan* (seal) and *li* (clerical) style.

This passage provides a detailed description of Yuanhao’s policy concerning script reform. Thus it seems obvious that the first Xia emperor was very determined to introduce the new script and to promulgate it, but at the same time he did not abolish the usage of the Sinitic script. In fact, he created two institutions to develop the new Tangut writing on the one hand, and to preserve the Sinitic script on the other. This fact may have two possible explanations. The first is that the second largest ethnic group living in the Tangut state was Han Chinese, and they would not have abandoned the Sinitic script. Secondly, due to strong Sino-Tangut cultural and political ties, the Sinitic script could not be easily and quickly eliminated. Therefore, the rise of Tangut identity, manifested in the form of creation of the Tangut script, had to be a transitional process taking place over a long time.

While Li Yuanhao supported both Sinitic and Tangut scripts, the Tanguts did not fully conform to the cultural rules of the Sinosphere, and that is extremely interesting. Nicolas Tranter points out that, despite the fact that the Tanguts were greatly influenced by both Tibetan and Chinese cultures, they accepted neither Tibetan nor Sinitic as their state script.<sup>27</sup> To a certain extent, such a script policy could be considered a way of expressing an independent cultural identity. We might expect such a rise of cultural identity as part of an effort to mitigate the influence of powerful neighboring cultures. Nevertheless, the Tangut ode and the preface to *Fanhan heshi zhangzhong zhu* both support the assumption that the Tanguts admitted the connections between the Tangut and the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Tranter, “Script ‘Borrowing,’ Cultural Influence and the Development of the Written Vernacular,” 182.

Sinitic. Nevertheless, the creation of the Tangut script advocates the conclusion that the Tanguts rejected full conformity with the rules of the Sinosphere. Alternatively, they might have felt a necessity to create a scriptural system as a powerful tool of self-identification and self-differentiation from the Han Chinese.

As mentioned above, some argue that the Tangut script was created under the influence of the Khitan script that developed one century earlier. There could be a certain cultural influence, but, on examining the features of the Khitan script, I cannot find a close relationship.

In 920 the Khitan ruler Abaoji (阿保機) ordered Elü Tulubu (耶律突呂布) and Elü Lubugu (耶律魯不古), with the help of Chinese literati, to create a script for the Khitan language. Their efforts led to the creation of Khitan Big Script, which was ideographic. The creators followed the model of the Chinese script, but simplified and modified the Sinographs. Ideographic Big Script was inconvenient for the agglutinative Khitan language, however, and therefore the Khitan ruler's younger brother, Elü Diela (耶律迭剌) created the Small Khitan Script. He borrowed the elements from Sinographs, but based it on the principles of the Uighur writing system. After its introduction, Small Khitan Script was used for documentation and inscriptions, as well as for poetry, history-writing, translations, and examinations. The period during which Khitan script was used is around three hundred years, from the beginning of the tenth to the end of the twelfth centuries (i.e., approximately 920–1191).<sup>28</sup>

A comparison of the creation processes of the Tangut and the Khitan scripts reveals many similarities. In each case, the initial impulse to create a script came from the ruler, who ordered his officials to undertake it. This is quite different from the situation with *kana* in Japan, which developed around the ninth century; in Japan, the ruler and the elites opposed the indigeneous Japanese script, preferring to maintain their Chinese-derived script because of its cultural prestige. In contrast, the idea of script creation in both Khitan Liao and Tangut Xixia originated from the ruler. This difference in script policies can be explained by the fact that the rulers of the Khitans and the Tanguts were eager to express their cultural independence from Song China; they were unable, however, to

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28 Chingeltei (清格爾泰), "On the Problems of Reading Kitan Characters," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 55, no. 1/3 (2002): 100.

completely abandon the linguistic influence of the Sinitic. They more or less relied on the principles of sinographical structure.

## STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF TANGUTGRAPHS

In order to answer the second question, namely, what logic did the creators of Tangutgraphs follow in their creative process, and what approach to script creation did they apply, it is important to trace the structural features of the Tangut writing system.

Luo Fuchang (羅福菴) in his work *Xixia guoshu lüeshuo* 西夏國書略說 (Brief introduction to Xixia state script), citing *Songshi* (宋史), mentions that Tangutgraphs, like Sinographs, are a tetrographic script and exist in three scriptural styles: *kaishu* (楷書), *xingshu* (行書), *zhuanshu* (篆書). However, in comparison with Sinographs, Tangutgraphs contain a greater number of strokes.<sup>29</sup>

Scholars who were active in the second half of the twentieth century suggest more detailed interpretations of the Tangut script structure. I would like to present here the research results concerning the structure of the Tangut script of three prominent scholars: Taiwanese scholar Gong Huangcheng (龔煌城), Japanese scholar Nishida Tatsuo (西田龍雄), and Russian scholar Evgeny Kychanov (Евгений Кычанов).

Gong Huangcheng builds his assumptions concerning the Tangut script system mainly on explanations provided by Tangut philological dictionaries: *Wenhai* 文海 (Sea of graphs) and *Wenhai zalei* 文海雜類 (Different categories of sea of graphs). He points out that, albeit Tangutgraphs may seem extremely complicated at first glance, they can be divided into smaller parts, each of which plays a particular role in the whole composition of the Tangutgraph. Usually Tangutgraphs consist of two, three, or four compositional elements. Gong Huangcheng points out that, despite the fact that modern scholars are able to figure out many of the components of the Tangutgraphs, there are still a great number of unresolved problems. One of the basic needs is to establish a definition of the minimal component of the Tangutgraph. In addition, despite the fact that we can find common components in Tangutgraphs, we still do not exactly understand the role of each element in the entire

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<sup>29</sup> Luo Fuchang (羅福菴), *Xixia guoshu lüeshuo* 西夏國書略說 (Brief research of Xixia state-script) (Xuantong jia yin, 1914), 1.

structure of a single Tangutgraph, as well as the relationship between the components. Gong Huangcheng points out that some elements borrowed from one Tangutgraph may in one case act as a semantic component, but transferred to another Tangutgraph may carry a phonetic function. Modern scholars are still unable to answer the question, What are the rules of such “element borrowings?”<sup>30</sup> Gong Huangcheng argues that Tangutgraphs can be divided into two categories according to their semantic structure: *tongxin jieyou* (同心結構 concentric structure) and *yixin jieyou* (異心結構 dicentric structure). The main differentiating factor between these two categories is the relationship between parts of the Tangutgraph and its meaning. For instance, the Tangutgraph “earthquake” consists of two elements, “earth” and “shake.” These are two keywords that describe the nature of this disaster, therefore these two terms belong to the same “semantic category” *yuyi fanchou* (語意範疇), so this Tangutgraph is defined as *tongxin jieyou*.<sup>31</sup> As an example of *yixin jieyou*, Gong suggests the Tangutgraph “to bury” 𐰇𐰺 [ly],<sup>32</sup> which consists of two components: the left element of the graph “earth” 𐰇 [ly] in the upper part of the Tangutgraph and the whole graph “down” 𐰇𐰺 [khu] in the lower part. Therefore the whole combination literally means “down the earth.” In addition to this, from the phonetic point of view, the Tangutgraph “to bury” 𐰇𐰺 [ly] has borrowed its pronunciation from the Tangutgraph for “earth” 𐰇 [ly]. Thus, this element carries both the semantic and phonetic components. Gong argues that these two terms (“earth” and “down”) do not belong to the same “semantic category,” therefore this Tangutgraph belongs to *yixin jieyou*.<sup>33</sup>

Gong Huangcheng suggests the classification of Tangutgraphs based on their structural features. He divides Tangutgraphs into three main groups, according to the features of their structural components. The first group is represented by Tangutgraphs that consist only of semantic elements

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30 Gong, “Xixia wenzi de jieyou” 西夏文字的結構 (Structure of Tangut script); Gong Hwang-chenng 龔煌城, “Xixia wenzi de jieyou” 「西夏文字的結構」 (Structure of Tangut script) in *Xixia yuwen yanjiu lunwenji* 西夏語文研究論文集 (Tangut philology: Collection of papers by Professor Hwang-chenng Gong) (Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, 2011, 308.

31 Ibid., 310–311.

32 In the current paper I use Marc Miyake’s version of Tangutgraph pronunciation.

33 Gong, “Xixia wenzi de jieyou” 西夏文字的結構 (Structure of Tangut script), 312.



and do not contain any phonetic component. This type of Tangutgraph is close to the *huiyi* type 會意字 of Sinographs. For instance, in the Tangutgraph 𐰇 [tha], which is translated as “Buddha,” the left part 𐰇 [dzwo] means “man”/“person.” The right part is a combination of three horizontal strokes, which stands for the “three worlds” (*trailokya* / *sanjie* 三界) of Buddhism, and one vertical stroke, which crosses the three horizontal strokes in the current Tangutgraph and means “to go through”/“to penetrate.” In other words, the structure of the Tangutgraph “Buddha” means “a man who had gone through three worlds.” The first group can be also subdivided into five subcategories, based on combinations of whole Tangutgraphs (Full) and parts of Tangutgraphs (Part). The examples that are presented in the tables below are taken from Gong Huangcheng’s article.<sup>34</sup>

Table 1

Type	Tangutgraph	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
(1) Full + Full	𐰇 [be] insect	𐰇 [ke] insect	𐰇 [ton] insect		
(2) Part + Full	𐰇 immortal <sup>35</sup> (仙 <i>xian</i> )	𐰇 [dzwo] man/person	𐰇 [ngyr] mountain		
(3) Part + Part	𐰇 [shan] mountain	𐰇 [bi] below/down	𐰇 [mji] no /negation		

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 314–315.

<sup>35</sup> The pronunciation of the Tangutgraph could not be determined.

Type	Tangutgraph	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
(4) Part+Part+Part	氾 [chhwan] river	𣎵 <sub>[zyr]</sub> water	𣎵 <sub>[rar]</sub> to flow/to leak	𣎵 <sub>[tsir]</sub> land/soil	
(5) Part+Part+Part+Part	𣎵 <sub>[he]</sub> sea	𣎵 <sub>[nor]</sub> water	𣎵 <sub>[mjū]</sub> deep pool	𣎵 <sub>[zyr]</sub> water	𣎵 <sup>36</sup> river











As we can see in Table 1, if a Tangutgraph consists of three or four components, it incorporates several parts of the other graphs. If a Tangutgraph is a combination of two components, it can be either a combination of two whole Tangutgraphs, or one whole/one component or a combination of two components.

The second category is represented by Tangutgraphs that are similar to the *xingsheng* type (形聲字) of Sinographs. In other words, one component(s) contains meaning, and one carries the phonetic element. Gong Huangcheng divides this category into five subcategories:

Table 2

Type	Tangutgraph	Component (Phonetic)	Component 1 (Semantic)	Component 2 (Semantic)
(6) Full Form + Full Phonetic	𣎵 <sub>[kwo]</sub> bed-wetting	𣎵 <sub>[kwo]</sub> Guo (surname)	𣎵 <sub>[bi]</sub> urine	
(7) Part Form + Full Phonetic	𣎵 <sub>[swy]</sub> ear	𣎵 <sub>[swy]</sub> race/offspring/seed	𣎵 <sub>[nu]</sub> ear	

<sup>36</sup> The pronunciation of the Tangutgraph could not be determined.

Type	Tangutgraph	Component (Phonetic)	Component (Semantic)	1	Component 2 (Semantic)
(8) Full Form + Part Phonetic	 [vir] to listen/to hear	 [vi] to realize	 [nu] ear		
(9) Part Form + Part Phonetic	 [ghe] true/real	 [ki] gold	 [se] clean		
(10) Part Form + Part Form + Part Phonetic	 [mbi] to grow/to develop	 [bi] reach	 [jwu] human/person		 [mer] Auxiliary word “person”

37

As can be seen from Table 2, the phonetic/semantic “borrowing” from the phonetic/semantic parts is not always precise. Examples 6 and 7 reveal the strict phonetic borrowing, hence in examples 8, 9, and 10, the sound of the Tangutgraph is similar to that of its components, but is not the same. This also applies to the function of semantic components, which in some cases are the same terms (example 7), are semantically similar (example 8), or even do not have much in common (example 9).

Tangutgraphs that belong to the third category are combinations of two phonetic parts, without any semantic component. The way in which these Tangutgraphs are created is similar to *fanqie*; these Tangutgraphs were used for transcriptional purposes.

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37 Similar to the Sinitic *zhe* 者.

Table 3

Type	Tangutgraph	Phonetic 1	Phonetic 2
(11) Full Phonetic + Full Phonetic	𐰇 [da] <sup>38</sup> graph for transliteration	𐰇 [de] an auxiliary word <sup>39</sup>	𐰇 [a] graph for transliteration
(12) Part Phonetic + Part Phonetic	𐰇 [ta] graph for transliteration	𐰇 [ti] to remain	𐰇 [a] graph for transliteration

Actually, Guang Huangcheng in his article is not clear about the difference between these two categories. Despite the fact that Tangutgraphs in this category served for phonetic purposes (similar to *fanqie*) their pictorial representation is a combination of their initial graphs (initial and final).

In addition to this, Gong Huangcheng also points out that there are some Tangutgraphs that cannot be divided into smaller parts. He calls such Tangutgraphs *duti zi* (獨體字).<sup>40</sup>

Evgeny Kychanov suggests a slightly different model of Tangutgraph classification. He understands the graphical structure of Tangutgraphs as a four-level system. The first level is represented by eight main strokes – simple graphic elements (простейший графический элемент) that are used in the Tangut script. These eight strokes form the graphical basis for the whole system of Tangutgraphs. The second level is represented by eighty-three graphs, which are formed by eight strokes of the first level. Kychanov calls them “components, which create ideographic-forming elements” (знаки, формирующие идеографообразующие элементы). He points out that they do not have any meaning or phonetic components, or in other words they are just “bricks” of Tangutgraph. The third level is represented by ideographic-forming elements (идеографообразующий элемент), which to a certain extent are close to sinographic *pianpang*

<sup>38</sup> The pronunciation of the graph is formed in a way similar to *fanqie*.

<sup>39</sup> Similar to the Sinitic *dang* 當, *ling* 令.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 313–317.

*bushou* (radicals) (偏旁部首). Kychanov supposes that the Tangut script contains about 650 ideographic-forming elements. Nevertheless, Kychanov, like Gong Huangcheng, admits that the process of definition of the components by Tangutologists is not completed yet. In addition to this, some elements do not fit this pattern. Tangutgraphs in their turn are formed from about 650 ideographic elements as are mentioned above. Kychanov agrees that the process of Tangutgraph creation was conducted through two main ways: semantic and phonetic. He also defined twenty main structural combinatorial patterns of Tangutgraphs.<sup>41</sup>

The Japanese scholar Nishida Tatsuo, like Gong and Kychanov, agrees that Tangutgraphs consist of basic elements. His examples show that Tangutgraphs that belong to the common semantic range (for example: “body”), contain the component “person.” He suggests calling such common elements as *moji yōso* 文字要素 (graph component). Nishida defines the *graph component* as the smallest, meaningful, and undividable part of a Tangutgraph. According to Nishida’s scholarship, the total number of Tangutgraph graph components is 348.<sup>42</sup>

One may ask the question, Are Nishida’s “graph components” (348) and Kychanov’s “ideographic-forming elements” (650) actually interchangeable terms? I suppose that these terms are rather similar, however the drastic difference in number can be explained by the different criterias of their differentiation.

Nishida figured out four main principles, which are the basis of Tangutgraph creation. He points out that the form of Tangutgraph is defined by the following four conditions:

1. “*Moji yōso*” type
2. The number of “*moji yōso*” (1 to 6) (examples of “water” & “fish”)
3. Combination pattern (1 of 44)
4. Location of “*moji yōso*” in the structure of the Tangutgraph

For example, the comparison between 𐰚 (*zyr*) “water” and 𐰚 (*zhu*) “fish” reveals that the difference

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<sup>41</sup> Kychanov “To the Study of Tangut Script Structure,” in *The History of the Tangut State* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2008), 407–410.

<sup>42</sup> Nishida, *Seika no mōji: sono dokkai no purosesu* (Tangut script: The process of its reading), 122–126.

between them is the position of two elements in the lower right corner. Both “water” and “fish” belong to the same semantic group, and therefore their elements are similar. They differ only by location of two “*moji yoso*.”<sup>43</sup>

#### TANGUT SCRIPT VS. KHITAN SMALL SCRIPT

After the detailed analysis of the Tangut writing system, presented above, I would like to draw a comparison between the Tangut script and its geographical and historical neighbor, the Khitan script. As mentioned above, the Khitan Small Script was created in the tenth century and probably gave inspiration for the creation of the Tangut script a century later.

Today we do not possess great numbers of materials written in the Khitan Small Script; nevertheless, from the extant stele inscriptions, scholars have been able to divide the graphical complexes of Small Khitan Script into two categories: monograms and polygrams. Monograms are represented by individual, isolated graphs, but alternatively polygrams are compact graphemic groups, which consist of two to seven components. Albeit the components in the polygrams are placed very near to each other, they are located in a certain order. In addition to this, Khitan graphs are divided by intervals of different lengths that are longer than those between the components of polygrams. This feature enables the reader to easily identify graphs of the Khitan language and serves the same aim as word intervals in the European languages. In addition to this, the components of polygrams are located in a strictly defined order, thus forming six main structural variants. Another feature of the graphical representation of Khitan Small Script is its lack of stable proportions for the components. According to its position, it can be written wider or narrower. Each component of the Khitan script consists of a combination of simple graphical elements – strokes and dots.<sup>44</sup>

If we compare the structural features of the Sinitic, Khitan, and Tangut script systems, we may see the process of transformation from Sinitic to Tangut, viewed through the Khitan script.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 127–128.

<sup>44</sup> Starikov, *Materialy po deshifrovke khidanskogo pishma* (Sources for the deciphering of Khitan script), 1: 20–23.

Table 4

Sinitic (Mandarin)	Khitan (Small Script)	Tangut	English
年 [nián]	𐰺 [ai] <sup>45</sup>	𐰽 [kew]	year
馬 [mǎ]	𐰺𐰾 [mori]	𐰽 [rer]	horse
虎 [hǔ]	𐰺𐰾 𐰾 [xaya'as] <sup>46</sup>	𐰽 [le]	tiger

As can be seen from these examples, one graph of the Khitan script may represent several syllables of the term. The Khitan term “year” consists of one syllable, and therefore it is presented in one graph: monogram. In the case of “horse,” which in the Khitan language consists of two syllables, it is accordingly presented in two sub-graphs, which form one polygram. In the case of “tiger,” which consists of three syllables, it is represented by a composition of three sub-graphs. The polysyllabism of the Khitan language may be explained by the fact that it probably belongs to the Mongolic languages,<sup>47</sup> and therefore one word may consist of a number of syllables. Nevertheless, in the Tangut language, which presumably belongs to the Tibeto-Burman languages, one term equals one syllable, and therefore one Tangutgraph stands for a one-syllable term.

I conclude that the Tanguts utilized the Khitans’ approach in creating the script. Since the Khitans tended to write the components (sub-graphs) of one polygram rather close to each other, the Tanguts were inspired to integrate the meaningful components into a single independent graph. It may be supposed that the idea of “combining the meaningful components into one complicated

<sup>45</sup> In the Khitan script this graph was also used to designate the cyclic sign *wu* 午.

<sup>46</sup> In the Khitan script, this graph was also used to designate the cyclic sign *yin* 寅.

<sup>47</sup> Denis Twitchet, “Hsuan-Tsung (reign 712–56)” in *The Cambridge History of China: Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, ed. Herbert Franke et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 3. 1: 364.

graphical composition” may originate from the Khitan Small Script. If the Tangutgraph tended to be too “overcrowded” (complicated, due to large number of strokes), its writers may have reduced some of the strokes, in order to make the Tangutgraph more user-friendly.

## CONCLUSION

In the first part of this paper I examined the origins of the Tangut script through analysis of Tangut and Chinese sources. While the Tanguts acknowledged the basic relationship between Sinitic and Tangut script, the first Tangut emperor, Li Yuanhao, in order to emphasize their ethno-political identity, ordered the creation of a national script different from the Sinitic. This could also be seen as a manifestation of the “second vernacular revolution,” as well as due to the rise of ethnic communities at the end of the Tang and the beginning of the Song periods. In the process of the script creation, the Tanguts may also have had reference to the Khitan script; however, they modified the general approach in order to make the script more convenient for the Tangut language. It is possible that the creator and propagator of the Tangut script, Yeli Renrong, may in fact have originated from Khitan Liao. Even after Xixia was destroyed by the Mongols, the Tanguts continued to use their script until the Ming Dynasty, as supported by recent archaeological discoveries. Thus, the Tangut script acted as a manifestation the Tangut identity.

Despite the fact that the Tangut script is rather complicated, in comparison with Sinitic or Tibetan, it was more convenient for use by the speakers of the Tangut language. The predominance of *huiyizi*-type Tangutgraphs, may be caused by toplectic differences in the Tangut language and by the national diversity (Tanguts, Han Chinese, Tibetans) in the Tangut state. Usage of the graphs that do not have strict reading components may have been perhaps more easily accessed by the speakers of several different languages.

The current project is only the first step toward needed research on the creation and development of the Tangut script.



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# China's Confucius Institutes: Promoting Language or Reputation?

Susan Radov

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, China has risen as a global power. Economically, it has not only tripled its gross domestic product but also become more attractive to developing countries through providing increased economic aid and greater access to financial markets (Nye 2005). Diplomatically, it has shifted from rejecting to entering multilateral partnerships, by sending more than three thousand troops to take part in the United Nations peacekeeping initiatives, and by joining the World Trade Organization (Nye 2005). While scholars have warned that this kind of twenty-first century diplomacy decreases the potential for other countries to curb China's power, American political scientist Joseph Nye acknowledges that China is limited in that it "does not have cultural industries like Hollywood, and its universities are far from the equal of America's" (Nye 2005).

While China has not established many non-governmental organizations abroad, it has created non-profit public education programs, called the Confucius Institutes, which teach Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. The Confucius Institutes act as a visible marker of China's more active presence on the international stage. Hanban, "a public institution linked with the Chinese Ministry of Education," operates as the Confucius Institute Headquarters, controlling the hiring practices and the curriculum (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). The Confucius Institutes have expanded rapidly, now numbering 450 college institutes in 120 countries and 650 "Confucius Classrooms" in K-12 schools as of 2015 (Sahlins 2015).

This paper explores the goals of the Confucius Institutes. Specifically, I seek to investigate the

differences between its outwardly and inwardly projected goals. I will examine these goals through the curricular aspects of the Confucius Institutes, such as the process for hiring teachers, and the specifics of the students' language program. I argue that while the Confucius Institutes promote the study of Chinese language and culture to foreigners, they serve the primary purpose of elevating China's standing in the world. In essence, I analyze how the Confucius Institutes act as a vehicle for global recognition, seeking increased social influence and a positive public image in the world.

## METHODOLOGY

I used both primary and secondary sources in my investigation in order to deeply analyze the motivations of the Confucius Institutes. It is important to consider that this paper focuses on the South Africa Confucius Institute, which is one of many Confucius Institutes. Therefore, my paper speaks to one, but not all, Confucius Institutes.

To get an "inside" account of the Confucius Institutes, I collected data from a semi-structured interview with a former Confucius Institute teacher named Jenny Li. (I have disguised her name here to preserve her privacy.) Following college graduation, Li taught for one year at a Confucius Institute in South Africa. I interviewed Li in a quiet room in a university library and recorded the dialogue with a standard recording application on my cell phone. The interview lasted approximately two hours. After transcribing and checking the interview for the most pertinent answers, I focused my attention on the Confucius Institutes' curriculum.

I based my questions on themes of historical knowledge about and personal experience at the Confucius Institutes. All of these questions also appear at the end of the paper.

When conducting my interview, I asked Li these two questions about the origin of the Confucius Institutes' name: *Why do you think that the institutes are named after Confucius? Can you explain a bit about the name's origin?*

I was guided by these questions for learning about the hiring practices of the teachers: I found that these questions allowed me to analyze the language program: *Why did you choose to teach at the Confucius Institutes? What do you think is the mission of the Confucius Institutes? How and why do you think you were hired as a teacher?*

I asked the following four questions to gain awareness of the cultural activities: *What did you teach and what did you not teach? How much flexibility did you have as a teacher to incorporate your own expertise? Was there any material you were not allowed to teach?*

In order to unpack the primary goals of the Confucius Institutes, I examined sources from both Hanban and scholars not affiliated the Confucius Institutes. Looking at Hanban's constitution and website, I was able to understand the reasons, details, and effects of the Confucius Institutes' hiring processes, language program, and cultural activities. By studying historical accounts, newspaper articles, education websites, and academic reviews of the Confucius Institutes, I was then able to compare the rationales and criticisms of its hiring practices and curriculum. Reading sources unaffiliated with the Confucius Institutes also helped to connect the institutions' political, scholarly, and cultural goals with China's larger role in international relations. The combination of these sources enabled me to better analyze the various ways in which the Confucius Institutes promoted and executed certain types of goals.

My paper is arranged in three main sections in order to thoroughly investigate how Hanban publically versus privately promotes the Confucius Institutes. In the first section, I examine the meaning of the name of the Confucius Institutes. In the second section, I focus on the hiring practices of the Confucius Institutes. Within this section, I examine the training for teachers and the kinds of teachers chosen. In the third section, I analyze the parameters of the Confucius Institutes' curriculum. I include here subsections regarding the promotion of one kind of language, the standardization of course material, and the emphasis on cultural activities. By organizing the paper in this fashion, I hope not only to provide a detailed analysis of the Confucius Institutes but also to discover the main ambitions of their curriculum and programs.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES

The Confucius Institute is named after the famous Chinese philosopher Confucius. Those who have studied Chinese political thought in the twentieth century have found this choice of name a bit perplexing, given that the Chinese Communist Party has long denounced Confucius. Starting in 1915, Chen Duxiu, co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, along with other language reformers, led

the “May Fourth Movement,” which condemned traditional Confucian ideals and promoted contemporary notions of Western democracy (Moser 2016, Starr 2009). According to Chinese language and studies scholar David Moser (2016), these May Fourth intellectuals “even called for the jettisoning of what had heretofore been the very core of Chinese ethics and intellectual life, Confucianism” (Moser 2016, 17). Moving ahead to 1973, we find that Mao Zedong, founder of the People’s Republic of China, created the “Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign,” which endorsed public criticism of Confucianism and encouraged Maoist interpretations of Chinese history (Mo 1975). The Chinese Communist Party’s public rejection of Confucian values calls into question its use of Confucius as a public symbol of the institutes.

The Confucius Institutes chose to name their program after Confucius because it is an internationally-identifiable symbol of China, free of past political controversy with Mao Zedong (*The Economist* 2011). Some scholars have speculated that China’s anti-Confucian government chose Confucius as the figurehead for the Confucius Institutes because of the government’s desire for world recognition (Pan 2013; Sahlins 2015; Starr 2009). Don Starr, a professor of Chinese studies at Durham University, defined the naming practice as a “branding issue,” in which the Chinese Communist Party used Confucius to signal positive representations of culture and education to the world (Starr 2009, 69).

Li, in my interview with her, while unaware of Don Starr’s theory, noted the evident contradiction between the institutes’ name and the government’s policy regarding Confucianism. She explained that the Confucius Institutes “have nothing to do with Confucius” and that “the Confucius Institutes’ major responsibility is to teach Chinese language and culture, so since Confucius is a famous person who represents education to everyone, he is a symbol of Chinese culture” (Li 2017). By naming the institutes after Confucius, Hanban appears to use the symbol as a way to gain what Marshall Sahlins calls “natural attractiveness” (Sahlins 2015, 1).

## HIRING PRACTICES

In this section, I scrutinize Hanban’s main outward motivations through its teacher recruitment efforts. Hanban promotes the Confucius Institute as an entity that mainly promotes Chinese language

instruction, so I think it is essential to evaluate this claim based on the recruitment and training of its teachers. I use the hiring process as a metric because teachers serve as the core component of an educational system.

By examining the disconnect between the public display and the lived experiences of the teacher hiring process, I call into question the Confucius Institutes' claim that it exists primarily to instruct foreigners in the Chinese language. The *Hanban News* published a report that the Confucius Institutes "have elaborately formulated and improved international standards for Chinese language teachers" (*Hanban News* 2017). While Hanban maintains a Teaching Quality and Evaluation Division, which concentrates on Chinese language teaching materials (Paradise 2009), some critics have condemned the criteria on which the selection of teachers is based. Several scholars who study the Confucius Institutes explain that the lack of available teachers translates into poor teacher quality and low standards promoted by the Hanban (Hughes 2014; Pan 2013; Starr 2009; Zhao and Huang 2010).

Li voiced opinions similar to these and gave her first-hand account of the process. She revealed that the Confucius Institutes have loose standards for hiring because they need an increasing number of teachers: "The process of interviewing is not strict. That's one of the disadvantages of the Confucius Institutes: they're not strict with choosing their teachers, they just want them to be from China" (Li 2017). Her comments reveal that the urgency of recruiting sufficient teachers may lead to the lack of emphasis on teacher qualifications.

While Hanban outwardly states that it uses strict standards to hire teachers, Li has clearly not seen this theory put into practice. Her comments reflect that the Confucius Institutes are more concerned with hiring teachers who are willing to promote China as a country rather than those who are qualified to teach Chinese as a language. These opinions make me question whether the Confucius Institutes' lack of meticulous teacher standards extends to a lack of thorough teacher training and lack of deep language study.

## TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

Hanban states that it "offers training programs for the management teams and teachers of Confucius Institutes" (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). According to Hanban in this statement, the

Confucius Institutes methodically hire and train teachers in order to promote Chinese as a global language. However, past scholars have highlighted the fact that the Confucius Institutes provide only very short courses of several days to train teachers, and they do not produce qualified teachers (Paradise 2009; Starr 2009; Zhao and Huang 2010).

Analysis of the institutes reveals that the teachers' posting time, like their training time, is rather brief. Li commented on this training and duration problem: "Some of us are not sufficiently qualified, because we only stayed there for one year" (Li 2017). Li's comment mirrors the scholars' misgivings about the quality of training. She gave a concrete example of how the length of the teaching program affected the performance of teachers. She also stated that students complained about a teacher who "was not focused on teaching Chinese language because he only had to stay for one year" and who "was under the impression that his teaching time was only a 'gap year' to rest before for his next degree" (Li 2017). The Confucius Institutes' short-term postings for teachers do not seem consistent with the Confucius Institutes' promotion of long-term study for students.

Given Li's and some scholars' beliefs that the teachers do not feel prepared to teach Chinese, I question the motivations of the Confucius Institutes. These comments lead me to doubt that the Confucius Institutes prioritize the highest degree of language learning for the students if they do not prioritize the highest degree of language training for teachers.

#### KINDS OF TEACHERS CHOSEN

Hanban states that it "selects and dispatches Chinese directors and teaching staff to Confucius Institutes" (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017-a). This declaration seemingly adheres to Hanban's mission to supply teachers of the Chinese language to Confucius Institutes. If we pay careful attention to the wording, however, it becomes clear that Hanban aims to recruit teachers who not only teach Chinese language but who also have Chinese ancestry. In other words, Chinese heritage serves as a precondition for teacher recruitment. Scholars have noted that by solely hiring teachers from China, Hanban may deny employment to qualified Chinese language speakers and teachers from other countries (Hughes 2014). Hanban's reasons for exclusively hiring Chinese teachers seem to reflect a heavier concentration on China as a country over Chinese as a language. This practice leads me to



doubt whether Hanban seeks to spread the language of China as much as it seeks to spread the good reputation of China.

Hanban also appears to hold much more power than its foreign institution affiliates in hiring teachers. Some scholars have expressed concern that Hanban has been "prescreening Chinese language teachers" and that cooperating foreign universities have been forced to accept the teachers already accepted by Hanban (Redden 2017). By exclusively hiring Hanban-approved Chinese teachers, Hanban is able to prepare the teachers and shape the curriculum in any way it chooses. This practice may translate to a one-sided perspective in the curriculum, favoring Hanban's goals and interests. Thus, Hanban seems, by valuing Chinese ethnicity in the hiring process, to concentrate most on promoting a positive global image of China.

The difference between Hanban's promotional statements and scholars' and Li's accounts signals that the Confucius Institutes seek to supply Chinese teachers who can better speak to China as a powerful country than can speak Chinese as a language. Based on this analysis of the standards, training, and demographics of teachers, it appears that Hanban is motivated to "establish their international prestige and position among universities in the world" (China Education and Research Network 2017).

## THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CURRICULUM

In this section, I reveal the Confucius Institutes' primary motivations by analyzing their language curriculum. Specifically, I uncover the difference between the curriculum showcased by Hanban and the curriculum taught by teachers or analyzed by scholars. The streamlined curriculum challenges the assumption that the Confucius Institutes primarily focus on language pedagogy. By examining the Confucius Institutes' curriculum, I find that while Hanban stresses what the curriculum includes, others who have experience teaching at or studying the Confucius Institutes, focus on what the curriculum excludes. Exploring the curriculum's degree of depth provides insight into the Confucius Institutes' primary motivation, elevating China's global status.

## PROMOTION OF ONE KIND OF LANGUAGE

Regarding language study, Hanban publishes on its website that it “is committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide, [and] it goes all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). This passage reveals its outward motivation to academically serve and fulfill the needs of students, by providing both breadth and depth of language study. However, past scholars have noted that Hanban mandates that the Confucius Institutes use only simplified Chinese characters and teach only the Chinese government’s national standard language, called *Pǔtōnghuà* (普通话) (Hughes 2014; Paradise 2009; Starr 2009).

By teaching only one form of the Chinese language, the Confucius Institutes do not seem primarily “committed to providing Chinese language resources and services” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). This streamlined language curriculum does not freely allow students to explore different kinds of Chinese. Chinese studies scholars outside of China have raised concerns regarding this single language policy, as they believe it denies students the opportunity to study different Sinitic languages, such as Cantonese, and different character forms, such as traditional ones used in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Hughes 2014; Starr 2009). By insisting on “conducting Chinese language instructions in Mandarin, using Standard Chinese Characters” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017b), the Confucius Institutes disseminate a message of a linguistically unified and politically powerful China. It appears as though the Confucius Institutes inwardly shape language learning preferences more than outwardly “going all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). This exclusion of other kinds of Chinese languages reveals a lack of depth in the language curriculum, which challenges the claims of Hanban’s outward focus on language study. By not providing knowledge of the varieties of the language for foreign students, Hanban cannot fully accomplish its outwardly projected goal of deepening students’ understanding of the Chinese language.

Additionally, I think that the Confucius Institutes’ policy of teaching only *Pǔtōnghuà* (普通话) speaks to their primary mission of increasing China’s powerful presence. Earlier scholars have noted that the Chinese government stresses the governmentally imposed standard language of

*Pǔtōnghuà* (普通话) to highlight cultural and political unification (Hughes 2014; Paradise 2009; Starr 2009). This emphasis on only one language, which implicitly conveys one culture, does not seem to follow the Confucius Institutes’ outward mission of “contribut[ing] to the development of multiculturalism” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). Jeffrey Gil (2009), Professor of Languages and Applied Linguistics, who has taught in China, explains that shaping preferences in teaching the Chinese language affects students’ attitudes and even creates more positive views of China. Building on his analysis, it seems that by learning the national language enforced by the government, students at Confucius Institutes are more likely to be influenced by the government’s perspective. Christopher Hughes (2014), Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, even goes so far as to call the enforcement of *Pǔtōnghuà* (普通话) “a distortion of the academic agenda” because the government seeks to promote the national language as a way to display the strength of the country (p. 65). Marshall Sahlins (2015), Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, echoes this idea, mentioning that the type of Chinese taught and the type of course materials used are inherently political. While Hanban displays itself as fully committed to teaching language in order to accommodate all students and to enrich their study of Chinese, it appears primarily interested in imposing the image of a nationally unified China through its sole instruction of the national version of the language.

#### STANDARDIZATION OF COURSE MATERIAL

According to Hanban: “Confucius Institutes/Classrooms adopt flexible teaching patterns and adapt to suit local conditions when teaching Chinese language and promoting culture in foreign primary schools, secondary schools, communities and enterprises” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). However, some have questioned the flexibility of the curriculum and the goal of the program.

By streamlining the curriculum with standardized material and by not providing time for teachers to incorporate their own course material preferences, it appears that Hanban controls what the students learn. Specifically, Li spoke to the limits of the language curriculum: “We could only teach them basic Mandarin because we only met twice a week for about an hour. Most of the time, it was very basic language learning” (Li 2017). Her comments reflect thoughts similar to those of Don Starr (2009), who has indicated that the language program focuses on the “pragmatic aspects of

language training” (p. 53). Li’s comments also reveal that the curriculum did not stress in-depth language study due to the lack of options in intermediate or advanced grammar and characters. According to the Confucius Institute Constitution, “All institutes must use the unified set of teaching materials supplied by the Head Office” (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017b). Li conveyed frustration as a teacher regarding this lack of flexibility: “I only got to teach a superficial level of language and I did not have much flexibility. I always wanted to teach more but it was very hard to do” (Li 2017). Her comments underscore a kind of condensed curriculum that prioritizes baseline language proficiency standards over deep language comprehension and curiosity. Past research further shows that Hanban’s heavy oversight and evaluation criteria impose a uniform teaching model, preventing self-design in the curriculum (Paradise 2009). Reflecting on these comments and opinions, we observe that the Confucius Institutes’ streamlined curriculum uncovers Hanban’s tight control on its teachers.

While Hanban maintains a strict language curriculum in the classroom, it seems to emphasize the Confucius Institutes’ image outside of the classroom. Li stated that she had to give two detailed reports a year to Hanban, which focused more on international media than on language curriculum. She specified that she had to compile a detailed report on what kinds of visitors and media outlets visited the Confucius Institute at which she taught (Li 2017). Specifically, she mentioned that: “I always felt like I had to showcase the curriculum to international visitors and media. I had to focus on how many international students were learning Chinese” (Li 2017). Her comments expose the amount of pressure that Hanban puts on teachers to adhere to its model of maximum media exposure. The focus on international media remains consistent with past scholars’ remarks regarding the Confucius Institutes as forms of publicity (Hughes 2014; Paradise 2009). In emphasizing the number of foreigners learning Chinese, the Confucius Institutes reflect, scholars have noted, their essential nature as a mission to present a new understanding of an internationally focused China (Pan 2013; Paradise 2009; Zhao and Huang 2010). Hanban may use these reports more as a metric to gauge how much positive exposure the Confucius Institutes receive outside of the classroom than as a way to improve the ways in which the teaching material is taught inside the classroom. By tightly monitoring the teachers’ curriculum and by showcasing the growth in Chinese learning to the international media, the Confucius Institutes seem primarily dedicated to improving China’s global reputation.

## EMPHASIS ON CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Several scholars have noted that the Confucius Institutes focus on the public aspect of the curriculum because they strive for China's recognition on the global stage (Starr 2009; Zhao and Huang 2010). I explore the Confucius Institutes' emphasis on the public sphere through its great focus on large-scale cultural activities and the lack of attention paid to purely academic efforts.

According to Hanban, the Confucius Institutes "provide information and consultative services concerning China's education, culture, and so forth" (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). On their website, Hanban articulates that the Confucius Institutes "develop study programs about modern China" (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2017a). However, Li noted that she felt constrained by the platform of showcasing "modern China." She said that: "My background is in premodern literature and I wanted to teach the students more in-depth about this important subject area. But I do not think that the Confucius Institute does a good job because it only touches the surface of academic understanding" (Li 2017). By preventing Li from teaching information about premodern literature, the Confucius Institutes do not fully immerse students in Chinese study. Hanban does not seem to encourage purely academic activities, such as literature. This assessment matches those of other scholars, who have specified that the Confucius Institutes' main goal is to ensure that Chinese is acknowledged and valued as a global language (Pan 2013; Paradise 2009; Starr 2009). Building on these views, it appears as though the curriculum concentrates more on the recognition of Chinese as a powerful language and as a necessary skillset in this time of China's rise. Because the Confucius Institutes do not incorporate the expertise of their teachers, they may not be able to provide as academically rich an experience as possible for foreigners.

While the Confucius Institutes do not seem to prioritize the private study of language in the classroom, they do appear to emphasize the public performance of cultural activities. These activities range from Chinese music competitions and Chinese holiday celebrations, to Chinese art group performances" (Paradise 2009, 651). Rather than emphasize premodern literature, Hanban prefers to showcase traditional cultural activities. Some scholars have described this practice as "mass targeted" (Hughes 2014, 28). The emphasis on cultural activities, similar to the attention paid to cultivating the media, parallels earlier scholars' remarks on the Confucius Institutes as tools of publicity and

branding (Hughes 2014; Paradise 2009; Starr 2009). By encouraging students to participate in and watch cultural activities, the Confucius Institutes may wish to grow China's positive reputation. When asked if the students benefited from the Confucius Institutes, Li shared this: "It really depends on the different students. I think that they enjoyed the celebration of the traditional festivals though" (Li 2017). This comment reveals that some teachers believe that students are trained to remember most the uplifting and entertaining cultural activities. I find it noteworthy that Li did not include language study when asked about the benefits for students. Her reference to cultural activities over academic instruction reinforces the perception that the Confucius Institutes emphasize visually appealing cultural activities over mentally stimulating literature study. This focus on formal celebration adheres with past research on how the Confucius Institutes want acknowledgment of China as a harmonious and civilized culture (Pan 2013).

Past scholars have explained that the cultural activities serve as a way for China to showcase its public image on a much larger scale (Gil 2009; Gill and Huang 2006). When asked about the cultural programs, Li indicated their lack of depth: "We only scratch the surface of the Chinese culture. We really just celebrate the traditional Lantern Festival. They have students sing, dance, perform, prepare a lot of Chinese food, and play Chinese games" (Li 2017). Li's comment uncovers a contradiction between how the Confucius Institutes interpret and use the words "premodern," "modern," and "traditional." While they prevented Li from teaching academic classes about "premodern" literature, they encourage cultural activities such as the "traditional" Lantern Festival in order to promote a "modern China." In other words, the Confucius Institutes link "traditional" cultural activities, but not "premodern" literature, with their conception of "modern China." It seems that the Confucius Institutes seek to promote "modern" China through positive and easily digestible cultural practices, rather than through complex and advanced academic study.

## CONCLUSION

While earlier scholars have scrutinized the political motives of the Confucius Institutes, I have analyzed here the curricular aspects of the Confucius Institutes, with special attention to the South Africa Confucius Institute. By evaluating the reasons for naming the institutions, the ways of

recruiting teachers, and the methods of instructing language, I have uncovered discrepancies between Hanban's promotion of South Africa's Confucius Institutes and teachers' and scholars' experiences and opinions of the Confucius Institutes. While Hanban showcases the Confucius Institutes as places primarily for Chinese language study, it appears to limit the curriculum by creating loose teacher standards, by privileging one kind of Sinitic language, and by excluding teachers' expertise in advanced academic areas.

In order to better understand the primary motivations of the South Africa Confucius Institutes, I find it helpful to return to one of Li's responses from the interview. When asked why in her opinion Hanban created the Confucius Institutes, Li replied: "The *zou* Chinese government has a policy of *zǒu chūqù* (走出去), meaning to get out of our own country, to gain international influence. This is the time when China wants to get known by other countries" (Li 2017).

At the same time, however, teachers' associations have denounced the Confucius Institutes' academic practices. The Canadian Association of University Teachers and the American Association of University Professors have urged universities to "cut ties with the Confucius Institutes" (Sahlins 2015, 43). Given the Confucius Institutes' rapid growth and the scholarly community's mounting criticism, I wonder: *Will the positive image of Confucius advance the efforts of the Hanban's Confucius Institutes, or will the negative view of its academic curriculum hinder its efforts to increase China's global recognition in the world?*

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Background on the Name of the Confucius Institutes:*

1. Why do you think the institutes are named after Confucius?
2. Can you explain a bit about the name's origin?

### *Getting Involved with the Confucius Institute in South Africa:*

1. How did you get involved with the Confucius Institutes?
2. What motivated you to teach there?
3. How and why do you think you were hired as a teacher?
4. How were you selected/chosen?

*Experience as a Teacher at the Confucius Institute:*

1. What did the Confucius Institute provide for you in terms of resources as a teacher?
2. What did you teach? What did you not teach?
3. How much flexibility did you have as a teacher to incorporate your own material?
4. Was there any material you were not allowed to teach? Was there any material you wanted to teach but could not?
5. What kinds of activities were at the Confucius Institute and how did you feel about them?
6. What kinds of topics and discussions were encouraged at the Confucius Institute?
7. Who did you report to as your boss?
8. How much did the host institution impact the curriculum?
9. Did you ever have any moments of tension when teaching? How did you handle that?
10. Do you think that students who went to the Confucius Institute benefited? How?

*Thoughts about the Confucius Institutes:*

1. What do you think is the mission or goal of the Confucius Institute?
2. Why do you think the Confucius Institutes were created?
3. Do you think the Confucius Institutes serve an academic and cultural purpose?
4. Did you like your experience teaching at the Confucius Institutes?

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# Avoiding Loss through Curation: An Examination of the Trajectory of Sinitic Languages in Singapore

Ben Roth

Singapore offers an unparalleled opportunity to study the ways in which multiple languages interact with each other and evolve over time. A small city-state with a thriving multicultural society comprised primarily of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnic communities, Singapore is also home to an remarkable diversity of Sinitic languages. Mandarin, Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese, Fuzhou, Hainanese, Shanghainese, and other Chinese topolects can still be found throughout the city today, the result of generations of immigration from mainland China.<sup>1</sup> After decades of government policy and social preferences have cemented the use of English and Mandarin over other topolects, the Singaporean Chinese community is beginning to grapple with the distinct possibility that in the near future it may not be possible to encounter Sinitic languages other than Mandarin in Singapore.

The forces that cause language shift and that determine language inheritance in a society are numerous and complex, and Singapore is certainly no exception. Singapore's varied Chinese language-speaking communities, population density, and government-mandated language policies provide an interesting lens through which to examine some of the forces that shaped Chinese language usage over time. Furthermore, as language can be a strong vehicle for cultural transmission, it is instructive to examine the ways in which language, personal identity, and culture have interacted to shape current attitudes towards language use in Singapore today. Over the course of my research for this paper, it became clear to me that, while in recent years there has been renewed interest in Chinese topolects in Singapore for heritage and cultural reasons, Mandarin and English are so fully implanted in the habits of the younger generation that it is difficult to see a plurality of Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> The words "topolect" and "dialect" are used interchangeably in this paper.

topolects ever again thriving in the country. This paper further argues that various Chinese topolects such as Hokkien, Fuzhou, and Cantonese have entered into a "curated" stage, in which they are regarded with respect for their heritage value by Chinese communities and enjoy limited preservation through cultural groups dedicated to learning ancestral languages, but for all intents and purposes the languages have ceased to exist in natural, self-sustaining forms. In order to understand whether or not this fate is sealed, the paper will first present a brief history of Chinese languages in Singapore, describe the various forces that affected and shaped their usage over time, and finally, assess the present-day attitudes of Chinese Singaporeans towards the current Sinitic language environment and their expectations for the future.

#### FORMATION OF SINGAPORE'S CHINESE-LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

Before Singapore was founded as a British colony in 1819, it was a sleepy fishing village of several hundred people. With no natural resources and an unforgiving tropical climate, Singapore's early existence was only made possible by its fortuitous geographical location, placed as it was at a strategic crossroads for trade between Europe and East Asia. Because the Dutch and Portuguese had already taken strategic port positions in Batavia (known today as Jakarta) and Melaka, respectively, the British sought to acquire an unclaimed deep-water port in the vicinity and settled on Singapore. By 1860, the population had grown to roughly 80,000, more than half of which were ethnic Chinese who had come to Singapore from Malaysia and mainland China for economic opportunity.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants from across the Malaysian and Indonesian archipelagos, India, and the Middle East had also come to settle and to benefit from the rapid early growth fostered by the British colonial administration. Singapore's multicultural and multilingual social fabric was woven together during its very earliest days.

Due to civil unrest in mainland China deriving from major nineteenth century conflicts such as the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, in addition to the allure of better livelihoods abroad, the rate of Chinese immigration to Singapore exploded in the nineteenth and early twentieth

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Ravinder Frost and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2013), 152.

centuries.<sup>3</sup> However, because many of the migrants originated from different provinces in China and spoke mutually unintelligible languages, tensions existed from early days among Chinese language groups in Singapore. For instance, in 1876 the colonial government sought to improve the quality of postal and remittance services among all of the Chinese population groups in Singapore, which hitherto had been privately run by a powerful clan of the Teochew community. Because the Teochew clan saw this as an affront to them and their business, the opening of a government-run post office in Chinatown set off a riot that damaged the newly opened post office and forced it to relocate to a different part of town.<sup>4</sup>

A second example is the proliferation of “secret societies” that emerged in Singapore during its early history. The British authorities were concerned that these groups, which claimed honorable purposes but also acted as shadow governments for their associated Chinese communities and engaged in illicit activities, were undermining the fragile social order of the city. Because there were so many different languages spoken, colonial law enforcement officials found it difficult to investigate the groups. A British official named William Pickering is believed to have been the first British colonial government official to competently speak a Chinese language, in this case Hokkien, in Singapore. When he arrived in 1872, he sought to infiltrate the “secret societies” to understand the ways in which the government might more effectively control them.

Pickering’s pivotal moment came in 1877 when he exposed an attempted mass kidnapping of newly arrived Chinese laborers by one of the Chinese secret societies. The government used the incident as an excuse to set up an official “Chinese Protectorate Bureau” which sought to protect vulnerable Chinese immigrant groups from the powerful societies.<sup>5</sup> These events serve as examples of the ways in which problems among fragmented language communities in the Chinese population in early Singapore provided historical context for future government policies that would seek to defragment the language communities and create unity through a common mutual tongue.

Because of the British colonial administration, English had been the de-facto *lingua franca*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 170.

among the empowered classes in Singapore since its founding, but as English language instruction was not widespread, many ethnic groups were unable to communicate with each other. By 1957, over thirty-three distinct mother tongue language groups had formed in Singapore, twenty of which had more than one thousand native speakers.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1900s the government actively tried to increase the number of secondary schools that taught in English, but this form of education was not obligatory, and many communities preferred to send their children to ethnic schools.<sup>7</sup> Chinese schools and Islamic madrasas filled an educational vacuum in late nineteenth-century Singapore. The fragile balance between the colonial government and the Chinese community in Singapore was again disrupted with the fall of the Qing Empire and the founding of the Republic of China in 1911. Many Singaporean Chinese felt a strong sense of duty to the new government in China and believed that status as British colonial subjects in Singapore was beginning to offer diminishing returns.<sup>8</sup> When Mandarin was chosen as the national language of the Republic of China in 1917, most Chinese schools in Singapore also adopted the practice, even though the colonial government made no such mandate. Chinese schools in Singapore followed the mainland when textbooks written in Classical Chinese were replaced by textbooks written in colloquial Chinese.<sup>9</sup> The importance of Chinese language schools in the transmission of Chinese culture should not be underestimated, and indeed, Lee Guan Kin, of Singapore Nanyang University, claims that during this period "in both theory and in reality, Chinese schools were the most important locale of cultural transmittance."<sup>10</sup>

However, even with the attempt to standardize language across Singapore's Chinese schools, many Chinese Singaporean communities remained compartmentalized until the second half of the

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6 Eddie C. Y. Kuo, "The Sociolinguistic Situation in Singapore: Unity in Diversity," in *Language and Society in Singapore*, ed. Evangelos A. Afendras and Eddie C. Y. Kuo (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1980), 40–43.

7 Frost and Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography*, 182.

8 Ibid., 196.

9 Beng Choo Ang, "The Teaching of the Chinese Language in Singapore," *Language, Society and Education in Singapore: Issues and Trends* (1998), 337.

10 Guan Kin Lee, "Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Reflections on the Cultural Implications of Modern Education," in *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Michael W. Charney, Brenda S. A. Yeoh, and Tong Chee Kiong (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 233.

twentieth century, when language policies of both the colonial government and the Republic of Singapore began to take effect. The colonial government's education policy after World War II and prior to independence in 1965 sought to promote English language usage in order to encourage social unity. Noting the significant decline of Chinese schools, Lee Guan Kin writes, "Between 1946 and 1954, enrollment for Chinese schools that originally surpassed that of the English schools by 30 percent, fell drastically to 1.5 percent lower than the English schools."<sup>11</sup> While this might appear to be due to the English language preference of the British government, Lee notes that the trend continued after the establishment of the Republic of Singapore as well. Highlighting some of the cultural implications of the dominance of English in Singapore before and after the colonial period, Lee writes:

During the colonial period, the colonial rulers made English the language of administration, business, education, and so on, leaving the mother tongues and cultures of the various races to their own fates. To the ethnic Chinese, the vibrancy of the Chinese schools ensured the continuity and development of their culture. After independence, the usage domain of the English language was widened even more with the incoming of a pragmatic government. As a result, the status of the English language was elevated even higher in independent Singapore than during the colonial period, while the mother tongues of the three main races were rendered second languages. As a consequence, a problem of inheritance was created for the cultures transmitted via these languages.<sup>12</sup>

The pragmatism that Lee references was epitomized in 1966 when a policy of bilingualism was adopted that required that all students in Singapore to learn English in addition to one of the other three national languages, usually that most closely related to its ethnic group.<sup>13</sup> By 1984, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Chin Leong Ng, *A Study of Attitudes of Dialect Speakers towards the Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore* (Springer, 2017), 21.

government announced a plan to insure that Chinese, Malay, Indian, and English language education would be compressed into a single, English-dominant curriculum.<sup>14</sup> English was widely perceived to be important economically, but today the notion that English is essential to Singapore's competitiveness is changing as the economic rise of the People's Republic of China has reshaped global trade, investment, and diplomacy. It is plausible that English proficiency is no longer critical to success for a Singaporean. That said, as early as 1985 the Singaporean government promoted the use of Mandarin for its economic practicality rather than for creating unity within the Singaporean Chinese community.<sup>15</sup> The Bilingual Policy was crafted to take advantage the economic value of not only of English but also of Mandarin.

Before this policy, Singaporean Chinese communities had continued to be segregated along linguistic fault lines. In a recent interview, Sofield Chao Künzi recounted the linguistic divisions she experienced as a child and young adult in the early years of the Republic of Singapore. Sofied was born in 1955 to a Singaporean Chinese family. Her parents had immigrated to Singapore from an area near Fuzhou, and she speaks a variant of the Fuzhou toplect as her native language. Sofield described the fact that most Chinese language communities would cluster together and that most economic activity, and everyday needs could be met through speaking one of the main dialect groups. However, there was some linguistic mixing. For instance, Sofield's family lived in the Chang-I district, and she recalls that it was at that time a primarily Hokkien-speaking district, with some Teochew and Cantonese speakers as well. Because the Fuzhou toplect has a relatively small number of total speakers, she noted that her family learned to speak the dominant toplects as well. By the time Sofield left Singapore in 1978, she was able to speak fluently Fuzhou, Hokkien, Teochew, Malay, and English. She notes that even by the time she left, English was rarely spoken among the Chinese Singaporean community. While Sofield expressed her belief that maintaining the Fuzhou dialect is an important part of cultural transmission, she also indicated that the economic advantage of speaking Mandarin outweighs the sentimental or heritage value of continued dialect usage. A second interview conducted in Mandarin with Sofield's ninety-four-year-old mother, Jingru (Sylvia) Li-Chao, revealed

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<sup>14</sup> Frost and Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography*, 236.

<sup>15</sup> Ng, *A Study of Attitudes*, 10.

that the even among the older generation in Singapore, the adoption of Mandarin as a standard language throughout the Chinese Singaporean community was seen by some in a positive light. Sylvia recalled that, during the 1950s, the acquisition of multiple languages was normal in the Singaporean Chinese community, and, while daily life unfolded relatively seamlessly, even widespread multilingualism was not enough to overcome language barriers among many Chinese language groups. Sylvia further described the way in which, after independence the use of Mandarin came to be seen as a way to unify the nation, and during this period many people in her generation embraced the pragmatism of adopting Mandarin as the common language.<sup>16</sup>

The degree to which multilingualism was taken up by Sofield and Sylvia is notable because one of the common justifications for Chinese language standardization in Singapore was that learning many languages is a burden upon society, and especially young children. Lee Kwan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister and most influential modern political figure, originally believed not only that learning dialects was a waste of mental space, but also that the ability to speak English proficiently separated Singapore from the rest of the East Asian cultural sphere by providing a significant comparative economic advantage. Charlene Tan of the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore writes, "[Lee Kwan Yew] pointed out that Singapore Chinese who only know Mandarin are 'of little value to China and the Chinese' since China already has 1.3 billion of them. What the Chinese in China find useful are Singapore Chinese who are bilingual and bicultural: 'Because we are English-speaking. Because we have English connections with the English-speaking world...that's our value-add.'" <sup>17</sup> It is reasonable to believe that this pragmatic thinking was the impetus for Lee Kwan Yew's Speak Mandarin Campaign, the aim of which was not only to ensure the ability of Singapore to conduct economic transactions with China, but would also facilitate the ability of the Singaporean population to speak English. Lee Kwan Yew's language policies would come to radically transform Singapore's Chinese language communities, and none more so than the Speak Mandarin Campaign.

The Speak Mandarin Campaign was implemented in 1979 as a response to a government study, known as the Goh Report, that showed that the Bilingual Policy was not having the desired effect and

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<sup>16</sup> Sofield Chao Künzi and Sylvia Chao. Interview by the author by Skype, Philadelphia, December 4, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Charlene Tan, "Change and Continuity: Chinese Language Policy in Singapore," *Language Policy* 5, no. 1 (2006): 41–62.



failed, as it was intended to do, to simultaneously improve Mandarin and English literacy rates.<sup>18</sup> Government officials concluded that the continued use of dialects in the household overburdened children, and that the only viable way of achieving bilingual education was for the Singaporean Chinese community to adopt Mandarin as the standard language spoken at home in addition to at school. The Speak Mandarin Campaign was extraordinarily effective in changing the linguistic habits of the Singaporean Chinese community. A Ministry of Education survey shows that Mandarin as a household language had increased from 26 percent to 64.7 percent from 1980 to 1992, while the use of the dialects at home had decreased from 64.4 percent to 3.6 percent.<sup>19</sup> The implementation of the Speak Mandarin Campaign was not without controversy, however. The government used harsh language to communicate the rationale behind the campaign, describing dialects as "vulgar, divisive, and having no value either culturally or economically."<sup>20</sup> Many in the Chinese community inevitably resisted the implementation of the campaign and what they viewed as heavy-handed government intervention. For instance, students starting school in Singapore were required to be registered under the Hanyu Pinyin transcription of their names, even if their official birth certificates, in English, listed a different spelling chosen by the parents. This requirement, however, was officially removed in 1991.<sup>21</sup>

The Speak Mandarin Campaign is the most explicit example to demonstrate the way in which the government sought to suppress the use of various Chinese topolects in Singapore. The impact of the campaign has significant, ongoing effects upon today's language environment in Singapore. Given the far-reaching implications of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, it is useful to consider whether or not the government's reasoning behind the Speak Mandarin Campaign was justified. While the government argued that a common language was necessary for education, and that the speaking of dialects at home prevented students from successfully following the Bilingual Policy, some scholars have pointed out that this belief is not rooted in rigorous scientific analysis. Rejecting the government-supported notion that successful acquisition of both English and Mandarin is hindered

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<sup>18</sup> Lee, "Singapore Chinese Society in Transition, 240.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ng, *A Study of Attitudes*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

by speaking topolects at home, John Newman of the Darling Down Institute of Advanced Education in Australia writes, “There is not even any hint of the possibility that success in language learning may be dependent in part upon the attitude the learner has to the language, the associated culture, and the motivation the learner brings to the language-learning task....there is no acknowledgement [by the government] that Singaporeans may sometimes use dialects because they like to use dialect or because dialects makes them feel more relaxed.”<sup>22</sup> There are many potentially confounding variables in the Singaporean’s government analysis behind the Speak Mandarin Campaign, and the simple idea that creating a clear, dichotomous English-Mandarin language environment for students free from the interference of family dialects was perhaps not altogether a scientifically sound method. Indeed, it is likely that when the government implemented the Speak Mandarin Campaign it did not anticipate the extent to which modern Singaporean society continues to grapple with the pros and cons of abandoning different topolects for two languages, English and Mandarin, which are historically non-native for most of the Singaporean Chinese community.

It is clear that socioeconomic, political, and cultural forces were significant in creating mechanisms that permitted a variety of Chinese languages to thrive in Singapore. Government policy, while varying in aims across the colonial to the independent governments, also has given rise to the domination of Mandarin as the preferred Chinese language in the Singaporean Chinese community. The next section of the paper explores how these forces have combined to result in the present state of Sinitic language communities in Singapore.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF SINITIC LANGUAGES IN SINGAPORE

The landscape of Chinese topolects in Singapore has vastly changed from the days when various Chinese language communities thrived across the island nation. Today, if one wants to experience a Chinese multilingual environment in public, one of the very few places to do so is in one of Singapore’s famous hawker centers – public centers with small food stalls offering a variety of

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<sup>22</sup> John Newman, “Singapore’s “Speak Mandarin Campaign”: The Educational Argument,” *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 14, no. 2 (1986), 58.

different ethnic cuisines – and observe the conversations taking place among workers inside a particular food stall, offering staples from regions like Hainan, Guangdong, or Taiwan.

The effects of government policy have clearly had a massive impact on the language environment of Singapore, and it is plausible to believe that languages like Hokkien, Teochew, and Fuzhou do not have sufficient number of active, young speakers to maintain viable language transmission across generations. Data from the 2011 Singapore government census shows that in the recent period of the years 2000–2010, use of dialects as the primary language at home has continued to drop, from 30.7% in 2000 to 19.2% in 2010.<sup>23</sup>

As the downward trend of their use continues, a number of important questions regarding the cultural value that Chinese topolects have and will continue to have must be asked. Is it possible for Mandarin to replace the original topolects without loss of cultural information? Are there any inherent cultural values that Teochew, Hokkien, and Fuzhou are capable of transmitting that Mandarin is not? While under different demographic and historical circumstances we might expect that Chinese topolects would disappear entirely, the cultural value of the languages is such that it is plausible to think that Singaporeans will strive to ensure that there are cultural centers and resources that will permit the languages to exist in an artificial, curated form that requires active upkeep from the population, but which for practical purposes have been relegated to an existence as mere artifacts.

There are other signs to support the notion that Chinese topolects in Singapore will not disappear entirely, and that, as more of the younger generation recognizes the consequences of the languages going extinct, more people will strive to preserve certain aspects of the language. Highlighting this possibility, an article published in August 2017 by *The New York Times* suggests that Chinese topolects in Singapore are even enjoying a modest revival as Singaporeans recognize that the slow demise of the topolects has led to a generational disconnect in which grandchildren and grandparents are unable to communicate with each other. The article states that this phenomenon has led to renewed social tensions as Singaporeans reject the ongoing government restrictions through language policies such as the Speak Mandarin Campaign, and a ban on dialect television

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<sup>23</sup> Singapore Department of Statistics, *Census of Population 2010: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*. Statistical Release:1 (Singapore: Dept. of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2011).

programming. Arguing that recent public sentiment has led to a change in language policy, *The New York Times* reporter Ian Johnson writes, “This linguistic repression, and the consequences for multigenerational families, has led to a widespread sense of resentment – and now a softening in the government’s policy. For the first time since the late 1970s, a television series was recently broadcast in Hokkien...many young people are also beginning to study dialects on their own, hoping to reconnect with their past, or their grandparents.”<sup>24</sup> A modest revival of interest in family dialects in Singapore does not mean that the languages are capable of sustaining themselves naturally, however, and it seems reasonable to think that renewed attention is but a symptom of the latter stages of decline of heritage language use in a developed, prosperous society like that of Singapore.

A closer examination of the government’s loosening of broadcast restrictions also reveals that the move is aimed less at stimulating a revival of dialect use among young people, but rather at facilitating the delivery of certain social services to the senior population. In September 2017, the leading Singaporean newspaper *Straits Times* noted that “The 10-episode Hokkien drama *Jiak Ba Buay* last year was reportedly the first dialect series aired in Singapore since 1979. It was a collaboration between Mediacorp and the Ministry of Communications and Information that was aimed at conveying government policies, such as MediShield Life, to senior citizens who may not be as comfortable in Mandarin.”<sup>25</sup> It follows, then, that recent policy changes by the government should not be interpreted as a sign that Chinese topolects are experiencing a true revival, but perhaps instead that the government has recognized the overwhelming success of the Speak Mandarin Campaign and has therefore decided that limited broadcasts in dialects is not going to change the trajectory of declining usage of various topolects.

Languages are never static. But languages are also resilient. Despite the government’s effort to suppress dialect speaking in Singapore, and despite the clear economic benefits that have accrued to Singaporeans through the speaking of English and Mandarin, heritage languages are not likely to

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<sup>24</sup> Ian Johnson, “In Singapore, Chinese Dialects Revive after Decades of Restrictions,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/world/asia/singapore-language-hokkien-mandarin.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Boon Chan. “askST: Why Does Singapore Restrict the Broadcast of Chinese Dialects in Mass Media?” September 6, 2017. <http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/askst-why-does-singapore-restrict-the-broadcast-of-chinese-dialects-in-mass>

disappear entirely in the small island nation. Reinforcing the notion that the sentiments of young people are potentially responsible for this move, Dr. Patrick Ng of the University of Niigata Prefecture writes, "Thus contrary to official stance that dialects are to be discarded, Chinese dialects continue to demonstrate a streak of resilience, entrenching their relevance and utility amongst some dialects speakers in Singapore. Some young Chinese Singaporeans believe that dialects are still productive linguistic resources."<sup>26</sup> While it is a pity for the vibrancy of the linguistic ecosystem in Singapore that many of the Chinese dialects will no longer be transmitted naturally from generation to generation, there is reason to be optimistic that the languages will continue to be available to both heritage users and anyone with even a passing interest in the language communities that shaped the history of Singapore. It appears fair to claim that Hokkien, Hakka, Fuzhou, and Teochew have now become "curated" languages, and that this special state of linguistic preservation is further indication that Singapore is home to a remarkably dynamic linguistic environment that will continue to evolve over time.

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<sup>26</sup> Ng, *A Study of Attitudes*, 62.

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# Divergence of Chinese Character-Based Vocabulary in East Asia: The Case of China, Korea, and Japan

Hyejin (Krista) Ryu

## INTRODUCTION

The countries of East Asia and even Southeast Asia have been significantly influenced by Chinese language and culture from ancient times. Especially significant is the influence of the Chinese language, or more specifically, of Chinese characters on the languages of Korean, Japan, and even Vietnam. The region composed of countries that heavily use a Chinese character-based vocabulary (CBV) is often called the “Sinosphere (漢字文化圈)” or the “Chinese character zone (漢字語圈).” Speakers of the languages in this zone still learn Chinese characters in school and use CBV in everyday communication. Similarly to how Latin-based or Greek-based words have become part of the English lexicon, CBV has become an important part of the language of the countries in the Sinosphere.

Despite being classified as part of different language families or considered language isolates, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean all have vocabularies very largely based on Chinese. Approximately fifty-eight percent of the words in the Korean standard dictionary are Sino-Korean words,<sup>1</sup> while around sixty percent of modern Japanese words in the that dictionary are Sino-Japanese words.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the CBV is shared among these three countries, and that is useful for facilitating communication within the East Asian region. It allows the users of the various languages within this zone to accelerate their learning of the other languages in the zone. The speakers of these languages

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<sup>1</sup> Kyonghee Paik, Francis Bond, and Shirai Satoshi, “Using Multiple Pivots to Align Korean and Japanese Lexical Resources,” *Proceedings of the Workshop on Language Resources in Asia* (November 2001), 64–70.

<sup>2</sup> Masayoshi Shibatani, *The Languages of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 142.

can often communicate through writing the CBV, without having to know the language of the person they are speaking to at all. However, as with the case of “false friends” in Spanish and English, such as the word “sensible” that means “reasonable” in English and “sensitive” in Spanish, not all words in the CBV have the same meaning in each of the three languages of East Asia. Furthermore, there are also items in the CBV that exist in one language but not in the other two, or vice versa, which can create confusion or cause miscommunication among the speakers of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. For example, “工夫” means “to study” in Korean, “time or skill” in Chinese, and “to ponder” in Japanese. On the other hand, “勉強” means “to study” in Japanese, but “to force someone to do something unwillingly” in Chinese and Korean. As a result, CBV used in each of the countries within the Sinosphere have actually diverged significantly over the centuries.

This paper studies the divergence of meaning and form of the CBVs in the three countries of East Asia through investigating CBV items that originated in each of the three countries and examining how they developed. It suggests that there are three main reasons for the divergence of CBVs in East Asia: (1) isolated change over time in the meaning of the existing CBV, (2) independent creation of new CBVs, and (3) selective adoption of newly coined CBVs by each country. For each of these reasons, I will provide examples and describe the difference in their meanings, as well as offer some hypotheses on why such changes occurred in each country.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF CHINESE CHARACTERS INTO KOREA AND JAPAN

While it is not entirely clear exactly when Chinese characters were introduced into Korea, scholars believe it to be around the second century BC, between the time that Wiman Joseon<sup>3</sup> was established in the northern part of the Korean peninsula and that the Four Commanderies of Han were built in BC 108 by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, in order to control the people of Gojoseon after the conquest of Wiman Joseon.<sup>4</sup> It is believed that during this time period, through their contacts with the

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<sup>3</sup> Last decade of the Gojoseon period. Gojoseon was the first dynasty in ancient Korean history. Legend says it was established by Dangun in BC 2333.

<sup>4</sup> Ki-Moon and Robert Ramsey, *A History of the Korean Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68.



Chinese, "some Koreans may have been aware of the existence of Chinese characters."<sup>5</sup> One of the earliest pieces of archaeological evidence is the "stone monument carved characters ... erected in AD85 ... in today's Pyongan Namdo Province in North Korea."<sup>6</sup> Historical evidence from the Three Kingdoms period shows that, by 400 AD, Chinese characters had already become popular in Korea. By the fourth century AD, "Koguryo kingdom established national and private schools to teach the Confucian Classics, and a history of the kingdom was written in Chinese characters."<sup>7</sup> By the time of the Unified Silla Kingdom (668–935), "many Sino-Korean words written in Hancha [Chinese characters] were adopted ... [and the administration] changed its native place names into Sino-Korean."<sup>8</sup>

Some archaeological findings in Japan potentially show that there was knowledge of the "existence" of Chinese characters in Japan as early as the first century AD, such as the King of Na Gold Seal, which dates to Emperor Guangwu's envoy to Japan in 57 AD.<sup>9</sup> However, only around the fourth and fifth centuries AD did a meaningful introduction and then the spread of Chinese characters take place. According to *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki*, "a Korean envoy by the name of Achiki came to Japan, bringing as a gift two horses..., impressed [by] his knowledge of Chinese characters, the Japanese emperor sent for another scholar, Wani [Wang In], who arrived in Japan the following year, bearing ten volumes of the Confucian Analects and one volume of the Thousand Character Essay."<sup>10</sup> Wang In was a scholar from Baekjae, one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, who made the legendary trip to Japan carrying many Chinese books to help spread knowledge of Chinese characters and Confucianism in Japan.<sup>11</sup> Although the two Japanese books mentioned above state the years the two

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5 Insup Taylor and Martin Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014), 172.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 273.

10 Taylor and Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese*, 273.

11 Marc Hideo Miyake, *Old Japanese: A Phonetic Reconstruction* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 9.

Korean tutors arrived in Japan as AD 284 and 285, “scholars today consider the late fourth or early fifth century to be more likely,” because widespread use of Chinese characters by Koreans themselves only began around the third century AD, and only after the fourth century AD were the Japanese “unified and had become politically and socially ready to accept Chinese culture.”<sup>12</sup>

In both Korea and Japan, Chinese characters were widely adapted to take the position of a written language, due to the lack of a well-established local writing system. That came much later, in 1446 in Korea with the invention of Hangul and around 800 in Japan after the adaptation of kana from Manyonaga.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for example, in the Goryeo and Joseon periods in Korea, “government officials and the nobility, as well as scholars and literary men, used native words in speaking but Sino Korean words in writing.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Japan, the scholarly or elite class primarily used Chinese characters for writing and record keeping, and it was mainly the lower classes or women who used the native writing system, kana, as shown in Heian literature such as the *Tales of Genji*. These Chinese character words were adopted in the noun form in both Korean and Japanese, and users at the time had to be literate in classical Chinese to be able to understand the meaning.

Interestingly, the way Japanese and Korean adopted Chinese characters into their language and writing system differs, evident in the way “native words (固有語)” are written in each country. For example, in modern Korean, native Korean words are not written using Chinese characters, and the pronunciation of the Chinese characters approximated the original Chinese pronunciation at the time the character was introduced. For example, in Korea, “the sounds of Hancha were modelled on those used in the capital of the Tang dynasty of China, Chang’an,”<sup>15</sup> which explains the phonetic similarities between Sino-Korean and some southern dialects of Chinese, including Southern Min and Cantonese, for certain characters and words that preserve the characteristics of Middle Chinese more than does Mandarin Chinese. As Hangul is used to write most Sino-Korean words, the number of

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese*, 273.

<sup>13</sup> Bjarke Frellesvig, *A History of the Japanese Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 160.

<sup>14</sup> Ho-min Sohn, *The Korean Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 103.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese*, 173.

Chinese characters taught in secondary school in Korea does not exceed 1,800, most of which are rarely required to read mass publications.<sup>16</sup>

However, in modern Japanese, the majority of native Japanese words are also assigned Chinese characters and written using them. There are 2,136 Chinese characters in common use and they are "heavily used to write Sino Japanese and some native content words in text along with Hiragana for grammatical morphemes."<sup>17</sup> As both Sino-Japanese and native vocabulary are written using Chinese characters, the reading of these characters differs depending on the word type. Generally, Chinese characters used in native Japanese words can be read using "訓読み (kun-yomi)," while those used in Sino-Japanese words are read using "音読み (on-yomi)," which is the pronunciation that approximated the original Chinese sounds, either based on the fifth- and sixth-century pronunciation of the Southern dialects of Wu ("Go'on"), or based on the seventh- and eighth-century pronunciation of the northern Chinese cities of the Tang dynasty, Xi'an and Luoyang (Kan'on).<sup>18</sup>

For example, while the Chinese character for horse (馬), pronounced "ma," exists in Korean, to refer to a horse, the native Korean word "말 (mal)" is used and is always written without the Chinese character. However, in Japanese, while the native word for horse, "うま (uma)," is also used, it will be written using the Chinese character 馬, but still read using kun-yomi as "uma," not with the on-yomi as "ば (ba)."

While the initial introduction of Chinese character-based words into Korean and Japanese was from Classical Chinese, additional layers of introductions that added different types of CBVs in each of the languages occurred until the modern period. For example, through the introduction of Buddhist scripts,<sup>19</sup> many Chinese character-based words that were translations of Sanskrit words

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese*, 172; Karen Steffen Chung, "Some Returned Loans: Japanese Loanwords in Taiwan Mandarin," *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 162.

were introduced into Korea and Japan, such as “阿修羅場 (*asurajang* in Korean, meaning chaos)” from the myth of Asura in the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*, “奈落 (*narak* in Korean or *naraku* in Japanese, meaning hell or abyss)” from Sanskrit “Naraka,” and “剎那 (*chalna* in Korean, meaning a very short period of time) from Sanskrit “ksana.” In addition, many Chinese character-based words were newly coined and introduced into Korean and Chinese from Japan during the modern period, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## DIVERGENCE DUE TO ISOLATED CHANGES IN EXISTING CBVS

The first reason for divergence of CBV in China, Korea, and Japan is the isolated changes to existing vocabulary that occurred in each country. The words that changed were mostly those acquired in the early period of CBV introduction, from Classical Chinese in Confucian classics, history, and literary books.<sup>20</sup> There are two types of changes of this type observable: a complete change in meaning while preserving the original form, and a change in form or look without significantly changing the meaning. The latter is mostly related to the change in the order of two or more characters within the word in one language or more.

Table 1 below shows examples of Classical Chinese-originated words that changed meaning either in two countries, or just in one country. Interestingly, these words are all pronounced in (approximately) the original way they were pronounced in “China” at the time they were introduced.

The semantic changes in these words are so significant that speakers of the three languages would not be able to understand the other person if they used these words to convey meaning. For example, in addition to the word 工夫 (*gongbu* in Korean, *kufu*- in Japanese, and *gongfu* in Mandarin) discussed in the introduction above, the word 放心 (*bangshim* in Korean, *ho-shin* in Japanese, and *fangxin* in Mandarin) means “to feel relieved” or “to feel reassured” in Chinese. However, the same word means “to be caught off guard” in Korean, and “to be dazed or absent-minded” in Japanese. Over time, both the meaning and the connotation of the word have changed dramatically in Korean and Japanese.

In Korean and Japanese, the CBV item that is used instead to convey the meaning of 放心 in

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<sup>20</sup> Ho-min Sohn, *The Korean Language*, 105.

Chinese is 安心 (*anshim* in Korean, *anshin* in Japanese, and *anxin* in Mandarin). 安心 in Chinese also means to be at ease or to feel relieved and is used together with 放心. However, the two words in Chinese have slightly different uses. More specifically, 安心 is less frequently used and is considered a literary language (书面语). Furthermore, while 安心 is used frequently with objects such as body (身体), work (工作), and study (学习), 放心 is used on its own. It is likely that the word 安心 was selected in usage naturally and then became the sole word representing the meaning of “feeling relieved” in Korea and Japan, because it was used in literary language, which was the primary channel through which CBV was introduced into those two countries. Hence, it could be possible that Koreans and Japanese actually encountered the word 安心 more frequently from the written texts from China than they heard 放心 from spoken Chinese, which explains why 安心 became the dominant term that kept its original meaning from Classical Chinese in Korea and Japan, while the word 放心 did not.

Interestingly, however, evidence of the existence of the term 放心 exists in a native Korean expression, which is “마음을 놓다 (to let go of heart).” This expression has the exact meaning of 放心 and is a direct translation of the word into native Korean: 放 is to “let go” and 心 is “heart.” It is possible that the existence of the word 安心 and the native Korean translated expression caused the elimination of 放心 in its original use in Korea.

While 工夫 and 放心 are examples of Chinese words that changed their meanings in Korea and in Japan, there are also words that changed meaning in only one country. For example, the word 砂糖 (*satang* in Korean, *satou* in Japanese, and *shatang* in Mandarin) in both Chinese and Japanese means “sugar,” but it means “candy” in Korean. The word used in Korean to represent sugar is 屑糖 or 雪糖. The character 屑 means “powder,” which is similar to the reason for using “砂” in the original word to represent “powder-like sweet.” The use of “雪” to represent sugar is interesting, and one may think that it was because sugar looks like white powder snow. However, its use could also possibly just be because it has the exact same pronunciation in Korean as the character 屑 (both pronounced “sul”), and people mistakenly used these two characters interchangeably, and then its mistaken use became solidified.

Finally, the word 是非 (*shibi* in Korean, *zeshi* in Japanese, *shifei* in Mandarin) is an example of a word that acquired a new meaning in Japanese that overshadowed the original meaning in terms of usage frequency. The original word means “right and wrong,” and in Korean and Chinese, the word is

used in the context of debates and arguments. The same meaning does exist in Japanese when the word is used as a noun. However, the more frequent way this word is used in Japanese is as an adverb to mean “certainly.” This meaning was acquired through interpreting the word’s meaning of “right and wrong” as representing “situations in which things are right or wrong.” Hence, if you “是非” do something, it means you will do something regardless of whether it is right or wrong, so it means “always” or “without fail.” As both Koreans and Japanese over time learned the meanings of the Chinese characters, they also started to interpret the characters on their own, permitting a divergence in meaning like this one to arise.

Table 1. Examples of a change in meaning of words originating in Classical Chinese

		Chinese	Korean	Japanese
Korean and Japanese	工夫	N. 1. Time; 2. spare (free) time; 3. skill; 4. labor; 5. effort	Used as verb with suffix “-하다 (to do -)” to mean V. To study	V. To ponder; to think deeply about something
	放心	V. To feel relieved, to feel reassured	Used as verb with suffix “-하다 (to do -)” to mean V. To be caught off guard	N. Absentminded; being dazed
Korean Only	砂糖	N. Sugar	N. Candy (Sugar will be: 屑糖)	N. Sugar
Japanese Only	是非	N. 1. Right and wrong; 2. quarrel		Adv. Certainly; without fail
	勉強	V. To do with difficulty; force to do something; Adv. Reluctantly; grudgingly; unwillingly		V. To study (with -する)

The second type of change observable in existing CBV is the change in form without significant change in meaning. For example, 和平, meaning “peace” in China, is used in the form of 平和 in Korea and Japan to mean the same concept.<sup>21</sup> Another interesting example is the phrase 成語, 贤妻养母, which means “wise wife and good mother,” used to describe the ideal women

<sup>21</sup> It is true the word 和平 in Chinese is used as an adjective to mean “placid” and “mild,” but the meaning change is not significant. Also, the form 和平 is rarely used in Korean and Japanese.

according to Confucian values in China. The form 成语 is changed in Korea, however, to become 賢母良妻, which now becomes "wise mother and good wife." In Japan, the form of this expression is changed again, as 良妻賢母, now to mean "good wife and wise mother." The basic meaning of the term and its purpose of defining the ideal woman in traditional Confucian East Asia remains the same across the three countries, but the form changes slightly in all three. Probably the aforementioned change in form of these words was due to the need to adapt the concept based on local culture. For example, it may be that the role of "mother" was deemed more important than the that of "wife" in Korea. Another reason for this change in form could be to make the pronunciation easier or "flow better," or in Chinese, "顺口."

In sum, many items in the existing CBV that originated from Classical Chinese changed their meanings or forms over time in the various countries of East Asia, causing a semantic mismatch.

#### DIVERGENCE DUE TO INDEPENDENT CREATION OF NEW CBV

The second reason for the divergence of CBV in East Asia was the independent creation of new words by each of the three countries after the initial spread of CBV in the ancient period, as well as the creation of new "Sino-form characters"<sup>22</sup> that were used only in the country in which they were created.

When new concepts and objects came to be introduced into each of the three countries of East Asia, new words had to be coined. Often these new words used Chinese characters, but the logic behind creating the word was not the same in each of the countries even for the same objects. Table 2 shows examples of three different CBV items coined for the same object. As shown below, for the same object, "name card," Korean, Japanese, and Chinese each created a distinct CBV by choosing different characters to represent the "card" part of the word. Here, some cultural context can be useful to understand why such a divergence arose.

In Korean, the character 銜 (*ham* in Korean, *gen* in Japanese, *xian* in Chinese), which actually

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<sup>22</sup> As not all of them were created in China, they technically cannot be called "Chinese characters," but these characters are still "sino-form" as they follow the same logic used for creating existing Chinese characters. Most of these characters are new combinations of existing characters used to convey meaning previously not possible through existing characters.

means the object “bit,” put in the mouth and used either for horses, to control them, or for people, to prevent them from speaking. It was used after the character 名, which means “name.” In traditional Confucian cultures, names were not supposed to be called out directly or casually, and most people had aliases throughout their lives that they used instead of their real names. For example, as a fetus, one had a 胎名(*taemyeong*), as a child, one had an 兒名(*amyyeong*), and after becoming an adult, one acquired a 字(*ja*) and a 號(*ho*), each used in lieu of one’s real name. Hence, the character 銜 used for name-related words in Korean vocabulary represents this cultural tradition of taking a very careful approach to speaking other people’s names. While this concept<sup>23</sup> weakened in China and Japan, it still remains in Korea and probably influenced the coinage of this word. Even now, unlike in Chinese or Japanese, this character is widely and frequently used, for words such as 姓銜 (*seongham*, the formal term for the word name), 職銜 (*jikham*, which means the title of a position at work), and 尊銜 (*jonham*, an honorific term for the word name). Furthermore, when stating the name of an older person whose age or position would require the use of honorifics, Koreans still insert the character “字 (*ja*)” between every character, or syllable, of that person’s name to avoid directly stating his or her real name. For example, if the person’s name is Hong Gildong, the speaker would say “Hong ‘ja’ Gil ‘ja’ Dong ‘ja,’” instead of just saying “Hong Gildong.”

On the other hand, in Japanese, the character “刺” (pronounced *shi* in Japanese, *ci* in Chinese, and *ja* in Korean) was used. As a noun, this character in both Chinese and Korean means a long sharp object like a thorn or a needle. As a verb, in all three countries, the character means “to thrust,” “to stick” or “to prick.” It seems like a completely unrelated character to use to represent the word “name card.” However, this character was used in Japanese because it was a cultural practice to “thrust” or “slide” or “stick” the name card or business card in the gap between the door and the wall when the owner of the house was not there to receive the visitor’s name card. Hence, the character 刺 was used with the character 名 to represent name cards or business cards.

Finally, in Chinese, the word 片 (*pian*) was used, which is the same character as the one used when counting objects that are thin and flat, which are exactly what business cards look like. Therefore, even for the exact same word, three different CBV can be created depending on the

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<sup>23</sup> Called 尊名思想.



cultural context and the logic used by the creator of the term, who often interpreted the meaning of different characters to most accurately depict the object as he or she understood it to be.

Another interesting example is the word for socks. The Korean and the Chinese terms are similar to each other because they both use the character 襪 (袜), which means the traditional footwear that is the equivalent of modern-day socks. Interestingly, while the Chinese just used the same character to represent the newly introduced Western-type or modern socks, the Koreans added the word 洋 (*yang* in Korean and Chinese), which literally means the ocean, but is often used to mean “from the west or across the ocean.” Hence, socks are the “western” version of the existing footwear for Koreans. On the other hand, the Japanese took a completely different approach and created the word 靴下 (*kutsushita*), which literally means “under the shoes.” As socks are what you wear “underneath,” or inside your shoes, this term also makes logical sense.

In addition to independently creating new CBV using existing characters, each country also invented new characters with which to create them. For example, in Korea, the character “𪎭” (pronounced *dab*) was created by combining the character for water and the character for fields to mean rice paddy fields, which are fields filled with water. Using this newly created character, the independent CBV 田𪎭 (*jeondab*) was created to mean “fields.”

Table 2. Examples of different Chinese character-based words for the same objects

English meaning	Korean	Japanese	Chinese
Business (name) card	名銜	名刺	名片
Check	手標	小切手	支票
Pharmacy	藥房	藥屋	药铺
Socks	洋襪	靴下	袜子
Gloves	掌匣	手袋	手套
Gas Station	注油所	ガソリンスタンド	加油站

Another example is the character 垚 (*dae*), which means “unit of land with buildings,” created by combining the character 代 (*dae*) for sound and the character 土 (*to*) for meaning, obeying one of the main rules used to create many of the existing Chinese characters. This type of productive rule in Chinese characters is called 形声, which is the “combination of one component for semantic value and one component for phonetic value.”<sup>24</sup> It is possible that these new characters were created in Korea due to the heavy emphasis and reliance on agriculture in ancient Korea, which made it important to be precise when using vocabulary related to land or farming. These characters were not spread to China or Japan, and this contributed to the divergence of CBV in the region.

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<sup>24</sup> Nicolas Tranter, “Script ‘Borrowing,’ Cultural Influence and the Development of the Written Vernacular in East Asia,” *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 187.

## DIVERGENCE DUE TO SELECTIVE ADOPTION OF NEWLY COINED CBV

The third main cause of the divergence of CBV used in China, Korea, and Japan is the selective adoption of newly coined words. This phenomenon mostly concerns the adoption of newly coined Japanese-originated CBV in Korea and in China. Many of the Japanese-originated CBV, called 和製漢語 (*wasei-kango*) in Japanese, were adopted by both the Korean and Chinese languages, but there were a number of words that became incorporated in only one language and not the other. Such selective adoption of the new words contributed to the difference in CBV in East Asia.

Japan was very active, especially during the Meiji period in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, in absorbing Western concepts related to the social and natural sciences.<sup>25 26</sup> To achieve modernization, many Japanese scholars and thinkers at the time, including Fukuzawa Yukichi and Mori Ogai, worked on translating Western scholarly materials into Japanese, and there was a dire need to create new words to represent the numerous new concepts.<sup>27</sup> Hence, most of the current CBV used in all three countries of East Asia related to politics, economics, the natural sciences, and legal terms. Such words as 政治 (politics: *seiji* in Japanese, *jungchi* in Korean, *zhengzhi* in Mandarin), 經濟 (economy: *Keizai* in Japanese, *gyeongje* in Korean, and *jingji* in Mandarin), and 物理学 (physics: *butsurigaku* in Japanese, *mullihak* in Korean, and *wulixue* in Mandarin) were all created in Japan during this process of adopting Western concepts.

A few different methods were used to create new CBV in Japan during the modern period. For example, some existing Chinese-originated CBV items were assigned new meanings, and over time, the new meaning dominated and the original meaning was forgotten in the countries that use the word. An example of a word that was created in this way is 社会, which had originally meant religious ceremonies or procedures in Classical Chinese, but acquired a new meaning equivalent to the Western social science concept of "society." Table 3 shows other examples of such words that existed

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese*, 262.

<sup>26</sup> Ho-min Sohn, *The Korean Language*, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Yeom, Jungsam. "The Creation of the Conceptual Word 'Logic' (論理 (Logic)라는 개념어의 형성," *Human, Environment, and Future* (October 2009): 139.

originally in Classical Chinese but that acquired a different meaning from Japan.

Table 3. Examples of CBV that acquired new meaning from Japan

	生産	放送	發明	入口/出口
Original meaning	To give birth	To let go of prisoner	Prisoner / sinner explains/ confesses	Put into or come out of mouth (words etc)
New meaning from Japan	Produce goods - Production	Broadcasting <small>Accepted only in Korean with new meaning</small>	Invention/ invent	Entrance/ Exit <small>Chinese still uses both original and new meaning</small>

Another method was to translate each part of the word based on meaning and allocate characters with the matching meaning. These words are called “calques.” The four words shown in table 4 are all examples of this method. For example, the character 空 was used to convey the meaning of “air” and 港 was used to represent the word “port.” Similarly, the Dutch word “Zuurstof” for the element oxygen is a compound of the word “zuur” which means acid and “stof” which means particles. Hence, the character 酸 was used to represent the “acid” part of the word and 素 was used to convey the meaning of “particle.” Note that the Chinese word for oxygen does not follow the Japanese translation. Instead, it uses a newly created character, yang (氧), based on the radical for air/gas, and the sound representing the verb “to raise/to grow” (养), which represents the role oxygen has in growing life on earth.

Table 4. Japanese-originated, Chinese character-based words.

Original word	Calque (Japanese)	Korean	Chinese
Airport	空港	空港	机场
Railroad	鉄道	鐵道	铁路
Zuurstof	酸素	酸素	氧气
Automobile	自動車	自動車	汽车

The key problem was that not all of these CBV items coined in Japan were adopted into both Chinese and Korean. As is clear in table 4, all four examples are Japanese-originated CBV that were adopted in Korean but not in Chinese. For example, the word 鐵道 for the railroad system was adopted into Korean with the same meaning, while the word was not adopted the way it was. In China, the character 路 was used instead of 道 to represent the word “road.” Hence divergence in the meaning of the words 鐵道 and 鐵路 emerged. The word 鐵路 in Korean and Japanese means the actual rail of the railroad and not the overall railroad system. But in Chinese the word 鐵道 is used for the actual rail.

In addition to Japanese-originated CBV, some native Japanese words written fully or partially using Chinese characters were also adopted into the Korean and Chinese languages as CBV. Similarly to the case discussed above, the adoption of these words was not the same for Korean and Chinese. Table 5 shows Japanese native words that were adopted as CBV in Korean, pronounced according the usual way Chinese characters are pronounced in Korea. Originally, these words were pronounced using “kun-yomi” as “oikosu” in Japanese because they are not Sino-Japanese. For example, the word “追い越す,” which means “to surpass,” is adopted into Korean by taking only the Chinese character part of the word, creating a new CBV “追越,” read “chowol.” This native Japanese verb was not

adopted in China and the corresponding word in Chinese would be 超越.<sup>28</sup> Another example is the native Japanese noun for buildings, written using Chinese characters as 建物 but pronounced in “kun-yomi” as “tatemono.” This Japanese native word was also adopted into Korean but pronounced as if it is a normal CBV, “geonmul.”

Table 5. Japanese native words adopted into Korean

Original Word	Korean
• 追い越す	• 追越 • Chinese:超越
• 建物	• 建物 • Chinese:建筑
• 売り上げ	• 売上 • Chinese:销售
• 身柄	• 身柄 • Chinese:人身

Similarly, table 6 shows examples of Japanese native words that were adopted as CBV in Chinese. For example, the native word 場合, written in Chinese characters and pronounced using kun-yomi as “ba ai,” means “situation,” “condition,” or “case.” This word was adopted into Chinese and became pronounced “changhe,” as if it is a normal CBV. However, the same word was not adopted in Korea and the corresponding CBV word in Korean is 境遇 (*gyeongwu*). Another example is the Japanese native word “取り締まり (*torishimari*),” which means “to ban” or “to crack down on.” The word was adopted into Chinese by taking just the Chinese character parts of the word, thus creating a new CBV used only in Chinese, 取缔 (*qudi*). In Korean, this word was not adopted and the CBV with

<sup>28</sup> Eui-sung Cho, “Japanese Words That Entered Our Language,” Cho Eui-sung’s Korean Language Research Lab, 2001, accessed May 6, 2018, <http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/choes/bibimbab/ilbonmal/Silbon.html>.

the same meaning used in Korea is 團束 (*dansok*). We can see that the selective adoption of words from Japanese, both CBV and native, caused a difference in CBV in Korea and China.

Table 6. Japanese native words adopted into Chinese

Original Word	Chinese
• 場合	• 场合
	• Korean:境遇
• 取り締まり	• 取缔
	• Korean:團束

A key point to note in this section is the fact that most of the words coined in Japan were adopted in Korea, but not in China, causing the divergence of CBV in the three countries. The main reason for such a phenomenon is the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. The assimilation policy in Korea during the occupation period forced the adoption of Japanese language in schools, and, as a result, many Japanese words entered into the Korean dictionary, including those shown in the tables. While the flow of CBV in ancient times, especially during the Tang dynasty, was from China to Korea and Japan due to the cultural and political dominance of China,<sup>29</sup> as shown in sections 2 and 3, the flow reversed in the modern era due to the political and military dominance of Japan in the region. The adoption of words through colonization and other types of political domination is also shown in the example of Taiwanese, which has a large number of Japanese loanwords that entered during the Japanese occupation from 1895 to 1945.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, with the recent rise of Korean

<sup>29</sup> Chung, "Some Returned Loans," 161.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 163.

popular culture, certain Korean words are now entering Japanese and Chinese. Therefore, it is also important to know the geopolitics of the region to properly understand the spread of CBV among the countries of East Asia.

## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

While the three main languages of East Asia studied in this paper, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, all share a large number of Chinese character-based vocabulary, it is also important to note the differences that can potentially cause miscommunication. Since the introduction of Chinese characters and words into Korea and then to Japan in ancient times, existing words evolved over time, and new words were created in each country of the Sinosphere.

In this paper, I have explained with examples the three main circumstances of the divergence in CBV of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The first cause discussed was the isolated change in existing CBV from Classical Chinese in Korea and Japan. The second reason was the creation of a CBV in each country that did not spread to other countries. The final reason discussed was the selective adoption of CBV originating in Japan and entering Chinese and Korean.

There are potentially other reasons that caused the differences in CBV used in China, Korea, and Japan that are not discussed in this paper, a topic for future research. Furthermore, another important country that is part of the Sinosphere not discussed in this paper is Vietnam. It will be important to include Vietnamese in future studies, especially given the large number of Vietnam-created characters, or *Chữ Nôm*, based on Chinese characters.

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# Minority Communities in China: The Role and Prospects of the Non-Sinitic Languages

Shelley Shim

The languages of China are chiefly separated into two groups: the Sinitic languages and the non-Sinitic languages. The Sinitic languages include only *hànyǔ* (汉语 in simplified Chinese and 漢語 in traditional Chinese), despite popular, flawed definitions that also embrace the Sino-Tibetan (汉藏 / 漢藏) and Tibeto-Burman (汉藏緬 / 漢藏緬) languages. The non-Sinitic languages, on the other hand, naturally incorporate the full remainder of languages. The Sinitic languages are officially categorized into eight toplect groups, Mandarin, Wu, Yue, Gan, Xiang, Kejia (Hakka), Northern Min, and Southern Min. There are many scholars, however, who argue for the need to expand the number of categories based on mutual (un)intelligibility. According to Dr. Victor H. Mair, there may be “three or four hundred different, mutually unintelligible varieties” in which “Mandarin itself, *guānhuà* (官话), is far from monolithic.”<sup>1</sup> It makes sense, then, to assert that the non-Sinitic languages still hold a valuable position in society today, not only as an essential method of communication in remote regions, but also as a marker of the complex migration history of China, which in turn conveys the imprints of accommodation as well as resistance to assimilation among specific ethnic groups.

## PART I: MINORITY COMMUNITIES

In 1979, the People’s Republic of China officially recognized fifty-six ethnic groups, many of which self-identified as a distinct group with a distinct language.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the 1,159 million Han Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> M. Zhou and H. Sun, *Language Policy in the People’s Republic of China: Theory and Practice since 1949* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 124.

<sup>2</sup> M. Schiavenza, “On Saving China’s Dying Languages,” *The Atlantic*, 18 June 2013, 3.

majority comprises 91.6 percent of the total population, whereas the remaining fifty-five nationalities, also referred to as the *shǎoshù mínzú* (少数民族), constitute the "leftover" 8.4 percent. This 8.4 percent may seem numerically trifling, but it represents nearly 106 million people who hold a significant political, economic, and strategic role in the country's overall unity and security.<sup>3</sup> In general, the location of China's minority communities can be split into six regions: the northeast, north, northwest, southwest, central west, and the south.<sup>4</sup> The northeast primarily consists of Manchu and Korean communities in addition to a few small Tungusic-speaking groups, such as the Hezhe and Orogon. The north is mainly dominated by a Mongol community but also houses smaller Daur, Dongxiang, Tu, Bonan, Ewenki, and Yugur groups. The northwest, as well as being home to a major Uyghur community, has Turkic-speaking Kazak, Kirgiz, Uzbek, and Tartar communities as well as Indo-European-speaking Tajik and Russian communities. In both the central west and the southwest, Tibetan is predominant; the central west has Hui and Salar communities, and the southwest has Monba and Lhoba communities. Finally, the south, with thirty-one minority communities, is linguistically and socially more intricate than the other territories.<sup>5</sup>

Language dispersion is a complex topic in China, not only because the minority population is so large, but also because it geographically occupies sixty-four percent of the rural sector. The minority populations predominantly dwell in the border regions, which are rich in natural resources and therefore critical for national economic development.<sup>6</sup> The geographical conditions of the remote regions also help facilitate the preservation of the non-Sinitic languages, although at the cost of slower economic development. For example, in comparison to the non-Sinitic languages spoken in other parts of China, those used in Yunnan enjoy higher protection and legal status because of the mountainous terrain.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, unlike the minority languages of the United States, Australia, and

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3 L. Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China* (New York: Springer, 2009), 9.

4 Ibid., 12.

5 Ibid., 14.

6 Ibid., 9.

7 Schiavenza, "On Saving China's Dying Languages," 4.

Taiwan, the minority languages of China suffer only minimal political oppression. Regardless, China's minority languages are slowly disappearing.<sup>8</sup>

China's linguistic landscape has shifted noticeably over the past half-century. China's minority languages have become "less and less vital"<sup>9</sup> with more and more non-Sinitic language speakers adopting standard Mandarin. This movement began in the late 1980s as China's market-oriented economy increased population mobility from the minority communities to the Han communities and vice versa. In fact, some minority groups, such as the Hui, adopted Mandarin, while the Manchu and the She switched completely to it. The remaining fifty-two ethnic groups still preserve their own languages, although some are already beginning to speak two or more.<sup>10</sup> China's linguistic landscape shows an interesting trend in that it is controlled by a language resolution according to which "both the intrusive language and indigenous language coexist." This resolution was developed by an American linguist called Joshua Fishman, who in 1989 proposed three possible language outcomes that depend on the environment as the languages interact over time. He asserted that the Chinese linguistic landscape was "dotted by Resolution 2 ('the intrusive language becomes dominant; the indigenous language dies out') and dominated by Resolution 3 (both the intrusive and indigenous languages coexist')." In China, he argued, "the intrusive Chinese is used for high functions or simply monopolizing newly created high functions in minority communities."<sup>11</sup>

It is evident that the non-Sinitic, minority languages of China play a critical role in China's language landscape, especially in remote regions.

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8 P. S. Ding, "China, Minority Languages," in *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*, ed. James A. Banks (Seattle, WA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 341.

9 M. Zhou, *Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms with Minority Languages, 1949–2002* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 27.

10 Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 11.

11 Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 28.

## PART I. THE ROLE OF THE NON-SINITIC LANGUAGES IN CHINA

### AN ESSENTIAL METHOD OF COMMUNICATION IN REMOTE REGIONS

In the early 1950s, the Chinese government recognized the need for having "good knowledge of the distribution of minority languages and a good classification of minority languages in China" as the foundation for its work in acknowledging minority nationality status and minority autonomy. The government was wholly oblivious of the fact that this understanding would later restrict the classification of minority languages in many ways in the late 1950s.<sup>12</sup> Language survey teams were designed and sent out in 1951 and 1956 to investigate the minority languages in Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Guangxi. For the most part, the entire process was rushed, which led to the exclusion of several linguistic communities and languages. The process became particularly difficult for ethnic groups that had already been recognized by the state but appeared to have more than one language. Arguably, a guiding principle in China's recognition and classification of minority languages in the 1950s was that "every national community was supposed to have a common language." This meant that "more languages should not be recognized than there were nationalities in China."<sup>13</sup> Although this conception was not recorded in the central government's official documents nor was it strictly followed in practice, it was one of the key guiding principles for language classification in China.

Communication in a minority language is critical in remote villages where the children have minimal exposure to Mandarin, or Putonghua, especially before children first enter school.<sup>14</sup> This does not mean, however, that the use of a minority language as an auxiliary learning tool in these regions epitomizes bilingual education. Most children in Yunnan had problems with understanding lessons that were conducted in Putonghua irrespective of their motivation and the attitudes of their parents. In fact, "across all students, 42 percent experienced difficulties most of the time"<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, in addition to language discrepancies, the non-Sinitic language speaking groups and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>14</sup> Ding, "China, Minority Languages," 342.

<sup>15</sup> Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 166.

Sinitic language speaking groups showed differences in culture and living habits. These socio-cultural disparities influenced language learning because “apart from learning a new language, minority children must also learn an unfamiliar culture.” For example, for Yi-speaking students, learning Putonghua was a major challenge because “their community is marked by different customs and lifestyles compared with the Han. Many words relating to the Han customs have no equivalent in Yi.”<sup>16</sup>

#### A MARKER OF THE COMPLEX MIGRATION HISTORY OF CERTAIN REGIONS

##### *Imprints of Accommodation*

The course of migration in China, especially in the most ethnically-diverse regions, consistently moved southward from the supposed homelands in West, Central, and South China. The distribution of China’s non-Sinitic language-speaking, minority communities mirrors their history of assimilation and accommodation, which in turn reflects their complex migration history. Most ethnic groups favored a segregated concentration of settlements, often at different altitudes, which led to the development of starkly different cultures and languages.<sup>17</sup> This diverse distribution consequently led to the amalgamation of various minority communities in three principal domains: multi-ethnicity, multilingualism, and multi-religion:

##### *Multi-ethnicity*

Homogenous settlements frequently appeared next to each other but often at different latitudes and altitudes. This varied geographical dispersion led to the development of disparate characteristics. For example, the Jingpo, Zaiwa, Maru, Lashi, and Bola groups of southwest Yunnan have dissimilar languages, cultural customs, and ritual activities, and the mountains of the west, south, and southwest are occupied by a blend of Tibeto-Burman language speakers, Miao-Yao language speakers, Tai language speakers, and Austro-Asiatic language speakers.”<sup>18</sup> This extreme ethnic diversity is especially

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<sup>16</sup> Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 174.

<sup>17</sup> C. P. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China’s Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>18</sup> Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 20.

noticeable in areas such as the Yunnan-Sichuan region wherein the geographical conditions contributed to the development of a striking diversity of non-Sinitic languages.<sup>19</sup> The geographical distribution of minority communities is principally determined by their history and production modes, which were profoundly influenced by the various governments' ethnic policies over the past two thousand years. Large minority communities are oftentimes found in regions where husbandry was historically predominant and governments executed accommodationist ethnic policies. Medium-sized minority communities are found in areas where there used to be a mixture of agriculture and husbandry, and governments alternated between assimilationist and accommodationist ethnic policies. Small and discontinuous minority communities thrive in agricultural regions where the governments have attempted to implement limited accommodationist ethnic policies for the past five hundred years.<sup>20</sup>

### *Multilingualism*

Linguistically, the distribution of China's minority communities also reflects their historical economy and production modes. For instance, "the Altaic language speakers, which include Turkic speakers, Mongolian speakers, and Tungusic speakers, are found in communities along the plains, deserts, and grasslands in the northwest, north, and northeast, since these groups are or used to be nomadic and rely on or used to rely on herding for their livelihood."<sup>21</sup> The total number of minority, non-Sinitic languages spoken in China is "still not definitively known."<sup>22</sup> Although the accurate number is yet to be determined, there are many dissimilar calculations. For instance, the State Language Commission recognized over 80 to 120 minority languages<sup>23</sup> whereas the authors of *The Languages of China* deduced a total of 129 languages.<sup>24</sup> The multilinguistic landscape further expanded with certain

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<sup>19</sup> Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>22</sup> Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> State Language Commission, *100 Questions in Language Orthography Work* (Beijing: Yuwen Chubanshe, 1995), 169.

<sup>24</sup> H. Sun, Z. Hu, and X. Wang, *The Languages of China* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2007), 193.

members of minority communities who abandoned their own language for another. Following years of close contact with the Jingpo people, the Xiando community of Yunnan, or the Achang people, converted to the Jingpo language for much of their daily communication. This switch resulted not only from intensive contact with the Jingpo, but also from the harsh living conditions for the Xiando people. The Xiando people had originally lived in a mountainous region 1400 meters above sea level. This area was regarded as one of the most primitive areas in Yunnan, subsequently inducing the government to move the Xiando to another village in 1995. As a result, the Xiando succumbed to the influence of Jingpo culture and customs and began to use the Jingpo language to practice Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the linguistic structure and systems of writing of the various non-Sinitic languages differ enormously from Putonghua in terms of sentence structure, word order, and pronunciation.<sup>26</sup> Their difference is so obvious that it would almost be safe to claim that they are fully mutually unintelligible.

### *Multi-religion*

The imprints of prevalence are further manifested through the presence of a variety of religions. The nationwide spreading of minority communities led to the expansion of an array of religions. The five most commonly seen are Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Daoism, and Christianity, beginning with Buddhism and ending with Christianity in terms of when they were first introduced. Buddhism preceded Islam, spreading eastward from India for more than a millennium. It first reached the Tibetan communities, then stretched further down into the northeast to the Mongolian, Tu, and Yugur communities where it became dominant. It also spread from Southeast Asia to the Dai, Blang, Derung, and some minority groups in southwest China. Islam, also for a thousand years, expanded eastward to Central Asia and further onwards, becoming the dominant religion in all the Turkic communities in Xinjiang and some Mongolian communities in Gansu and Ningxia. It was also popular among the immigrant Tajik in Xinjiang, the immigrant Hui along the great plains of the Yellow River,

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<sup>25</sup> Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



and the Han people.<sup>27</sup> Though it is often treated as a religion, Confucianism in China was more of an ideology than a religion. It was dominant among the Han, with a strong influence on the Korean community in the northeast, the Manchu who lived amongst the Han, the Tujia, Miao, Jing, Gelao, She, and Zhuang communities in the south and central south, and the Dong, Bouyei, Bai, and Shai communities in the southwest. Daoism, on the other hand, was "the real religion that originated in the Han communities."<sup>28</sup> Despite this preeminence, however, it had a meager influence in the minority communities. Christianity differed from the other religions in that it did not originate or take hold early in China. It was brought to China by foreign missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, swaying the religious beliefs of some Miao, Bai, Lahu, Yi, Va, Jingpo, and Nu communities in Yunnan and Guizhou.<sup>29</sup>

### *Resistance to Assimilation*

In addition to the favorable signs of mutual adaptation, intensive contact among minority communities also generated a noticeable resistance to assimilation. Minority groups, despite living directly next to each other, formed unique identities in terms of ritual activities, kinship systems, clothing style, specific names for themselves and others, migration history, and language, all of which might differ from that of their neighbors. For instance, the Mosuo of the Yunnan-Sichuan region developed a matrilineal system that was in stark contrast to the patrilineal structure of the most closely related groups. This tendency has also been noted among local Han Chinese groups, many of which created a discernable local identity, lifestyle, and occasionally, a language, such as *Daohua*<sup>30</sup>.

## CASE STUDY: THE YUNNAN-SICHUAN REGION

Geographically, biologically, historically, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically, the Yunnan-Sichuan region is unquestionably the most diverse of all in China. A third of its population of 44.5 million is

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<sup>27</sup> Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 203.

comprised of ethnic minorities who live on both sides of the border, and it is home to twenty-six of the fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups. Each of the minority groups speaks one or more languages, and the region is home to three Chinese-speaking southwest Mandarin groups: the Han, Hui, and a smaller group of Manchus. Because the arrival of the Han Chinese was relatively delayed, they did not become the majority in the southwest until 1850. Yunnan also has a few unrecognized nationalities, such as the Mosuo, who are seeking official identification, as well as others who are applying for re-identification.<sup>31</sup> Another interesting aspect of the Yunnan-Sichuan area is that the number of ethnic groups that consider themselves distinct is much higher than those that are officially recognized by the government. Moreover, the region operates as a crucial migrant corridor for four ethnic peoples: the Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman and Sinitic), Tai-Kadai, Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer), and Hmong-Mien peoples. This ethnic diversity embodies the complex migration history of the area.

The Yunnan-Sichuan region is located at the meeting point between Tibet, China, and Southeast Asia, stretching along the southeastern ridge of the Tibetan plateau. It functions as a critical dividing line between three realms: the Tibetan world to the north and northwest, the Sinitic world to the east, and the Sinitic and Southeast Asian world to the south and southeast. Geologically, the region is “a land of magnificent mountains” with high peaks that reach a height of 7,500 meters, and “deep ravines, turbulent rivers that include the Mekong, Salween, and Yangtze Rivers.”<sup>32</sup> The elevation wanes from the north to south as the Qinghai-Tibet plateau yields to the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau. This vast altitudinal and latitudinal range creates a considerable diversity of climatic zones that spans from alpine cold to subtropical and tropical temperatures. The partially isolated habitats are also home to a startling assortment of endemic species.<sup>33</sup>

Historically, the region was deluged with political fragmentation and rivalry between regional superpowers. The Tibetan and Chinese empires were in power since the seventh century and the

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<sup>31</sup> Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 157.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>33</sup> K. Chirkova, “Non-Sinitic Languages of Yúnnán and Sichuān,” *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, ed. Rint Sybesma, vol. 4. (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

royal courts of Burma and Siam ruled during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. There are many interpretations regarding the true rulers of the region, one of the most common being that the Chinese empire controlled most of southwest Sichuan and northwest Yunnan after the establishment of the Sino-Tibetan border in 1727, and present-day Yunnan after the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century. In reality, however, the vast territory remained fragmented throughout most of history into many different indigenous states that include Nanzhao (738–902), the Dali kingdoms of the Yi and Bai groups (937–1253), the Tai Kingdom Sipsongpanna (late twelfth century–1911), the Tibetan kingdom of rMili (1580–1950), and eventually to local autonomous rule well into the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the languages spoken in the area are Tibeto-Burman, which includes Himalayish, Kachinic, Ngwi-Burmese, as well as Rawang and the controversial Qiangic. There are also several unclassified spoken languages such as Sinicized Bai, Achang, and Na. All the language families extend beyond country borders. For instance, Mon-Khmer, which includes Wa, Bulang, and De'ang; Tai-Kadai, which includes Zhuang and Dai; and Hmong-Mien, which includes Miao and Yao, are restricted in distribution and minimally seen in the far southwest, south, and southwest.<sup>35</sup> It is commonly accepted that "over 120 languages are spoken ... although most are officially classified as dialects." For example, the Yi speak more than six identified dialects of which at least four are mutually unintelligible.<sup>36</sup> Over all, the region can be said to suit the profile of a residual zone that has high genetic diversity, no clear center of innovation, no lingua franca for the entire area until recently, a few areal features, such as multiple existential verbs, and some unique, cross-linguistically uncommon features such as "a topography-based spatial deixis in the north and northwest."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>35</sup> Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 84.

<sup>36</sup> Tsung, *Minority Languages, Education and Communities in China*, 158.

<sup>37</sup> Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 83.

## PART IV: THE FUTURE OF THE NON-SINITIC LANGUAGES

Within two generations, the linguistic map of China will likely be quite different from the current version. The People's Republic of China has invested a considerable sum of money in spreading Putonghua across the nation, to the exclusion of local languages. In response, many local governments have taken steps to sustain their non-Sinitic language(s). For example, most cities in Jiangsu require at least one state-run local television channel to program in the local dialect. Additionally, the Yunnan-Sichuan area has many non-Sinitic, minority languages that consider themselves distinct but have yet to be recognized.<sup>38</sup> Though there is an identifiable resistance to assimilation among some minority groups, they generally lean favorably towards mutual adaptation. The boundaries between the non-Sinitic language speaking groups are "not so firm and fast that they could not be crossed." In fact, there have been many cases in which individuals or communities altered their ways "so much as to meld with another group (assimilate)."<sup>39</sup> Clearly, the non-Sinitic languages play a crucial role in the communication, assimilation, and accommodation of the minority communities in China. Without them, communication, as well as an accurate understanding of the historical development of minority groups and their non-Sinitic language(s) would be infeasible.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>39</sup> Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 203.

# Local Cinemas with Local Dialects: An Analysis of Jia Zhangke's Dialect Films

Tao Tang

In recent years, using dialects in Chinese film has become increasingly popular. The Chinese film audience in general shows enthusiasm for dialect expressions in films such as Zhang Yimou's (張藝謀) *The Story of Qiu Ju* (秋菊打官司 *Qiu Ju Da Guan Si*) and Ning Hao's *Crazy Stone* (瘋狂的石頭 *Feng Kuang De Shi Tou*). However, dialect films are still marginal in Chinese-language cinema. Most are independent films, produced outside the major film studio system, in addition to films produced and distributed by independent entertainment companies. This means that the market for dialect films is much smaller and the number of viewers is much lower than in mainstream Chinese film.

Observing this, I wondered: what are the interactions between dialect and film; why is it that in mainland China, using dialect expressions as an element in film can be successful, yet dialect film as a whole is still in such an awkward situation; how the Chinese film industry might best deal with the element of dialect in movies; and what is the future of dialect film in mainland China?

To answer these questions and ultimately to figure out the best direction for China to take with respect to dialect films, I focus on the works of an exceptional filmmaker, Jia Zhangke (賈樟柯), a director who persists in producing all feature films in dialect and meanwhile enjoys an extremely high reputation around the world. This paper is a case study of Jia Zhangke's dialect films, with the aim of exploring the representations of dialect in film and understanding how dialect and film interact with each other.

In Part 1, I first analyze the reality of language varieties in mainland China and sum up the history and situation of dialect films in mainland China. In this part, I argue that Jia Zhangke's films are the key to figuring out the proper direction for dialect films in mainland China. In Part 2, by analyzing Jia's successful practice of using dialects in film, I want to explore the representations of

dialect in film and understand how dialects and film interact with each other. In this part, I try to analyze the representations of Shanxi 山西 dialect (Jin language) and other dialects in Jia Zhangke's films and investigate the following questions: How does Jia present dialect in his films? What role does dialect play in his films? What meanings does using dialect give to film? How does dialect film influence dialect in reality? In Part 3, I try to figure out the future of dialect film in mainland China by drawing on lessons learned from Jia Zhangke's films.

## THE HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION OF "DIALECT FILM" IN MAINLAND CHINA

### DEFINING "DIALECT" AND "DIALECT FILM"

#### *What is "dialect"?*

"Dialect" is a particular form of a language that is peculiar to a specific region or social group.<sup>1</sup> A Chinese "dialect" is one of a variety of Chinese languages. The classification widely adopted in mainland China divides Sinitic languages into seven regional groups: Mandarin (northern half of China and the southwest), Wu (Jiangsu and Zhejiang, e.g., Shanghai and Suzhou dialects), Gan (Jiangxi and surrounding areas), Xiang (Hunan), Min (mainly Fujian, Hainan and Taiwan), Yue (mainly Guangdong and eastern Guangxi, e.g., Cantonese), and Hakka (or Kejia, scattered in many parts of southern China with its largest concentrations in a region covering northeast Guangdong, southern Jiangxi and western Fujian). Three more regional groups have been proposed in recent decades: Jin (Shanxi and surrounding areas), Hui (border region of Anhui, Zhejiang and Jiangxi) and Pinghua (Guangxi).<sup>2</sup> If we pursue the division further, each dialect group contains subgroups, which in turn have subdivisions and local dialects. Alongside these varieties of Chinese dialect, in mainland China, the government strongly promotes learning and speaking a standard, national variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Hodson 2014, 2.

<sup>2</sup> See the classification of "Dialect Groups of the Chinese Language" on Oxford bibliographies website, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/abstract/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0024.xml?rskey=oyZSK&result=3&q=Sinitic+languages+#firstMatch>.

Chinese called "Modern Standard Mandarin"<sup>3</sup> (MSM, also called "Putonghua," or "common language"), which is the official language of China. Its pronunciation is based on the Beijing dialect, its vocabulary on the Mandarin dialects, and its grammar is based on written vernacular Chinese. In other words, MSM is not a kind of language people speak spontaneously but a new language created by the government. In this article, I do not offer linguistic research on dialectology, but mainly focus on the interactions between dialect and film; therefore, I generally use "dialect" to mean Chinese languages that people speak in daily life naturally, other than MSM. In addition to geographical variation, the social background of a speaker will also influence the variety of Chinese that person speaks: two children may grow up in the same city, but if one is born into a wealthy family and attends an expensive private international school, while the other is born into a less well-off family and attends the local public school that gathers kids from various towns, the two are likely to end up speaking rather different varieties of Chinese. It is this combination of regional and social variation that I refer to collectively as "dialect" in this article.

*What is "dialect film"?*

"Dialect film" in this article refers to feature films in which the main characters use dialect in dialogue, the history and reality of people's lives in particular regions are shown, and the characteristics of specific regional cultures are presented. There are two points I want to stress here. First, "dialect film" must be a "feature film." There are many films in Chinese cinema based on local operas, such as Sichuan and Kun opera, that are dominated by dialects; an example is the film *Peony Pavilion*,<sup>4</sup> which is adapted from a Kun opera. I do not discuss this kind of film here, as it seems to me quite separate from the points I want to discuss. Second, I emphasize that merely using some dialect expressions in film is not really "dialect film." The dialect film tradition I discuss here requires that the setting of a "dialect film" be a place where people speak a dialect, most dialogues between the actors are in dialect, and the film presents the audience with a specific regional culture.

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<sup>3</sup> I address MSM below.

<sup>4</sup> *Peony Pavilion* (遊園驚夢 *You Yuan Jing Meng*) is a 2001 Hong Kong drama film adapted from the Kun opera *Peony Pavilion*.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIALECT FILM IN MAINLAND CHINA

In this section I scrutinize the history of using dialect in films in mainland China and address the following questions: Why has dialect become popular in film? Why does dialect film still remain marginal in mainland China?

The use of dialect in the mass media has always been a political matter, particularly in mainland China. As early as the 1930s, dialect was used in Chinese cinema. The *White-Golden Dragon* (*Bai Jin Long*, 1934), a film directed by Xue Juexian and Gao Liheng, was the first Cantonese film in China. Then, in the name of language unification, the Republican government implemented a policy prohibiting the screening of any film using dialect. In 1949, the PRC central government mandated the use of Putonghua in the mass media. Dialects became extinct in the Communist mass media until the 1960s. In 1963 a prominent dialect film, *Forced Recruitment* (*Zhua Zhuang Ding*), was produced. Throughout the film Sichuan dialect is used as the main spoken language: there is no Mandarin in this film. This film is full of all kinds of local gags and jokes. This film set off an upsurge of public viewing.

In the same year, dialect also played important roles in other films, such as *Satisfied or Unsatisfied* (*Man Yi Bu Man Yi*, 1963). This film has both a Mandarin version and a Suzhou dialect version. The Mandarin version was screened in the whole country, while the Suzhou dialect version was shown only in the Wu dialect area. After this screening, dialect versions became quite popular with local audiences. This film even prompted the development of other region-catering film industries. However, the trend of using dialect in films failed to be sustained. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Cultural Revolution was sweeping the country, the film production industry was largely destroyed. Dialects also began to fade away on stage. At the beginning of the 1990s, with social and political thought beginning to open up, film producers started to focus on the life of the common people, and the speech of the “grassroots,”<sup>5</sup> “dialect speech,” came back to stage and film again. Directors began to tell “China Stories” in a way that had never previously existed.

Some cinematic examples include *The Story of Qiu Ju*, which features the Shanxi dialect, and *Shanghai Fever* (*Gu feng*; Lee Kwok Lap, director, 1994), in which audiences can hear Shanghainese,

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<sup>5</sup> “Grassroots” refers to “草根 Cao Gen” in Chinese, and it means low-income civilians, the masses whose power is weak, in contrast to the government, the ruling class or other socially powerful class.



Cantonese, and Putonghua. The award-winning films of Jia Jiangke and the box office success of Ning Hao have brought various Northeast and Northwest dialects into vogue.

So why has dialect become so popular in film?

First, since the 1990s, when China's policy of reformation and opening began, all kinds of new ideas have been surging forward and have formed a diverse cultural environment. Filmmakers began to focus on various styles of life among different people, especially the so-called grassroots people. And speaking in dialect is a kind of symbol of those people.

Second, the loosening of cultural policies has also provided ample room for Chinese filmmakers to explore the multiple features of China in various ways. Some filmmakers make films that are much more localized, intending to attract a global audience, and thus they use dialect to present the real world of local people in small towns.

Third, since the eighties, with the introduction of the concept of "documentary film," Chinese filmmakers began to explore the performance skills required in documentary film. At the same time, advances in recording technology began to allow Chinese filmmakers to capture such sounds in reality. These factors all enabled "dialect speech" to appear in film.

Nevertheless, the use of MSM is still mandated for all mass media in mainland China. "Dialect film" attracts some audiences, but it nevertheless is increasingly marginalized. Most "dialect films" are independently made films, which are created with considerably lower budgets and have a smaller market.

#### THE FILMS OF JIA ZHANGKE

The central argument of this paper is that Jia Zhangke's practice of using dialects in his films can be understood as a representation of successful dialect films in mainland China and can help us identify the future of dialect film in mainland China

Jia Zhangke is a Chinese film director and screenwriter whose work speaks to a vision of authentic Chinese life. His films are distinctive for using dialects in film, with which he manages to present the authentic situation of either uneducated people or those people who prefer to speak in native languages in China. From his first work, *Xiao Shan Going Home* (小山回家 *Xiao Shan Hui Jia*), to his latest film in 2015, *Mountains May Depart* (山河故人 *Shan He Gu Ren*) dialect speech is the

main spoken language in the film. Most of Jia Zhangke's films are based on Shanxi dialects, though their speech is mixed with other local dialects and Mandarin. *Xiao Shan Going Home*, *Unknown Pleasures* (任逍遥 *Ren Xiao Yao*) and *Platform* (站台 *Zhan Tai*) are mainly in the Shanxi dialect. *Xiao Wu* (小武) is mainly in the Shanxi and Henan dialects; *World* (世界) is an ensemble of Shanxi and Wenzhou dialects; *Still Life* (三峡好人 *San Xia Hao Ren*) is mainly in the Shanxi and Sichuan dialects, 二十四城 (*Twenty-four city*) is a combination of Sichuan dialect and northern dialects.

Some directors use occasional dialect expressions in a few dialogues in film in order to provide amusing effects, but Jia applies dialect as the main spoken language. In his films, dialect is not a decoration or gimmick, but an indispensable part of the film, and it embodies regional culture. Thus, his films truly can be regarded as “dialect film.”

In addition, Jia is the only director in Mainland China who persists in using dialect as the main language in his films, and meanwhile enjoys an extremely high reputation around the world. He is generally regarded as a leading figure of the “Sixth Generation”<sup>6</sup> movement of Chinese cinema and performs a leading role in the Chinese independent film industry. He tries his best to popularize his independent dialect films among audiences in and outside mainland China. He is one of the few Chinese directors who has a large number of “fans” in the overseas market and who enjoys a very high reputation internationally. It is significant that he has a much larger group of fans, a much larger audience, a much bigger market, and a higher reputation abroad than he has inside mainland China.

In Part 2 I want to take his dialect films as a case in point to study interactions between dialect and film in mainland China, and to try to find a better way forward for the Chinese dialect film.

## PART 2: INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DIALECT AND FILM: A CASE STUDY ON JIA'S PRACTICE OF DIALECT FILM

In this part, I briefly analyze some features of Fenyang 汾陽 dialect in Jia Zhangke's feature films and investigate how dialect interacts with film.

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6 The post-1990 era has seen the “return of the amateur filmmaker” as state censorship policies after the Tiananmen Square demonstrations produced an edgy underground film movement loosely referred to as the Sixth Generation.

## DIALECTS IN JIA’S FILMS

Jia Zhangke has said, “Speaking and listening are the most common forms of interactive communication, so I think the language itself is very important. In other words, in such a choice, in fact, it is an aesthetic choice. I think there is a subtle feeling in the expression of dialect. I think it can show the character’s emotion very well.”<sup>7</sup> Dialogues occurring in his films include speeches in Shanxi dialect, Henan dialect, Zhejiang dialect, Sichuan dialect, Guizhou dialect, Shanghainese, Beijing dialect, Northeastern dialect, Mandarin with local accents, and, more rarely, Mandarin and English.

There are many differences between local dialects among adjacent towns in Shanxi Province. Most dialogues in Jia’s films are in Fenyang dialect, which is a branch of the Jin language. I briefly analyze the features of Fenyang dialect in Jia’s films.

*Phonetics*

First, dialects and Mandarin differ in initials, vowels and tones. I’ve listed the differences between Fenyang dialect and Modern Standard Mandarin below.

Table 1: The tones of MSM and Fenyang dialect

MSM	Fenyang dialect
Dark even	Dark even, dark entering
Light even	Light even, dark entering, light entering
Rising	Rising, dark entering
Departing	Departing, dark entering, light entering

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<sup>7</sup> Jia Zhangke 2009, 37.

Table 2: Initials of MSM and Fenyang dialect

MSM	Fenyang dialect	MSM	Fenyang dialect
p	<sup>h</sup> p, p	tɕ	tɕ, tɕʰ, tɕʰ, ɕ
<sup>h</sup> p	<sup>h</sup> p, p	<sup>h</sup> tɕ	<sup>h</sup> tɕ, <sup>h</sup> ts
m	m	ɕ	ɕ, x, s, tɕʰ
f	f, p, <sup>h</sup> p	ts	ts, tɕʰ, ts
t	<sup>h</sup> t, t	<sup>h</sup> ts	<sup>h</sup> ts, <sup>h</sup> tɕ
<sup>h</sup> t	<sup>h</sup> t, t	s	s, ɕ
n	n, nɿ, n̄, ŋ, z, ø	tɕ	ts, tɕʰ, tɕʰ, ts
l	l	<sup>h</sup> tɕ	<sup>h</sup> tɕ, <sup>h</sup> ts, <sup>h</sup> ts, <sup>h</sup> tɕ, s, ɕ
k	<sup>h</sup> k, k	ɕ	ɕ, s, ɕ, ts
<sup>h</sup> k	<sup>h</sup> k, <sup>h</sup> k, tɕʰ	ʈ	ʈ, ø
x	x, k, <sup>h</sup> k, f, ɕ	ø	v, f, ø, n̄, n, ŋ

As shown in the tables above, richer tones and changes characterize Fenyang dialect. Dialect in films sounds much more cadenced. With richer tones, initials and vowels, speakers have more space to vary their pronunciation and show us abundant mentality.

Second, the long sound phenomenon is very common in Fenyang dialect. It is usual, for example, for people when speaking to emphasize their discourse by repeating and stretching long sounds. In film, long tones in Fenyang dialect are more extended than those in MSM, and meanwhile the long tones in Fenyang can also become accented. We can hear more long tones and accented sounds in Fenyang than in MSM. This shows that, when speaking their native languages, people

experience fewer rules and more freedom in pronunciation, and they can use changes in tones to express much more feeling.

### *Vocabulary*

In Jia's films, there are much richer expressions in the Fenyang dialect than in MSM. In Fenyang, people have more characteristic slang words and also have multiple expressions of modal particles.

Slang is a fixed phrase of colloquialism created by the working people, which embodies people's daily life experiences and aspirations and comes naturally with dialect regional features. As far as the lexical meanings of words are concerned, most slang words describe the geographical and cultural features of dialect areas. In addition, speaking slang words is an alternative for people who are hard-pressed to express their emotions in ordinary language, and this means that their use of slang can show us the psychology of native speakers of a dialect.

For example, in the film *Xiao Wu*, when talking about the fact that Xiao Wu does not have real abilities and skills but can get money only by stealing, people describe him as “偷雞兒摘門簾的把式 Tou ji er zhai men lian de ba shi” (“having only the skill to steal chickens and take off the door curtains”). This has two effects: since covering the door with curtains is a custom specific to Shanxi, the expression only makes sense in Fenyang dialect. And, by speaking thus in Fenyang slang, the characters show their contempt for Xiao Wu's “job.”

There are multiple expressions of modal particles in Fenyang dialect, which gives speakers much more space to change their tones according to different situations.

For example, when “哈啊 Ha a” (xa) is used at the end of an imperative sentence, it can mean “advise repeatedly,” as in “不用走哈啊 Bu yong zou ha a.” When it is used at the end of a question, it means “question closely,” as in “今兒開學，哈啊 Jin er kai xue, ha a?”

To sum up, dialect plays important roles in film, and using dialect as the main spoken language in film brings some new connotations. I attempt here to address the questions that arise as a result: How do these linguistic features of dialect interact with the narratives of film? What roles does dialect play in film? How does film influence dialect in reality?

## WHAT ROLES DOES DIALECT PLAY IN FILM?

*As an important tool for presenting the actual situation of peoples' lives and to help the audience grasp the emotions of characters.*

As shown in my analysis above, linguistic features like richer tones and dialect vocabulary in films can show us the regional culture and the psychology of characters.

For example, in the film *Mountains May Depart* (山河故人 *Shan He Gu Ren*), the coalmine owner Zhang Jinsheng is a young and rich man. Jinsheng always shows off his wealth in front of his friends and pretends to be very generous. When his female friend Shen Tao crashes his car into a large stone, he comforts her and says in Fenyang dialect, “德國技術 Deguo ji shu, 可結實了 ke jie shi le” (“It’s German technics, so the car is very sturdy.”). When their friend Liangzi comes to check the car, Jinsheng takes out some fireworks and asks Liangzi to “鬧點效果 Nao dian xiao guo” (“make fun effects”). These two expressions are typical Fenyang dialect expressions that can vividly indicate that Jinsheng wants to show off his wealth and pretend that he doesn’t care about the car in front of a beloved girl and his old friend.

In another scene, when their friend Liangzi has left, Zhang Jinsheng says to Shen Tao “濤 Tao, 以後咱倆不要帶梁子耍了 Yi hou zan lia bu yao dai Liangzi shua le.” (“Tao, We will not take Liangzi with us to have fun in future.”) Shen Tao asks “咋滴勒 Zha di lei,” (“Why/What happened?”) Zhang Jinsheng is a little shy and says “就咱倆 Jiu zan lia, 不好 Bu hao?” (“How about just us?”) First, in Fenyang dialect, people would use “耍 Shua” to mean “have fun” instead of “玩 Wan” in Mandarin, especially in the circumstance of having fun with friends in a romantic relationship. In Fenyang dialect, when expressing “make girlfriends/boyfriends,” people prefer to say “耍男女朋友 Shua nan nv peng you.” Therefore, in this sentence, “耍” hints that a romantic relationship is developing between Jinsheng and Tao. Second, in Mandarin, people usually add an interrogative word like “嗎 Ma” at the end of a question, while in Fenyang dialect, as I noted above, people sometimes express the question mode by changing the tone of the last word in the sentence. When Jinsheng asked “不好 Bu hao?,” there are some changes in the tone of the word “好 Hao,” which vividly shows that he is quite bashful and nervous. If this were asked in Mandarin, “不好嗎 Bu hao ma,” the character could not change the tone of “嗎” and could only express the question mode.

*As a tool to reinforce dramatic tensions in a film.*

Language conflict is a part of dramatic conflict in film. In a scene in the film *Mountains May Depart*, when Shen Tao goes to Shanghai to meet her son Dollar and says to him in Fenyang dialect, “到樂 Daole , 咋的不跟妈妈说话了呀 Zha de bu gen Mama shuo hua le ya, 叫妈 Jiao Ma,” (“Daole, why don’t you talking to me? Call me Mama.”) Dollar responds like a stranger. After quite a long silence, he says “妈咪 Mami,” a word that mixes Mandarin and English. The conflict between Fenyang dialect and Mandarin has broken the peaceful atmosphere between a mother and a son, such that a dramatic conflict is precipitated in which Shen Tao bursts out with her anger and blames her son in Fenyang dialect, saying “妈咪 Mami? 甚人教你这么叫的 Shen ren jiao ni zhe me jiao de, 爽快点 shuang kuai dian, 叫妈 Jiao ma.” (Mami? Who taught you this word, be straightforward, call me ma.) The tone of this sentence is increasingly severe, which shows that Tao is getting angry. Similarly, the gap between Dollar and his father Jinsheng is later shown to be manifested by language conflicts. Jinsheng speaks Fenyang dialect, while his son can only speak English, so that their conversation must rely on translation by another person, a woman. It is shown that Jinsheng has become extremely angry and says some curse words in Fenyang dialect, but since his speaking is being translated by the woman, the tone of anger and rudeness in Jinsheng’s vulgar dialect just disappears. His son Dollar cannot understand his father’s desperation, just as he cannot understand his father’s language.

*As a symbol of the marginal identity of the speakers.*

Jia Zhangke always focuses on those “grassroots” people who are at the local (most basic) level of society, rather than at the national center of political activity, like the prostitute in film *Xiao Shan Going Home*, the pickpocket in film *Xiao Wu*, and the migrant workers in the film *World*. All of these are “grassroots” people in mainland China. They live at the margins of mainstream society and may not get much of an education. But people can only grasp MSM by learning it, and as a result, speaking MSM is a symbol of educated people, and speaking dialects is a symbol of uneducated people.

In metropolitan cities, compared with MSM, Fenyang dialect is a marginal language and this can indicate the marginal social status of the speakers.

In the film *World*, apart from the local Peking men speaking Beijing dialect, other characters

speak both Fenyang dialect and Mandarin. In the film, a large number of migrant workers from rural areas have poured into modern cities. These people did not receive a good education. Although they work in the metropolitan area of the motherland, they can't speak standard Mandarin. They use a little standard Mandarin at work, but when they return to their rented rooms and gather together, Fenyang dialect is naturally their first choice for communication. As the sociolinguist Chen Yuan says, "Although members of any social group have mastered the language used by another social group, in general, they always think that only in their native language can they express their feelings best."

In addition, language variations in a film indicate the real problems in the rapid transformation of the society and the living conditions of the "grassroots" people.

In the film *World*, MSM is the mainstream language in Beijing, and Fenyang dialect is a marginal language. In public, those migrant workers forced themselves to speak Mandarin to each other to erase their original identification of "grassroots," people from small towns. It's obvious that in the public sphere, Mandarin has much more power than dialect, and these workers are trying to hide their original identification by using Mandarin.

*Language variations indicate the cultural gaps between different generations and among people of different social status.*

In the film *Mountains May Depart*, made in 1999, people in Fenyang all spoke their native language, and can communicate with others without barriers. In 2014, people in Fenyang were encouraged to speak MSM, and MSM became the only language used in the mass media. Tao's son Dollar formerly spoke the Fenyang dialect, but was then taught in Mandarin at an international school. Tao, who speaks Fenyang dialect, has difficulty in communicating with her son, who prefers to speak Mandarin. Later, in 2025, the gap became much bigger, and, after being educated in the United States for many years, Dollar hardly remembers how to speak Mandarin or Fenyang dialect, while his father Zhang Jinsheng can only speak Fenyang dialect, and they can only understand each other through an interpreter. In addition, when Dollar tries to seek his "roots" back in China, he starts to learn MSM instead of his mother tongue, the Fenyang dialect. This means that Dollar will not be able to communicate with his father in their native language, ever.

The language variations in the film, on some level, challenge the significance and purpose of



MSM in mainland China. If the ostensible purpose of speaking MSM is to remove communication obstacles between people in different regions, then what is to be done about the cultural barriers it is erecting between people in different generations or between people who are educated with Mandarin and less educated people who speak dialects. And if, one day, people in mainland China all speak MSM, members of generations like that of Dollar may have no way ever to seek their real "roots." And the regional culture and colorful psychology of a great many communities embodied in their dialects will disappear as well.

#### HOW DO FILMS INFLUENCE DIALECTS IN REALITY?

1. Some dialect expressions have been used to provide more moods and local color by characters in dialect films. Many dialect expressions have become popular among people who are non-native speakers, especially those words with moods that Mandarin hardly possesses. One example is the word “咋地嘞 Zha di lei” in Fenyang dialect, which means “怎么了 Zen me le” (“what happened?”) in Mandarin, and indicates the straightforwardness characteristic of the speaker. With the widespread screening of Shanxi dialect films, the expression has become popular among other Chinese. Sometimes people adapt these dialect expressions into Mandarin, and their Mandarin versions preserve the mood conveyed by the original. For example, when hearing a man say “咋地嘞” in Mandarin, people regard that man as a straightforward person.
2. That dialect films always focus on “grassroots” people reinforcing educated peoples’ stereotype that dialects are the vulgar languages of uneducated people of lower social status. The problem is that dialect itself should be a common language without any implications of social status.
3. The widespread use of dialect in film reinforces the troubled interaction between dialect and MSM. On the one hand, dialects are constantly becoming more elegant and standardized. It seems that the more dialect is exposed to the mainstream society, the more rules it comes to observe. This can lead to the loss of the original dialect, but original dialects recorded in film can improve this situation. Dialect films can preserve the original features of dialects and let many more non-native speakers know the original dialects. What’s more, they can inspire

native speakers to enhance their culture identity and to be independent in speaking their own language without being affected by powerful Mandarin. For example, currently, as a result of being surrounded by Mandarin for a long time and being influenced by it, the Jin language group, especially in the northern area, has been evolving toward the omission of the tail vowel in the entering tone. However, the dialogues in Shanxi dialect in films show us its flexible tones. In this way, dialect film can be regarded as a preserver of original dialects by presenting its audiences with colorful regional culture embodied in regional languages. On the other hand, by being exposed to colorful dialect vocabulary, people come to use more dialect expressions in daily life, which enriches the vocabulary of Mandarin. More dialect words are being adopted into Mandarin, and people use these “dialect Mandarin words” to express their moods in everyday life more dramatically.

### PART 3: THE FUTURE OF DIALECT FILM IN MAINLAND CHINA: HOW DOES JIA REPRESENT DIALECTS IN FILMS AND WHY IS THIS SUCCESSFUL?

We have analyzed the representations of dialects in Jia’s films and investigated the interactions between dialect and film. In this part, we need to study Jia’s practice and try to figure out the future of dialect film in mainland China.

Languages in Jia Zhangke’s films are almost entirely faithful to the natural state of languages people speak in real life at the level of voice, vocabulary and grammar. This means that the spoken languages of characters in his films may speak not “standard dialects,” but simply the real languages they speak in everyday life. For example, in the film *Unknown Pleasures* (任逍遥 *Ren Xiao Yao*), the girl Qiaoqiao tries her best to speak the Datong dialect when she works in Datong, but her wording and accents still indicate that she is a non-native speaker of Datong language. When asking people where they are from, Qiao qiao says “你們倆 哪的人呀 *Ni men lia na di ren ya*” in a Datong accent, while the native speaker Xiaoji asks “你倆哪的咧 *Ni lia na de lei*.” As a non-native speaker, Qiaoqiao has learned to speak in the Datong accent. However, she has only roughly imitated the accent but has

missed some important features of Datong dialect, like the modal particle “咧 Lei” at the end of a question.

Thus, we can see that, in Jia Zhangke's film, the most important thing is realism. This is also the core of “dialect film.” “Dialect film” is not an art work about the “dialect” language, but rather a story telling of peoples' lives in a specific region.

Learning from Jia's practice of using dialect as the main spoken language in films, we can identify some methods with which to tackle the challenging problems of “dialect film” in mainland China.

*How should real life be presented in “dialect film”? How should the language barrier between actors and characters be removed?*

In a lecture at the Beijing Film Academy, Jia Zhangke once said, “In my films, I especially like to use dialects because I think any dialect is a native language of a regional group, and the performers are more natural in their native language. Using dialects gives the actors a kind of linguistic freedom. It would be hard to imagine that I would have a similar film if I used a group of local actors and made them perform in Putonghua.”<sup>8</sup>

Most actors in Jia Zhangke's films are non-professionals. Jia recruits many amateur actors among local people and lets them act with their own accents. He prefers those actors who are native speakers of the place where the film is set. And before shooting, all actors need to be involved in the real life of the place in which the film is set, and must learn accents and ways of wording things from local people.

*How should the relationship between subtitles and sounds be dealt with?*

A big challenge for “dialect film” is to deal with the problem of subtitles in Mandarin. Most people would never understand dialogues in dialects in films if they were not native speakers of that dialect. When translating dialect films into English, subtitles can only give the meanings literally. For example, in the film *Still life* (三峡好人 *San Xia Hao Ren*), domestication is adopted as a way to translate Sichuan dialect.

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<sup>8</sup> Jia Zhangke, 2009, 55.

何老闆 He laoban: 你有啥事嘛 Ni you sha shi ma? 你來奉節幹啥子嘛 Ni lai Fengjie gan shazi ma? 啥子 shazi?

Mr. He: What is it? Why are you in Fengjie? What?

摩的司機 Modi siji: 三峽工程妳曉不曉得 San Xia Gongcheng ni xiao de bu xiao dei?  
拉你去拆遷辦 La ni qu chaiqian ban, 要不要得 Yao bu yao dei?

Driver: Ever heard of the Three Gorges Dam? I'll take you to the Relocation Office.  
How about it?

“啥 sha,” “啥子 shazi,” “曉不曉得 xiao bu xiao dei,” “要不要得 yao bu yao dei” are typical words and phrases in Sichuan dialect. “啥 sha” and “啥子 shazi” can be explained as “什么 shenme” in Chinese standard Mandarin, which is similar to the interrogative pronoun “what” in English. “曉不曉得 xiao bu xiao dei” means “你知不知道 ni zhi bu zhi dao?,” the phrase “要不要得 yao bu yao dei” means “可不可以 ke bu ke yi?” Both of the phrases are general questions in an inquiring tone. In all the examples above, the words and phrases in Sichuan dialect are translated literally according to the meaning.

The problem is how to translate dialects into Mandarin in mainland China. Different from English or other foreign languages, which are based on cultures quite different from that of Mandarin, Chinese dialect is still part of Chinese languages group. If we give merely a general meaning in the subtitles, the distinctive linguistic features of the dialect disappear and all the interactions discussed above do not work.

Thus I prefer that filmmakers preserve the local cultural color of dialects in Mandarin subtitles and consider both phonetic sounds and meanings in subtitle translations. On the one hand, translators need to go deeper into the dialect itself, and explore the exact meaning or even the origin of the dialect expressions. On the other hand, they need to deliberate on the exact pronunciations of the dialect words. Then with the combination of the meaning and sound, they pick the most accurate words in Mandarin. For example, in the film *Still Life* (三峽好人 *San Xia Hao Ren*), “摩的 mo di” is a

kind of vehicle in the Sichuan regions. In the regions, the motorbike is popular and widely accepted as a vehicle similar to a taxi, for it is convenient, small in volume and cheaper to run than the taxi. Many drivers of motorbikes wait at the bus station or railway station to solicit business. In Modern Standard Mandarin, people would call the same vehicle a “摩托車 motuoche.” In this circumstance, translators need to figure out why Sichuan people originated their word. Standard Mandarin calls a taxi “的士 dishi.” “摩的 modi” is a compound word for “摩托 motuo” and “的士 dishi.”

摩的司機 modi siji: 摩的 modi, 走不走 zou bu zou?

Driver: Come. Rides for hire! Anywhere you want to go!

To summarize, in translating dialect expressions, phonetic sound and literal meaning should both be adopted by the translator, not only to realize a successful cross-cultural communication, but also to make sure that the translated subtitle is sufficiently coherent with the original local color of the dialect.

*How should the sounds in film be made coherent with the languages in which the screenplay is written?*

There are always problems between written languages and oral languages. In mainland China, people hardly write in dialects they speak. This is also a problem for dialect film. If a filmmaker can barely write his screenplay in dialects, how can he guide his actors to speak in dialects? The answer is to proceed with no fixed writing at all.

Jia Zhangke never has a fixed screenplay before the shooting. He only provides the scenes, the story and the emotions of characters, then the actors are required to live with local people in that setting for a while, and then to perform as they actually do in reality. In most cases, dialogue between the actors is all improvised. In this way, Jia requires actors to express certain information in a certain context, and in a certain environment, but then the actors must express it in their own language according to the customary way of speaking.

## WHERE IS DIALECT FILM HEADED IN CHINESE-LANGUAGE CINEMA?

In mainland China, it's hard to describe the relationships between dialects and Modern Standard Mandarin: they are dynamic, complex, and always changing. Similarly, the issues concerning Mandarin film and dialect film are never simple in that they are related to art itself. However, if we put aside those political factors and focus on the Chinese-language cinema itself, I regard the "dialect film" as an indispensable part of Chinese-language cinema.

It's very important to recognize that if we want to depict the "real world" and show people the real regional culture in film, the representation of that culture's speech is basic and central to this depiction. As such, "real life" has been equated with "real speech," and "real speech" must include "dialect speech." And these representations of "dialect speech" must rely on filmmakers' correct understanding of the interactions between "dialect" and "film."

As I have tried to show, the vitality of "dialect film" is the regional culture, and the core impulse of "dialect film" is to respect people's real life and to give voice to people in communities that are more frequently spoken about than allowed to speak. Therefore, communicating with the audience effectively while preserving its local characteristics is the main future of "dialect film" in Chinese-language cinema.

Above all, what I hope to show in this article is that there is a lot of exciting and necessary work still to be done on dialect and film in Chinese-language cinema; the field is almost entirely untouched. And I believe that that fact is itself perhaps another manifestation of the marginal status of Chinese dialect film in Chinese-language cinema.

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## Chinese Characters in Fashion: How Different Levels of Readability Affect the Characters' Meanings

Julia Wang

The aim of this paper is to study the use of Chinese characters in various contemporary fashion collections. What draws me to this unusual topic is my observation of Japanese and, more recently, Chinese characters appearing as graphic elements on street style apparel. It seems reasonable to connect this trend to the fact that Japan is widely regarded as the “street style capital of the world,”<sup>1</sup> prompting designers of high and fast fashion to adopt certain styles and visual vocabulary from their Eastern inspiration. However, I more recently started noticing specifically Chinese characters and phrases (as opposed to the occasional Kanji used in a Japanese context) on clothes, and this shift seemed significant enough to merit further exploration and discussion.

To add a little more flavor to my endeavor, I would like to perform a side-by-side reading of fashion and tattoos. That is, I hope to show, through the framework of tattoos, why such clothes as these, which include Chinese characters in their designs, are significant in a contemporary context. In order to accomplish this goal, I will first give some background on tattoo history in China, as well as describe the state of Chinese characters in tattoo art now; then, I will discuss how Chinese characters are used and interpreted in art; and finally, with the first two sections in mind, I will discuss three fashion collections as case studies of various ways Chinese characters have been used in fashion design. This is not meant to be a comprehensive survey of Chinese characters in tattoo, art, or fashion; rather, I would like to provide a multidisciplinary and nuanced analysis of how these varied uses of Chinese characters might possibly play into the ways in which Chinese characters can be read.

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<sup>1</sup> Manus Browne, “Japan Is the Street Style Capital of the World, If Tokyo Fashion Week Is Anything to Go By,” *Highsnobiety*, published October 25, 2017, accessed December 7, <https://www.highsnobiety.com/2017/10/25/tokyo-fashion-week-street-style-ss18/>.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINESE TATTOO: FUNCTIONAL AND DECORATIVE

Although tattoos are now mostly perceived as decorative body art, they historically began in China as a functional type of body modification. In her paper "Early Chinese Tattoo," Carrie E. Reed describes several types of tattoo as mentioned in early Chinese texts, two of which are concerned with the shift towards a more decorative type of tattoo: tattoo in the military, and figurative and textual tattoo. Traditionally, "tattoo was used [in the military] to brand men as part of a particular regiment, as a means of identification (dead or alive), to prevent them from escaping and to mark prisoners of war."<sup>2</sup> However, there were some cases in which "valiant individuals also tattooed themselves with oaths, proclaiming their wholehearted dedication to a particular nation or to a certain military or personal cause."<sup>3</sup> These oaths, usually made up of a few words such as "*yixin shizhu*" 一心事主 (serve the ruler with undivided heart) or "*jinzhong baoguo*" 盡忠報國 (serve the nation with absolute loyalty), were meant to "instill a sense of strength and valor" in the soldiers.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to textual tattoos that were meant to bring shame to their bearers, these tattooed oaths seem to be a positive type of decoration, serving as an affirmation of what these soldiers considered important to them.

Reed points out another detail that is worth noting here: many terms were used to refer to tattoo, and while there isn't necessarily consistency in their usage, some generalities can be drawn. She says,

In general, if the tattooing of characters (字) appears in the term, it refers to punishment, but this is certainly not true in every case. Likewise, if a term literally

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<sup>2</sup> Carrie E. Reed, "Early Chinese Tattoo," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 103 (June 2000): 20, accessed December 6, 2017, [http://www.sino-platonic.org/complete/spp103\\_chinese\\_tattoo.pdf](http://www.sino-platonic.org/complete/spp103_chinese_tattoo.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23–24.

meaning “to ornament” or “decorate” is used, it does not necessarily mean that the tattoo was done voluntarily or for decorative purposes.<sup>5</sup>

Even if the terminology is inconsistent, the difference that Reed tries to outline here is an important one. In a later example, the examination of a dead body reveals two types of tattoo, “tattooed characters, *ci zi* 刺字, and decorative tattoos, *diao qing* 雕青.... It is significant that the two types of tattoo are noted separately: the mark of punishment and that used as decoration are not considered one and the same.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the content and purpose of a tattoo bear weight, and because the use of characters had historically been considered a form of punishment, that people choose voluntarily to have characters tattooed onto their bodies is consequently an important new form of self-expression.

#### A NEW KIND OF CHINESE TATTOO AND ITS (MIS)USE OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Nowadays, tattooing words on oneself is quite common, and there is even a trend in which Westerners get tattooed in Chinese characters without fully understanding what they mean. This phenomenon is well documented by the blog *Hanzi Smatter*, as people submit photos of their tattoos to the blog with the hopes of deciphering what their tattoo actually means. More often than not, the characters used in these tattoos turn out to make no sense as phrases because of one common mistake — people assume that one can spell in Chinese, such that “original English phrases [are] pieced together from Chinese characters.”<sup>7</sup> An “alphabet” of sorts, which assigns a set of Chinese characters to the English alphabet, has been identified on *Hanzi Smatter* as a gibberish font set that many tattoo parlors use, resulting in Chinese phrases such as “*nü shou gong quan*” 女手功拳 (female

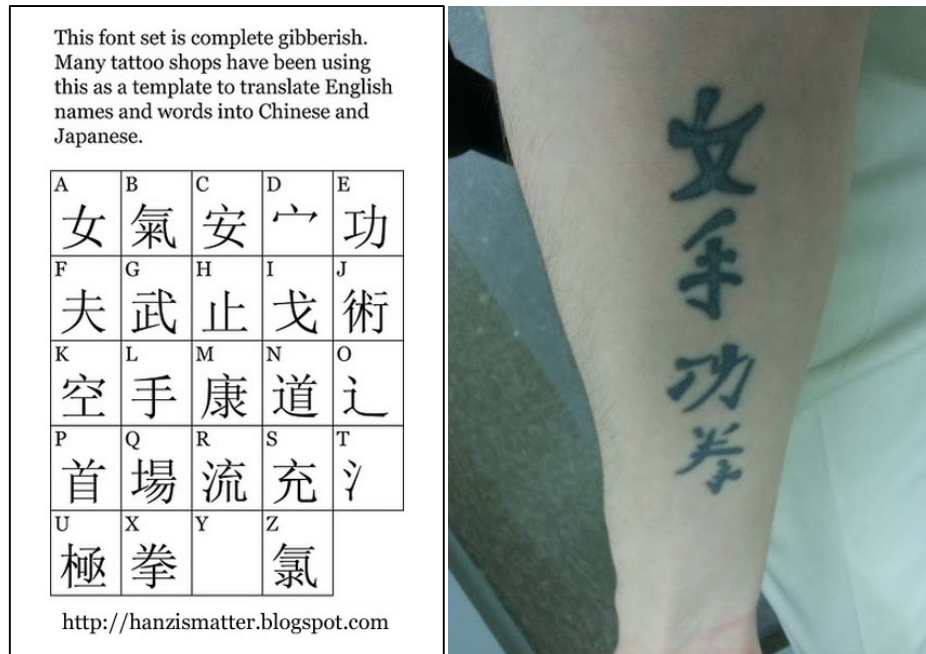
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<sup>5</sup> Reed, “Early Chinese Tattoo,” 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Imre Galambos, “Chinese Symbols as a Tattoo Design: Buying Chinese Symbols to Assemble a Tattoo Design for Ourselves,” *Logoi*, published May 26, 2011, accessed December 15, 2017, [http://www.logoi.com/notes/chinese\\_symbols\\_tattoo\\_design.html](http://www.logoi.com/notes/chinese_symbols_tattoo_design.html), Internet Archive, [https://web.archive.org/web/20110526175901/http://www.logoi.com/notes/chinese\\_symbols\\_tattoo\\_design.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20110526175901/http://www.logoi.com/notes/chinese_symbols_tattoo_design.html).

hand work fist) that, when translated using the font set, represents the English word "Alex." This type of tattoo clearly does not carry the same meditative meaning that the Chinese soldiers' tattoos did. So, what happens when Chinese characters are used in such a way that their meaning is less important than their aesthetic form?



"Alex" rendered in gibberish font. Sources: "Gibberish Asian Font Mystery Solved," *Hanzismatter* (blog), published August 31, 2006, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://hanzismatter.blogspot.com/2006/08/gibberish-asian-font-mystery-solved.html>. *Hanzismatter* (blog), published August 9, 2013, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://hanzismatter.blogspot.com/2013/08/from-al.html>

## CHINESE CHARACTERS AS ART

At this point, it may be useful to introduce some concepts from art to help discuss the use of Chinese characters in fashion later on. Xu Bing's work, especially those involving Chinese-looking characters, relates to this paper because it plays with the form and function of such characters. In *Square Word Calligraphy*, the characters at once mean something and mean nothing, for it takes an English word and transforms it to look like a Chinese character; on the other hand, the characters in *A Book from the*

Sky are made to look like Chinese characters but turn out to be completely meaningless symbols.<sup>8</sup> The play on meaning and meaninglessness is a kind of asemic writing, which is an art form that mimics writing without actually having a fixed meaning.<sup>9</sup> This tension between the presence or absence of meaning can be achieved specifically because visual art pays attention to the form of the characters. In Xu's own words, these characters "are words and yet simultaneously are not words. They look familiar, but you cannot name them. They have been disguised to look different internally and externally."<sup>10</sup> Thus, as we begin to think about Chinese characters in fashion, it is important to keep in mind different interpretations in which they may or may not be considered words, and to what degree readability plays a role in such interpretations.



Left: *Square Word Calligraphy*; right: *A Book from the Sky*. Sources: "Xu Bing: Square Word Calligraphy Classroom," *Asia Art Archive in America*, published September 8, 2011, accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.aaa-a.org/events/xu-bing-square-word-calligraphy-classroom/>. Dan Graur, "Selected Publications," accessed December 20, 2017, <http://nsmn1.uh.edu/dgraure/Publications.html>.

## CHINESE CHARACTERS IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

In this section, I will discuss three different brands' use of Chinese characters, which ranges from the

<sup>8</sup> Britta Erickson and Xu Bing, *The Art of Xu Bing: Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Gaze, *Asemic*, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://www.asemic.net/>.

<sup>10</sup> Erickson and Xu, *The Art of Xu Bing*, 18.

playful to the serious and from the personal to the political. While I chose the brands mostly based on availability (these were the most prominent results I found regarding the use of Chinese characters by major fashion labels), they still represent an interesting mix: none of them are Chinese brands, though two of them can claim some connection or relation to China or the Chinese language.

#### Case 1: Han Kjøbenhavn SS17

Han Kjøbenhavn, a Danish label, recently incorporated several Chinese phrases in its Spring 2017 collection: "*huixuan ti he bai kao mianbao*" 迴旋踢和白烤麵包 ("roundhouse kick and white toasted bread"), "*piyi zhandou*" 皮椅戰鬥 ("leather chair battle"), and "*gouwu zhanshi*" 購物戰士 ("shopping warrior"), though in some cases the "*shi*" is dropped to make "*gouwu zhan*" 購物戰 ("shopping war").<sup>11</sup> Each phrase functions as a motif, appearing on different articles of clothing in different forms. For example, in one iteration, "*huixuan ti he bai kao mianbao*" is embroidered on a knit sweater in large, centered text, such that the line breaks between "*bai*" and "*kao*"; in another, the same phrase is printed on the left chest of a sweatshirt, breaking between "*ti*" and "*he*." In other examples, "*gouwu zhanshi*" and "*piyi zhandou*" are repeated in print on the hem of a denim skirt; "*piyi zhandou*" also appears on sweatpants and socks in different styles. While the exact designs and locations of the phrases vary, they all share some commonalities, whether that be color palette (mostly pastels, with emphasis on lilac and yellow) or bold outlines. What this means is that separate pieces can be combined to create entire outfits on which these motifs are present in visually dynamic and interesting ways.

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<sup>11</sup> Kristin Anderson, "Copenhagen Spring 2017: Han Kjøbenhavn," *Vogue*, published August 10, 2016, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/copenhagen-spring-2017/han-kjobenhavn>.



Han Kjøbenhavn SS17. Source: Leach, “Han Kjøbenhavn Looks to the Far East.”

In terms of semantic content, it seems that these phrases are meant to poke fun at certain capitalistic or materialistic tendencies by dramatizing consumer behavior while making it feel whimsical by juxtaposing random terms. One phrase, “*piyi zhandou*,” is particularly clever because of the pun it makes on *piyi* 皮衣 (leather jacket). This switch could be interpreted as a mistake, as it would make more sense for text used in a fashion collection to refer to leather jackets (*piyi* 皮衣) rather than to leather chairs (*piyi* 皮椅). However, there is a sense that it does not really matter whether the design meant to refer to leather jackets or leather chairs — for many of its consumers, the meaning and readability of Han Kjøbenhavn’s designs may matter less than their visual design, which already successfully captures the playful and unconventional spirit of many “capital-C cool” streetwear brands.<sup>12</sup> The de-emphasis on readability is further supported by the fact that Han Kjøbenhavn chose to use traditional Chinese characters for its designs, meaning that those who can only read simplified Chinese might need assistance in deciphering the text on these clothes. This detail relates back to the notion of asemic writing and the idea that words can successfully function as

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, “Copenhagen Spring 2017.”



objects without linguistic meaning. In this case, the phrases' asemic-ness occurs on two levels: whether or not one can read the characters on the clothes, and whether or not one can make sense of what the characters convey.

#### Case 2: Yohji Yamamoto AW16

Yohji Yamamoto is a Japanese designer whose avant-garde pieces often combine elements of East and West, as well as those of past and present. His work, specifically the Fall 2016 menswear collection of his eponymous brand, is particularly relevant because it features several pieces on which Chinese characters are incorporated graphically; the muted colors and carefully considered forms are a stark contrast to the pastel colored sweatshirts and loose fitting drawstring trousers in Han Kjøbenhavn's designs.<sup>13</sup>



Yohji Yamamoto AW16. Source: "Yohji Yamamoto 2016 Fall Winter Collection launched at KOKKO,"

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<sup>13</sup> What these two collections do have in common is that they both include the brand's name, rendered in Chinese characters, on at least one item of clothing. For Yohji Yamamoto, "*shan ben yao si*" 山本耀司 is created on a black tie with thin, gold chains; for Han Kjøbenhavn, "*ta gebenhagen*" 他哥本哈根 appears on several pairs of socks. It seems that the brands have included these Chinese versions of their names in order to better integrate their use of Chinese characters in every part of the collection.

There are three distinct phrases, each of which appears on a unique piece of clothing, and unlike those used by Han Kjøbenhavn, these are rendered in simplified Chinese characters: “*gaosu tamen wo de xingfu*” 告诉他们我的幸福 (“tell them about my happiness”), “*wo jiang gaosu mei yige ren*” 我将告诉每一个人 (“I will tell every single person”), and “*sheng er wei ren, duibuqi*” 生而为人, 对不起 (“sorry I was born human”). The first two phrases quote verses from Hai Zi’s 海子 poem, “*Mian chao dahai, chun nuan hua kai*” 面朝大海, 春暖花开 (“Facing the Sea, with Spring Blossoms”), while the last quotes Osamu Dazai’s 太宰治 novel, *Ningen Shikkaku* 人间失格 (*No Longer Human*).<sup>14</sup> It is crucial to note that the literary works being cited in these designs are modern and therefore the phrases are meant to be more relatable to a contemporary audience, building on Yamamoto’s desire to pay more attention to humanity in today’s increasingly chaotic world.<sup>15</sup> This desire to focus on the individual is supported, from a design standpoint, by the fact that the phrases appear just once, each with a specific design on a single piece of clothing (as opposed to the almost overwhelming repetition of the phrases as motifs in Han Kjøbenhavn’s collection), so that each phrase has a unique and irreplaceable presence within the collection.

However, there’s still a level of opacity — even if consumers are able to read and understand the text, they may not know the texts’ origins. When I asked a friend (who is fluent in Chinese) about this collection, his initial response was of relative apathy, but when I told him about the literary references, he decided that they “make it a lot cooler then.”<sup>16</sup> What this indicates is that even though these phrases were picked thoughtfully and even if they make sense as individual phrases, there is yet

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<sup>14</sup> KOKKO, “Yohji Yamamoto 2016.” It is worth stating that there are other translations for the excerpt from Dazai’s novel, such as “*sheng er wei ren, wo hen baoqian*” 生而為人, 我很抱歉. It appears as “生まれて、すみません” in its original language, Japanese. The issues of translation are beyond my expertise, but the reason Yamamoto chose one particular translation, and even a translation at all, could be worth more study: unlike the Hai Zi quotes, which were originally written in Chinese, there doesn’t appear to be a reason Dazai’s work should be written in Chinese.

<sup>15</sup> Leitch, “Fall 2016 Menswear.”

<sup>16</sup> William Yu, text message to author, December 21, 2017. Also note his response to the Han Kjøbenhavn collection: “the use of Chinese characters is pretty bad....I think that Chinese characters are being overused and they have to be used carefully and tastefully.”

another level of readability that the collection's use of Chinese characters fails to reach, which is that of making clear the literary references that develop a specific theme.

### Case 3: Gosha Rubchinskiy AW15

In contrast to the other collections discussed so far, Gosha Rubchinskiy's Fall 2015 collection focuses on just one term, "*yundong*" 運動 ("sport"), as its central theme.<sup>17</sup> The phrase is applied in various ways, whether that be as a pattern stitched repeatedly across a sweater, or as an embellishment. Furthermore, it often appears alongside "cnoпр" (the word sport written in Cyrillic), just as the Russian and Chinese flags appear next to one another in other designs. One particularly memorable piece is a scarf which combines not just the two nations' flags, but also the word "sport" rendered in each nation's language. While the characters themselves represent a relatively simple concept, they convey a rather powerful message about tensions between the two superpowers,<sup>18</sup> and this in large part is due to the supporting graphic elements. One of the most striking images juxtaposes the Russian and Chinese flag, and sandwiches them at top and bottom with two navy blue rectangles; this design quotes the logo of American brand Tommy Hilfiger.<sup>19</sup> The graphic immediately creates a clash of three cultures, and by placing "*yundong*" and "cnoпр" alongside it, Rubchinskiy successfully gives the characters more nuance than their surface level definition, suggesting some sort of cautiously friendly competition between the two cultures and nations.

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<sup>17</sup> Luke Leitch, "Fall 2015 Menswear: Gosha Rubchinskiy," *Vogue*, published January 22, 2015, accessed November 9, 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2015-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy>.

<sup>18</sup> Leitch, "Fall 2015 Menswear."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Gosha Rubchinskiy AW15. Source: Colombo, “Go backstage at Gosha Rubchinskiy”

This case is special, and perhaps it is the most successful, because its use of Chinese characters is very readable: the characters are not only identifiable (even if they are written in traditional Chinese characters), but also convey the collection’s semantic and thematic meanings.

#### CONCLUSION

It seems clear by now that the interpretation of Chinese characters in fashion depends on three different kinds of readability: whether one can read the characters, whether one can make sense of the phrase itself, and whether one is able then to grasp the thematic concept that these phrases are trying to convey. To many, it may not matter whether or not Chinese characters achieve even the first level of readability, for aesthetic and form may be more important than the characters’ meanings. However, from both Xu Bing and Gosha Rubchinskiy’s work, and to some extent Yohji Yamamoto and Han Kjøbenhavn’s work, it is clear that producing pieces that are both aesthetically pleasing and semantically satisfying is possible. Thus, the stakes of designing and wearing clothes with Chinese characters on them seems to lie in one’s intention — why would one wear such an article of clothing?

Let us return briefly to Reed’s discussion of military tattoo: she cites one story, in which a famous Song general Yue Fei 岳飛’s mother was “crying as she pierces her son’s skin by using an embroidery needle.”<sup>20</sup> The tool with which she applies Yue Fei’s tattoo is extremely interesting, because certain forms of tattoo were referred to by terms which contained the character *xiu* 繡 (to

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<sup>20</sup> Reed, “Early Chinese Tattoo,” 24.

embroider), such as *xiujian* 繡面 (to ornament the face).<sup>21</sup> Of course, *xiu* is also used to describe embroidery in clothing, such as *cixiu* 刺繡 (to pierce embroidery), but by simply replacing *xiu* with *qing* 青 (blue-green), we have the phrase *ciqing* 刺青 (to pierce blue-green), which is another term that is commonly used to describe tattoos. There's a sort of circular logic to the etymology of these phrases, but in a way, it also shows how closely related tattoo is to embroidery (hence, fashion). Thus, it makes sense on some level to read tattoo and fashion side-by-side, as two forms of self-expressive body art, for when people wear these Chinese characters (on their skin or on their clothes), they communicate to the world something about their identity. It may not matter what these characters are supposed to mean or how they are supposed to be used, as we know that Chinese characters' meanings are malleable and are constantly being morphed.<sup>22</sup> Characters, when treated as visual forms, are waiting for meaning to be given to them. Perhaps, then, by wearing these Chinese characters in unexpected contexts and using them as self-expression, we incidentally breathe new life into them and find new ways of reading these characters to varying degrees of recognition, understanding, and conceptualization.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Mair, "Tattoos as a Means of Communication," *Language Log*, published September 1, 2012, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=4159>. See how the meaning of *wen* 文 has changed, though this phenomenon is present in many other Chinese characters and phrases. It often occurs when other cultures borrow the characters for new meanings, which eventually return to Chinese.

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# Chinese Internet Set Phrases and Their Potential

Zeyao Wu

## INTRODUCTION

Once the number of netizens in China had increased significantly, Internet language was coined and popularized to adapt to their communication needs. Netizens usually use Internet language when they comment on hot news in Bulletin Board Systems (also called BBSes) or chat with their friends using apps. Since 2013, a large number of four-character phrases, such as “*bù míng jué lì* 不明觉厉” (“can’t understand it but believe it is amazing”) and “*lèi jué bù ài* 累觉不爱” (“feeling tired and never love again”) have appeared on the Internet. In a short while, such phrases become widely used by netizens and thus get a lot of attention. A report in *Beijing Daily*<sup>1</sup> mentions that these four-character phrases are labeled as “postmodern set phrases (*Hòu xiàndài chengyu* 后现代成语)” by some people; meanwhile, many netizens believe that these new four-character phrases will become real set phrases in the future. However, linguistic specialists dissent from the view of netizens, and they disagree with categorizing these four-character phrases as set phrases. They believe that equating these phrases with traditional set phrases is untenable because characters in these phrases lose their semantic meanings, and may confuse readers. Furthermore, using these four-character phrases will violate standard language norms and have a negative influence on Chinese usage, especially for young people.

But those who make this argument simply deny that the new words and expressions being produced are following the norms of language development. Language is not static. It inexorably develops and changes all the time, influenced by the development of society, technology or cultural

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<sup>1</sup> The report “Can ‘*Xi da pu ben*’ be categorized as a set phrase?” (“‘喜大普奔’能算成语吗?”) was published in *Beijing Daily* on September 26, 2013.

collaborations just like Internet language. Internet language, used by a large group of netizens, should be taken more seriously. Government authorities and netizens should all maintain a critical altitude towards these four-character phrases rather than completely ban them. My argument is that some of these four-character phrases (which could be called network set phrases) have the potential to become real set phrases, and authorities cannot radically forbid using them in public; instead, it would be useful to standardize the meanings and applications of these Internet set phrases.

## POSTMODERN MYTH

When these four-character phrases get such a pretentious name as “postmodern set phrases,” things become complicated. In the book *Postmodernism*, Kevin Hart traces many different understandings of postmodernism from different authors such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida and concludes that “the word ‘postmodernism’ can mean different things in different contexts, and the most important context is the word to which it refers: ‘modernism’” (Hart 14). The *Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>2</sup> also mentions modernism when defining postmodernism, in that it “represents a departure from modernism.” In *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy*, “postmodernism refers to a diffuse sentiment that humanity can and must go beyond the modern” (Griffin viii). Generally, it is hard to unify the definitions of postmodernism, but one thing that is clear is that postmodernism is related to modernism. Here the question comes down to, what is modernism? According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, modernism is defined as a metanarrative which could legitimate science by offering a totalizing and comprehensive explanation to various things based on the appeal to universal and objective knowledge. Based on this definition, he defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (xxiii). Lyotard argues that metanarratives should be viewed with suspicion since there is no objective and universal truth which can explain things relevant to all people. It is impossible to avoid subjectivity when people interpret the world. Obviously, postmodernists question the existence of a truth that has helped people to build a firm ground of knowledge; what’s more, they “talk too much against the firm ground” (Hart 31). They try to find subjectivity and irrationality in metanarratives to question legitimizations of firm ground, and this

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<sup>2</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/postmodernism>



process can be regarded as a deconstruction. As Griffin mentions in his article, postmodernism is heavily associated with deconstruction.

When it comes to these four-character phrases, the reason for labeling them as postmodern products can be explained in this way: people who believe that these four-character phrases are postmodern may want to signal that they are doing something different from what has already existed as a heady phenomenon (traditional set phrases) for a long time. They attempt to question the "metanarrative" of the set phrase as people usually define it and imply that the content of set phrases is not unchangeable. Additionally, some people who mistakenly believe that postmodernism is all about popular culture may also agree that these new phrases are postmodern since they come from popular culture.

However, it is unreasonable to categorize these four-character phrases as postmodern set phrases. First, set phrases are not modern products, and there is no clear definition of the set phrase. They evolved from ancient stories and have been produced from premodern times. People can only summarize some features of set phrases by long-term observation. What's more, these four-character phrases do not purposely go against basic rules of traditional set phrases and draw a clear line with them. The establishment of so-called postmodern set phrases also does not experience either of the two postmodern processes "deconstructive process" or "reconstructive process." On the contrary, these phrases are coined by netizens accidentally. They are new set phrases rather than "postmodern set phrases." Thirdly, some of the four-character phrases have the potential to become real set phrases. They have the same structures and forming process as traditional set phrases. In brief, it is unpersuasive to call them postmodern set phrases as they do not satisfy the traits of postmodernism. From a linguistic perspective, the result is still the same. Considering the nature of language, we see that languages can have no modernism or postmodernism. Thus, set phrases also have no modernism or postmodernism.

## THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

Language is a communication system; it is not a static, legalized truth. It "sustains and reproduces" ( et al. 2000, 6) society and exists in many styles. In different historical periods, a language exhibits the

distinctive characteristics of its time; “it also offers different ways of speaking and writing appropriate for different occasions” (Moulton 1973, 17). For example, take the use of the word “cappuccino.” It was first used for Capuchin friars in 1525 to describe their brown robes and pointed head coverings. When the Capuchin friars came to Italy, local people named this new group Cappuccino (which combines an Italian word, “cappuccino,” originating from “headscarf,” and Capuchin) to identify this group of people. Later, Italian realized that the color of a kind of coffee mixed with milk is similar to that of the monks’ robes. They named this kind of coffee cappuccino, and now it has become a household name. This example demonstrates that language develops all the time to satisfy the need of naming new objects appearing with the development of society. What’s more, it also shows that one function of language is that it is a tool for people to communicate and share ideas. When you say cappuccino, people who speak English can get your idea. Here, I highlight “people who speak English” because cappuccino is an English word; people who only speak Chinese may not understand it. Language “exists in many different geographical and social varieties” (Moulton 1973, 18). Thus, in Chinese, they also have their own word to signify “cappuccino.” Additionally, in different social groups, people also use different languages. “The lower-class speaker, for whatever reason, is unable to learn middle-class English” (Moulton 1973, 18). Thus, English speakers who live in poor and remote areas and have no chance to get in touch with specialized coffee may also not understand the word “cappuccino.” To sum up, as a vehicle for all people to communicate in society, language that keeps changing should not be categorized in terms of postmodernism or modernism. The development of new languages is not for distinguishing existing languages or deconstructing them; in fact, languages develop following the development of the society and its need for communication. Furthermore, people who cannot understand the Internet set phrases are not unusual, since they may come from a different social group.

From this perspective, designating these four-character phrases as “postmodern” set phrases is unconvincing. Considering the nature of language, it is not hard to understand the emergence of the Internet language and these four-character phrases. The environment of Internet society requires netizens to develop their own communication methods to accommodate the characteristics of Internet communication, such as high efficiency and entertainment. These four-character phrases are the result of a natural development of Internet society, and a tool for all people in Internet society.

Thus, they can be called Internet set phrases. Here, the communicational tool for people in Internet society may explain why linguistic specialists who have never heard these phrases simply believe that Internet language loses any semantic meaning and want go back to the standard language norms. These people are probably not members of the Internet society. Thus, they do not understand the meanings and applications. However, it is still unreasonable to ban something just because people in power do not understand and use them.

## INTERNET LANGUAGE — A SOCIAL TOPOLECT

Language always exists in variants. Basically, there are two kinds of variants – regional variation and social variation. The regional variation of language forms regional topolects. According to Janet Holmes, regional variation develops because people are separated into different “areas where different vocabulary, or grammatical usages or pronunciations occur” (Holmes 1994, 139). While social variation, unlike regional variation (which is used to judge which area people come from), is used to figure out which social group people come from. In the 1950s in England, many pairs of words were used to identify the social groups that the speaker belongs to (Holmes 1994, 148). Basically, a social dialect is used by people who have the same social characteristics. In addition, Wei Wang and Hongqi Wang point out that the second feature of social dialect is that social dialect is also used in particular social situations (Wang et al. 2013, 26).

Therefore, the Internet language, which satisfies these two features, belongs to the category of social topolect. First, according to *The 40th China Statistical Report on Internet Development*, the total number of netizens in June 2017 was 7.51 hundred million. Among them, the main group of netizens is people 10 to 39 years old, accounting for 72.1% of the total. Meanwhile, students occupy the largest proportion, almost 30%. According to the statistics, the main group is students ranging from junior high school to college undergraduates. Internet language thus reflects the features of communication of interest to young netizens, such as entertainment and novelty. For example, netizens will use *gǒu dài* 狗帶 (literally, dog and belt) to express the meaning “I am going to die” because the pronunciation of *gǒu dài* is similar to English “go die.” People in the same social group — Internet

society — will understand them. Young netizens successfully coin new Internet language, which “functions to unite and represent netizens to other groups” (Homles 142).

Second, the Internet language is used on the Internet, a virtual world. Netizens will use their virtual names and hide their real information. In this case, netizens don’t need to think about social circumstances and their relationships with their interlocutors; they don’t even need to think carefully about what or how to communicate. Therefore, Internet language is quite arbitrary, and it is hard to apply these language forms in some formal occasions or informal reunions.

Internet language accords with the characteristics of social dialect. The notification about banning Internet set phrases seems unreasonable because it is banning a social dialect. But the authorities also have their own reasons for banning the Internet set phrases.

#### THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SAPPRFT

On November 27, 2014, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of The People’s Republic of China (SAPPRFT), whose main task is supervising “state-owned enterprises engaged in the television, radio and film industries,” according to Wikipedia, and censoring all materials and content that harm Chinese culture and have a bad influence on society, made an announcement about using national commonly used language and script normatively in TV programs and advertisements. It prohibits all kinds of Internet set phrases in TV programs and advertisements. First, this authority believes that Internet set phrases (especially those that revise one or two character(s) of traditional set phrases — the type of homophonic deviation mentioned below — violate the spirit of inheriting and developing traditional Chinese culture. Second, these non-standard phrases will mislead people, especially juveniles, and have a bad influence on them. Third, random alterations in traditional set phrases will lead to disorder in using set phrases.

According to this announcement, SAPPRFT not only bans the social dialect but also believes that the product of language development violates Chinese traditional culture. In fact, they do not see the value of Internet set phrases is that these phrases have the potential to become real set phrases. What’s more, they ignore the truth that Internet set phrases are also part of Chinese culture. Thus, banning Internet set phrases is indefensible.

To prove this, it is necessary to introduce the different types of Internet set phrases and talk about why they could be understood as set phrases.

#### FOUR STRUCTURES OF INTERNET SET PHRASES

According to the structures of Internet set phrases, they can be divided into two main categories and four branches. The category "new set phrases" only has one type of Internet phrases, which is formed by the abbreviation principle. The other category, "neological set phrases," includes three types of set phrases. All set phrases in this category deviate from traditional set phrases by changing the Chinese characters to English words that have the same pronunciations, by reinterpreting the traditional set phrases, or by substituting some of the Chinese characters with their homophones. In summary:

1. New set phrases
  - Abbreviations
2. Neological set phrases
  - Bilingual phonological deviation
  - Semantic deviation
  - Homophonic substitution

#### NEW SET PHRASES

##### *Abbreviations*

As its name shows, these new set phrases are created by abbreviating a sentence or some phrases that come from social events. The abbreviations have four characters just as the most traditional set phrases have.

Table 1: Abbreviated Internet Set Phrases

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
1.	十动然拒	Shí dòng rán jù	ten move but refuse	Very touching but still to be rejected.  Describes unexpected results.
Origin:		她十分感动，然后拒绝。 She was deeply moved but rejected [it].		
2.	分钟涨姿	Fēnzhōng zhǎng zī	minute hour rise posture	Get some new knowledge in every minute.  Describe an unbelievable situation.
Origin:		分分钟涨了姿（知）势（识）。 Every minute, I learn some new gestures (which has a similar pronunciation to “knowledge” in Chinese).		
3.	为何弃疗	Wèihé qì liáo	for what give up treatment	You had better go to a hospital and treat your illness.  Describes people who have done something stupid.
Origin:		为何放弃治疗？ Why do you give up your treatment?		
4.	细思恐极	Xì sī kǒng jí	tiny think fear pole	When you think about it carefully, it is horrible.  Describes something which seems ordinary but is actually terrible.

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
Origin:		仔细思考发现恐怖之极 Thinking carefully and then realizing it's extremely horrible.		
5.	我伙惊呆了	Wǒ huǒ jīng dāi	I partnership surprise stupid	All people here are stunned.  Describes a thing that is shocking.
Origin:		我和我的小伙伴都惊呆了 I and my friends are all stunned.		
6.	全聚悲始	Quán jù shǐ bēi	all gather tragic start	Social meetings are always the beginning of the sadness.  Describe reunions which are full of comparisons among participators, and "I" have nothing to "show off."
Origin:		全班老同学一起聚会，就是我悲伤的开始。 When the reunion of all the classmates starts, it is the beginning of my sadness.		
7.	喜大普奔	Xǐ dà pǔ bēn	happy big general rush	Describes a piece of exciting news that delights everybody, and people share this news with each other.
Origin:		喜闻乐见，大快人心，普天同庆，奔走相告 Love to see and hear, cheer people greatly, the whole world joins the jubilation, rush about telling the news.		

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
8.	一全自醒	Yī quán zìxǐng	one all from wake	Describes people who are normally busy working, and who really need to sleep when they have a vacation.
Origin:		放假第一天全部用来补充睡眠，睡到自然醒 The first day of the vacation will all be used to catch up on sleep, and people will wake up naturally.		
9.	二全赏剧	Èr quán shǎng jù	two all appreciate drama	Describes a kind of vacation life. After getting enough sleep on the first day, people on the second day will watch the hit show that they did not have time to watch before.
Origin:		放假第二天全部欣赏之前没看完的热播电视剧， The second day of the vacation will all be used to watch some popular TV series which people do not have time to watch normally.		
10.	三全笑堵	Sān xiào quán dǔ	three all laugh block	Describes terrible traffic jams during the vacation. People who don't travel around during the vacation satirize people who have a self-driving tour and are trapped in traffic jams.



No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
Origin:		放假第三天全都用来笑话出去旅游被被大堵车堵塞在路上的人。 The third day of the vacation will be used to laugh at people who travel around and completely get caught in traffic jams.		
11.	不明觉厉	Bù míng jué lì	no understand feel amazing	Describes something that is too complicated.
Origin:		虽然不明白什么意思，但是觉得很厉害 Even though I don't know what you are talking about, it seems amazing.		
12.	男默女泪	Nán mò nǚ lèi	man silent woman tear	Describes something which makes all people feel sad and sympathetic.
Origin:		男人沉默，女人流泪 Men are silent, women cry.		
13.	回困倒睡	Huí kùn dǎo shuì	return sleepy inverted sleep	Describes someone who feels too sleepy.
Origin:		回到宿舍困得不行，于是倒头就睡。 After going back to the dorm, I am too sleepy. Then I fall asleep at once.		
14.	累觉不爱	Lèi jué bù ài	tired feel no love	Too tired to love anyone else. Describes something that people do not have an ability to change but also do not want to accept.
Origin:		很累，感觉自己不会再爱了。 So tired, I feel that I will love no more.		

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
15.	人艰不拆	Rén jiān bù chāi	people difficult no tear down	Life is so hard. Don't nail a lie. Describes a truth that is hard to accept.
Origin:		人生已经如此的艰难，有些事情就不要拆穿了。 Life is very hard, so please don't reveal the truth.		
16.	说闹觉余	Shuō nào jué yú	speak noisy sense surplus	Feel lonely because of being left out by others.
Origin:		其他人有说有笑有打有闹感觉自己很多余。 Others are talking, laughing and having fun together, and I feel I am superfluous.		

### *Bilingual phonological deviation*

This type of Internet set phrase has the obvious trait that it mixes Chinese characters with English words. They derive from traditional set phrases but still keep the original meanings. The only difference between these Internet set phrases and traditional set phrases is that the Chinese characters in the traditional set phrase are replaced by an English word that is pronounced similarly. For instance, in table 2, (No. 1) blow = *bù lòu* (不漏), pour (No. 2) = *pō* (泼) and tour (No. 3) = *tú'ér* (途而). The Chinese characters that are replaced by English words don't have a standardized form. They can be one character, two characters or a phrase. Every traditional set phrase has the potential to become an Internet set phrase, once people set up a phonological relationship between Chinese and English.

This type of set phrase first emerged at the end of 2016. An online celebrity, Papi, tweeted a Weibo (微博), writing “one set phrase: *Bàn tour fèi*. (*Yīgè Chéngyǔ: bàntú'érfèi*. 一个成语：半tour废).” It triggered a heated online engagement at once, and in 2017, this type of phrase had already

become a mainstream expression on the Internet. The number of this type of Internet set phrases is growing very fast. The basic purpose of using this type of net phrase is for entertainment.

Table 2: Bilingual Phonological Deviated Set Phrases

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Original set phrases	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning <sup>3</sup>
1.	滴水 blow	滴水不漏	Dī shuǐ bù lòu	drop water no leak	Make a perfect proof and without any omission
2.	瓢 pour 大雨	瓢泼大雨	Piáo pō dà yǔ	gourd ladle sprinkle big rain	Rain very heavily/downpour
3.	半 tour 废	半途而废	Bàn tú' ér fèi	half way moreover abandon	Drop out halfway/fail to complete something
4.	Mouth 顿开	茅塞顿开	Máo sè dùn kāi	ramie plug pause open	Be suddenly enlightened
5.	生不 rules	生不如死	Sheng bù rú sǐ	life no as death	To live is no better than to die
6.	似懂 freedom	似懂非懂	Sì dǒng fēi dǒng	Seem understand error understand	Not fully understand
7.	贪生 pass	贪生怕死	Tān sheng pà sǐ	greed life fear death	Covet life and fear death

<sup>3</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong Hanyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Original set phrases	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning <sup>3</sup>
8.	藕 dance 连	藕断丝连	ǒu duàn sī lián	lotus root break silk join	The lotus-root snaps but its fibers stay joined — (of lovers) still in contact though apparently separated.
9.	Book 思意	不可思议	Bù kě sī yì	no need think discuss	Beyond belief
10.	Excel 而过	一笑而过	Yī xiào ér guò	one smile moreover pass	Laugh it off
11.	无可 phone 告	无可奉告	Wú kě fèng gào	no need esteem tell	Have nothing to say
12.	心如 dog	心如刀割	Xīn rú dāo gē	heat as knife cut	One's heart felt as if it had been stabbed
13.	Star 皆空	四大皆空	Sì dà jiē kōng	four big all empty	(In Buddhism) All the four elements are void/all is vanity
14.	Gas 神功	盖世神功	Gài shì shén gōng	cover world divinity achievement	Matchless Kung fu
15.	身经 buy 战	身经百战	Shēn jīng bǎi zhàn	body experience hundred wars	Have experienced (or stood the test of) many battles
16.	有 bear 而来	有备而来	Yǒu bèi ér lái	have preparation moreover come	Well prepared

*Semantic deviation*

This type of Internet set phrase doesn't change anything except for the idiomatic meaning. Thus, it could be regarded as a reinterpretation of traditional set phrases. The characteristic of this kind of set phrases is that literally, they are hard to understand, or they could be explained in many ways because some of the characters have many different meanings. For instance, the character *nián* of the No. 2 set phrase *Dù rì rú nán* (度日如年) in table 3 has two meanings — year or Chinese spring festival. If readers don't know the set phrase's provenance and original expression (used to express a hard life), they may easily interpret it in at least two ways — "pass days as if they were years" and "live every day like Chinese Spring festival." We can demonstrate this trait again with No. 7, *Jiàn yì sī qiān* (见异思迁). *Sī* could be a verb, thing or a noun, thought and idea. Therefore, "*sī qiān*" could be interpreted as "the change of a thought" or "think to leave."

No. 3, *Bēi shuǐ chē xīn* (杯水车薪) is a set phrase which cannot be understood literally. The literal meaning is "a cup for *bēi*," water for *shuǐ*" "a car for *chē*" and "faggots or salary for *xīn*." These four characters — cup, water, car, and salary or faggots — could be interpreted and connected in thousands of different ways, if people don't know its backstory: that a woodman tried to put out a burning cartload of faggots with a cup of water but failed. Literally, there is no word to imply that the relationship between water and faggots is using water to put out burning faggots. Therefore, in reinterpretation, netizens reestablish their relationship (and also use other meanings of the character) to express a new meaning. No. 3, *Bēi shuǐ chē xīn* (杯水车薪) now becomes "drinking water for *bēi shuǐ*" and "the salary which could afford a car for *chē xīn*" (here, the meaning of *chē* also changes from "a cartload of" to "a car"), and the meaning becomes: that people only need to drink a cup of water during their work, but they could earn high monthly income with which to afford a car.

Table 3: Semantic deviated Internet set phrases.

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>4</sup>	Reinterpretation
1.	稍纵即逝	Shāo zòng jí shì	slightly/a little vertical/indulge be/reach/mean pass/die	fleeting	Someone who had been weak died after a slight jump.
2.	度日如年	Dù rì rú nián	limit day as year	Every day appears like a year in length.	Live every day like the Chinese New Year.
3.	杯水车薪	Bēi shuǐ chē xīn	cup water car firewood/salary	Use a cup of water to put out a cartload of burning firewood.	The daily task is drinking water, but the salary could afford a car.
4.	知足常乐	Zhī zú cháng lè	know foot always happy/music	Happiness lies in contentment.	Feel happy knowing someone wants to invite me to have a foot massage.
5.	有机可乘	Yǒu jī kě chéng	have opportunity need ride/multiply	There is a crack to wedge oneself into.	(Always) can take a flight (when going to other places).
6.	才高八斗	Cái gāo bā dòu	ability/just now tall eight fight/bucket	To have profound learning	Someone is only eight-bucket high. Describes someone who is short.

<sup>4</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong chengyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>4</sup>	Reinterpretation
7.	见异思迁	Jiàn yì sī qiān	view different think move	Be inconstant or irresolute	Seeing a good-looking member of the opposite sex, he or she wants to move to live with this person.
8.	三心二意	Sān xīn'èr yì	three heart two meaning	Half-hearted	Three hearts: Compassion, confidence, responsibility; two minds: creative and making others satisfied.
9.	不学无术	Bù xué wú shù	no learn nothing/without method	Know nothing	Don't learn useless things.
10.	夫唱妇随	Fū chàng fù suí	husband sing woman/wife follow	The husband to sing and the wife to follow — domestic harmony	The husband goes to the nightclub, and then the wife follows him furtively.
11.	江郎才尽	Jiāng láng cái jìn	river man talent/just now all/exhaust	To have used up one's literary talent or energy	There is a young man near the river who just committed a suicide.

No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>4</sup>	Reinterpretation
12.	语重心长	Yǔ zhòng xīn cháng	language heavy heart long	Offer weighty advice	Someone says rude words. I remember them for a long time in my heart.
13.	何足挂齿	Hé zú guàchǐ	what foot hitch/hang tooth	Not worth mentioning at all	What kind of feet will have teeth.
14.	开门见山	Kāi mén jiàn shān	open door see mountain	Speak out to the point.	People who live in the countryside can see the mountain when opening the window.
15.	耳目一新	Ěr mù yī xīn	ear eye one new	All is new before one's eyes.	Women who just finish facial massage feel fresh.
16.	来龙去脉	Lái lóng qù mài	come dragon go pulse	Sequence of events (or actions)	Someone coming as a dragon (but) only has one tendon left when leaving.
17.	日理万机	Rì lǐ wàn jī	day reason/manage myriad change/organic	Too busy with a packed schedule every day	Someone needs to repair almost 10,000 machines in one day.
18.	多愁善感	Duō chóu shàn gǎn	many/much anxious kind/good sense	To be always in grief and prone to illness	People who often feel sad more easily catch a cold.



No.	Internet set phrases (Chéngyǔ)	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>4</sup>	Reinterpretation
19.	斯文扫地	Sī wén sǎo dì	this/then culture/literary sweep/besom floor	Disgrace one's scholarly dignity	Sweep the floor gracefully.

### *Homophonic deviation*

In this type of Internet set phrase, one (or two) characters is (are) replaced by their homophone(s). The prototype set phrases in this category have clear literal meanings, and the altered characters are ideographic so that they suggest the new meanings of the Internet set phrases. Thus, even though one or two characters are altered in these traditional set phrases, readers can still directly catch the new meaning with the altered characters. For example, “ké (咳, cough) in No. 1 means “cough,” and “qī (妻, wife)” in No. 2 relates to a wife. Considering this feature, this type of Internet set phrase is mostly used in advertisements because it can directly and obviously introduce the products or their functions in new set phrases. For instance, ké (咳, cough) in No. 1 implies the medicine for a cough; “wén (蚊 mosquito) in No. 5 implies the product which repels mosquitos. As for other set phrases, which are not used for advertisements, they also have strong suggestibility. The altered homophones are the key point of the Internet set phrases.

Table 4: Homophonic Substitution Internet Net Phrases

No.	Internet set phrases Chéngyǔ	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meanings <sup>5</sup>	New meaning
1.	“咳”不容缓 (刻)	“Ké” bù róng huǎn (kè)	“cough” no appearance/allow postpone/relaxed (carve)	Make it all the more urgent	The therapy of a cough cannot wait. (An advertisement for cough medicine.)
2.	郎才女貌 (才)	Láng “cái” nǚ mào (cái)	man “wealth” woman appearance (ability/talent)	A perfect match between a man and a woman	A perfect match between the money of a man and the beauty of a woman. (Implying that beautiful women always want to date rich men.)

<sup>5</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong chengyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

No.	Internet set phrases Chéngyǔ	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meanings	New meaning
3.	随心所欲” 浴” (欲)	Suí xīn suǒ “yù”(yù)	follow heart place/those/that “bath” (desire)	Follow what the heart desires	1. Go to the bath center and take a massage whenever they want. (Implying some leaders who have a corrupt life.) 2. Take a shower whenever you want. (Advertisement for a bathtub.)
4.	“骑”乐 无穷 (其)	“Qí” lè wúqióng (qí)	“ride” laugh nothing poor (he/its/that)	Joy is boundless.	Riding a bike is boundless fun. (Advertisement for a bicycle.)
5.	默默无” 蚊” (闻)	Mò mò wú “wén”(wén)	silent silent nothing “mosquito” (hear/smell/news/reputation)	Of no reputation	Silent and no mosquito. (Advertisement for an insecticide.)

No.	Internet set phrases Chéngyǔ	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meanings	New meaning
6.	步步 糕”升 (高)	Bù bù “gāo” shēng (gāo)	step step “cake” liter (tall)	Be promoted step by step	Cakes will be promoted step by step. (Advertisement for cakes.)
7.	“衣衣” 不舍 (依 依)	“Yī yī” bù shě (yī yī)	“clothes clothes” no abandon (depend depend)	Be reluctant to part	Cannot stand laying down the clothes. (Advertisement for clothes.)
8.	万”室” 俱备 (事)	wàn “shì” jù bèi (shì)	myriad “room” device prepare (thing/matter)	Everything is ready.	All rooms are prepared. (Advertisement for an apartment.)
9.	“礼”所 当然 (理)	“lǐ” suǒ dāngrán (lǐ)	“gift” place/that/those when/equal but/right (reason/idea)	It stands to reason.	Gifts are necessary. (Implying the gift- giving phenomenon.)
10.	“闲”妻 良母 (贤)	“xián” qī liáng mǔ (xián)	“leisure” wife fine mother (virtuous)	(An ideal type of womanhood) as an understanding wife and loving mother	Leisured wife and a good mother. (Advertisement for a washing machine.)

No.	Internet set phrases Chéngyǔ	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meanings	New meaning
11.	闻"机" 起舞 (鸡)	wén "jī" qǐwǔ (jī)	news/smell/hear "machine" rise dance (cock)	Rise up upon hearing the crow of a rooster and practice with the sword	Rise up upon hearing the sound of a computer game and play it. (Advertisement for a computer game.)
12.	领"鲜" 一步 (先)	lǐng "xiān" yībù (xiān)	lead "fresh" one step (before/earlier)	Keep one step ahead	Always being fresher. (Advertisement for seafood supermarket.)
13.	好色之" 涂" (徒)	hàosè zhī "tú"(tú)	like/interested in color this/go "smear" (apprentice)	lecher	High quality paint with good color. (Advertisement for paints.)
14.	择"油" 录用 (优)	Zé "yóu" lùyòng (yōu)	Pick "oil" hire fetch (excellent)	Enroll those who are outstanding.	Choose the one who gives more bribery. (Implying officers who make a decision by comparing bribes given by competitors.)

No.	Internet set phrases Chéngyǔ	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meanings	New meaning
15.	“饮”以 为荣 (引)	“Yǐn “yǐwéi róng (yǐn)	“drink” use/according to become glory (lead)	To take it as a great honor.	Proud of drinking alcohol. (Implying the phenomenon that government officials always solve problems by drinking alcohol.)
16.	一”捞” 永逸 (劳)	Yī “lāo “yǒng yì (láo)	One “gain” always leisure (work)	Put things right once and for all.	Use a wrongful method to get a large amount of money that is enough for the rest of life. (Implying officials who earn too much illegal money.)
17.	知书达” 礼” (理)	Zhī shū dá “lǐ” (lǐ)	know book reach “present” (principle)	To be well educated and a model of propriety	It is not enough to learn knowledge from books. You should also learn to “present gifts.” (Implying the gift- giving phenomenon.)

No.	Internet set phrases Chéngyǔ	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meanings	New meaning
18.	先斩后 揍” (奏)	Xiān zhǎn hòu “zòu” (zòu)	first cut later/offspring “beat” (play music)	To behead sb. first then make all known to the Emperor — to act first and report afterward	Kill a person first and then beat him. (Implying people who always do things in a wrong order.)
19.	下”步” “违”例 (不) (为)	Xià “bù”“wéi” lì (bù)(wèi)	descend/below “step” “disobey” example (no) (become/by)	Not to do it again	Next step, destroy the regulations. (Implying that government officials always disobey laws and regulations to satisfy their own desires.)

## DEFINITION OF THE INTERNET SET PHRASES AND THEIR POTENTIAL

Obviously, most of the set phrases listed above have four characters. So we might ask, does this mean that all four-character phrases can be categorized as set phrases? Of course not. Why, then, should these Internet four-character phrases be named as set phrases?

In the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, *chengyu* (成语) is defined as “Idiom: concise and meaningful phrases or short sentences that have been in long public usage. Most Chinese idioms have

a historical origin and consist of four Chinese characters. The meanings of some are obvious ... but some can be understood only by knowing their sources, or the stories behind them” (248). On account of the traits in this definition, translating *chengyu* as idiom seems unspecific because idioms could mean different things in Chinese such as idiomatic phrases (*guan yong yu*, 惯用语), set phrases (*chengyu*, 成语) or colloquialisms (*tuhua* 土话). Idiomatic phrases and topolects cannot satisfy the definition of *chengyu*. Therefore, *chengyu* that are clearly characterized by being written phrases having historical origins, clear meaning, and four characters should be translated as “set phrases,” as distinguished from idiomatic phrases, a form of spoken language with three characters and other forms. The book *The Sea of the Characters and Phrases* also describes *chengyu* as set phrases that have four characters mostly, different sources and various forms (Xia 2003, 122).

From these two definitions, we can see some clear criteria defining set phrases, and the most obvious one is the fixed length of four characters. Even though set phrases do not only include four-character phrases, “set phrases of four characters occupy 95% of the total, the largest proportion of all” (Wang et al. 2013, 305), according to the Chinese Idiom Knowledge Base (CIKB). Thus, the four-character structure is the most obvious criterion of set phrases. The Internet set phrases I have collected are all four-character phrases except for bilingual phonologically deviated set phrases, which do not have four characters but have four syllables. Thus, most of the Internet set phrases accord with the obvious rule — four characters — of traditional set phrases. Furthermore, Internet set phrases also satisfy other criteria of traditional set phrases, such as fixed forms, having sources, and having the potential to satisfy the criterion of long-term use. Considering the categories of Internet set phrases, the new set phrase is the best type to analyze since they are created by netizens. Most of the neological set phrases are derived from traditional set phrases and their features as Internet set phrases are not apparent.

*Internet set phrases have the same fixed forms as traditional set phrases*

“One prominent feature of set phrases is fixed syntactic structure” (qtd. in Li et al., 2016, 1679). Degao Li, Yu Zhang and Xiaolu Wang divide Chinese set phrases into seven categories according to their different syntactic structures, such as “subject-verb units (SVs), verb-object units (VOs), the structure of modifications (SMs)” and so on. Comparing Internet set phrases with traditional set phrases, it is



easy to find out that Internet abbreviated set phrases still follow these syntactic structures of traditional set phrases.

*Verb-verb syntactic structure:*

In this category, the four characters could be divided into two two-character verb phrases. Table 5 illustrates some of the traditional set phrases that are structured with two verb phrases, and table 6 illustrates Internet set phrases that have the same structure. Table 7 gives a comparison that proves that Internet set phrases have the same fixed syntactic structure verb-verb as that of traditional set phrases.

Table 5: Verb-verb Syntactic Structure of Traditional Set Phrases.

No.	Internet set phrases Verb-verb structure	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>6</sup>
1	玩(verb)物-丧(verb) 志	wán wù sàng zhì	Play objects mourning/lose will	Riding a hobby saps one's will to make progress.
2	三思(verb)-而行 (verb)	sān sī ér xíng	Three think moreover behavior	To think thrice before you act.
3	浅尝(verb)-辄止 (verb)	qiǎn cháng zhé zhǐ	Shallow taste usually stop	To have just a tiny sip of sth.

Table 6: Verb-verb Syntactic Structure of Internet Set Phrases.

No. 1 in table 1	十(adv.)动(v.)-然(adv.)拒(v.)	Shí dòng rán jù
No. 4 in table 1	细(adv.)思(v.)-恐(v.)极(adv.)	Xì sī kǒng jí
No. 11 in table 1	不(aux.)明(v.)-觉(v.)厉(adj)	Bù míng jué lì

<sup>6</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong chengyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

No. 13 in table 1	回(v.)困(adj.)-倒(v.)睡(v.)	Huí kùn dào shuì
No. 15 in table 1	人(n.)艰(v.)-不(aux.)拆(v.)	Rén jiān bù chāi
No. 16 in table 1	说(v.)闹(v.)-觉(v.)余(adj.)	Shuō nào jué yú

In the Internet set phrases, the four characters in *Shí dòng rán jù* (十动然拒) coincide exactly with the characters in the traditional set phrases *sān sī ér xíng* (三思而行).

Table 7: A Comparison between the Traditional Set Phrase and the Internet Set Phrase.

十 Shí (number, adv.)	动 dòng (verb)	然 rán (adv. then)	拒 jù (verb)
三 sān (number, adv.)	思 sī (verb)	而 ér(adv. then)	行 xíng(verb)

*Subject-verb syntactic structure:*

In this category, the four characters could be divided into two two-character phrases — one subject phrase and one verb phrase.

Table 8: Subject-verb Syntactic Structure of Traditional Set Phrases.

No.	Internet set phrases subject-verb structure	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>7</sup>
No. 1	夜郎 (subject)- 自大 (stative verb)	yè láng zì dà	Night man (here yelang indicates a name of a state) from/self big	Yelang think too highly of itself. Extremely arrogant.
No. 2	学海 (subject)- 无涯 (stative verb)	xué hǎi wú yá	Learn ocean nothing limit	Knowledge is boundless.

<sup>7</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong chengyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

The Internet set phrase *wǒ huǒ jīng dāi* 我伙惊呆 (No. 5 in table 1) belongs to this category. The first two characters “*wǒ huǒ* 我伙” means “*wo he wode xiaohuoban* 我和我的小伙伴 my friends and I,” and it is a noun phrase. The last two characters “*jīng dāi* 惊呆” work as a stative verb to describe the situation of the noun phrase. This Internet set phrase *wǒ huǒ jīng dāi* 我伙惊呆 has the same syntactic structure as *yè láng zì dà* (夜郎自大).

Table 9: A Comparison between the Traditional Set Phrase and the Internet Set Phrase.

我伙 <i>wǒ huǒ</i> (noun phrase, people)	惊呆 <i>jīng dāi</i> (stative verb)
夜郎 <i>yè láng</i> (noun phrase, a place)	自大 <i>zì dà</i> (stative verb)

*Subject-verb and subject-verb syntactic structure:*

In this category, the four characters could be divided into two subject-verb phrases.

Table 10: Subject-verb and Subject-verb Syntactic Structure of Sraditional Set Phrases.

No.	Internet set phrases subject-verb and subject-verb structure	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>8</sup>
No. 1	柳 (subject) 暗 (verb)- 花(subject)明(verb)	liǔ àn huā míng	Willow dark flowers bright	There is always light at the end of the tunnel.
No. 2	风 (subject) 吹 (verb)- 雨(subject)打(verb)	fēng chuī yǔ dǎ	Wind blow rain beat	Exposed to the wind and rain.

<sup>8</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong chengyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

Table 11: Two Subject-verb Syntactic Structure of Internet Set Phrases.

No. 6 in table 1	全(subject)聚(verb)-悲(subject)始(verb)	Quán jù shǐ bēi
No. 12 in table 1	男(subject)默(verb)-女(subject)泪(verb)	Nán mò nǚ lèi

*Structure of modification:*

In this category, the four characters could be divided into two phrases — one modifier and one kernel. The kernel could be a noun phrase or a verb phrase. In table 12, there are two traditional set phrases with verb kernels.

Table 12: Modification Structure of Traditional Set Phrases

No.	Internet set phrases Structure of modification	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Original idiomatic meaning <sup>9</sup>
No. 1	乘虚(adjunct nucleus verb) 而入(kernel: head nucleus verb)	chéng xū ér rù	Ride/multiple humble/empty moreover income	Take advantage of a weak point.
No. 2	与日(adv)俱增 (kernel: verb)	yǔ rì jù zēng	And/with day altogether increase	Multiply daily.

Table 13: Modification Structure of Internet Set Phrases

No.2 in table 1	分钟(adv.)涨姿(kernel: verb)	Fēnzhōng zhǎng zī
No. 3 in table 1	为何(adv.)弃疗(kernel: verb-object )	Wèihé qì liáo
No. 8 in table 1	一(adverbial of time)全(adv.)自(adv.)醒 (kernel: verb)	Yī quán zìxǐng

<sup>9</sup> Idiomatic meanings quoted from *A Dictionary of Commonly Used Chinese Idioms with English Translation Han-Ying shuangjie changyong chengyu cidian* 汉英双解常用成语词典 written by Menghui Cheng 程孟辉.

No. 9 in table 1	二(adverbial of time)全(adv.)赏剧(kernel: verb-object)	Èr quán shǎng jù
No. 10 in table 1	三(adverbial of time)全(adv.)笑堵(kernel: verb-object)	Sān quán xiào dǔ

In this category, the modifiers could be an adverb or an adjective, and they are used to modify the kernel. The Internet set phrase *Fēnzhōng zhǎng zī* (分钟涨姿) has the same syntactic structure as *yǔ rì jù zēng* (与日俱增).

Table 14: A Comparison between the Traditional Set Phrase and the Internet Set Phrase.

分钟 fēnzhōng (adverbial of time)	涨姿 zhǎng zī (verb-object)
与日 yǔ rì (adverbial of time)	俱增 jù zēng (adv-verb)

Syntactic comparisons between Internet set phrases and traditional set phrases indicate that it is unreasonable to conclude that Internet set phrases violate the grammatical structure of traditional set phrases. In fact, there are many overlaps between their grammatical structures.

#### *The sources of Internet set phrases*

Another trait of traditional set phrases is that “they have historicity” (Liu and Liu 2007, 40) which means people can find their origins. Liu applies this rule to distinguish set phrases with four-character common sayings for which the idiomatic meaning of a set phrase is not predictable, while meanings of four-character common sayings are clear and obvious. People can understand four-character common sayings without checking their provenances, but they cannot understand a set phrase if they do not read its backstory. For instance, “*Zìyóu fàngrèn* 自由放任” means free and indulgent, and readers could understand this phrase from its literal meaning. Thus, it could not be categorized as a set phrase. However, for the set phrase “*Sān gù máo lú* 三顾茅庐” (“calling thrice at the thatched cottage”), people may only get the literal meaning that someone visits a cottage for three times if they do not know its backstory. In fact, it comes from a story in *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (*Sānguó yǎnyì*), talking about how Liu Bei asked Zhuge Liang to “come out from his seclusion and assist Liu Bei in

running the government” (Situ 1998, 27) three times, and finally touched Zhuge Liang because of his sincerity. With this backstory, this set phrase is used to “describe the sincerity in enlisting the service of a man of talent” (Situ 1998, 27). Obviously, idiomatic meanings of set phrases is based on their backstories, and that is why there are many books about set phrase histories (*Chéngyǔ gùshì* 成语故事), which include all the provenances of set phrases. Provenances may be historical events, fables, and literature. Thus, it is necessary to examine the origins of these Internet four-character phrases to find out whether these phrases qualify as set phrases.

The earliest ancestor of the Internet set phrases is *Shí dòng rán jù* (十动然拒), which first emerged in 2013.

*Shí dòng rán jù* (十动然拒)

Source: On November 11, 2012, a man sent a 160,000-character love letter which was written in 212 days as a gift to the girl he liked. This love letter contains poems, prose pieces and many genres focusing on their stories. The girl was very moved when she got this love letter, but she still rejected this man.

Annotation: The result of the story seems abnormal and funny, immediately causing a heated discussion online. The Internet set phrase “*Shí dòng rán jù* (十动然拒)” which originally describes the attitude of the girl gradually becomes a popular phrase to describe abnormal results. Netizens also use this Internet set phrase to satirize an unexpected attitude.

*Wǒ huǒ jīng dāi* (我伙惊呆)

Source: On November 14, 2012, a netizen called “Su Yinheng” posted a picture about a composition written by a primary school student. The topic of this composition is “the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival,” and this primary school student made up an incredible story ending with a sentence “after listening to this story, my friends and I are all stunned.”

Annotation: when netizens read this composition, they felt that they were also stunned because they cannot believe a primary school student could make up such a crazy story. Afterward,

netizens started to use the set phrase *Wǒ huǒ jīng dāi* (我伙惊呆了) to describe and satirize unbelievable things.

*Rén jiān bù chāi* (人艰不拆)

Source: It comes from a popular song named "Tell a Lie (Shuohuang 说谎)" which is sung by Youjia Lin, and the most popular part of the lyric is "Do not say that I tell a lie. Life is so hard, so do not expose anything. (*Bieshuo wo shuohuang, rensheng yijing rucide jiannan, youxie shiqing jiu buyao chaochuan* 别说我说谎，人生已经如此的艰难，有些事情就不要拆穿)"

Annotation: "Tell a Lie" was a really popular song in 2011, and everyone who knew this song could hum this famous part. Gradually, netizens came to use this set phrase to describe bad things that they don't want to know. It gradually became an ironic phrase to describe tragic situations that they do not want to face.

*Lèi jué bù ài* (累觉不爱)

Source: On December 8, 2011,<sup>10</sup> a young boy who was born in 1998 talked about his love life in Douban (a popular Chinese BBS). He said that as a bachelor and "an old man" who was born in 1998, he was too tired to love anything.

Annotation: This post aroused heated debate, and netizens laughed at his naïve remark. Many netizens first used this set phrase to satirize this young boy. Later it became a phrase to describe a mode of helplessness.

Other Internet set phrases, such as *Yī quán zìxǐng* (一全自醒), *Èr quán shǎng jù* (二全赏剧), *Sān quán xiào dǔ* (三全笑堵) also have origins. They arise because of the Chinese National Day and its three-day break. These three set phrases describe the holiday life of young Chinese people in that they always catch up on sleep on the first day, watch the soap opera on the second day and laugh at people who make a self-driving tour and trap themselves in serious traffic jams on the third day since

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10. This is the original post: <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/23952704/>

all visitors need to go back home on the third day, the last of their break. These three Internet set phrases embody a popular lifestyle of young people.

These examples successfully prove that Internet set phrases not only satisfy the structural feature of traditional set phrases — four characters, — but also satisfy the content feature of the traditional set phrases that they all are derived from backstories. Thus, they have the potential to become traditional set phrases. We may reckon that today's Internet set phrases will be tomorrow's traditional set phrases, and it means that traditional set phrases may be a kind of "Internet set phrases" at the time when they were created. People did not have Internet in the past, but they had "other nets." For example, the traditional set phrase "*bǎng shàng wú míng* 榜上无名" ("Fail in an examination") was written by Menglong Feng in the Ming dynasty. It complains about the failure of the exam. The author's helpless mode is like the Internet set phrase "*quán jù shǐ bēi* 全聚悲始." After he wrote this phrase, it was quoted by many scholars who had the same experience as he did, and this set phrase was spread. Nowadays, students who fail an exam will also use this set phrase. This set phrase was spread by scholars and then gained a long-term public use. Actually, long-term public use is the third trait of traditional set phrases.

#### *Life of Internet set phrases*

The first Internet set phrase appeared in 2013, so it only has a history of four years, but the formative period of traditional set phrases can be traced back to the pre-Qin period (Chen and Liu 2014, 34). Thus, the formation of set phrases will take a long time, from its first emergence with a backstory to its possible extensive use. However, nobody could define the length of "a long time" because set phrases are created at different times. For example, the traditional set phrase "*Bù chǐ xià wèn* 不耻下问" ("never feel embarrassed to ask and learn from lesser people"), which comes from *The Analects of Confucius*, has a more than 2000-year history; while the set phrase "*wén shān huì hǎi* 文山会海" ("too much paperwork and meetings to attend to") first comes up in 1988 and has been used for only thirty years. From this perspective, Internet set phrases may become real set phrases after a thirty-year application. In fact, there is no clear standard about time to define set phrases, but it is clear that Internet set phrases cannot become real set phrases at once when they appear.



*Potential of neological set phrases*

According to the criteria of traditional set phrases, it is not hard to prove that Internet four-character phrases can be categorized as Internet set phrases, and they also have the potential to become real set phrases. However, when it comes to the neological set phrases, can these nonstandardly altered set phrases or reinterpreted Internet set phrases replace the original set phrases and become the real set phrases? In fact, there have already been some examples of changing the official meanings of traditional set phrases.

Set phrase: 空穴来风 (*kōng xué lái fēng*)

Literal meaning: vacancy/empty hole/cave come wind

Source: Song Yu replied, saying, "I have heard from my teacher that bent woods attract birds to make nests. An empty hole invites the wind." It was selected from *Ode to the Wind*, written by Song Yu.

Annotation: "*kōng xué lái fēng* 空穴来风" which is translated as "wind comes from the hollow cave" is originally used to describe the fact that there must be some reason for the spreading of news and rumors. But after a long time of misuse, in the sixth edition of *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, the editors added a new meaning that refers to groundless news and rumors because many people mistranslate it as "the cave will never have wind. Thus, when people say the caves have wind, they may tell something unreal."

This new meaning is totally different from its original meaning. The original meaning implies that news and rumors have a certain authenticity; while the new meaning implies fake rumors.

Set phrase: 呼之欲出 (*hū zhī yù chū*)

Literal meaning: exhale this desire come

Source: It comes from the poem which was written by Su Shi in Song dynasty. The set phrase was selected from the sentence "the picture seems that Shuxian is here, and when I call him, he may come out from the picture" (*Shuxian zai yan, hu zhi yu chu*).

Annotation: “*hū zhī yù chū* 呼之欲出” which means “something is really vivid, and it seems to come out at one’s call” is used to describe a lifelike image. But after a long time of misuse, in the sixth edition of *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, the editors added a new meaning which refers to things that will be unveiled at once because many people mistranslated it as “something is almost there.”

These two examples illustrate that the meaning of traditional set phrases can be changed. When people keep the wrong understanding and use it widely for a long time, it has potential to become the right meaning, and so does semantic deviation form in neological set phrases. When people use reinterpretations for a long time, these new meanings of Internet set phrases will have the potential to replace the original meanings of traditional set phrases. Lijuan Gao pointed out that the regulation of set phrases should adapt to how people use them. It is not necessary to overemphasize the origins of the set phrases but ignore the development of set phrases. From this perspective, neological set phrases could become real set phrases.

#### THE IRRATIONALITY OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SAPPFT

According to the analysis above, the arguments of authorities that these phrases do not have linguistic value and that they do not conform to standard language norms are unpersuasive. These Internet set phrases are the inheritance and the development of traditional set phrases. They preserve the traditional four-character structure, follow the fixed forms of traditional set phrases, and connect with Chinese popular culture. However, as I have mentioned, the development of languages is influenced by society. The SAPPFT, which believes that Internet set phrases violate the traditional Chinese culture, does not realize that the society cannot keep on being traditional forever. Therefore, languages also cannot be kept “traditional” all the time. Society is changing, and languages are changing. The Internet language shows characteristics of language in our time. Thus, Internet set phrases possess great research value as people can not only learn features of set phrases but also learn features of Internet languages such as “the principle of economy” (qtd. in Zhao 2003, 16), characteristic of entertainment and irony.

Second, SAPPFT argues that Internet set phrases have a bad influence on standard language and mislead people, especially young children. This would make sense only in the case that people

don't know what the standard language is. If that were to happen, all kinds of language forms have potential to mislead people, such as topolects, slangs, and argots, and would need to be banned. Internet language is a social dialect, and the authority overseeing Chinese language would do better to standardize the place of Internet language and help people to understand the differences between Internet language and other languages. People who understand the difference between written language and spoken language will not apply spoken language in formal writing. Thus, when people learn the differences between Internet language and formal language, they will understand that Internet language should be used online. In formal situations, Internet language is not allowed to appear. With the right guidance, people may even learn more about the semantic meanings of Chinese characters from Internet set phrases rather than being misled by them. For instance, by comparing "*Zhī shū dá lǐ* 知书达理" (No. 17 in table 4) and *Zhī shū dá lǐ* (知书达礼), students could understand the difference between two homophonic characters. With further explanations about the sources, students can remember the right character in the traditional set phrase. Learning Internet set phrases can enlarge their vocabulary. In fact, banning the use of Internet set phrases in public will not stop people seeing them. From this perspective, banning them will also not prevent the influence of these Internet set phrases on people and especially on juveniles.

Third, SAPPFT believes that random alterations in traditional set phrases will lead to a division of culture and a disorder of language. In fact, there is no random alteration, which means that all alterations are suggestive. The advertising slogan of Shanxi tourism "*Jìn shàn jìn měi* 晋善晋美" which derives from the traditional set phrase "*Jìn shàn jìn měi* 尽善尽美" is a good example.

Table 15. A Change from Traditional Set Phrase Using Homophones

	Internet set phrases	Pinyin	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
	Chéngyǔ			
Traditional set phrase	尽善尽美	Jìn shàn jìn měi	All good all beautiful	To perfection
Internet set phrase	晋善晋美	Jìn shàn jìn měi	Another name of Shanxi Province good another name of Shanxi Province beautiful	Shanxi Province has nice people and beautiful scenery.

The Internet set phrase changes two characters of traditional set phrases with homophones. As an advertisement, it exposes the main idea, introducing Shanxi province as having nice people and beautiful scenery. The four-character structure is also more powerful and memorable than a long sentence. What's more, the name Jin (晋) of Shanxi province also has a long history. It came from the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). At that time, Jin was the name of a state, and its capital and main territory were all in today's Shanxi Province. Thus, Shanxi also has the name Jin. From this perspective, the Internet set phrase does not bring disorder to the language, and it even includes knowledge of history. The structure of the phrase also exposes the simplicity and concision of Chinese.

## CONCLUSION

Authorities have to face the fact that with the wide dissemination of Internet, more and more people will become netizens and share the same social topolect — Internet language. Thus, it is unreasonable to simply overlook or ban Internet language. As an important part of Internet language, Internet set phrases, which are created by netizens but inherit the four-character structure of traditional set phrases, also deserve to be studied seriously.

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The Power of Language:  
Ha Jin's Sensuous Representation of China's Past in *Waiting*

Wanyue Yang

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I seek to explore the extent to which and the ways in which indigenous Chinese experience can be represented and recreated in the Chinese American diaspora literature. I am curious about the ways in which writers could bring to life the authentic Chinese lived experience through the English language. I am also interested in the degree to which non-Chinese readers could comprehend these writings and the degree to which these readers might even “live through” these experiences by way of the reading process.

Guided by Tove Solander's work regarding literature and perception, I single out Ha Jin, a contemporary Chinese American diasporic writer, as my case study.<sup>1</sup> Ha Jin deserves special attention among his contemporaries in that he is the only writer who writes in English but whose works are almost exclusively about China and indigenous Chinese lives.

For this paper, I focus on Ha Jin's novel *Waiting* (2000) as the primary material on which to conduct an in-depth analysis. Despite the fact that Ha Jin's *Waiting* remains very controversial even today, I argue that this novel in particular successfully represents and recreates the authentic Chinese experience in the English language.<sup>2</sup> This is achieved through Ha Jin's meticulous attention to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ha Jin 哈金 is the pseudonym of Jin Xuefei 金雪飛 (1956– ). “Ha” comes from Jin Xuefei's best-loved city, Harbin. “Jin” comes from his surname. Ha Jin was born in Liaoning, China, emigrated to the United States in the 1990s, and is currently Professor of English at Boston University.

<sup>2</sup> More details about the reception of and controversies regarding Ha Jin's work can be found in Belinda Kong, “The

sensations of the Chinese experience, which this paper explores and discusses in detail in the following sections.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before proceeding with a close analysis of the novel, however, I will articulate in this section the theoretical foundation on which such an analysis is built. In *“Creating the Senses”: Sensation in the Work of Shelley Jackson* (2013), Tove Solander suggests that literature and perception are in fact interrelated. Although Solander uses the works of Shelley Jackson as her primary material, I argue that Solander’s theories and methodologies could also be applied to the appreciation of the works of Ha Jin.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in what follows, I will summarize the research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology used in Solander’s work. I will then elucidate the ways in which it can shed fresh light on our reading of Ha Jin’s oeuvre.

### TOVE SOLANDER ON LITERATURE AND PERCEPTION

The driving question behind Solander’s research is: what are the ways in which Shelley Jackson achieves “body writing,” which not merely concerns the body thematically, but also adopts a “bodily” style, and “seems to address the body of the reader ... more than most forms of writing”?<sup>4</sup> In order to address this, Solander turns to the “sense impressions and the literary techniques used to evoke them.”<sup>5</sup> Her argument is that “references to the senses and to sensory qualities” serve to create what she terms “phantom sensations.”<sup>6</sup> The “phantom sensations,” in turn, contribute to “the experience of

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Aporetic Square: Ha Jin’s *The Crazy*,” in *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square: the Chinese Literary Diaspora and the Politics of Global Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 120–135.

<sup>3</sup> Shelley Jackson (born 1963) is a contemporary American writer and multimedia artist.

<sup>4</sup> Tove Solander, *“Creating the Senses”: Sensation in the Work of Shelley Jackson*, Umea Studies in Language & Literature (Book 18) (Umea: Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, 2013), PDF, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> By “phantom” Solander does not mean to suggest “a phantom of something; literary phantom sensations as vague and disembodied echoes of ‘real’ sensations”; rather, she wishes to “indicate the intense realness of phantom limb phenomena”



the written work as a sensible material object."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Solander does not "consider literary representations of the senses primarily *as representations* but as linguistic performances potentially rewriting and prosthetically extending the sensing body of the reader."<sup>8</sup>

Solander proceeds by devoting her chapters to "each of the Aristotelian five senses in turn," in an attempt to "consider the literary techniques used to evoke sensations and the specific functions of such sensations in the literary work."<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, she also considers the ways in which these sensations "relate to," "interplay with," and "differ from sensations in other sensory modalities."<sup>10</sup> Despite "the relative sensory poverty of the literary medium" as compared to other forms of art such as paintings and woodcuts, Solander suggests that it can nevertheless produce phantom sensations.<sup>11</sup> In addition, she argues that "literary phantom sensations are virtual sensations," which are "dependent upon the material of language as actual sensations are dependent upon sensory stimuli."<sup>12</sup> For that reason, literary phantom sensations cannot be separated from "the referential aspect of language, from cultural discourses or literary traditions surrounding the senses, although they ultimately exceed and elude these."<sup>13</sup>

I find Solander's theories and methodology, particularly her reading of Shelley Jackson's works alongside the burgeoning field of sensory scholarship, very illuminating. The interrelationship between literature and perception, I shall argue, is also what underlies Ha Jin's work and makes it

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by which the individual experiences feeling in a missing limb despite "the absence of a concrete limb to provide the sensory stimulus." See Solander, "*Creating the Senses*," 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Solander intends literary phantom sensations to be treated as "a form of conscious, controlled hallucinating triggered not by sounds and visions, as in film, but by language." See Solander, "*Creating the Senses*," 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

innovative and influential. By the power of the written word, Ha Jin represents and recreates China's past, inviting his readers to hear, to feel, and to linger over everything through his artistic lens.

#### REPRESENTING CHINA'S PAST

Within the past few decades, Ha Jin has emerged as one of the most influential non-native novelists to write in the English language in the United States.<sup>14</sup> To date he has been awarded the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, the National Book Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the PEN/Faulkner Award.<sup>15</sup> He has also been lauded for bringing a distinctive Chinese sensibility into the Anglo-American literary scene. American dramatist and novelist Jim Grimsley, a judge of the National Book Award, comments that Ha Jin "is inventing a whole new genre of literature that really only he can write, because he's lived there. He grew up speaking Chinese ... but yet he is writing in English about these direct experiences."<sup>16</sup> *Kirkus Reviews* also credits Ha Jin for capturing the specificities of local Chinese communities and for "[making] China available to a new world and a world of new readers."<sup>17</sup> However, while many critics have acclaimed Ha Jin for representing and recreating China for non-Chinese readers in an accessible manner, seldom do they recognize the sensuous language that significantly underlies such achievement.<sup>18</sup>

The sensuous language, I argue, is what lies beneath Ha Jin's craftsmanship and makes it exceptional. In particular, in *Waiting*, Ha Jin's debut novel in the anglophone world, Ha Jin adopts various vivid and descriptive languages so as to represent and recreate in detail the particularities of

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<sup>14</sup> Hang Zhang, "Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English: Ha Jin's *In the Pond*," *World Englishes* 21, no. 2 (2002): 305, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-971X.00250>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 305–306.

<sup>16</sup> Dave Weich, "Ha Jin Lets It Go," in *The Powells.com Interviews: 22 Authors and Artists Talk about Their Books* (Lincoln, NE: IUniverse.com, 2000), quoted in Hang Zhang, "Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English" (2002), 306.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph J. Ellis, "In the Pond," review of *In the Pond*, *Kirkus Reviews*, November 1, 1998, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/joseph-j-ellis/in-the-pond/>, quoted in Zhang, 306.

<sup>18</sup> Zhang, 306.

the indigenous Chinese lives during the Cultural Revolution. I argue that the success of this novel lies not only in its universal humanist themes but also in its sensuous language, which has brought to life so many well-rounded Chinese characters and so many authentic Chinese experiences for even a non-Chinese audience to experience and admire.

In what follows, I shall explore in detail the ways in which Ha Jin employs sensuous language so as to make his text sensually appealing. In particular, I shall use Ha Jin's *Waiting* as my primary text. Given the scope of this paper, the analytical sections that follow are structured around three sense impressions, devoting a section each in turn to sight, taste, and sound. These discussions, I hope, will be of use and interest to scholars and researchers searching for new case studies on literary sensations.<sup>19,20</sup>

## VISUALIZING CHINA'S PAST

In *Waiting*, Ha Jin uses sensuous language to delineate the circumstances, actions, and characters of his story, offering visually evocative experiences to his audiences.<sup>21</sup> For example, in Part III, Chapter 4, Ha Jin a wedding scene in such minute detail, allowing his readers to peep into China's past:

The wedding took place in the conference room.... More than half of the hospital's staff and their families gathered there that evening.... Sodas, bottles of wine, platters of apples and frozen pears, and plates of roasted hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, pine nuts,

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<sup>19</sup> Solander, 45.

<sup>20</sup> In order to proceed with my discussion, I will summarize the plot of Ha Jin's *Waiting* here. In sum, it is a story revolving around the fortunes of three people: Lin Kong, Shuyu Liu, and Manna Wu. Lin Kong is a medical doctor who wants to divorce his country wife, Shuyu. However, it takes him eighteen years to divorce her. Eventually, Lin Kong marries Manna Wu, a nurse in his hospital, only to find himself aged and wearied after all these eighteen years of waiting.

<sup>21</sup> In his analysis on visual imagery in scenes, Richard L. Pratt suggests searching for three elements in one scene: circumstances, actions, and characters. Writers, according to Pratt, mostly depict scenes using these three elements "so that their readers could see the past in their mind's eye." See Richard L. Pratt, Jr., "Scene Depiction," in *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), 171.

cigarettes, and candies were laid out on twenty-four tables which had been arranged into six rows. Children turned noisy at the sight of so many goodies; most of them were Young Pioneers ... boys were running about and shouting at their pals ... little girls were warming their hands.... The panes were covered with frost, shimmering in the fluorescent lights; on them one could see the patterns of clamshells, seaweeds, reefs, waves, capes, islands.... Six strings of colorful bunting intersected one another in the air ... two lines of balloons wavering almost imperceptibly; one of them was propped, hanging up there like a blue baby sock.<sup>22</sup>

Here, the sensuous language Ha Jin uses at once evokes several vivid sights. The three elements of the visual imagery – circumstances, characters, and actions – have all been included in this single scene. First, the circumstances of the evening hospital conference room on a snowy day evoke visions of the sun breaking through the clouds, spreading its glow over the windowpanes which “were covered with frost,” and, zooming in, we can even see the “patterns of clamshells, seaweeds, reefs, waves, capes, islands” on these windowpanes.<sup>23</sup> Second, a number of characters also came into our view: there are the hospital workers and their families, children who are “Young Pioneers,” “[some] boys,” and “[a] few little girls.”<sup>24</sup> Third, Ha Jin also makes us see the various actions of these characters: some were sitting quietly at the conference table, some were running, shouting, “spitting out shells of sunflower seeds,” and “cracking roasted pine nuts”; some were “warming their hands on the radiators.”<sup>25</sup> Taken together, these sense impressions add a visual dimension to the original narrative and bring home a characteristic Chinese wedding banquet of the 1960s and the 1970s.

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<sup>22</sup> Ha Jin, *Waiting* (New York & Toronto: Random House, 2000), 235–236.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

REPRESENTING THE MATERIAL CULTURE

Ha Jin also uses sensuous language to represent and recreate the Chinese material culture of the time, ranging from clothing, household items, localities, transportation means, and printed texts, to photographs and paintings. Often, his sensuous language serves to visualize the production and consumption of various materials in different regions in China.

*Clothing*

Ha Jin uses sensuous language to delineate the clothing that his characters wear on different occasions and during different periods of time. For example, Shuyu is a country woman who works "like a servant, denying herself food and clothing" so as to save money.<sup>26</sup> Characteristically, when she leaves the barbershop after having her hair cut:

... the people began talking about her. They all agreed [that] she didn't know how to dress.... The cut of her dark-blue jacket was suitable for a woman of over sixty, with a slanting line of cloth-knots on the front instead of real buttons. If she hadn't worn the puttees, which made her trousers look like a pair of pantaloons, her bound feet would not have attracted so much attention. Probably womenfolk in the countryside had different taste in clothing.<sup>27</sup>

Here, in this single scene, Ha Jin uses many sensation-bearing words so as to cause us to visualize how old-fashioned Shuyu looks. He uses such images as "the dark-blue jacket," adding that the cut of this jacket is appropriate, perhaps, only "for a woman of over sixty."<sup>28</sup> He also uses images such as the "slanting line of cloth-knots," "the puttees," and the ill-fitting trousers, which were like "a pair of

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26 Allison Amend, "Ha Jin," in *Multicultural Voices: Asian-American Writers*, Multicultural Voices (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 2010), 83, accessed October 31, 2018.

27 Ha, *Waiting*, 208.

28 Ibid.

pantaloon.”<sup>29</sup> Having all these visual impressions in mind, even we as readers might find ourselves nodding in agreement with the remark people seeing her made: “[probably] womenfolk in the countryside had different taste in clothing.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Household Items*

In *Waiting*, Ha Jin also uses sensuous language to delineate quotidian household items in China. Given that the story is set against the backdrop of a changing Chinese society, many of the household items mentioned in the novel are no longer being used today. Nonetheless, the sensuous language Ha Jin uses allows us to visualize these items. For example, in this paragraph, Ha Jin describes meticulously the household wares being sold on a normal market day:

... the sidewalks ... were occupied by vendors. They were selling poultry, vegetables, fruits, eggs, live fish, piglets, clothes. Everywhere were wicker baskets, chick cages, oil jars, fish basins and pails. A bald man was blowing a brass whistle, a sample of his wares, and the noise split the air and hurt people’s ears. Some young girls at watermelon strands were smoking self-rolled cigarettes while crying for customers and waving goose-feather fans to keep flies away.<sup>31</sup>

In this single paragraph, Ha Jin encapsulates the hustle-bustle of a normal market day in the Chinese suburb. A number of sensuous phrases have been employed. From the crowded “vendors,” the “baskets, chick cages, oil jars, fish basins and pails,” to the “bald man” blowing his “brass whistle” and the young girls “smoking self-rolled cigarettes” and “waving goose-feather fans,” Ha Jin indeed evokes a vivid and vibrant market scene with all household items accessible to our vision.<sup>32</sup>

Many other household articles are delineated throughout the novel, all in minute detail. From

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

the laundry items such as the "wooden club" and the "stone stab," the cooking utensils such as "bellows," the domestic necessities such as a "yellow enamel basin" and "toweling coverlet" to the small items such as "wheat coupons," "food coupons," "Peony cigarettes," "Gold Dragon Fountain pen," and "Shanghai wristwatch," Ha Jin uses sensuous language again and again, allowing his readers to visualize China's past through these meticulous descriptions.

### *Localities*

In *Waiting*, sensuous language is plentifully used to evoke Chinese localities. For example, there are descriptions of and references to such real localities as the Songhua River, the Wusuli River, the Amur River, Shenyang City, Tsingtao City, Changchun City, Jilin Province, Jiangsu Province, and Anhui Province; there are also descriptions and references to imaginary localities, such as Goose Village, Muji City, the Four Seas Garden, Victory Park, and Victory Lake. While creating these, Ha Jin also ingeniously names many of the imaginary localities so as to create a distinctively Chinese flavor. For example, there are Peace Avenue, Splendor Match Plant, Glory Street, the Divine Horse Shrine, Sunrise House, and the New China Bookstore. In addition, there are also culturally specific localities such as "hot-water room" and "army hospital," religious sites such as "temples," "abbeys," "convents," and "nunneries," which have all been destroyed by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, as well as historically specific places such as "production brigade's office," which refers to the organized working team at that time. Taken together, these Chinese localities serve to recreate the social realism of China during the 1960s and the 1970s, and the ingenious naming of these localities also serves to defamiliarize the non-Chinese readers as well as to add a Chinese feeling to the novel's visual ambience.

### *Transportation Means*

Ha Jin also uses sensuous language to evoke visual images of the contemporary means of transportation. For example, conveyances such as "oxcarts" and "horse carts" are named.<sup>33</sup> Oxcarts are used to carry loads such as "millet sheaves" in the field, and one such oxcart is described as being

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

extremely cumbersome, “swaying as it rolled along.”<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, its “two iron-rimmed wheels” are also described as “screeching rhythmically on the bumpy road” as it moves along.<sup>35</sup> In addition, there are also modern transportation means such as bicycles, trucks, and automobiles, which are used in the suburban and urban areas. Interestingly, the bicycles in the novel are often provided with visually appealing brand names. For example, there are the “Little Golden Deer Bicycle,” the “Flying Pigeon Bicycle,” the “Phoenix Bicycle,” and the “Peacock Bicycle.” The trucks are branded, too. “East Wind Truck,” for example, will indeed form a mental image of a patriotic Chinese company naming itself “East Wind” rather than “West Wind.”

#### *Printed texts*

In the novel, Ha Jin also uses sensuous language to represent Chinese print culture; accordingly, many books and periodicals are vividly named so as to create a sensually appealing image. For example, there are county newspapers such as “Country Constructs,” “which was merely a handwritten, mimeographed affair at that time.”<sup>36</sup> There are also magazines such as “Popular Medicine,” Red classics such as “Song of Youth,” “The Guerilla Detachment on the Railroad,” “How Steel Is Tempered,” Chairman Mao’s “On Contradiction,” dictionaries such as “Forest of Words,” as well as printed revolutionary slogans such as “Secure the Law Like a Mountain” and “To Get Rich Is Glorious.”

#### *Photographs and Paintings*

Ha Jin also uses sensuous language to delineate photographs and paintings characteristic of that time. In Part I, for example, Ha Jin introduces a Chinese photograph which is kept by Lin Kong within “the vellum cover” of his dictionary, *Forest of Words*.<sup>37</sup> The photograph “was a new one, black-and-white

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 67.



and four by three inches."<sup>38</sup> In the middle of the photograph, there were Shuyu and Hua, who stood among "water vats, the thatched adobe house, and half an elm crown over the roof."<sup>39</sup>

Alongside the photographs, there are also many propaganda paintings specific to that time period, and many posters which were used to spread the political agenda. For example, in Part III, Lin Kong and his colleagues were detailed to make "posters for a general's visit to the hospital."<sup>40</sup> Lin Kong, who "was among the few skilled with the writing brush," had even been assigned specifically to write the phrase "Warmly Welcome" "with a brush on a large sheet of paper."<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, there are also many paintings and pictures for domestic ornamentation. In Part III, Chapter 12, for example, when Lin Kong comes to visit Shuyu, he "saw four Spring Festival pictures on the walls, similar to those in their village home and each having at least one fat baby and a pair of giant peaches in it."<sup>42</sup> The pictures Lin Kong saw are in fact a popular form of Chinese decoration during the Chinese New Year Holiday. Earlier in the novel, Ha Jin also mentions these kinds of pictures, which often show "a baby boy, fat and naked in a red bib, riding a large carp in billowing waves."<sup>43</sup>

## TASTING CHINA'S PAST

In the previous section, I examined the various ways in which Ha Jin engages with visual imageries. In this section, I shall focus on the ways in which Ha Jin uses sensuous language in order to represent and recreate the tastes and smells of Chinese food culture.

Perceived with sense and relished with sensation, food is indeed central to human lives.<sup>44</sup> It

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>44</sup> R. Kenji Tierney and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "Anthropology of Food," in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed.

not only offers nutritional support for the human organism, but also provides opportunities for different social groups to come together and to interact. In Ha Jin's *Waiting*, many sensuous phrases have been employed to evoke Chinese food culture. Although the novel is set during the Cultural Revolution period, a time when China was undergoing a severe food shortage, there are still many different types of food mentioned throughout the novel, ranging from restaurant food, homemade meals, to festive feasts.

#### RESTAURANT FOOD

In the prologue, when Lin Kong returns to Goose Village to attempt to divorce his wife Shuyu and has once again been declined, he leaves the court with Bensheng, his brother-in-law, and Shuyu. The three of them come to a small restaurant to dine. Ha Jin uses sensuous language to describe this dining scene:

Together they went into Sunrise House at a street corner, a small restaurant that offered mainly wheaten food. They sat down at a table by a window.... A waitress came and greeted them ... saying, "What would you like for lunch today? We have noodles, beef pies, leek pancakes, sugar buns, and fried dough sticks."

Lin ordered a plate of cold cuts – pork liver and heart cooked in aniseed broth – and four bowls of noodles, two of which were for his brother-in-law. Shuyu and he would each have one bowl.

In no time the dish came and then the steaming noodles, which were topped with starchy gravy made of minced pork, snap beans, scallions, coriander, and egg drops. While stirring the noodles with a pair of chopsticks, Shuyu spilled a blob of gravy on her left wrist. She raised her hand and licked it clean.... After finishing his first bowl of noodles, Bensheng broke the silence, saying to Lin. "Elder brother, don't

take to heart what I said in the court. Shuyu's my sister and I had to do that." His thin eyes were glittering as he chewed a piece of pork heart.<sup>45</sup>

In this scene, Ha Jin employs sensuous language to capture the characteristic restaurant meals of suburban China. For those readers who are familiar only with the westernized Chinese food of their own countries, however, the food listed on the restaurant menu might seem very bizarre. Yet, it nevertheless is very typical in northeast China, the region where the novel is set. For example, whereas gustatory images such as the "beef pies," "leek pancakes," "sugar buns," and "fried dough sticks" might seem to be very tasty, the "pork liver and heart" might seem to be very shocking.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, Ha Jin's minute descriptions vividly represent and recreate the social reality of China during the 1960s to the 1970s. Thus, these restaurant meals, at least for the local people, are actually very common and appetizing, as one could tell from Shuyu "[smiling] and [sucking] her noodles vigorously" and Bensheng "[chewing] a piece of pork heart" with his eyes twinkling.<sup>47</sup>

#### HOMEMADE MEALS

In addition to the restaurant meals, sensuous descriptions are used to evoke homemade meals. In Part II, Chapter 11, for example, when Lin Kong comes back to Goose Village to rest, Ha Jin again uses language to stimulate the sense of taste. Despite the fact that Lin Kong's home at Goose Village is both small and impoverished, whenever food is introduced into the domestic scene, it becomes both pleasant and sweet. See, for example, this paragraph:

... [Lin Kong] enjoyed being at home.... He liked the home-cooked food, most of which was fresh and tasty. The multigrain porridge, into which Shuyu always urged him to put some brown sugar though she wouldn't take any herself, was so soft and delicious that he could eat three bowls at a meal without feeling stuffed. The eggs sautéed with

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<sup>45</sup> Ha, *Waiting*, 19–20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

leeks or scallions would make his belches redolent of the dish even hours later. The steamed string beans seasoned with sesame oil and mashed garlic gave him a feeling of ease and freedom, because he would never dare touch such a homely dish in the hospital for fear of garlicky breath. What is more, it was so relaxing to be with his family. There was no reveille, and he didn't have to rise.... The morning snooze was the sweetest to him. He had been home four days already. If only he could stay for a whole month.<sup>48</sup>

Here, Ha Jin does not simply tell his readers that Shuyu cooked "multigrain porridge" for Lin Kong, but makes the event so precise that Shuyu even urges him to "put some brown sugar" into it, which would make the porridge taste both "soft and delicious."<sup>49</sup> Likewise, Ha Jin does not simply tell his readers that Shuyu also made for Lin Kong the eggs and the steamed string beans, but moves on to describe in vivid detail that the eggs were "sautéed with leeks or scallions" and that the beans were "seasoned with sesame oil and mashed garlic."<sup>50</sup> Through these detailed sensuous descriptions, Ha Jin invites his readers to experience with Lin Kong the gustatory delight of Shuyu's homely meals. It is not merely Lin Kong who experiences the "ease and freedom" of tasting these meals – as readers, we, too, experience imaginatively with him the relish of this scene.<sup>51</sup>

#### FESTIVAL FEASTS

Apart from the restaurant meals and homemade food, the festival feast is also an essential part of Chinese food culture. In the novel, there are several types of festive occasions celebrated by the characters, including Chinese National Day and the Spring Festival. In Part I, Chapter 10, for example, Ha Jin describes how the hospital where Lin Kong and Manna work celebrates National Day by holding a banquet:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

People began to propose toasts and raise chopsticks to eat. At once the room echoed with laughter, chattering, and the clatter of bowls, plates, ladles, mugs. Eight courses were served. There were smoked flounder, sweet-and-sour ribs, sautéed pork with bamboo shoots, scrambled eggs with tree ears. Each table was given two bottles of red wine, a jar of wheat liquor, and a basin of draft beer.<sup>52</sup>

Here, at the banquet, the gustatory imageries again dominate the scene. In addition to the dishes explicitly named in this paragraph, we are told, as the narrative unfolds, that the banquet is also composed of meaty dishes such as meatballs "made of ground pork" and cold dishes such as "radish salad seasoned with sugar and vinegar."<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting that Ha Jin introduces the dish names always in a precise and detailed manner, and includes not merely the original materials, but also the culinary process involved in making the specific dish. For instance, rather than simply listing the courses, Ha Jin "feasts" us a catalog that simultaneously evokes Chinese culinary artistry: there are "smoked flounder" and "sweet-and-sour ribs"; there are also "sautéed pork with bamboo shoots" and "scrambled eggs with tree ears."<sup>54</sup> Whether "smoked," "fried," "steamed," "simmered," "sautéed," "scrambled," or "stewed," these dishes are introduced one after another, in a manner almost reminiscent of the continuous flow of a river. Accordingly, with the names unfolding themselves on the page, we as readers also experience the sensuous delight with the characters, tasting the banquet that is dedicated specifically to the hospital workers on Chinese National Day.

Along with Chinese National Day, the Spring Festival is also a crucial occasion on which food will be abundantly served. In Part III, Chapter 12, for example, Ha Jin describes how Lin Kong came to visit Shuyu and Hua, their daughter. He carried with him "a duffel bag [of] four frozen mackerel and a bundle of garlic stems" which were "allocated to their family by the hospital for the holiday."<sup>55</sup> When Lin Kong arrived at the dormitory house, he was touched by the scene inside:

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 297.

Mother and daughter were making pies together. A round bamboo grid on a kneading bowl held three rows of pies. Hua was rolling out the dough with a wooden pin, while her mother was using a spoon to stuff the pies with sugared red-bean paste. Shuyu looked younger now, somewhat urbanized; she reminded Lin of a professional cook.<sup>56</sup>

Here, the deftness of Shuyu reminded Lin Kong of “a professional cook”; the sensuous language delineating the recipes and the techniques involved in making these pies also reminds us of a professional cookbook.<sup>57</sup> As the narrative unfolds, we are also told that each household made “thousands of pies and dumplings” to celebrate the festival.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, when the dinner was eventually ready, Ha Jin introduces a variety of dishes that will be reserved for this very particular time of the year:

Dinner was ready. Hua put on the table a cabbage salad mixed with cellophane noodles, a plate of stewed chicken, a small basket of fried pies made of glutinous-rice flour, and a casserole of sauerkraut and pork and tiny shrimps. Shuyu opened a bottle of wheat liquor and poured a full cup for Lin.... They clicked the cup and bowls and drank. Shuyu said to him, “Try a pie and see how good we made it.” With her chopsticks she put one of the two chicken legs in his bowl.<sup>59</sup>

In minute detail Ha Jin describes the sumptuous festive meal Lin Kong shares with Shuyu and Hua, though the “holiday was still two days away.”<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, the mouthwatering catalog of Chinese cuisine, from the “cabbage salad,” “the stewed chicken,” “fried pies made of glutinous-rice

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 300–301.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 301.

flour," to the "casserole of sauerkraut and pork and tiny shrimps," once again evokes the lusciousness of the feast, adding a particularly sensuous dimension to the whole narrative.<sup>61</sup>

## HEARING CHINA'S PAST

In the previous section I examined the various ways in which Ha Jin engages with gustatory imageries. In this section, I focus on the ways in which Ha Jin uses sensuous language to represent and recreate the Chinese acoustic environment.

In *Waiting*, there are many auditory impressions evoked by sensuous language: throughout the narratives, we hear the whizz of the bicycle, the whistle of the rider, the jingle of the bells, the jarring note of the fiddle, the clapping of the crowd, the chirp of the cicadas, and the croak of the toads. In what follows, I shall divide these auditory impressions into the categories of natural sounds and human sounds.

## NATURAL SOUNDS

In the novel, the natural sounds serve to represent and recreate the natural surroundings that the characters live in. For example, in *Goose Village*, we are told that "[beside] the pigpen, a white hen was scraping away dirt and making go-go-go sounds to call a flock of chicks, the smallest of which was dragging a broken leg."<sup>62</sup> Here, the onomatopoeic "go-go-go" phonetically imitates the sound made by the white hen, which is both stimulating and tonally impressive. In another scene, in *Muji City*, when Lin Kong is trying to sleep at night, we are told that "[outside] the window, raindrops were dripping from the eaves, producing a light ding-ding-ding sound."<sup>63</sup> As the narrative unfolds, we are told that Lin Kong could not sleep though he had his both "eyes closed tight."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, with such an

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

onomatopoetic “ding-ding-ding,” even the readers’ mental ears are being disturbed.<sup>65</sup> There are also many other onomatopoetic representations of natural sounds throughout the novel. From the whirring of the north wind, the splashing of the tap water, the bleating of the goat, the buzzing of the mosquito, to the chirping of the beetles and the grasshoppers, Ha Jin indeed brings to life the acoustic environment in which his Chinese characters live.

#### HUMAN SOUNDS

In addition to the natural sounds, there are also human-related sounds. For example, there are the faint sizzling of Ren’s tobacco, the bubbling of Lin Kong’s nose, the small whirring of the automobile, the squishing of the scrub brush, the wheezing and murmuring of Manna’s roommates, the “he-he-he” chucking of Geng Yang, the chattering of the nurses, and the clattering of the bowls, plates, ladles, and mugs at the holiday banquet. Nonetheless, what makes Ha Jin’s novel distinctive is that it also includes many sounds that are specific to its time. Therefore, in what follows, I shall focus on two types of sounds: the sociopolitical sounds and the cultural sounds.

##### *Sociopolitical Sounds*

The sociopolitical sounds Ha uses could be further subdivided into Cultural Revolution slogans, speeches, and songs. Cultural Revolution slogans were very common during Lin Kong’s time, and in the novel, we encounter several of them. For example, when Manna is waiting for Liang Meng inside the Victory Park, the narrator invites us to see slogans such as “Down with Russian Chauvinism,” which was painted in front of a monument, as well as “Long Live Chairman –!,” a slogan painted in red which already had the word “Mao” cleaned off.<sup>66</sup> In the courtroom, we are introduced to the slogan, “Secure the Law Like a Mountain,” on a banner suspended above the court table.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in these slogans, sight and sound might be intertwined. Yet, when the slogans reveal themselves, we also

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 213.



overhear ourselves reading them aloud in our mental ears – this, I shall argue, is the way in which the sound, rather than the sight, dominates our sense perceptions.

There are also many references to the revolutionary speeches and the songs of the period. For example, when Director Chen makes his speech during Lin Kong and Manna's wedding ceremony, he announces that, "Now, the bride and the groom pay tribute to the Party and Chairman Mao."<sup>68</sup> On another occasion, when the judge points at Lin Kong's face, he also proclaims that, "Comrade Lin Kong, you are a revolutionary officer and should be a model for us civilians.... Tell me, do you have a conscience or not? Do you deserve your green uniform and the red star on your cap?"<sup>69</sup>

In addition to revolutionary speeches, Ha Jin also weaves into his narrative many revolutionary songs, an integral part of Chinese life through the 1960s and 1970s. For example, when Nurse Tsu comes into her dormitory, she hums the popular song "On the Sun Island."<sup>70</sup> When Manna and Lin Kong are at their wedding banquet, they sing "Our Troops March toward the Sun."<sup>71</sup> When Lin Kong stands outside the home of Shuyu and Hua, he hears a loudspeaker announcing the news after the music of "The East Is Red, the Sun Is Rising."<sup>72</sup> When Bensheng leaves Lin Kong's home, he whistles the tune of the folk song "A Little Cowherd Gets Married."<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Ha Jin also intermittently incorporates lyrics so as to represent and recreate the melodiousness of these songs, despite their propaganda purposes. For example, after Lin Kong treats Manna's blisters and leaves the low farmhouse, he overhears the nurses inside the house singing an opera song together:

The wide lake sways wave after wave.

On the other side lies our hometown.

In the morning we paddle out

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 94.

To cast nets, and return at night,  
Our boats loaded with fish....<sup>74</sup>

These lines, extracted from the Chinese modern opera *Red Guards on Honghu Lake* (1961), epitomize the collective memories of the Chinese who lived through the 1960s and the 1970s. Here, Ha Jin ingeniously weaves them into his narrative, bringing to life the shared audible past of the Chinese people. In so doing, he also succeeds in representing and recreating in a detailed manner for his readers the Chinese lived experience, creating auditory images that even let his readers “eavesdrop on” Chinese lives.

### *Cultural Sounds*

In addition to sociopolitical sounds, there are also cultural sounds. By “cultural sounds” I mean the sounds made by the characters within the Chinese cultural context, which include Chinese proverbs, indigenous Chinese spoken language, Chinese swearwords, and Chinese terms of address.<sup>75</sup>

CHINESE PROVERBS. The Chinese proverb is defined as “a grammatically complete sentence expressing an observation or judgement based on experience.”<sup>76</sup> There are numerous vivid and interesting Chinese proverbs cited throughout the novel. Each time the Chinese proverb appears, the reader’s auditory experience is enriched. For example, in the courtroom, we hear the judge say, “All right. If you had not done anything to be ashamed of, you would not be afraid of a ghost knocking at your door.”<sup>77</sup> Here, “a ghost knocking at your door” is an indigenous Chinese expression, and the whole

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>75</sup> This subsection is modeled on Hang Zhang’s discussion on Ha Jin’s lexical innovation in *In the Pond*, where Hang Zhang divides his subsections into “curse words and obscenities, address terms, proper names, vocabulary items of uniquely Chinese reference, political discourses, metaphors and proverbs, nativized discourse strategies, norms of written discourse.” See Zhang, “Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English,” 307–313.

<sup>76</sup> John S. Rohsenow, “Proverbs,” in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 158.

<sup>77</sup> Ha, *Waiting*, 125.

sentence in fact means "[if] your behavior is moral and upright, you'll sleep with a clear conscience."<sup>78</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Alongside morality, there are also proverbs related to fame and money. For example, when Geng Yang advises Lin Kong to offer Shuyu a bribe so as to influence her to accept the deal, he says, "I'm sure it will help. With money you can hire the devil to grind grain and cook dinner for you."<sup>80</sup> Here, we hear a pragmatic man boasting about his knowledge of the central role money plays in his society, and the whole sentence in fact means "[money] makes everything possible."<sup>81</sup>

In addition to fame and money, there are also proverbs related to interpersonal relationships. For example, when Manna attempts to persuade the drunken Geng Yang to let her go, she exclaims, "You're Lin's friend.... Don't you know the saying, 'A good man must never take liberties with his friend's wife?'"<sup>82</sup> Here, what Manna implies is that, according to the proverb, except for Lin Kong, her fiancé, no man should touch her, but now Geng Yang is indeed taking advantage of her when Lin Kong is absent.

There are also many other proverbs throughout the narratives, all representing and recreating the audible dimension of Chinese culture in vivid detail. For example, when Lin Kong compares himself to the commissar, who "must have plenty of women already, but he [Lin Kong] had only one woman," he murmurs to himself, "[a] well-fed man can never feel a beggar's hunger pangs."<sup>83</sup> This proverb literally means "one cannot understand someone's suffering without having experienced it."<sup>84</sup>

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78 Larry Herzberg, "Chinese Proverbs and Popular Sayings," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of the Chinese Language*, ed. Sin-wai Chan (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 303.

79 Yang Yi 羊毅, "Yi Ha Jin dengdai weili fenxi muyu qianyi xianxiang" 以哈金《等待》為例分析母語遷移現象 [Taking Ha Jin's *Waiting* as an Example to Analyze the Phenomenon of Mother Tongue Transfer], *English on Campus* 11 (2012): 130, accessed October 31, 2018, CNKI.

80 Ha, *Waiting*, 174. Yang, "Yi Ha jin dengdai wei li," 133.

81 Herzberg, "Chinese Proverbs and Popular Sayings," 304.

82 Ha, *Waiting*, 181. Yang, "Yi Ha jin dengdai wei li," 133.

83 Ha, 140. Yang, 133.

84 Liwei Jiao and Benjamin M. Stone, *500 Common Chinese Proverbs and Colloquial Expressions: An Annotated Frequency Dictionary* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), s.v. "Entry 288: 饱汉不知饿汉饥 (飽漢不知餓漢饑)."

Meanwhile, when the beautiful Haiyan marries a man “with a carbuncular face and two gold teeth,” people whisper behind her back, “[a] fresh rose is planted on a cowpat.”<sup>85</sup> This proverb means that “a beautiful woman is married to an old or ugly man.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, when Lin Kong asks Manna not to tell others their secret, he uses the proverb, “there’s no wall without a crack.”<sup>87</sup> This proverb means that “secrets will always come out.”<sup>88</sup> Taken together, the proverbs recurrent throughout Ha Jin’s narrative wittily encapsulate the richness of Chinese culture, adding an auditory dimension to the text.

INDIGENOUS CHINESE SPOKEN LANGUAGE. Like the Chinese proverbs, the phrases of indigenous Chinese spoken language are also widely used in Ha Jin’s *Waiting* to recreate authentic everyday conversations. For example, when Lin Kong attempts to bring Manna and Meng Liang together, he shows Meng Liang’s letter to Manna, saying, “You see, he has good sense. You should write him back.”<sup>89</sup> Here, “good sense” is an indigenous Chinese term that in fact implies that Meng Liang has a romantic feeling towards Manna. Meanwhile, on another occasion, when Manna is considered to be an adulterous woman, Lin Kong, her fiancé, is viciously attacked as “a greenhatted cuckold.”<sup>90</sup> Although in western tradition it is not uncommon to call a man with an unfaithful spouse a “cuckold,” the modifier “greenhatted” is nonetheless a distinctively indigenous Chinese term. According to historian Matthew H. Sommer, “greenhatted” in fact derives from sumptuary legislation of the Yuan, Ming, and early Qing, which required the males in prostitute households “to wrap their heads in green cloth.”<sup>91</sup> Consequently, “a greenhatted cuckold” becomes an indigenous Chinese expression in use even today.

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85 Ha, *Waiting*, 188. Yang, “Yi Ha jin dengdai wei li,” 133.

86 Jiao and Stone, *500 Common Chinese Proverbs and Colloquial Expressions*, 24.

87 Ha, *Waiting*, 73. Yang, “Yi Ha jin dengdai wei li,” 130.

88 Jiao and Stone, *500 Common Chinese Proverbs and Colloquial Expressions*, 191.

89 Ha, *Waiting*, 121.

90 *Ibid.*, 198.

91 Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 218.

CHINESE SWEARWORDS. Chinese swearwords are also frequently used in Ha Jin's novel, which not merely creates a defamiliarizing effect on non-Chinese readers, but also evokes a sense of humor and playfulness. For example, when the characters are displeased, they often shout out "a stupid egg," "son of a bitch," or "old devil."<sup>92</sup>

Often the swearwords are invested with sexual connotations. For example, when Manna is raped by Geng Yang, she cries, "I curse your whole clan! Damn you, you'll be childless."<sup>93</sup> Later, when the rape comes to be known to the mentally deranged Mrs. Su, Mrs. Su repeatedly calls Manna "self-delivery," a Chinese slang expression that implies that Manna "delivers" herself to Geng Yang, the rapist, just as a prostitute "delivers" herself to her client at the brothel.<sup>94</sup>

CHINESE TERMS OF ADDRESS. In addition to the swearwords, there are also many Chinese terms of address used in Ha Jin's novel. These terms of address are an integral part of the Chinese lived experience, and they are often used to convey "cultural messages, especially concerning the status of the interlocutors and the power-relation between them."<sup>95</sup> For example, the word "comrade" is often used between strangers who wish to address each other in a formal manner. Thus, when Mai Dong met Manna, he said, "Glad to meet you, Comrade Manna Wu."<sup>96</sup> When Lin Kong, Shuyu, and the judge are at the court, they address each other respectively as "Officer Lin Kong," "Comrade Shuyu Liu," and "Comrade Judge."<sup>97</sup> When Commissar Wei introduces Geng Yang to Manna, he says, very formally, "This is Comrade Geng Yang, from the Third Border Division."<sup>98</sup>

There are also some interesting informal terms of address used in everyday conversations. For example, when Lin Kong is eventually persuaded by Manna, he grunts, "Okay, my little granny."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See also Zhang, "Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English," 307–308.

<sup>93</sup> Ha, *Waiting*, 183.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>95</sup> Zhang, "Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English," 308.

<sup>96</sup> Ha, *Waiting*, 25.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 123–124.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

When Ming Chen wants to have the attention of the children, he cries, “Small friends – boys and girls – you can eat.... Understand?”<sup>100</sup> Here, both “little granny” and “[small] friends” are distinctively Chinese terms of address.

There are also terms of address serving to create exotic impressions. When Commissar Wei is conversing with the “fat official in a blue Mao suit,” the official asks him, “How are you, Old Wei? How I miss you!”<sup>101</sup> Looking startled, Commissar Wei replies, “I’m well. How about you, Old Zhao?”<sup>102</sup> Here, the terms of address “Old Zhao” and “Old Wei” do not necessarily indicate the elderliness of the two officials.<sup>103</sup> Rather, it is a humorous and indigenously Chinese way of addressing one’s old acquaintance.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, there are also some intimate terms of address that are often used between strangers. For example, when Shuyu comes to the barber’s shop for a haircut, the woman asks her, “What hairstyle do you want, sister?”<sup>105</sup> Here, it is not necessarily the case that Shuyu and the barber are indeed sisters. The address term “sister” here merely serves to create an informal friendly atmosphere between the two strangers. Likewise, terms such as “uncle” and “aunt” do not necessarily indicate blood relationships, either. In Chinese culture, it is very common to address a man as an uncle and a woman as an aunt. For example, when Haiyan wants to introduce Lin Kong to her son, she says, “Come, Taotao, and meet Uncle Kong.”<sup>106</sup> On another occasion, when Manna accidentally knocks down a woman in the street, she asks, “Are you hurt, Aunt?”<sup>107</sup> In these two cases, the use of the terms serves to create an intimate relationship between the interlocutors.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Yang, “Yi Ha Jin dengdai weili,” 130.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ha, *Waiting*, 206.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 159.

## CONCLUSION

Prior to Ha Jin, many writers have recognized that the "profound secret to good writing" lies in the employment of the five senses.<sup>108</sup> Joseph Conrad, for example, once claimed in his author's preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897) that all art "appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses."<sup>109</sup> Through the engagement of the senses, Conrad believes that the novelist could reach what he calls "the secret spring of responsive emotions."<sup>110</sup> In an interview with *The New Yorker* in 1997, the poet Jorie Graham also describes the way in which a poem develops in her mind:

... then there's a little something that comes through. The way sunlight is striking the snow – it's almost always a sense perception of some kind. Then I just wait. Some other physical things maybe stick to it. Maybe the sun on the snow, and then, the next day, the bright sound of ... That brightness and that sharpness. And that sort of sticks, because there's a sound element to the image.<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, in *Mystery and Manners* (1969), Flannery O'Connor points out the importance of engaging the readers' senses in writing: "[the fiction writer] appeals through the senses, and you cannot appeal to the senses with abstractions."<sup>112</sup>

In this paper, I have explored the extent to which and the ways in which literature and perception can be interrelated. Using Ha Jin's *Waiting* as my primary material, I have shown that Ha

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<sup>108</sup> Oakley Hall, *How Fiction Works: The Last Word on Writing Fiction — from Basics to the Fine Points* (Cincinnati, OH: Story Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1914), 13, quoted in Hall, *How Fiction Works*, 15–16.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> "Big Poetry: Why Jorie Graham Is the Most Celebrated American Poet of Her Generation," interview by Stephen Schiff, *New Yorker*, July 14, 1997, 67, quoted in Hall, *How Fiction Works*, 15.

<sup>112</sup> Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 67, quoted in Hall, *How Fiction Works*, 15.

Jin employs sensuous language to make his text sensually appealing. Using visual, gustatory, and auditory imagery, Ha Jin succeeds in bringing to life the Chinese lived experience during the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the fact that this novel remains very controversial even today, I hope my discussion and analysis here will enrich the scholarly debate, introduce a different dimension in which to consider this novel, and be of interest and use to scholars searching for new case studies on literary sensations.

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